

The Society for Co-operative Studies  
REPORT FOR 1973/4

1. The Presidents of the Society - with Mr. L. A. Harrison taking the place of Mr. K. A. Noble - have remained in office during the year. Mr. D. G. Hopwood has occupied the Chair and Mr. S. P. Clarke and Mr. C. J. F. Ringrose have served as Vice-Chairmen. In accordance with the practice of the Society the 1972/3 Chairman, Mr. W. J. Philpott, has been invited to attend meetings of National Officers during the year.

The Officers have had three meetings: the attendance they regret to report has not been good. The following is their report for presentation to the Annual General Meeting on 29th/30th March, 1974.

2. Membership

(a) At 31st January, 1974 the membership of the Society (with the 1973 figures given in brackets) was:

	<u>Individuals</u>		<u>Organisations</u>		<u>Total</u>
	<u>Co-op- erative</u>	<u>Other</u>	<u>Co-op- erative</u>	<u>Other</u>	
Metropolitan & Southern	6 (5)	4 (6)	8 (4)	1 (1)	19 (16)
Midland	10 (11)	6 (7)	8 (5)	1 (1)	25 (24)
North	- (2)	1 (2)	1 (1)	1 (1)	3 (6)
North-West	11 (14)	5 (6)	9 (7)	- (-)	25 (27)
Scottish	7 (6)	5 (5)	4 (3)	1 (1)	17 (15)
South-West*	7 (8)	- (-)	2 (1)	- (1)	9 (10)
Yorkshire & Humberside	3 (4)	1 (1)	9 (6)	1 (1)	14 (12)
Overseas	1 (1)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	1 (1)
	<u>45 (51)</u>	<u>22 (27)</u>	<u>41 (27)</u>	<u>5 (6)</u>	<u>113 (111)</u>

\*This includes the Western Region of the 1972/3 Report.

- (b) The increase in Co-operative organisations in membership is the result of a special approach to the larger societies which brought in fifteen of them.
- (c) The recent record of total membership, at the end of January in each year, has been 132 (1971), 124 (1972), 111 (1973) and 113 (1974).

### 3. The "Bulletin"

In past years three Bulletins have been published annually but under the financial stringencies of 1973/4 this has been reduced to two, Number 19 and 20. The latter has been reproduced in a cheaper, but still, we hope, quite manageable and attractive form. However, the Bulletin has remained one of the main services from the Society to its members and the two issues have included, in addition to regular features: "Education and the Community" by Professor K. J. W. Alexander; a summary of the research by the Birmingham group of the Society on "Communications in the Birmingham Co-operative Society"; a commentary by Dr. A. Wilson on the Co-operative Union's Staff Training Working Party Report; a note by Jim Craigen on "Co-operation in 1980"; and the annual bibliography of publications on the Co-operative Movement.

### 4. Other National Activities: Research

#### (a) CO-OPERATIVE COLLEGE ENDOWMENT FUND

The National Officers have offered advice to the Education Executive on disposition from this fund - with particular encouragement for a comparative study of Co-operative law in different countries which, among its other services, would provide a useful background for the proposal for a Co-operative Development Agency.

#### (b) DIRECT PROMOTION BY THE SOCIETY

There have been no further developments in this category.

## 5. Regional Developments

Reports of some activity were received from three Regions and the following summaries are based on those:

### MIDLAND

Activity in the Midlands during 1973 was largely confined to the West Midland Group. Meetings were held in Birmingham throughout the year and although the numbers attending have generally been small, the year saw the completion of an ambitious and varied programme of activities.

A survey of communications within the Birmingham Co-operative Society was undertaken and the report which was produced by the Group is included elsewhere in this Bulletin. The survey was concerned with all material emanating from the Society addressed to members and our work would not have been possible without the assistance readily given by the Society. The Group was particularly grateful for this assistance and considers that the willingness to provide this detailed information is a commendable reflection upon the open and democratic manner in which the affairs of the Society are conducted.

During April Mr. K. E. Wadsworth, the Financial Controller of Birmingham Society, attended a meeting of the West Midland Group and discussed in detail the Balance Sheet of Birmingham Co-operative Society for 1972. The session was well attended and proved to be particularly interesting to those present.

In association with the Extra-Mural Department of Birmingham University a seminar was held in early December which was conducted by Dr. G. N. Ostergaard. The subject covered by Dr. Ostergaard was the Process of Democratic Control in British Retail Co-operatives. A well attended meeting heard a provocative address from the speaker and this was followed by a lively discussion.

The Group hopes to continue to develop its activities during 1974 and a programme of topics has been drawn up for the first half of the year.

#### NORTH WEST

Unhappily, a "nil return" has to be recorded for the activities of the North Western Branch in the past year. In 1972 attendance at Branch meetings dwindled away, so a letter outlining the situation was sent early in 1973 to all members and they were asked to poll on whether a different time and venue would be more suitable to them for meetings. Afternoon meetings at Holyoake House, the Co-operative Union headquarters, were suggested.

However, the result of the poll still gave no clear indication to the Branch organisers as to what the great majority of members really wanted. Indeed, about one-third of the members never bothered to reply. Of those who voted, a majority of six were in fact in favour of the new time and venue, but several of these voters added qualifications and criticisms about the change which could reduce the frequency of their attendance at meetings (sic!). Five of the voters were very happy about the change of venue because they work at Holyoake House anyway, so in reality the new suggestion was approved by a majority of only one. Because of this indecisive result, no Branch activity took place in subsequent months but this did not arouse the slightest critical response from any of the members.

The acting Regional Secretary, who anticipated upon appointment that he would soon be succeeded by a member who could devote more time to the future of the Branch, has now held the post for more than two years. He has been greatly assisted by Mr. A. R. Perkins, the North Western Sectional Secretary of the Co-operative Union. But because of other commitments, both these officials would welcome their replacement by an enthusiastic member who will be prepared to tackle the Regional Secretary's job. Soundings they have made so far have met with no response.

## SCOTLAND

There was little Branch activity, except that a number of members attended the monthly meetings of the Public and Co-operative Enterprises group. This is under the Chairmanship of Professor Alexander of Strathclyde University.

One meeting was held at which the speaker was Mr. J. M. Craigen, JP, and now Co-operative/Labour MP for the Maryhill Constituency of Glasgow. His subject was "The Co-operative Movement in the 80's" and was very well received although the attendance was rather meagre owing to climatic conditions.

Two members of the Branch, Dr. Butt and Mr. W. Stewart, both of Strathclyde University, addressed a course arranged for the Stirling and Clackmannan Co-operative District Councils. Dr. Butt spoke on "The Relevance of Robert Owen to the Present Co-operative Movement", and Mr. Stewart on "The Money Market and How It Operates".

6. Finance

The Cash and Bank Account for the year ended 31st December 1973 is being audited: the comparison with the account for the previous year is as follows:

<u>RECEIPTS</u>	<u>1972</u> £	<u>1973</u> £
Cash in Hand Brought Forward .. .. .	42.05	0.86
Cash at Bank Brought Forward .. .. .	909.72	573.68
Subscriptions .. .. .	492.00	584.50
Fees - AGM and Conference .. .. .	156.00	105.00
Sales - Society Bulletin .. .. .	2.75	4.71
Postage Refunded .. .. .	0.25	-
Bank Interest .. .. .	4.10	0.94
	<u>£1,606.87</u>	<u>£1,269.69</u>

<u>PAYMENTS</u>	<u>1972</u> £	<u>1973</u> £
Printing Society Bulletin .. .. .	325.50	606.00
Stationery and Postage .. .. .	69.39	61.02
Typewriting .. .. .	59.07	44.85
Translations .. .. .	5.00	-
Telephone .. .. .	1.44	0.72
Annual General Meeting .. .. .	274.78	156.00
International Congress .. .. .	25.00	-
Other Meetings .. .. .	161.80	78.32
Research Grants .. .. .	40.00	85.00
Consumer Scholarships .. .. .	50.00	-
Fees Refunded - AGM and Conference .. .. .	7.00	-
Subscriptions Refunded .. .. .	12.00	0.50
Course Fees .. .. .	-	2.00
Bank Commission .. .. .	1.35	0.70
Cash in Hand Carried Forward .. .. .	0.86	0.47
Cash at Bank Carried Forward .. .. .	573.68	234.11
	<u>£1,606.87</u>	<u>£1,269.69</u>

It is clear that the "modest resources" which were noted in our last Report have become even more modest. In particular, the present year has had to carry payment for Bulletins 17 and 18 which preceded the last AGM; and Bulletin Number 18 had been particularly substantial and, therefore, particularly costly.

#### 7. Role for the Future?

In past years it has been acknowledged that Regional activity was limited and that the main justification for the Society was found on the level of its national service. Even that, however, has been diminished in 1973/4 and the Annual General Meeting should consider whether and how organisation and activities can be improved on both levels. Can Co-operative societies, as well as individual members, initiate more engagement with universities and

colleges for the purposes of the SCS? Would a descriptive leaflet about the Society be useful equipment for such efforts? Does the example of the Birmingham group, aiming to involve members from neighbouring societies and institutions in study projects of local scope, suggest a useful line of development?

And so on. The AGM can serve the Society well if it pursues such questions constructively.