

SAT., June 21, 2008

Ted Quant, Loyola Twomey Center for Peace through Justice

Their Center has 60 years history of working for social justice. In 1947, Fr. Twomey started the Industrial Relat's Centre, to bring labor & mngt together – to work toward human dignity of workers. The marketplace should not determine how people are treated. He based it on the papal encyclical, *Rarum Novarum*.

He illegally brought together black & white people for classes / labour schools, saying that labour is not just labour, it's white & black people together.

It is not ok for faith to be just for charity; it is an obligation of faith to work for justice. He wrote a book: the *Blueprint for Social Justice*. Before he died in 1969, participated much in the civil rights movement.

In the 21st century, things are different again, in a globalized economy. People have something in them which they want to contribute, & we need to facilitate that. The start of the Farmer's Market: a staff person at the Center had the idea to start it; connects to the co-ops in Miss.; fishermen who lost everything in Katrina, etc. He kept climbing mountains, & seeing higher ones each time. My vision of things: you have climbed to a certain height. You are making the new reality *NOW*, not tomorrow. This is not about "one day it will be better for my children," but making the world better now, through worker co-ops, consumer co-ops, CU's, alternative currency.

Gandhi: "Be the change you want to be in the world." I understand that this is what you are doing. The change you are creating is taking you to higher levels, to seek ways to help bring dignity to all people.

Harvey Reed, Exec Dir. of the La. Assoc of Co-ops

Focus is agriculture co-ops, ag issues. On various boards; 4H, summer programs, teaches at Delgado.

It is difficult to see what is happening in Iowa with the flooding.

The resurgence in co-ops in La: In 1967, Fr. McKnight helped to establish the La State Assoc of Co-ops, to help black farmers get their products to market. There were v discriminatory practices; was diffc for black farmers to sell their products. It was not until hurricane Katrina that a lot of things came to the surface. The lower part of Plaquemines parish was hit twice by Katrina, b/c it circled back – almost 200 tornadoes hit the area. The state was then hit again by Rita; it leveled Holly Beach. The agricultural production, oil production & other businesses were heavily damaged. One issue: it's hard to grow citrus b/c of the salt intrusion. They decided to get together to organize into a co-op in order to fish, in Plaquemines parish. They organized fishers of crabs, shrimp, oysters. There are blacks, whites, natives, latinos all involved.

In the Western part of the state, there is another co-op, but it is 100% white. They are trying to involve people from other races.

There are some other co-ops in other parts of the state; & Harvey has started meeting with them. They have held community meetings; they wanted to see where help could come from. This had Harvey criss-crossing the whole state. Once they got up to 11 organizations, they formed the La Assoc of Co-ops, late in 2007. They decided that they wanted to do some things together, so held a meeting in Alexandria. One co-op put up the money to hold the meeting. They incorporated. Since that time, they have grown from 11 to 22 members. They're working with farmers, fishers; & also have a goat co-op. The latter sells primarily to the muslim community. It is vital to understand one's market.

One thing which we do is to interact actively with our member co-ops. Our government official in charge of co-ops knew absolutely nothing about co-ops; he knew nothing about farmers' co-ops, etc.; with the exception of electric co-ops. The larger co-ops mainly deal with large farmers that have 700 acres & above: soybeans, sugar cane, etc. We try to reach the small farmers. Co-ops are not for everyone. Some people are not ready; co-ops are for self-help, run by the people. We need to educate people: to let them know that they own their co-op; & the co-ops own the Association. The policies come up from the members, & we do what they tell us to do, as long as it's within the letter of the law. Like the Oyster Co-op in 1954, "if you want to do some jail time, fix your prices." Each co-op has people's livelihoods in its hands; we must be vigilant.

There has now been an awakening of the co-op movement in La. I had a chance to travel w/ a USDA official, to try to register some African-amer's who were not reg'd with the census.

According to the USDA, La officially has 1856 black farmers. The census count is wrong. They started to do a door-to-door count; the numbers are going up consistently. The same with Latino farmers, currently at over 12,000.

Do we have problems? Yes, we do. It will take multiple generations to solve some of them. Before Katrina, very few folks knew about co-operatives, ex for luxury high-rise housing co-ops. We need to do some things that are desperately needed in La. Apparently Babylon had housing co-ops, in 2000 BC.

Our mission as leaders in the co-operative field. We must not forget the mission and vision of the co-op leaders who came before us, or what is going on in other places. In Costa Rica, the economy is centered around co-ops. There are 1000's of co-ops in Mexico, Japan, India. What we are doing right now is just tiny. Co-ops are so impt. Right now we have 11 ready to come on board. In So Carolina, I was visiting a chicken processing co-op owned by African – Americans – and they joined the LAC.

Q&A:

Q: What's the reception to the co-op message in Louisiana?

A: People are looking for an alternative; the reception has been good.

Q: Does La. Have a co-op statute?

A: No. And in order to incorporate based on electric co-ops, one needs at least 8 people.

Q: Are there any affordable housing co-ops?

A: There are at least 3 in the N.O. area developing; we are unsure if there are others.

Q: What kind of support have you found here in La.?

A: Some of the other co-ops are involved with faith-based groups. We encourage them to stay close to them, so they are not totally dependent on us.

Q: How can we help you?

A: I can put it to pen and paper.

Q: Have you worked with the larger farmer co-ops?

A: We have tried to collaborate w/ them; we are looking to enter into a dialog with the, but with us maintaining our autonomy.

Q: Any WC's?

A: there are two being started up.

Q: Is anyone interested in starting a grocery co-op?

A: Yes, one in N.O.; planning to go on-line in 2009.

Q: Is anyone working to put together a co-op law?

A: It may not be a good thing to have them look at this, in this state. Better left alone.