

NEWSLETTER

It is good that the subject of last year's Annual Conference, "MEMBERSHIP PARTICIPATION IN RETAIL CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETIES" is still arousing comment. This seems to divide into two main areas. Some feel that to have done justice to the question it would have helped to have papers circulated beforehand. The Officers at their last meeting took this point and it is hoped that a paper or a report will be available prior to this year's Annual Conference when the subject will be "Co-operation between Co-operatives". The second main comment seems to be 'What now?'. The conference sparked off a lot of discussion and some members feel the need for a follow-up. This could take a number of forms, including regional meetings. But another likely outcome will be the setting up of a Study Syndicate which will look at membership participation in greater depth than was possible at last year's Annual Conference. Will Watkins, honoured President of the Society, has been in the forefront in making suggestions about the work of the proposed Syndicate. But we would also welcome your views. Or, better still, your participation. If you have ideas or wish to join the discussions please contact me at 23, Crown Hill, Rayleigh, Essex (tel. 0268 775062). Meetings are likely to be kept to a minimum. The main exchange of ideas is likely to be mainly through correspondence.

Co-operative Courses

The number of courses with some Co-operative element in Adult and Further Education Colleges continues to increase. Often these

are short courses designed for those who are setting up new businesses. Such proliferation will be welcomed by Co-operative teachers. It helps to create a more favourable and knowledgeable climate of opinion in which Co-operatives can develop. It can, however, also pose a problem for this Society. One of our main aims is the exchange of information about Co-operative studies. As courses in the public sector increase in number this task becomes more complex. But there should also be compensations, mainly in the number of potential members joining the Society from among the new teachers of Co-operation.

The Plunkett Foundation for Co-operative Studies has announced that it is to hold a series of Summer Courses for Workers' and Community Co-operatives. They will be held simultaneously at Ruskin College, Oxford, between 1st and 5th August, 1982. The main subjects will be "BASIC FINANCIAL CONTROL, BOOK-KEEPING AND MARKETING FOR SMALL CO-OPS.". If you, or any of your friends in new Co-operatives, would like further details, please contact Yvonne Tucker, at the Plunkett Foundation, 31 St. Giles, Oxford OX1 3LF.

New Chief Registrar

How many teachers of Co-operation will have used a phrase similar to the following in their classes. 'Whereas companies register with the Registrar of Companies, Co-operatives register with the Registrar of Friendly Societies'. It helps to be able to put a face to such a notable official as the Chief Registrar and those attending the Co-operative Union's

Annual Congress will have become familiar with that of Mr. Keith Brading. He was the Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies from 1972 until his recent retirement - and we offer him admiration for his work and best wishes for his retirement. If in that new condition his undoubted interest in Co-operatives brings him into engagement with the S.C.S. we shall be delighted. He is being succeeded by Mr. Michael Bridgeman and we share in the welcome to him.

Government cuts have resulted in a reduction of some of the statistics which the Registrar publishes. On behalf of Co-operative students, let us take this opportunity of a little special pleading. The basis of much Co-operative research is the Registrar's Annual Report and Statistics. We hope that further cuts will not have to be made and, indeed, that those that were can soon be restored. For example, much clearer information is now required about the rate and size of growth of workers' Co-operatives but prior to the cuts these were linked with the productive units of the CWS which were hardly compatible let alone comparable.

Co-operative Researchers

Following its Co-operative Researchers' Seminar last June the Society has made representations to the ICA about researchers' continued access to its library and to the Co-operative Bank about possible funding of future research projects. The Officers are considering holding a follow up seminar for later this year.

Among the Agricultural Co-operatives

Co-operative marketing, member commitment and the benefits of Co-operative ownership of machinery all feature in news from agricultural Co-operatives. A group of West Wales farmers recently held their first Co-operative sale of top-class British Friesians. Speaking at this, Mr. Alan Thomas, Director of the Welsh Agricultural Organisation Society said that the quality of animals in the sale was very high indeed and 'this illustrated just what Co-operation among producers can do in setting extremely high standards and in ensuring that a uniform level of high quality stock is available'.

Again in Wales, delegates to the Welsh Agricultural Organisation Society's annual supply conference were told by Mr. John Marsh, Vice Chairman of Staffordshire Farmers, that the 'old faintly musty ideology of service to members has got to be replaced by a more aggressive attitude to buying and selling.' He added that this could only be achieved by firm commitments by members to their Society. "We have got to get rid of the previous defensive attitude of preserving services to members" he said, "and move on to the offensive in positive commitment - perhaps 100 per cent - in our buying and selling and fully using the expertise of management and capital resources available to us". Mr. Marsh continued, "I know that we have always looked upon ourselves as members but I suggest that from now on we should consider ourselves shareholders and owners - and as owners of societies we should use them as extensions of our farming activities." "Such sentiments will find echoes in every other sector of the Movement.

One of the conclusions reached by Richard Taylor of Nottingham University in a comprehensive dissertation on "THE ECONOMICS OF SUGAR BEET HARVESTING" is that Co-operative ownership of machinery benefits farmers. 'By spreading the fixed costs of ownership over the group area, there is more benefit due to the economies of scale (purchase of high capacity, up-to-date harvester) and economies of utilisation (more effective use of harvester) by groups than for growers with equal individual areas who harvest their own sugar beet.' And, presumably, this Co-operative lesson applies to other areas of farming.

Housing

Praise for tenant management Co-operatives running housing estates came from the Minister for Housing, Mr. John Stanley, MP, at a one-day conference on "BUILDING COMMUNITIES" organised by the Greater London Secondary Housing Association in February. The conference dealt with the full range of Co-operative housing options from tenant management Co-operatives on local authority or housing association estates through to shared ownership schemes.

Mr. Stanley said that experience showed that successful management of existing housing stock was as important to the provision of satisfactory housing as new building and improvement.

Industrial and Service Co-operatives

The Productive Board of the Co-operative Union is a permanent committee which was set up following last year's Co-operative Congress

decision. A year earlier the Co-operative Union had taken over the engagements of the Co-operative Productive Federation.

The remit of the new Productive Board is to deal with matters connected with the operations of those productive/industrial Co-operatives who are already members of the Co-operative Union or who subsequently affiliate. The Board will provide services to these and make recommendations on their behalf to the Central committee or to the Parliamentary Committee of the Union. At present members of the Board are strongly representative of the earlier Co-operative Productive Federation members and include G. Allen, Derby Printers; N. Carter, Avalon Footwear; A. Dawson, Leicester Carriage Builders; G. Fletcher, Leicester Printers; K. Hill King, Walsall Locks; and W.H. White, Queen Eleanor.

Local Authority Involvement

The increasing involvement of local authorities in Co-operative development continues. In January the Cleveland County Council announced that it was setting up the Cleveland Co-operative Development Agency with funding of £10,000 in the current financial year and £87,000 in the next. Then, in February came the announcement that the West Midlands County Council, with the support of Wolverhampton and Birmingham District Councils, was establishing a CDA with three local CDAs in Coventry, the Black Country and Birmingham. It has set aside £250,000 a year to provide financial support for Co-operatives in its area to the tune of £17,000 a year while, last autumn, Leicester Council set up the Leicester CDA with financial support of £25,000 per year. In Scotland, financial support for the work of

the Scottish Co-operative Development Committee is now coming from several Regional Councils and from the Scottish Development Agency.

Generally speaking, the functions of local CDA are to provide advice and information on the legal and financial aspects of establishing Co-operatives. Also to provide links with the financial institutions which can assist them.

There are a number of ramifications in the growing links between local authorities and developing Co-operatives. One is the nature of the relationship and the question of how independent such Co-operatives can remain. Another is who will train the greatly increased numbers of people who will be advising Co-operatives on behalf of their local authorities. Some training in Co-operation is highly desirable because many will have had no previous Co-operative experience.

Present co-operative developments are very exciting but established Co-operators would be wrong to turn a blind eye to some difficulties or to withhold the benefits and lessons of their own previous experiences.

Society Members in Action

Lord Jacques, a President of the Society, spoke at a recent meeting of the Metropolitan and Southern Section. His theme was the changing relationships between the CWS, CRS and retail societies.

David Hutton, Chairman of the Society last year, spoke on the same subject at a recent seminar organised jointly by the Member Relations

Department of the Oxford and Swindon Co-operative Society and the Industrial Branch of the local WEA. Entitled "What Future for Co-operation?" the seminar was also addressed by two other members of the Society, Jenny Thornley and Martin Stott.

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Rita Rhodes

Note of the Author

Rita Rhodes was until recently Education/Liaison Officer of the Co-operative Development Agency. Has been student of the Co-operative College, lecturer in Industrial Relations in further education and Education Officer of the Scottish Section of the Co-operative Union.