

SOCIETY NOTES

In recent Bulletins we have said farewell to Presidents of the Society who for various reasons have had to leave. Now "hail" and a warm welcome to those who have accepted the invitation of the Society into that honoured estate - Dr. Margaret Digby, George Gay and Lord Young of Dartington who represent a wide range of Co-operative experience and a powerful reinforcement of the Society.

Annual Conference and A.G.M.

The Report of the 1980 A.G.M. was not available for the last Bulletin and although it is a bit late to print it in full now, items from it will be included in these Notes.

For the moment, however, we look forward to the 1981 occasion. It will be held at Stanford Hall from afternoon tea on Friday 25th September to lunch the next day. The topic of the Conference will be "Member Participation in Retail Co-operative Societies" and the charges will be £21.00 for residents and £12.00 for non-residents. Full and enticing details will no doubt be sent out later but please make your note and arrangements now.

Society Study Groups

At the last Annual Conference the national officers recommended that one way of encouraging the study of Co-operative topics in greater depth in the society could be through the setting up of study groups. In turn this should enable the society to make a greater contribution to Co-operative thought at the present time.

The first study group has got underway. It is looking at the topic "Co-operation between Co-operatives" and its deliberations were prompted by an article which Will Watkins, a President of the Society, wrote for the Co-operative News last May. He is a member of the study group along with Harold Campbell and other members of the Society from agricultural and housing Co-operatives and credit unions. Archie Macintosh is acting as convenor and 'scribe' and the Bulletin should have periodic reports of its progress. At the outset the group has attempted to compile a table showing the socio-economic weight of each sector of the movement. This has been beset with various difficulties which will be described in due course but a future one is likely to lie in the limitations in the Co-operative statistics produced by the Registrar of Friendly Societies.

The Newsletter refers to the 20% cut made by the Housing Corporation. The reduction demanded of the Registrar is only 10% but we understand that as a result, the annual returns which Co-operative societies make will be shortened, and that less information will be extracted from these and subsequently published. Society secretaries filling in their annual returns may not be unhappy but Co-operative researchers who use these statistics will be; as will the study group. Once it has produced the table of socio-economic weight of different sectors of the Movement it will wish to update it periodically to see which parts are growing and which are contracting and this item of its work is likely to become more difficult with these constraints on the statistics produced by the Registrar.

A second study group is also forming and will concern itself with Co-operative history,

probably along the lines of the Ruskin College History Workshops. Members of the society who would like to be involved should contact Stephen Drodge, Librarian at the Co-operative College or Roy Garrett, the Co-operative Union's Librarian.

Co-operative Researchers' Seminar, London,
26th June, 1981

One of the Society's objectives is the exchange of information and experience on Co-operative studies and research. The Society is therefore convening a seminar for Co-operative researchers which will be held at the Central Council for Agricultural and Horticultural Co-operation in London on 26th June. The seminar will not discuss items of recent Co-operative research in the way that the half-yearly research seminars, organised by Co-operative research bodies, do. Instead, it will consider research strategies and will look at such questions as how to stimulate more Co-operative research; how to achieve a better co-ordination of Co-operative research efforts so as to avoid unnecessary duplication and ensure that they are directed to the most important subjects; how to assemble and maintain a comprehensive directory of on-going and completed Co-operative research; and how to achieve a wider dissemination of research results.

It will be easier to obtain a picture of completed research when the Co-operative Research Directory currently being produced by the Plunkett Foundation for Co-operative Studies and the Co-operatives Research Unit of the Open University has been published. Co-operative librarians, however, from the requests they receive for information, know

that there has been an upsurge of research into Co-operatives and the seminar can support and guide this in the ways indicated.

Membership and Money

At the February meeting of the national officers, a current membership of 172 was reported, including 47 organisations. Comparison with the past is reasonably comforting - a few below the 1979 record of 180 but still on the relatively high plateau of achievement - as some people might, unfortunately, say. There are still heights to be climbed and, I am confident, they are within our capacity, particularly since the Society and the Bulletin are accommodating a wider scope of Co-operative interests and forms than they did in the beginning.

One of the reasons for this ambition is to strengthen the financial security of the Society. I find it difficult to see how the present modest expenditure, already pressed by various limitations, can be further reduced in a way significant to our financial position without serious detriment to our status and quality - though, of course, of course, there is no avenue which should be left unexplored. I would look more confidently to increasing the income. More members? Increase in fees? Wider marketing of the Bulletin? Special support from "patrons" among societies and organisations particularly interested in the S.C.S.?

And the Next Bulletin?

This should be published in August and include as special features an assessment of the Co-operative Development Agency and some

attention to the Conference topic "Member
Participation in Retail Societies.

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R.L.M.