

The Society for Co-operative Studies
 REPORT OF THE EIGHTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
 29TH/30TH MARCH, 1974
 AT THE CO-OPERATIVE COLLEGE, STANFORD HALL

1. Attendance

The following were present: those from an organisation in membership of the Society are indicated:

MR. D. AINLEY	London Society
MR. J. ARCHER	Mansfield and Worksop Society
MR. J. BAGSHAW	Greater Nottingham Society
MR. J. A. N. BAMFIELD	Co-operative Union
MR. E. A. BENTLEY	Leeds Industrial Society
MR. J. BLAIZE	North Midland Society
MR. K. BRADSHAW	Leicestershire Society
MR. R. BRISCOE	Plymouth and South Devon Society
MR. L. E. BURCH	Co-operative Union
DR. T. F. CARBERY	
MR. S. P. CLARKE	West Yorkshire Society
MR. A. E. COBILL	Barnsley British CRS
MR. G. N. COOKE	North Midland Society
MR. K. COOPER	Derby and Burton Society
MRS. B. DAVEY	Plymouth and South Devon Society
MR. J. W. DEANE	Brightside and Carbrook Society
MR. P. L. DAWSON	
MR. T. R. EDMONDSON	Ipswich Society
MR. W. A. EDWARDS	Portsea Island Society
MR. L. C. FOX	Co-operative Union
MR. G. R. GAY	St. Cuthbert's Co-operative Association
MR. M. GIBSON	
MRS. M. GURDEN	Coventry and District Society
MR. R. HANKS	Brighton Society
MR. J. H. HEWITT	Barnsley British CRS
MR. C. C. HILDITCH	Co-operative Union

MR. D. G. HOPWOOD	
MRS. L. HOVE	Co-operative Press
MRS. KING	Central and East Fife Society
MR. D. LANE	Co-operative Union
MR. R. A. LEE	CRS
MR. P. A. LEGG	
MR. D. LOGAN	Hull and East Riding Society
MR. R. T. LOWE	Leicestershire Society
MR. J. McDONALD	CRS
MR. R. W. MACKIE	Central and East Fife Society
MR. R. L. MARSHALL	Co-operative Union
MR. J. D. MOORE	Greater Nottingham Society
MR. B. W. PARRISH	Greater Nottingham Society
MR. A. RHODES	CRS
MR. C. J. F. RINGROSE	Co-operative Union
MR. H. ROBINSON	Greater Nottingham Society
MR. B. J. ROSE	Co-operative Union
MR. W. SHEARER	Co-operative Union
MRS. H. B. SHORT	Plymouth and South Devon Society
MR. R. G. E. DE SILVA	Co-operative Union
MR. E. E. STEPHENS	CWS
MR. F. STYLES	Royal Arsenal Society
MR. E. W. TAYLOR	Harrogate and District Society
MR. C. THORPE	Mansfield and Worksop Society
MR. N. TURNER	CRS
MR. A. S. WALKER	Co-operative Union
MR. J. H. WALKER	Royal Arsenal Society
DR. A. WILSON	
MR. R. WILSON	Co-operative Union
MR. D. WILKINSON	Co-operative Union
MR. A. W. WOOD	North Midland Society
MR. J. H. WRIGHT	Leeds Industrial Society

2. Introduction by the Chairman

Mr. D. G. Hopwood welcomed members and noted with satisfaction the large attendance.

3. Apologies

Apologies were conveyed on behalf of various members, including Presidents of the Society, Mr. L. A. Harrison, Professor S. Pollard and Mr. W. P. Watkins.

4. Report of the National Officers for 1973/74

The Secretary introduced the Report and noted that the membership had held, largely as a result of approaches to large societies, fourteen of whom had responded. On paragraph 4, "Other National Activities: Research": there had been no direct development during the year; on "Regional Developments": the Midland Region was the most active group, but, in general, Regions were not managing to make the progress that had been hoped for.

Referring to the section on "Finance": the Secretary indicated that the increased subscriptions were a reflection of the recruiting drive; and on payments there had been a heavy increase in printing costs, but this burden would in future be reduced by having the "Bulletin" produced through the Co-operative Union's own printing service.

Although the Society's modest resources were, at the year end, even more modest, the prospects were not too forbidding.

5. Future Development of the Society

(a) ARRANGEMENT OF THE AGM

The meeting considered a suggestion from the Midlands Region that more members and particularly those "Co-operatively" engaged, might attend the Society's Annual Meeting if it were held on a Sunday. The consensus of the meeting appeared to be that a one-day conference would not give sufficient time adequately to consider the items necessary and that it was not likely that a Saturday and Sunday conference would prove any more convenient than

the existing arrangements. However, a suggestion was made that the National Officers consider holding a separate day conference each year in a different Region.

(b) GENERAL PROSPECT

There was a general and quite hopeful discussion on the general development of the Society which included these points:-

- (i) A suggested difficulty in bringing "academics" into dialogue with management "professionals" in the Society was that although academics were interested in specific subjects and areas of concern to the Society, they often felt membership would entail a commitment on their part that they did not feel able to give.
- (ii) A major problem was communication; first, in making academics aware of the Society's existence and, secondly, in involving their participation. The National Officers might, it was suggested, consider a campaign with articles in journals and invitations to particular individuals to bring them into association with the Society. It was stressed, however, that in order to interest more academics it would be necessary to offer them something interesting and useful to do. Without that, any campaign would not be successful.
- (iii) The importance of association with undergraduates was instanced. Many students were open to suggestions for areas of study and their value to the Society could be considerable.
- (iv) There was agreement that a dominant objective of the Society was to get more academics to take up close scrutiny and continuing dialogue with the Co-operative Movement. The most obvious chance of growth lay in building from present strength - in the usefulness of the Annual Meeting, the service of its Bulletin, localised groups which brought together Co-operative societies and neighbouring universities, and in national research.

6. Appointment of Officers

Thanks were expressed to the Officers for their service during 1973/74 and the following members were recommended and elected to office for 1974/75:-

- (a) Existing Presidents.
- (b) Mr. S. P. Clarke as Chairman.
- (c) Mr. C. J. F. Ringrose and Mr. Michael Gibson as Vice-Chairmen.
- (d) Mr. R. L. Marshall as Secretary and Treasurer.
- (e) Mr. R. L. Marshall and Dr. T. F. Carbery as Editors of the Bulletin.

Mr. Hopwood was thanked for his services as Chairman, and Mr. Marshall was thanked for his services as Secretary and with Dr. Carbery as Editor of the Bulletin.

7. Conference Papers

- (a) "The Co-operative Development Agency - An Examination of Prospects"

Mr. Geoffrey Rhodes, MA, MP, Labour and Co-operative Member of Parliament for Newcastle East, suggested, on the basis of a note distributed at Conference, that there were more ways of establishing social ownership than via nationalisation, which could be bureaucratic, and which might involve very little real partnership and involvement in the running of the undertaking either by the employees or by the consumers. Co-operative forms of social ownership could overcome some of these difficulties and the Labour Movement were now giving serious thought to the idea of a Co-operative Development Agency.

This was first officially suggested in the 1970 General Election and appeared in Labour's programme (1973) endorsed by the Party Conference of that year. The Co-operative Development Agency would encourage rationalisation, modernisation and innovation in the Co-operative sector of the economy and would need to have at its disposal resources adequate to carry out its tasks - as was the case with the Industrial Reorganisation Corporation for private industry under the previous Labour Government. Major tasks would be to stimulate research and find methods for restructuring existing Co-operative societies and to assist and help new Co-operative ventures in new areas of both retail and productive service.

Points made in the discussion were:-

- (i) That the issue of the CDA was still rather vague and before any detailed discussion were possible there would need to be a more open and publicised draft of specific proposals and possibly further dialogue between the Labour Party, Co-operative MPs and the Co-operative Movement to clarify several issues.
- (ii) There was an area of direct interest to the Society for Co-operative Studies in the availability of resources for research and education into specifically Co-operative problems and proposals for development.
- (iii) On the proposal for CDA there might be some reservation of principle. There was not a perfect analogy between state aid for the Co-operative Movement, i.e., one form of enterprise in various industries, and aid to a complete industry which might accommodate different forms. Moreover, among the Movement's basic assumptions was the view that under fair competition the Movement could show its superiority and the CDA could be seen as an abandonment of that principle.

(iv) To some extent the Movement was committed to the proposal for the CDA as supported at Co-operative Congress. If social ownership was considered a worthwhile aim, it seemed likely that this would in future develop on more Co-operative lines, and through "consumer-orientated" organisations.

(v) If there were not an overall case for Co-operative financial support there could well be a case for money for small retail services in areas where retailing was not economic. In any allocation of resources to Co-operative development each effort would need to be specific. Many millions of pounds spent over the whole Movement would be completely insufficient to be effectual.

(b) "Regionalisation in the Co-operative Movement: Prospects and Problems"

Two papers were presented, one by Mr. David Ainley, President of the London Co-operative Society, supporting the Regional Plan II and another by Mr. T. R. Edmondson, Secretary and Chief Executive Officer of the Ipswich Co-operative Society, suggesting that a more or less uniform pattern of regionalisation for all areas was not the full answer and indeed by ignoring optimum size of operation in relation to population, could be disadvantageous. The papers had been printed in Bulletin 20.

In the presentation of the papers and in the discussion, points in favour of regionalisation were:-

- (i) The need in present economic conditions for Co-operative trading to think and act as one movement and one organisation.
- (ii) The need for larger societies capable of financing heavy capital costs, undertaking modernisation and development, and of attracting and using to advantage the best available management.

- (iii) The future possibility of less differentiation between retailing and wholesaling. Large retail societies could assume more wholesaling functions.
- (iv) With the development in size of societies, a new element had entered into the situation: retail societies were increasingly competing not just with their old rivals, but with neighbouring Co-operative societies.
- (v) Where there were trading deserts in areas between societies' centres, it would be better, instead of ignoring what neither society could alone do, to see what both societies could do together. At the present, co-operation was at best building only a number of successful Co-operative islands.

Some of the points against regionalisation were:-

- (vi) Size was not synonymous with efficiency - the large organisation could be less efficient.
- (vii) There was a danger for large societies in becoming too concentrated in, and on, central and populous areas, thus creating trading deserts.
- (viii) Growth could only come from individual strength and efficient management - not as a result of a general plan. Societies were being taken over by CRS because they were inadequately managed - not because they lacked size.
- (ix) The larger the scale of the retail trading organisation the more difficult it was to maintain the essential features of a Co-operative society.
- (x) Regional Plan II did not take into account sufficiently the different organisational requirements of different parts of the country.