

# NEWSLETTER



*"They also serve who only stand and wait."*

This has never seemed to me an unquestionable principle for universal application but I hope it has at least a passing truth for me as at the time of writing I await the discussion at Congress on the future of the College. I have neither the status nor the information nor the inclination to intervene in the exchanges but perhaps it is seemly and safe enough to offer best wishes to all of good will carrying responsibility on this matter - and to exhibit some degree of fellow feeling for them. I can recall in the past similar questions presenting themselves though not perhaps in the same scale or depth, and not intensified by the movement's recession - linked financial problems. What then is to be discussed and settled about the College which is at once a Co-operative institution and an educational charity?

## **The Purposes of the College?**

It is not easy, at least for me, to identify and define precisely the particular issues in the "great debate" but, though my eyes are dim, I can see, I think, the main areas of concern. There is, first, the need to re-examine the purposes of the College and that is a constant enough requirement. This "great imperative" is not in doubt - to analyse from time to time the changing conditions in which an institution operates and calculate what changes should be made, if any, in response to them. "Challenge and response" - "adapt or perish". These are good and wide principles to which we all defer.

We are all keenly aware also, of course, of the difficulty in putting them into practice. There is, to begin with, a reluctance to change the existing order - and that it exists may be a high tribute to the skill and devotion with which it was built. Even if this initial resistance is overcome, there is then the problem of finding time and energy to stand back from the day-to-day preoccupations (which will not stand back from us) and deal with the broader questions.

## *The Governance?*

Then there is the second question - the governance of the College to serve whatever purposes are set - what the nature, composition and relations of the directing agency or agencies should be. It is a larger and deeper question than can be met, for example, by variations in the terms of reference or adjustments in the range of representation etc. Action on this latter level is, of course, a serious enough preoccupation and I recall an early acknowledgement of this.

Not long after I reached Stanford Hall, a letter from a local educationist asked for guidance on some issue of committee membership and I dictated a reply begging to be excused - or at least to be given more time. As I recall, I said - "I am still treading my way warily through the complexities of the Co-operative committee structure"; the letter brought to me for signing was impeccably typed, except that it reported me to be "treading my way wearily" through these complexities. Well - that rendering has its own truth.

However, by governance I have in mind also larger questions which pressed themselves upon us from time to time and called at least for exploration. For example, there was a continuing engagement with the need to have the economic powers of the Movement fully represented and committed in the direction of the College. Of course, the social ambitions and authorities of Co-operation had a special claim on any educational institutions or measures but the involvement of the economic authorities in their ownership, policy and function was something constantly to be sought.

### *The Organisation?*

Thirdly there is the question of the organisation to serve the purposes and respond to the decisions of governance - essentially the institutions and measures calculated to bring adequate staff and appropriate students together in locations and settings conducive to effective education and training. This too, of course, attracted debate from time to time and over the years I can recall scrutiny of various factors. Considerable differences were revealed in the debates but I think there was agreement, in our profession if not always our practice, on a truth which all held to be self-evident, that among these factors the staff is the dominant one. Its quality is the determinant.

Enough is enough - and I hope not too much. To return for a final moment to Milton, I have not reached the stage where "old experience do attain/To something like prophetic strain" but I am sure that those who now carry the responsibility for the future of the College will seek to match the task. Let it be said of them and of their recommendations, "Then are thy glorious words/Parent of good".

### **Code of Best Practice**

The Co-operative Union is to draw up a Code to help societies "maintain the highest standards of corporate behaviour". This follows a passing advocacy in an earlier Newsletter, but - shunning the example of the cock crowing over the dawn it has caused - congratulations to the Union and a promise of interested scrutiny of what emerges.

### **The Author**

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