

REKINDLING RAIFFEISEN'S IDEALS IN THE HEART OF EVERY CREDIT UNION.

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-Social Justice is a moral principle and a moral value-

In the early 1960s, the pioneers of the credit union movement in Asia felt obliged to promote social justice and to help the poor from their own resources. Most of the pioneers then were Catholics. In conferences and seminars, the first modern encyclical – Rerum Novarum of 1891 or “New Things”, Mater et Magistra of 1961, Populorum Progressio of 1967 were introduced. So was Raiffeisen’s new venture the “ Thrift and Loan Society” in Heddesdort in 1864, together with the humanitarian ideals and experiences of credit unions/cooperatives pioneers in Europe, North America and elsewhere in the world.

Inspired by social justice, our pioneers believed that those who are involved in economic activities should carry out their tasks in conformity with the common good.

Amongst the First set of credit union books, they studied and translated for use in Asia was the work and ideals of F.W. Raiffeisen – “The Man Who Conquers Poverty”. Raiffeisen was known by credit unions in Asia as a great credit union pioneer; a social revolutionist, a helper of humanity; a far seeing organizer of economic forces and that helpless people were centre of his supporting acts.

Basic principles put forward by him were belief in the ideas of self-help , self-administration and self-responsibility.

The statement made by him of “ Credit Unions must not confine themselves to granting loans. Their main objective should be to control the use of money, to improve the moral and physical values of people, and their will to act by themselves.” Is being used extensively particularly in credit union financial literacy education and training.

Addressing 30 people who wanted to replicate credit union, Raiffeisen said: “ I cannot offer you a miracle which will free you from poverty without any effort on your part. But one way I do know which anyone can follow and which, if all work together for the common good, can achieve its purpose – freedom from want. We must start from the fundamental principle that, by improving physical well-being,

spiritual welfare also benefit. By providing loans to the needy and industrious members of your parish, they will be able themselves to enjoy the fruits of their industry and thrift instead of laboring for the benefit of the usurer. In this way they will become independent of any form of outside help which can only reduce them again to poverty with all its bitter consequences.”

It is gratifying to know that today, the Asian Credit Union Movement is still a movement committed to social justice. We believe that if social justice be satisfied, the result will be an intense activity in economic life as a whole pursued in tranquility and order. This activity will be the proof of the health of the social body. We also believe that development cannot be limited to mere economic growth. We do not believe in separating the economic from human, as can be seen in our efforts to help promoting the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

At times, however, we can get so used to our own rhetoric that we mistake principles, and good intentions expressed for actions. It is therefore, crucial that we translate these principles and values into operational practice. I have learnt from my participating in the International Raiffensen Cooperative Seminar held in November in 1993 in Bangkok that the International Raiffeisen Union (IRU) sees its primary object as fostering the ideals of Raiffeisen, presenting them in public, and promoting the realization of these ideals worldwide. ACCU should support IRU's effort.

I have deliberately tried to make this talk assigned to me by Leni, the CEO of ACCU more like a reflection or a meditation than a talk. The credit union movement has risen from obscurity because those who see the promise it continually holds for mankind are willing to work and sacrifice. It has been this way since the very beginning. I felt I would be remiss if I do not mention the determination of Raiffensen. The letter in this slide, written for him by his daughter Amalie, but signed by the near-blind mayor shortly before his death, illustrates Raiffeisen's determination. The letter observes that attacks are suddenly being mounted against the still-infant credit societies in 1883 and Raiffeisen urges his correspondent to give all possible assistance in forming a new credit society.

Highlighting “new”, we should have a process of constant innovative review of the status quo, a process of creativity where new technologies such as robotics, block-chain, big data and artificial intelligence, new products and new process are pioneered and brought to the market to serve mankind with the determination shown to us by Raiffeisen.

