
Cooperation in Publishing Socialist Literature.

by Charles H. Kerr

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The Need of a Socialist Publishing House.

Socialism is coming. The last phase of human slavery, called the "wage system," is nearing its end. The conflict between labor and capital can never be permanently settled except by Socialism. Capitalism is crumbling and the new order is almost here. Unconscious forces stronger than any human will are hastening the revolution, whether we help or we hinder.

Yet the conscious efforts of those who look beyond the present moment may do much to modify the form of this revolution that is inevitable. The future belongs to the workers. Whether they now understand it or not, they are to be the ruling class in the near future. But if they come into power with no clearly defined ideas of what they are to do, their mistakes will be costly in suffering.

The mission of the Socialist Party and its literature is to educate the workers of hand and brain into a clear understanding of the Socialist philosophy and its bearings upon the many complex problems which the birth of the new order will bring. If the clearest thinking of the ablest minds of the international movement can be brought within easy reach of all, the chances will be a thousand fold better for a peaceful and efficient solution of these problems.

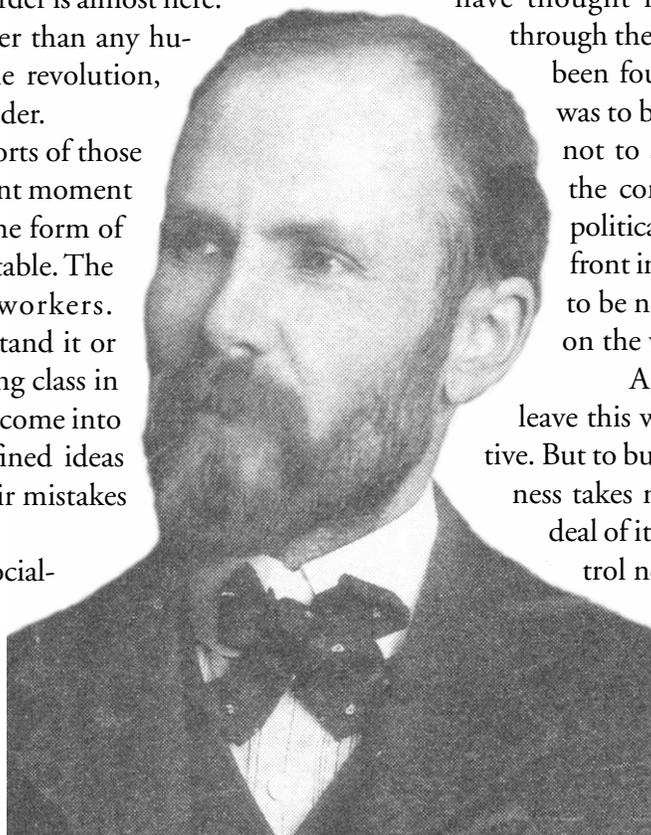
How to Provide the Literature.

Talk is cheap, but it takes money to buy books, if we may be allowed to paraphrase an ancient American proverb. How to get the money to print the books is the question. Various solutions have been tried. Some have thought it best to use money raised through the party organization. But it has been found that the tendency of this was to build up a central dictatorship, not to speak of the further fact that the comrades who show fitness for political activity and thus come to the front in a organization are quite likely to be not the ones best fitted to carry on the work of book publishing.

Again, some think it best to leave this work entirely to private initiative. But to build up a book publishing business takes not a little money but a great deal of it. Now the capitalists who control nearly all the money are not, as a rule, disposed to use it for attacking the interests of their own class. Here and there may be an individual so disposed, but it would be a rare and strange piece of good fortune if a capitalist

should be found with a knowledge of the publishing business and at the same time an uncompromising devotion to the principles of international socialism.

The ideal solution of this difficult question would seem to be in the organization of a company controlled



by so large a number of Socialists and so widely distributed that they could not be bought up by the enemy nor carried off their feet by any wave of local excitement or prejudice; while the management of minor details should be left unreservedly to comrades who had proved their fitness for the particular kind of work that has to be done.

This is not wholly a dream. Such a publishing house exists in embryo. It is not only the nucleus of what is needed in the near future, and yet it has grown to the point where it supplies the greater portion of the really scientific Socialist books circulated in the United States.

How This Company Started.

The publishing house of Charles H. Kerr & Company had its first beginnings in 1886. It was not a Socialist publishing house then: there was no American Socialist movement then, unless that name can be given to the few groups of immigrants who had brought the Socialist thought with them from Europe. The publishing house began with the attempt to spread the literature of "a religion that is rational and a rationalism that is religious." It was in touch with a group of writers who thought they had a message, thought they believed in evolution, thought theirs was the religion of the future, and wondered why the people did not listen. And the people went on all the while, trying with increasing difficulty to solve the concrete economic problem of making a living, and caring nothing whatever about the abstractions of the writers with the alleged rational religion. There were a few customers with wealth and "clutchah," who bought the books of these writers and languidly bewailed the obtuseness of the outside world, while they congratulated themselves on their own superior discernment. And so things went on for five years or so.

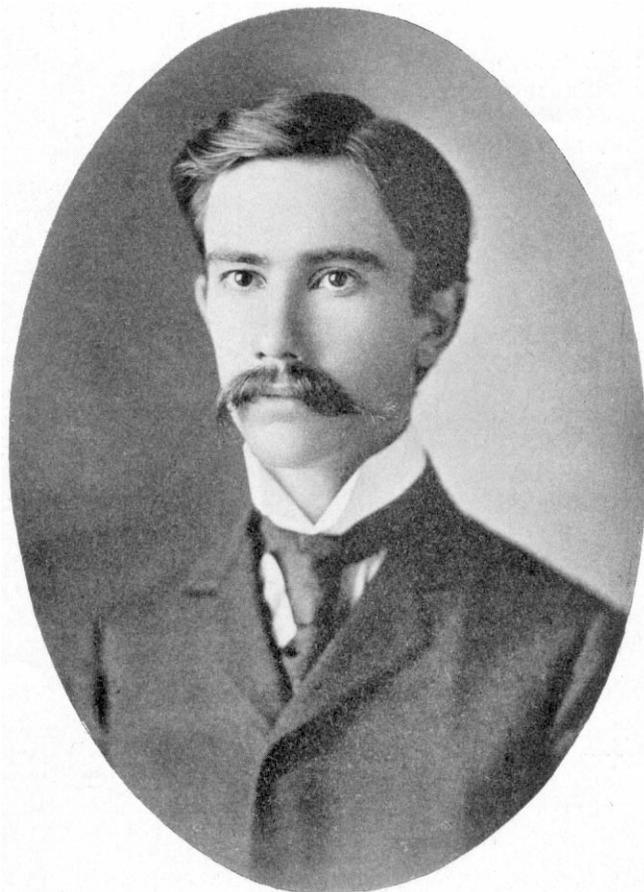
Then a wave of unrest from the real world outside disturbed the peaceful atmosphere, and the manager of the little Unitarian publishing house awoke for the first time to the fact that there was a social problem. It was only the populist movement that he had come in contact with; crude enough, harmless enough, one would think. But it was distinctly distasteful to the refined writers we have been speaking of, it brought incursions of sundry low, vulgar people

into the sacred precincts, and some of the populist utterances issued from the press of the little publishing house, containing unpleasant even if not wholly scientific prophesies of trouble ahead. So the publisher found himself rapidly becoming *persona non grata* in the cult of "Freedom, Fellowship, and Character in Religion," and was soon, with perfect legality, separated from the bulk of his earnings during seven years, and gently deposited on the outside. (Not understanding economic determinism nor capitalistic class-consciousness at the time, he felt annoyed. But pardon the digression.) This was in the early spring of 1893. In April the corporation was organized, under the name of CHARLES H. KERR & COMPANY, the same that had previously been used for the private business. A plant of typesetting machines was for a time operated by the company, this branch of the business being managed by the vice-president, A.U. Hancock. He died of consumption at the end of two years, leaving the entire responsibility of the business on the shoulders of the original manager. Finding the load too heavy, he took the first opportunity to dispose of the printing plant, and has since then carried on a publishing business only.

From 1893 to 1897 the principle publications of the company were populist books, the most successful of which was *Money Found*, a treatise on government banking by Thomas E. Hill. Early in 1897 the company issued *President John Smith*, by Frederick Upham Adams, who soon after acquired an interest in the company and became its vice-president. Soon after a combination was formed with B.O. Flower of Boston, who had been removed from the editorship of *The Arena* through a change in ownership, and a new magazine called *The New Time* was established, which, however, soon passed into the control of a separate company. The New Time Company, not long after its organization, passed into the hands of Frederick Upham Adams, who withdrew from connection with Charles H. Kerr & Company, and not long after sold his subscription list to *The Arena*, and left a receiver to wind up the affairs of *The New Time*.

Meanwhile the publishing house of Charles H. Kerr & Company had made a real start in the line of Socialist Literature by the publication of an edition of *Merrie England*, and set itself definitely in the direction of Socialism. In the spring of 1899 the first num-

ber of the *Workers' Call* (now *The Chicago Socialist*) appeared under the editorship of A.M. Simons, and fraternal relations were at once established. The next year Comrade Simons left the *Workers' Call* to become the vice-president of Charles H. Kerr & Company, and editor of *The International Socialist Review*, which position he still holds.



Algie Simons (1902)

Charles H. Kerr continues, as from the first, to hold the double post of president and treasurer. The third member of the board of directors is Marcus Hitch, a Chicago attorney who is an active member of the Socialist Party and has a profound knowledge of the literature of Socialism in several languages.

Plan of Organization.

The company is organized under the general corporation law of Illinois. Consequently any stockholder who has paid for his stock in full is thenceforth free from any possible liability in connection with the company in any event. The present capitalization of

the company (February 1903) is \$10,000, divided into 1,000 shares of \$10 each. Of these only about 200 remain for sale, and new subscriptions are coming in at a rate that will make an increase in the capitalization necessary in the near future. We shall probably ask our stockholders during 1903 to authorize an additional subscription of stock to the amount of \$15,000, which will make room for 1,500 more stockholders at \$10 each.

The actual number of stockholders as we go to press. We cannot publish a list of them, for the reason that many are so situated that they might be injured by the publication of the fact that they are actively interested in the Socialist movement. The number of shareholders, large as it is, does not show the total number of active Socialists who have subscribed to the capital stock of this company, for the reason that many recent stock subscriptions have been from locals of the Socialist Party, paid for either out of the treasury of the local or out of a special contribution by a number of comrades.

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Why Subscribe for Stock?

In the opening pages of this booklet we have tried to show the necessity of a strong Socialist publishing house, and the claim of Charles H. Kerr & company to the confidence and cooperation of the Socialists of America. We now come to the question of what personal advantage is to be gained by subscribing for stock.

In the first place, no dividends have ever been paid, no dividends are promised, and while there is nothing to prevent the stockholders from voting to pay dividends in the future, it is unlikely that they will do so. More than half the stock is already in holdings of one share each. A 5% dividend on this would amount to only 50 cents for each shareholder, which would hardly be worth the amount of labor that would be involved in making the payments to stockholders scattered over the world, and many of whom are frequently changing their addresses. On the other hand, the total sum that would be represented by this small dividend on all the shares would be enough to add some important book to our list of publications, and

it is the general desire of all stockholders so far as heard from that the profits be used to increase the work that the company is doing.

The personal advantage to stockholders is not in any possible dividends; it is in the privilege of buying Socialist books at the reduced prices explained on the last page of this booklet. How our cooperative plan makes it possible to offer these reduced rates and still continue doing business is something we will try to explain.

What a Book Costs.

There are several elements entering into the cost of a book. The most obvious element is the actual paper, press work, and binding which are necessary to the production of every copy of every edition of every book. This can be reduced to some but not to a great extent by manufacturing in large quantities. In the case of a 200 page book like, for example, Vandervelde's *Collectivism*, it amounts to about 11 cents for the cloth edition and 5 cents for the paper. Now if there were no other element of cost, Socialist books could be sold much more cheaply, but there are other elements.

In the first place, there is the labor of the author. In the case of our 5 and 10 cent pamphlets, with hardly an exception, this is contributed as a labor of love to help the cause of Socialism, and the same is the case with some of our larger books, but in some cases, the time of the author or translator has to be paid for.

Again, the general expenses of the business, including rent, office work, postage, advertising, and incidentals, must be added to the selling price, or the business would soon be insolvent. These expenses are necessarily larger in proportion on a small volume of business than a large, and therefore can be proportionately reduced as the number of our cooperators increases. At present they amount approximately to about the same as the first element of cost just described.

But before the first copy of a book can be supplied, there is an initial expense of from 60 cents to \$1 a page, or sometimes even more, for typesetting and electrotyping. In the case of Vandervelde's *Collectivism*, mentioned above, this element of cost is about \$150. Now then, to consider only the cloth edition for the sake of simplicity, let us say that the cost of

paper, press work, and binding is 11 cents and the necessary general expenses 11 cents more, and that the edition printed and sold is 1,000 copies, out of which the \$150 for plates must be covered. In this case, the thousandth part of \$150, or 15¢, must be added to the cost of each copy of *Collectivism*, making it 11¢ plus 11¢ plus 15¢ — or 37¢.

If the number of copies sold could be 5,000 instead of 1,000, the charge for plates on each copy would be only 3¢ instead of 15¢, and the total cost of each copy would be 11¢ plus 11¢ plus 3¢ — or 25¢. But the sale of no one of our cloth bound volumes in the Standard Socialist Series has yet reached 5,000 copies, and still we are selling them to our stockholders at 25¢ each, and we have not become insolvent. Do you see how?

This is where the stockholders get the benefit of cooperation. The first cost of plates, as well as the pay of the author or the translator when he has to be paid, is covered not by the sale of books but by the sale of stock. Thus the stockholders are enabled to buy the books at what they cost with this heavy item of cost omitted.

It should be observed that as the number of Socialist book buyers increases, it will be possible to sell larger and larger editions of the best books. Then our resources for making plates for new books will not be limited to new stock subscriptions, but will be increased by the profit on books which sell beyond the first edition. But to increase the number of such buyers requires advertising. And advertising costs money.

How About Yourself?

This means you, comrade! You believe in Socialism. You want to see it come in time to gladden the workers who are now on the earth. You understand by this time just what we of the cooperative publishing house of Charles H. Kerr & Company are doing, or if you do not fully understand you will get a prompt and frank answer to any reasonable question. Now what do you propose to do?

If you are not already a shareholder, the first way to help is to become one. If you cannot spare \$10 at one time, send a dollar and pledge a dollar a month for nine months. If capitalism has robbed you to an extent where even this is too much for you, get others

to join you in taking a share of stock for the Socialist Local to which you belong.

But when once a stockholder, do not think that your responsibility is at an end. Events are moving rapidly. There is no telling how soon an economic crisis may force the working class of America into decisive action with no time for further thought. Now in this breathing space of so-called "prosperity" is the time for our work of education. If this company depends solely on its present resources and the individual stock subscriptions which will be received during 1903, it will probably double the amount of genuine Socialist literature circulated in the United States, but with ample resources, it might multiply the amount by 10, 20, or 100.

How the Money Should Be Spent.

Several thousand dollars ought to be expended at once in advertising the literature of clear, scientific, International Socialism in the columns of our party press, which inevitably gives most of its space either to local matters or to elementary propaganda; in widely circulated papers which have hitherto advertised pamphlet literature of a type adapted to confuse rather than to clear and strengthen the Socialist movement; in a few of the best periodicals read by the intellectual proletarians who have begun to suspect the rottenness of capitalism, but who are still dabbling with palliatives; and finally as far as possible in the capitalist dailies most read by workingmen. All this should be done without cutting off our expenditure for making electrotype plates for new Socialist books, for these will be all the more necessary in proportion as advertising adds to the number of readers.

Part of the cost of this advertising will be repaid by the increased sale of books, but all experience indicates that but a fraction of the cost will be returned in this way during the year, although in the long run it should increase the regular income from book sales enough to repay what it costs.

This brings us to the next question:

How the Money Can Be Raised.

It may be possible to use for this purpose some of the money received during 1903 for stock subscrip-

tions, but most if not all of the receipts from this source will be urgently needed for the publication of new books, so we must look elsewhere. Let us suggest three ways in which comrades may find it possible to help.

1. *Contributions to Advertising Fund.* We have never solicited donations to our work, for the reason that our expenditures have been such as ought ultimately to bring back their cost in cash returns. The proposed expenditure, however, is somewhat different from the ordinary, in that its business value, measured in cash returns, is uncertain, while its propaganda value to the cause of International Socialism is beyond question. It should, moreover, be remembered that the ownership of this company is no longer in any small group of individuals, but is distributed among a body of Socialists already numbering about 600, and increasing at the rate of one a day, so that in the event of the advertising bringing a profit, that profit can only be used for the further circulation of the literature of scientific Socialism. If, therefore, you who read this booklet wish to contribute 10 cents, \$10,000, or any sum between these amounts, to a fund for advertising Socialist literature, the money will be duly acknowledged in *The International Socialist Review*, in connection with your name unless you have some special reason for withholding it, and it will be expended to the best of our judgment in bringing the best Socialist books to the attention of new readers.

2. *Loans Without Interest.* During the past year a number of our stockholders have assisted us with loans of \$10 and upwards without interest. Some of these comrades have in addition conformed to our general rule requiring cash to be sent with each separate order for books. We have with the opening of 1903 adopted the card ledger system of bookkeeping, which will make it easy and convenient for us to receive from each stockholder a deposit of money, large or small, according to his own convenience, and then let him order books against it from time to time until it is exhausted. We think this plan will prove a real convenience to many of our comrades, since it will save them the trouble and expense of frequent purchases of money orders, or the risk of sending stamps and coins through the mails. On the other hand, the aggregate of many small sums deposited in this way will be a substantial help to the company, and may easily grown to a point where it can safely be drawn against to pay for advertising.

3. *Loans With Interest.* Some of our stockholders have more or less money with which they would like to help the cause of Socialism, but are under the necessity of drawing an income from it. To any such we will allow 5 percent interest on sums of \$50 to \$500 for a term of 2 years, and will give satisfactory security for the return of the money. As Socialists we do not believe in perpetuating the system of interest, but we recognize the fact that all of us are for the present obliged to live under the capitalist system, and we prefer paying interest to Socialists rather than to bankers. Within two years we believe that the increase of stock subscriptions will enable us to take up all the interest-bearing loans and to devote the total receipts of the business to the further increase of our work — the publication of the literature of International Socialism.

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Socialist Books at Cost to Stockholders.

Elsewhere in this booklet we have explained the various elements of cost entering into the publication of a book. The company will at all times supply its stockholders with Socialist books at actual cost, so far as this can be arrived at. The following scale of prices will hold good until further notice:

Madden Library. (16 page booklets selling at 2 cents.) Fifty cents a hundred by mail; \$4.00 a thousand by express at purchaser's expense.

Pocket Library of Socialism. (32 page booklets selling at 5 cents.) Two cents a copy; \$1.00 a hundred by mail; \$8.00 a thousand or \$35.00 for five thousand by express at purchaser's expense.

Ten Cent Books. Five cents a copy or \$5.00 a hundred by mail; \$4.00 a hundred or \$35.00 a thousand by express or freight at purchaser's expense.

Other Paper-Covered Books. Fifty percent discount if sent by mail or express at our expense; sixty percent discount if sent by express at purchaser's expense.

Cloth-Bound Books. Forty percent discount if sent by mail or express at our expense; fifty percent discount if sent by express at expense of purchaser.

Books of Other Publishers. We do not offer discounts on the books of other publishers, but as an accommodation to our stockholders we supply them, if desired, at the advertised retail prices.

Terms: Cash With Order. Our capital is not yet sufficient to enable us to extend credit. Stockholders as well as other must send cash with order. Those, however, who desire to save the trouble of obtaining a postal order for each small purchase can make a deposit of money and order books against it.

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