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THE MANNING TIMES

CO-OPERATIVE MARKETING OF LEAF TOBACCO

An Independent View of Ralph D. Cochran of Manning, S. C., at Present Located at Tarboro, North Carolina.

Let me state in the outset, before trying to write on this important subject, that I am a North Carolinian by birth, I hail from Person County. I went to the Palmetto State many years ago when the tobacco industry in that State was in its infancy. I am a great lover of North Carolina. I love her people and cherish her traditions. I have been twice married in this good old leader of Southern States and count my friends by the score. I have been a life-long Democrat, and I have been strengthened in this good old doctrine by some whose memory I shall always revere; the late Governor C. B. Aycock, R. B. Glenn and Governor Bickett. These were leaders that have passed off the stage of action in this State, but they have left footprints upon the sands of time that shall forever lead others to emulate their examples, that shall forever cause North Carolinians to perpetuate their memories. I am a concrete believer in Woodrow Wilson, the greatest Democrat living today, when I pause to think I am constrained to believe that language is inadequate that would give this great leader and lover of humanity justice. I believe in equal rights to all and special privileges to none. I believe in a government for the people, by the people. I believe in one having individuality, initiative, and free thinking.

For the last twenty-five years I have been engaged in the production of tobacco. I have also been engaged in the buying, handling and operating of a tobacco warehouse. I am opposed to the so-called Co-operative Marketing System. And I wish to make it plain in the outset, that in this I am not selfish, unless my readers shall term one selfish that believes in certain things from principle. I shall try to show you before I am through with this article, why I am opposed to this system.

As I have already stated, for the last quarter of a century, I have been engaged in the tobacco industry. During these long years, I have observed many things pertaining to the tobacco business.

I have been thoroughly convinced that Abraham Lincoln was right when he said, "There is no easy road to success, or royal road to learning." The tobacco warehouseman is to the farmer what the rudder is to the ship. Many times he has to combat tempestuous seas. I have studied tobacco, its grades etc., from every angle. And I find many new things representing themselves each year. I believe I know the grades of tobacco as well as the average warehouseman. If I did not I would not be competent of conducting sales for my clients. The tobacco warehouseman knows

more grades of tobacco and their approximate value than any man in the buying end. I can prove this, I think, the average buyer knows his own grades, the warehouseman tries to know all the various grades of tobacco and their approximate value. His limits are the skies. He has no company to please or satisfy. His business is to stand between seller and buyer and give them "Hell".

The so-called Co-operative System of selling tobacco, has for its aim the uplift of the down-trodden farmer. It is being cussed and discussed all up and down tobaccodom today.

I know this is a big subject for one little layman, farmer an notorious tobacco warehouseman to tackle single-handed and alone. I have not a California Corporation lawyer to advise me and if I needed one I have not the amount of, "Kale", handy to retain him.

I said I would tell why I was opposed to the Co-operative System of selling tobacco. I am a believer in co-operation of the right kind. I believe it possible to sell cotton and many other crops co-operatively. Cotton can be handled without so much expense to the grower. This product has staple grades. Most every other crop we grow can be stapelized, but tobacco in this country cannot be successfully handled through a channel of this kind. There is not a man living today that can properly grade tobacco, there is not a man living today that can properly price tobacco in the true sense of the word. But says some impractical, "I thought tobacco men knew tobacco," they know what grades their respective companies want, and the price is based on conditions, on world conditions, on the law of supply and demand. The prices of tobacco vary and fluctuate according to the demand, like cotton or other commodities. Who can price cotton? Imagine a tobacco grader sitting down in a tobacco storage house waiting for purchasers to come along to purchase his holdings, imagine him suggesting to the various exporters and manufacturers, that he has in storage certain grades of tobacco, and they are quoted at so and so, the latest market report is thus and so. Why, reader, one with common grey matter, if he has any knowledge of the tobacco industry, knows the buyers would do their own grading based on their respective wants, and the price would be based accordingly. Tobacco cannot be successfully handled through this system, unless it is first graded, redried and put in hogsheads. This is objectionable and especially to us in the Carolinas, because we have not the redrying facilities. But says Mr. Co-operative advocate, we can get the various companies to buy before they redry. How do you know that you can? You have no guarantee when you will sell this tobacco, and in the meantime lots of tobacco will spoil, especially in Eastern North Carolina and South Carolina where we have a damp climate. The Co-operative System is objectionable on the grounds that storage houses will become congested and you cannot show tobacco to any ad-

vantage. It is objectionable because you have not any storage houses of any consequence in Virginia, North Carolina or South Carolina to store in. It is objectionable because the average farmer like myself, cannot afford to have his tobacco stored away to be handled and sold in an impractical way. It is objectionable even if it could be properly stored and properly graded, because the average farmer cannot get along on forty or fifty per cent of the valuation of his tobacco, and take chances on getting the remainder when his tobacco is sold. The poor man is the majority in the tobacco growing States of the South. It is objectionable because it cannot be priced as it is delivered. Those in office cannot fulfill the contracts and pay over the forty and fifty per cent to the grower, when he delivers his tobacco. But says Mr. Co-operative, "We will figure up what it costs to produce the tobacco, and base our price on that." You might be in a position to do this if you had the power to make the tobacco buying world eat out of your hand, lay down and play dead, etc. I will grant you that we could make them come to our figures or quit the field if we had money enough to corner the tobacco crops of the world. But what would be the use of all of this worry if we had the sufficient where-with-all to do this? Let's use our common mother-wit and not be carried away by every wind of doctrines, preached by foreign and local pie-hunters. It is objectionable because we will not realize as much for our tobacco under this system as we now get. It will kill all legitimate competition in the selling of our tobacco. But says Mr. Co-operative, "How is this?" As I see it one concern at a time will buy the tobacco we have in storage that suits his respective order. I do not believe we will then have a ycompetitive bidding. Why should we have? You get what suits you at your price and I will do likewise when I come for my grades. It is objectionable because the companies that buy our tobacco will make us pay the storage, insurance, taxes and interest on the monies, they will then buy our tobacco as they need it and not before. It is not the case under the present marketing system. Under our present marketing system, the various companies must buy our tobacco as it is sold in order to protect their own interest, and in order to keep the wheels of the tobacco industry in motion. Under the new system it will not be necessary for the companies to buy and store tobacco in advance. If the tobacco is redried it will keep alright and the various companies will only buy as they have needs. Tobacco manufacture better after they get from two to five years of age on them. Like whiskey, Mr. Farmer it improves with age. Had you thought of this, Mr. Co-operative Advocate. Time and space will not admit of me to keep elaborating on the objectionable features. I must hurry and complete.

I desire to mention briefly some of the few things that the other side ob-

ject to in our present system. I have heard much talk of the variation of prices of tobacco. Many seem to stumble here and not be able to understand why this occurs. This very thing is one of the strongest reasons why we should still maintain our present system of buying. Well, here goes. As I have already stated there is not a man on earth that can always properly grade tobacco. But says Mr. Co-operative, "I thought tobaccomen were experts." I will now give you the definition of an expert: He is a being that knows about one-third of what he is talking about, and a Hell of a long ways from home. Now if trained men make mistakes under the best lights in the world to show up tobacco, skylights in a well lighted tobacco warehouse, how much more will a grader make mistakes when he tries to grade for various companies. We certainly cannot afford to have around one hundred graders to cover the various grades of tobacco, one or two men would have to do all the grading. I know there are mistakes made in every line of business but there are not any more made in the tobacco grading and selling than in the grading and selling or buying of cotton. You do not catch the mistakes that are made in the grading of cotton because you do not know the grades and the same applies largely to tobacco. The same buyers that vary in their judgment in their buying of tobacco that pay more for a pile of tobacco moved from one row to another, get caught often in the buying. Many has been the time that I have taken piles of tobacco off the hands of some buyer that had bought it too high for his Company's order, rather than see him ship it in and get a kick from the Company that might have hurt my market. And my clients would have been injured as a consequence. Of course, the average farmer that has observed the other side, the variation of prices of piles of tobacco does not know that this rule works both ways, but every tobacco warehouseman and buyer will bear me out in this statement.

No, Mr. Co-operative, there are no perfect tobaccomen. Good St. Peter associates with those kind in Heaven. Probably Enoch of Old, was a tobaccolist. He walked with God and was not, for God took him to be with the Holy Angels.

I believe that a tobacco buyer and warehouseman as a class, are as honest and upright as any people that walk the face of the earth. I would be willing to take stock any time with any other legitimate business.

It is said that tobacco-men are highly paid, this is not true. The average traveling salesman gets a larger salary than the average salaried tobacco buyer.

Some Co-operative advocates think the present system of handling tobacco too expensive. It certainly is not as expensive as the proposed new system will be. I do not care the rap of my finger what they tell or promise you, they do not know what the expense will be. But the farmer that has gone into this one-sided affair will have knowledge imparted to him

in the shape of expense that he has never dreamed of.

The farmers have already built warehouses, redrying plants, storage-houses and various other plants for the handling of tobacco. Do you want to be taxed to buy all this stuff over again?

You are now going into business for yourself. You are now, in one sense of the word, going to buy your own product as I see it, this is what it will amount to. You are really going into buying and selling tobacco strictly on speculation without orders and without money except what you borrow. Can you afford to borrow money at a time like this, and launch out upon a sea of high finance?

The class of farmers I represent do not believe they can afford to tamper with wildcat speculation at a time like this.

I know there are those that will differ with me. There are those that will probably become indignant. But I represent thousands of bony handed sons of toil in Eastern South Carolina and in the other tobacco producing states, that have just as much right to have their side championed as the opposing side has.

We are now willing to sell our birthright for a mess of pottage. We are not ready to appoint our administrators and assigns. And if we do appoint them, we do not want them to function until we shake our mortal coil.

All the propaganda used by the Co-operative advocates cannot and will not change the present system of selling tobacco at auction. The movement may decrease the amount that will be sold this way. But it will after all work out for the best interest of the growers who continue to be their own guardians in the salesmanship of the product, they have grown by the sweat of their brow.

You have heard much said about the way fruit is sold in California, how Co-operative selling proved a great success to the grower of same. Some of our farmers are foolish enough after growing and handling tobacco all their lives, to believe that tobacco could be sold the same way. There is no analogy whatever in the two products. If I owned a citrus fruit farm, vineyard or orange grove, of any other fruit farm or grove that they are hobbying about, I would be wealthy to start out with. Have you ever heard of the fruit growers of the little corner in California making a failure in a crop of fruit? Did you ever consider that fruit is a necessity and tobacco a luxury? Fruit is sold every day in the year to everybody from the poorest man that walks the face of the earth up to the multi-millionaire.

Tobacco in its raw state has only a few buyers, so what is the use to argue this question?

How did all this movement come about that is so prevalent all over the world today? The Bolsheviki Communistic, Socialistic ideas that are running rampant in Europe today have made their appearance and foot-prints upon the soil of Free America.

Are we to be carried away today, by untried Communistic, Socialistic stur, just because forsooth, we will please a California Corporation lawyer?

This intellectual gigantic monstrosity of the West has come East in search of what the people of the East and South went, West for in 1849 "Gold." This emancipator and lover of humanity left his sunny home in Southern California and came East to search for new fields f easy picking.

He thinks I see ne coming from the far-off Pacific coast: Hush, who is it? "It is a man with the wisdom of Moses, and the voice of Aaron the High Priest, but the sad part that I dislike to disclose, is that he has the greed of Pharaoh. Join my Co-operative Association, I am the best Co-operation lawyer on earth. I see great possibilities for a large retainers fee, probably one hundred thousand dollars a year."

This emancipator and lover of mankind, of course, like all great men has made some disciples in all the tobacco growing states.

Me thinks again, I see Aaron climbing a high mountain in the East, which is Mount Possibility. Look, who is that we see walking with him? It is Mr. Stone, head of the Louisville Tobacco Warehouse Company, incorporated; Mr. J. Y. Joyner, ex-school teacher and politician of North Carolina, and editor of the Progressive Farmer, Mr. Poe, they have taken him along to give them a write-up of the beautiful scenery. I also see my friend Mr. Bright Williamson, farmer an dbanker of Darlington, South Carolina. Look now, they have ascended the topmost peak, the man of the hour, Aaron, the High Priest and spokesman. Me thinks I hear a voice sounding down the mountain side, filled with rythm and high-

(Continued on page two)

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

All persons having claims against the Estate of Joseph J. Mitchum, deceased, will present them duly attested. All persons owing said estate will make payment to the undersigned qualified Executors of said Estate.

Porcher M. Mitchum, Ella P. Martin, chg. Executors.

Davis Station, S. C., R. F. D., Jan. 16, 1922.

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