

REPORT OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

18TH-19TH APRIL 1968

AT THE STEPHENSON HALL, THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

1 Attendance of Members

The following were present: where the participant represented an organisation in membership of the Society, this is given after his name:

MISS J. M. ABBOTT
MR. F. ABBOTTS
MR. R. BRISCOE

(Plymouth Society)

MR. F. BRUCKSHAW
MR. C. BURKILL

*(Barnsley British Society and
Co-operative Education
Secretaries' Association)*

DR. T. CARBERY

(University of Strathclyde)

MR. S. CLARKE

(Bradford Society)

MR. H. CLODE
MR. J. H. HARRISON
MR. L. HARRISON

(Nottingham Society)

MR. P. HARTY

*(Coatbridge Society)
(Education Committee)*

MR. W. HIGGINS
MRS. B. HIGGINS
MR. H. L. JENNINGS

MR. H. KEMP

(Co-operative Party)

MR. W. LAWN
MR. B. LE BARGY
MR. R. LOWE

*(Leicester Society
Education Committee)*

MR. R. L. MARSHALL

(Co-operative Union Ltd.)

MR. K. NOBLE

(Co-operative Wholesale Society)

MR. S. OLIVER

(Brightside & Carbrook Society)

PROFESSOR S. POLLARD
MR. E. PRITCHARD
MR. A. RHODES
MR. J. ROPER
MR. E. TAYLOR

(Harrogate Society)

MR. A. THOMAS
MR. W. P. WATKINS
MR. J. WHITFIELD
MRS. N. WILLIS
DR. A. WILSON

Dr. M. Howe of the Department of Business Studies, University of Sheffield, also attended at the invitation of the Society.

2 Greetings

Professor S. Pollard, Department of Economic History, University of Sheffield, and a President of the Society, extended a welcome to the participants and expressed the hope that they would have an enjoyable and fruitful Conference.

3 Introduction by the Chairman

Dr. Wilson briefly reviewed the background against which we were holding the first AGM. The Society had been established with initially modest intentions—and he felt that these had been realised. The membership figure was quite reassuring; a sound financial basis had been established; the *Bulletin* had been inaugurated and was already giving a distinctive service; and at least in some of the regions quite promising activities had been launched. On the whole he felt we could look with some satisfaction on our first year and with some confidence to the future.

4 Report of the National Officers for 1967-68

This has been printed in *Bulletin* 3 of the Society and was now reviewed by the AGM.

(a) MEMBERSHIP

On this, the question was raised of the comparatively small list of “non-Co-operative” organisations included so far in the Society, and various members promised to do what they could to improve this figure. In general, there was agreement that in this first stage a useful membership had been built up: and that the immediate task of the Society now was to show by fruitful work that it could retain and expand the membership so far achieved.

(b) THE BULLETIN

There was general commendation for the format and content of the three *Bulletins* which had so far been issued. A question was raised about the definition that the *Bulletin* was not intended to “serve as a ‘learned’ journal for the publication of the results of the research”. It was explained that this was not intended to exclude material directly arising from the work of the Society whether the material was the outcome of research or the compilation of reports of discussions in the regions.

(c) KINDRED RELATIONS

Attention was drawn particularly to relations developing with PACE. On the question whether separate and distinctive roles could be maintained for it and for the Society, there were noted, on the one hand, the preoccupation of the Society with the range of co-operative interests, its particular concern with co-operative education and training and its development of a regional structure; and, on the other hand, the value of PACE in bringing together co-operators, trade unionists and politicians. Each appeared to have its special function but, of course, relations between the two should be close and should be kept under review.

(d) FINANCE

A cash and bank account from the formation of the Society up to 31st March 1968 was distributed to supplement the accounts given in the Annual Report up to 17th February 1968. The later statement was reviewed and satisfaction expressed with it—though it was appreciated that the cash at bank of 31st March 1968 did not represent any disproportionate reserve. Special appreciation was expressed for the gift of £20 from the League of Co-operators—to Mr. and Mrs. Higgins who were present at the AGM and to Mr. C. E. Buck, the Secretary of the League, who had been specially active in making this donation. A question was raised of the availability to the regions of funds for the development of their work and it was explained that, within the limited resources available and where there was some reasonable prospect of the expenditure being productive, such expenses as the travel of visiting speakers, etc, could be covered.

5 Appointment of Officers for 1968-69

Thanks were expressed to all the Officers who had served in 1967-68 and, for the following year, the following motions were carried:

- (a) That all the Presidents should be re-elected.
- (b) That Mr. T. E. Stephenson, University of Leeds, should be Chairman.
- (c) That Mr. W. E. Lawn and Dr. T. Carbery, University of Strathclyde, should be Vice-Chairmen.
- (d) That Dr. Wilson should be invited to attend meetings of the National Officers in 1968-69 so that his experience was still available to the Society and that a further year of service in this way from the retiring Chairman should be annually maintained.
- (e) That Mr. R. L. Marshall should be Secretary and Treasurer.
- (f) That Miss Abbott and Mr. Marshall should be Editors of the *Bulletin*.

6 Future Development of the Society

This had been set as the main theme for the further discussions of the AGM, and Professor Pollard and Mr. Marshall had been asked to introduce it. The following notes record briefly their introductions and the variety of points that were made in the ensuing discussions. It was envisaged that the National Officers would consider the record and select the specific lines of action to be followed in the year to come.

(a) PROFESSOR S. POLLARD

He referred to two developments on the university level, one of them not very favourable to the interests of the Society and the other perhaps more helpful. First, it had to be acknowledged that the teaching resources of universities were scarce, so that there might be less response to requests for the formation of courses for co-operative officials, directors, etc. Secondly, however, there were developing possibilities of money being available for research provided a good case could be made out for it, particularly in the social sciences. Along the second line therefore the Society would wish to consider possibilities such as these:

- (i) Grants from the Social Sciences Research Council.
- (ii) Grants from other funds, for example in the area of management studies.
- (iii) Grants from co-operative societies to establish certain appointments which might later be taken within the financial framework of the university.
- (iv) The influencing of research students to select co-operative topics—and a factor in this would be the willingness of co-operative societies to open their records to such investigation.

(b) MR. R. L. MARSHALL

In his view the national structure of the Society was firm and representative enough: but the regional framework was still rather insecure and sporadic. When we looked for signs of response and life within that structure there was some limited encouragement to be obtained. There had been some achievement in providing regularly fairly complete accounts of current co-operative research and studies in accordance with the objectives of the Society—though there was no evidence yet that this compilation was in fact influencing the development of such research and studies. Then the engagement between co-operators from various levels of the Movement and universities and colleges has been extended and made more systematic, but the productivity of that engagement had still to be proved. There was need in the immediate future to show a quite positive role for the Society in practical terms and he raised two particular points:

- (i) Should the Society prepare, if necessary commissioning, study material nationally, which could be distributed to the regions as a basis for the discussion of some current topic of importance? Regional views could be sent up to the National Officers who, with the aid of an editor or panel, would then consider whether a report on the topic should be prepared. This would have the benefit of making an identifiable contribution from the Society to the discussion of some major co-operative problem and would also provide a basis for regional activity—though he was not suggesting that this should be a “compulsory” activity for all regions nor that it should be the only activity in any region.
- (ii) Research in any depth could be undertaken effectively only by qualified individuals and they could do it only if resources were available to support them in that task. Where then were these resources to be found and how were they to be organised? Mr. Marshall felt that one line of progress would be to establish a small research unit under the joint direction of the Co-operative College and a neighbouring university. He believed the university would be receptive to the possibility: he had the assurance of some money and the hope of more; and would like to envisage the inauguration of this kind of work within a year or so. The preoccupation of this research would be with the problems of the Movement in the comparatively long-term future: to ask what would be the economic and social conditions within which the Movement would be operating in five or ten years’ time and what guide lines can be laid down now to help its response to these conditions.

(c) REGIONAL ACTIVITIES

Points made in the discussion were:

- (i) Some scepticism about the value of the regional groupings becoming "talking shops".
- (ii) Some further emphasis on the need for regional dialogues which would involve both the "academics" and the experienced co-operators in bringing their experience to bear on current and future issues.
- (iii) The value of regional activities in helping to develop the content and methods of co-operative education and training.

(d) UNIVERSITY COURSES FOR CO-OPERATIVE OFFICIALS AND DIRECTORS

A point made in discussion was that in some universities, because the number of social students was limited in order to leave places for students in the sciences, there might indeed be further resources for extra-mural classes for such co-operative groups.

(e) RESEARCH

Points made in discussion were:

- (i) Widely and emphatically that research that looked ahead to the conditions in five or ten years time was urgently needed.
- (ii) That, in one or two societies investigations were already being organised on a small scale to pursue investigations about the changing conditions of distribution and of consumers.
- (iii) That, following the centenary gift from the SCWS to the University of Strathclyde there was a prospect of two research fellows who would include co-operative interests in their scope.
- (iv) That university departments might be quite likely to respond to requests for them to undertake pieces of "operational" research, particularly if the material for that research were readily made available. Larger scale research would have to fit into the existing range of the department's interest.
- (v) That additional means of getting research undertaken into Co-operative topics would include the provision of bursaries amounting to about £500 for MA candidates; encouragement to HND students in technical colleges to select co-operative topics for their projects; and the commissioning of post-graduate students to undertake small-scale investigations.
- (vi) That the availability of resources from the Industrial Training Boards for the promotion both of co-operative research and co-operative studies was a possibility that needed to be carefully watched and developed.

- (vii) That there were many topics needing research ranging from the problems of democracy in regional Societies to the problems of capital for co-operative development, from the application of "value-added" taxes to the possibilities of unified action in the Movement, etc.

(f) **THE NEXT STAGE**

There was considerable stress on the importance of the Society concentrating its efforts in the immediate future on one or two lines of development selected from the wide range of possibilities open to it. It was envisaged that the National Officers would review the various suggestions made at this AGM and select such priorities.

7 Annual General Meeting 1969

It was agreed:

- (a) That in general there was a value in the AGM moving among different centres—including a resort to the Co-operative College possibly about every third year.
- (b) That the next AGM should if possible be held at the University of Manchester.
- (c) That the dates should be Friday and Saturday, 11th-12th April, 1969—providing two sessions on the afternoon and evening of the first day and one session on the Saturday morning.
- (d) That, in 1969, one session be the business meeting of the Society and that the other two be based on papers reporting research carried out or in progress.

Lines of Development for 1968-69

A Review by the National Officers

In a wide-ranging discussion at their May meeting the National Officers of the Society for Co-operative Studies reviewed the report of the Annual General Meeting given on the preceding pages of this Bulletin and sought to identify some lines of concentration for 1968-9. In the outcome, the main points were:

1 General

There was agreement that the concern of the Society was not to assume any of the executive responsibilities which belong to the official agencies of the Co-operative Movement but to encourage and share in the exploration of the problems and developments which lay beyond these immediate tasks.

2 Increasing the Membership

It was noted that, in some regions, an urgent need was still to build up a group of members of a size which could sustain an appropriate programme. There was interest in the scheme under consideration in one region for sponsoring a social occasion such as a wine and cheese party to bring "Co-operators" and "Academics" together by individual invitations and at a charge, and to use the occasion to increase the membership.