

Society for Co-operative Studies

Report of Conference, 26-27th September 1980

Stanford Hall

"SIX DECADES STRONG - THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF
THE CO-OPERATIVE COLLEGE"

FIRST SESSION: "A DIAMOND JUBILEE OVERVIEW"

Speakers: Lord Jacques of Portsea Island,
Mr. W. P. Watkins, JP (former Director of the
International Co-operative Alliance) and
Dr. R. L. Marshall, OBE, MA (Chief Education
Officer and College Principal 1946-77)

formed a panel to outline the development of
the Co-operative College over 60 years.

Mr. Watkins, 1919-1926

The Co-operative College was 20 years in gestation.
In the first decade of the 20th Century there was a
revival of educational activity in the Movement. It was
followed by the great calamity of the First World War,
which affected the Movement to its roots and cost it so
many young committed and educated men.

Fred Hall was the principal propagandist for the
College and used the Co-operative Students' Fellowship as a
means of drumming up support. Hall was the first academic
to be employed by the Co-operative Union on a full-time
basis in 1915 - which placed him in a strategic position as
an advocate.

The College was founded as a Co-operative War Memorial.

Investment in education was seen as essential to make up for the loss of talent in the war. Working first as a research student and later as a tutor provided insight into the key factors in the development of the College, which were:-

- (1) location in Manchester in the heart of Co-operative decision-making with the "giants" crossing their path every day;
- (2) the dynamism of Fred Hall;
- (3) the quality of the people attracted to this small institution. (Many people were mentioned but of particular interest to future researchers was the work of Mr. Owen who did a study of the working expenses of co-operatives.)

At first the numbers were very small. Eight or nine people - some coming for one term. But, even at this stage the College was an international institution with students from Australia, Sweden and India.

Lord Jacques, 1929-1939

In the inter-war years Co-operative Retail Societies (and co-operative education) had a number of advantages. As employers they offered security, high wages, better than-average conditions and thus were able to take the cream of the working class labour market. Because of the lack of educational opportunity within the ranks of the employees there was a thirst for education and intellectual development to which the Co-operative Union Education Department and College was able to respond. Even so, there was a lack of resources because the Co-operative Union had been slow in pursuing the pledges of financial support at the 1919 Congress. Thus, when societies found themselves in a liquidity squeeze as a result of a fall in the price level, they were unable to provide the financial support, and consequently the College was under-financed.

However, Fred Hall was a very determined operator. He used his influence within the Co-operative Union and the Movement, and by 1924 the Education Department was the largest in Holyoake House both in terms of staff and space allocation. A hostel was bought in Vine Street, Kersall and, to help with its finances, Co-operative Wholesale Society Directors were encouraged to use it as a hotel. Finally in 1931 an extension was made to Holyoake House which gave the College and Department adequate space.

Hall was able to make phenomenal progress because of his pivotal position, by using the "College" resources for an evening class programme for the Societies in the Manchester area, and by having an academic staff who worked office rather than tutorial hours.

"It was the hardest job I ever experienced and at times I worked between 80 and 100 hours a week."

Most of the work was in the correspondence section, not in the College. In 1929 there were 6 Tutors and 30 full-time College students. By 1939 the Tutors had increased to 12 while the number of College students had merely risen to 40. This gave some indication of the volume of evening and correspondence work.

In retrospect the tragedy was that the Movement did not set up an institution like Stanford Hall in 1919.

Dr. Marshall

Was constantly surprised to realise that the College had developed for half its history under his stewardship. But this conference was not the time nor the place for a systematic review of those years. Nevertheless, drawing from the experiences provided by three characters over the period, it was possible to make some generalisations.

The first character was a Jordanian student who had said: "A wise man must give priority to his family and his private life if he is to succeed." Certainly, the Education Department and College had been run with inadequate managerial resources which had led to intolerable burdens at times. There was a need for a stronger middle management - and this deficiency appeared to have been overcome.

The second character was a Chief Official and ex-student who said: "The College taught us the right practices and methods but when we returned to our societies we were unable to put them into practice." While the College had put forward the correct policies and techniques, the students had not been able to effect their implementation.

The third character was a Professor of Adult Education at Nottingham University which indirectly raised the question of the University Diploma in Social Studies. While this adult education course had an appropriate and honourable place in the history of the College, nevertheless, in Dr. Marshall's opinion, it was the least central area of activity. In the past he had had differences of opinion with the Chairmen of the Education Executive about the appropriateness of the Social Studies course in the Co-operative College. On reflection, they may have been right to insist on its continuance.

Discussion

Mr. Fred Abbotts Recalled that he had thrust on him the responsibility of buying Stanford Hall. Mr. J. L. Wilson, the Youth Organiser, discovered that Stanford Hall was on the market. The Education Executive had reservations about the building - seeing it as a drain on resources.

In order to resolve the situation the Central Executive was invited to inspect the premises. They were impressed with its grandeur and felt that it would be ideal. After agonies of indecision he decided in light of the wartime restrictions on building that it was important to have a centre.

There were other factors at the time. The previous Principal had been sacked, and the post had been blacked. The staff were disaffected and disturbed by the move away from Manchester. Thus the College had to be re-made at Stanford Hall by first, a team of volunteers recruited by Arthur Hemstock from local co-operative societies and later by the students and tutors themselves.

Mrs. Muriel Russell. There was a high level of disorganisation when she first arrived at Stanford Hall. But Arnold Bonner, who was highly committed to the College, helped them to muddle through for the first year until Dr. Marshall arrived.

Mrs. Rita Rhodes. The Social Studies Diploma was a very valuable course for those who came on it. The loss of Mr. Bonner left a gap which would always be hard to fill because of his commitment to the Movement, his abilities as a natural teacher, and his willingness to serve the College as an Institution.

Mr. Brian Rose. The Social Studies Diploma had failed to produce the cadre of voluntary leaders the Movement urgently needed and this was as much a reflection of opportunities in the consumer Co-operative Movement as it was on the College.

Mr. Will Watkins. His father had always maintained that the first task of co-operative education was to make co-operators. But there has been a failure to define the key characteristics of a co-operator and establish those areas of life where those characteristics were vital.

Miss Fountain's research established that the Pioneers did not talk or preach about Principles - they were practitioners who established a set of working methods and demonstrated that these could be effective. Because of Holyoake's skills as a propagandist these methods became fixed into a form of commandments which stultified creative thinking. Vansittart Neale did attempt to work at a general philosophical level - but he was exceptional.

Drawing on his experience, Mr. Watkins felt that the effective co-operator was not a doctrinaire but rather someone who has the knack and skill of working with and stimulating other people to work together. The most important part of a co-operative educational experience should be teamwork and the skills of association. The task for co-operative education is first to isolate what is indispensable for working together and then demonstrate throughout the "Movement" the collective benefits of association.

SECOND SESSION: "THE STANFORD HALL YEARS"

A panel of ex-students, including

- Ron Edmondson, JP, CHD, SScD (former Chief Executive Officer, Ipswich Co-operative Society);
- Derek Heffer, CSD, FCIS, AMBIM (Assistant Co-operatives Adviser, Overseas Development Administration);
- John Tomlinson, DipPESS (Lecturer in Trade Union Studies, Solihull College of Technology, and former MP); and
- Lloyd Wilkinson, ACIS, CSD (General Secretary, Co-operative Union Ltd.)

discussed the role of the College since 1945 and made a personal assessment of their period at Stanford Hall.

Mr. Edmondson, 1945-1947

Outlined the importance of personal networks in guiding him to the Co-operative College in the immediate

post-war period - and in particular the influence of Cyril Forsyth. Because his friends and mentors felt he was destined for a political career he found himself in the Social Studies faculty (prior to the link-up with the University of Nottingham). He never regretted this "choice". The study of the social and behavioural sciences is the only effective training for management, for a willingness to take decisions, risks and follow actions through. Accountancy and all the other techniques are merely tools - there is a dimension beyond them which conventional management training fails to reach. Indeed, conventional training tends to produce an élite of well-paid zombies.

When he arrived the College was in the "control" of Arnold Bonner. Education was a scarce commodity and the College community in this first year had its share of eccentrics, a very high proportion of women, and without exception was full of characters.

When he returned for the second year in Session 1946-47 the situation had changed. First, the student body comprised a younger group of conventional men studying co-operative management. This was perhaps a reversion to the historical norm. Social Studies was a tolerated fringe group. The second change was the appointment of Lt. Col. R. L. Marshall as Principal - whose acceptance of the post was a mark of either courage or innocence. From the beginning of that term Mr. Edmondson had conceded both a grudging admiration and a reluctant submission to a new and important influence.

Lt. Col. Marshall contributed three things to Mr. Edmondson's intellectual development. First, as a result of their engagements he became more liberal, more informed and more concerned to direct his reading into profitable areas. Secondly, he became aware of the need

for self-discipline and evidence when putting forward an argument. Finally, he became absolutely convinced of the unique contribution co-operation could make to social development. He acknowledged his debts.

Mr. Heffer, 1955-1956

Was a Secretarial student and, in comparison with Mr. Edmondson, led a sheltered and quiet life at the College. He had listened to Lord Jacques talking about the long hours the tutorial staff worked in the 1930's. As far as he was concerned his hours were 168 a week, sleeping on iron beds, collecting leaves, washing up on a rota basis and accepting an 11 p.m. curfew.

His route to the College had begun in Ipswich with the influence of his mentor, Dick Lewis. As an evening class student the peak of his ambition was to earn a scholarship to the College. Once there on the Secretary's Diploma he sought a quiet life - the tutors were old world gentlemen and he was sure that he neither deserved nor appreciated them at the time.

His memories were fragmentary and could not recall much mixing of the different groups of students, particularly the overseas contingent.

Once he left the College and began the traditional migration from one society to the next, he was pleased to find that the books really balanced. The College was a ticket to jobs. Only when he went overseas in 1967 did he begin to see the importance of the College (and the key posts in the Establishment). Stanford Hall was not merely the focus of ambition overseas - it was a co-operative Mecca. Ex-students would inquire about the principal and the tutorial staff, but their real concern was for Jack Dring (who had given them their post) and Hilda Watling (who had fed them).

Overseas the ex-students are a benevolent Mafia. Many of them are in senior governmental posts and still see Stanford Hall as a source of talented officials and managers.

In retrospect, he would agree with Mr. Edmondson that the Social Science element in the course was the most vital. He had sat reluctantly through Friday sessions on Western Values taken by Mr. Bing, convinced that it was a diabolical plot by the Principal to prevent people going home early. Yet this proved to be invaluable in subsequent years.

For the future he wondered whether the College could offer a service to "second-time around" co-operatives because he was convinced that this was where the future lay.

Mr. Tomlinson, 1959-1961

Left school early and completely disillusioned with education. His patron was Arthur Moore, who encouraged him to apply for the London Society Scholarship to the College. He was a political activist who had joined the Co-operative Party at 15 because it was the only one which would have him. (Transport House was busy purging youth organisations.)

He arrived at the age of 20 with an outstanding obligation for National Service in the armed Forces. Although not a pacifist by principle, he objected strongly to the way the armed Forces were being used to put down nationalist movements in the former colonies; he registered as a conscientious objector. This led to court appearances and the threat of arrest as a deserter - which did not fit very well with the prevailing ethos of Stanford Hall. Eventually the problem was resolved and he had to cope with the experience of his idealism confronting intellectual reality.

There were other stresses. The College was a benevolent autocracy policed by Mr. G. Adams and the Rev. Wm. Walker.

Leaving the College, fired with the ambition for Co-operative service, he met another kind of reality as a worker for the Co-operative Party in Sheffield. Having experienced the rivalry of the two Societies in that city, he left to join the staff of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers and from there into adult education, and finally into Westminster as a Member of Parliament. There he discovered the importance of the Co-operative College connection, which was often a guarantee of integrity and which he discovered as a junior Minister also extended overseas.

The tutors and the other students were and are obviously an important resource. But he was convinced that the secret of the success of the College lay in the values which underpinned its work.

Mr. Wilkinson, 1958-60

His guardian and mentor was Bill Lawn of the Huddersfield Society, who encouraged him to build on a foundation of family-based experience in co-operative retailing. After National Service in the Air Force he was awarded a CWS Centenary Scholarship, followed by what may have been one of the first local authority bursaries from the West Riding.

He came to the College as a co-operative employee and left as an employee-co-operator. It instilled a sense of self-discipline, it provided the important paper qualifications, and imbued an ambition to pursue professional studies still further. His enduring memory was of the great number of friendships made,

together with the enduring regret that so many friends have left the Movement. But during his time at the College and immediately afterwards he felt that there had been no profound effect. Growth and development, as Derek Heffer testified, only came later.

Discussion

Brian Rose. Having experienced the College as a student in 1960 and later as a tutor, leaving in 1976, he could testify to the changes since Lloyd Wilkinson's time. As a student he was acutely conscious of the pervading sense of discipline - which had largely disappeared by 1976. By that time the students were much more affluent and were much less grateful for what was being provided for them. Another change was visible in front of the Hall. In 1960 it was open and spacious; by 1976 it was crammed with student cars which were used for going home at week-ends. Finally, there was a change in attitudes and maturity between the actual and the post-National Service generation.