

Education for Co-operators

Basil Loveridge

Johnston Birchall wrote in the September issue 1997, in his article on 'Co-operative Values and Principles':

There is an even larger conception of Co-operative Education. Many of the early promoters were also keen on adult education, seeing each as a condition for the other, and both as a precondition for one of the classic liberal values, individual liberty as self development.

This touches the nub of the British Consumer Co-operative Movement's failure with education; we have talked about "Co-operative Education" when we should have been planning "education for Co-operators". Co-operative education provides only a small part of the task of preparing people for "Liberty as self development" and the failure to see the difference between the two has been largely responsible for there being so few education programmes in British co-operatives in the past 75 years.

The government's Adult Education Report of 1918 said of Co-operative Education:

Its influence may be judged by considering the loss which would have been suffered by education if it had not existed ... there would, but for Co-operation, have been far less continued education, especially in the North of England, and far fewer facilities for culture.

There might have been, as far as can be judged, no University Extension Movement . . . The Worker's Educational Association which was derived in part from the educational tradition of the Co-operative Movement, would probably not have been founded. Co-operatives were in fact, the only working class body which continuously, and persistently stood for a humane education as an essential element in the social aims of democracy.

This report acknowledged that "education for co-operators" continued up to the First World War. It was not the growth of public provision for adult education that made inroads into Co-operative Education, it was the political climate of the thirties and the Co-op's association with the Labour Party. This red herring about public provision appeared again in 1945, when public provision was much better and more sophisticated. And for me it appeared again in 1960. The reader is invited to study any local programme of adult education and judge whether the study of subjects and problems in which we are interested are being addressed. There are classes in pottery, woodwork, rural life, and the modern novel but very seldom the study of the social, economic and political issues of our day.

Increasingly co-operative education in the thirties, and post 1945, was used in support of the Labour Party and the return of a left wing government. The Co-operative Party compounded the problem. The British Co-operative Movement had decided that it was the only co-operative movement in the world that needed to be represented in Parliament to protect its interests. Others found better ways. Anybody who lived through the 1930s, particularly the early part of the decade, can appreciate the urgency with which the working class pressed its political demands. Like the century before with the Chartists, there were very good reasons for thinking that power in the House of Commons was the urgent need of the day. It was much easier to see in the short term glittering prize of political power a greater hope for the future. By comparison, the quiet, unspectacular, slow progress of co-operative education may have appeared to many as inadequate for the crisis of the times. Since 1920 co-operative committees have employed the organising techniques of the politicians - conferences, film shows, weekend schools, public meetings - and sometimes they have gone hunting for things to do which should never have concerned an education committee: travel and summer holidays. They have supported brass bands and choral festivals which had popular interest but little educational or cultural value. Committee Secretaries and their committees were ill-equipped for a role in education. Many of the more capable education secretaries saw their job as a stepping stone to Parliament, and education committees supported them by not asking questions when they were absent

from the office nursing their constituency. Committees felt they were indirectly supporting the Labour Movement. Too often the members of education committees did not have the right experience and preparation for service on an education committee. That preparation should have been in education work, preferably as a student in serious class work. Too often service in a social or political organisation, or one of the Guilds, was thought appropriate for a place on the education committee. The Women's Guild did a wonderful job and the few who had experience of serious study were the salt of the earth. But service in the Guild was not enough for sound education committee service.

There were three things which led to the failure of co-operative education:

- local activity programmes which had little educational content and were politically motivated;
- lack of understanding of the difference between co-operative education and education for co-operators;
- education secretaries who were more interested in politics than education and education committees that were not equipped for the job.

All of these resulted in the diminishing value of local co-operative education programmes.

To approach a co-operative education programme with the aim of educating people primarily in co-operative principles, practices and philosophy is to embark on a strictly limited educational exercise. It never has attracted many and there is no reason why it should. They **will** be interested and enriched by a study of the problems, disciplines and ideas of our heritage and culture. In these we try to place the value of our co-operative experience and tradition.

Since the 1920s, there have been only two societies which have understood "education for co-operators" and developed sound education programmes and policy. They are the South Suburban and the Royal Arsenal (RACS) societies in the 1930s and the Royal Arsenal Society 1945/47. These Societies were

following a policy of education for co-operators. The RACS Education Prospectus for 1946/47 stated:

We seek to encourage and organise studies in the social subjects. Co-operation does not live in a world of its own. It is part of a wider whole and can only be understood in any of its own several aspects if studied in relation to the other social studies of economics, history and social institutions.

An education programme of this character demands its own special approach and techniques. In May 1945, in the RACS, there was a very poor rump of the old adult class work of prewar days. Six years of war had badly depleted the programme. But by 1947, in just two years, it could report the following:

Other Classes

Other classes have been organised in conjunction with the L.C.C., Kent Education Committee, Surrey Education Committee and the Workers' Educational Association. The R.A.C.S. Education Committee has been directly responsible for others.

L.C.C.	..	..	44	R.A.C.S.	..	16
S.E.C.	..	..	12	W.E.A.	..	7
K.E.C.	..	..	9			
		University Classes	..			3

Subjects for all classes during the session were as follows:-

1. Economics	2	12. Local Government	1
2. International Affairs.. ..	12	13. History of Working Class Organisations	1
3. Modern, Social and Economic Problems	7	14. Development of British Democracy	1
4. Current Affairs.. ..	3	15. Problems of the Peace	1
5. Citizenship	6	16. Literature	2
6. Next Steps in Co-operative Advance	5	17. Appreciation of Music	1
7. Psychology	5	18. Choral Music	7
8. Child Psychology	1	19. Orchestral Music	3
9. History of the Common Man	1	20. Elements of Socialism	1
10. Local Government & Public Speaking	2	21. Drama	10
11. China and Japan	1	22. British Economic Problems	1
		23. Esperanto	3
		24. Arts and Crafts	14

The courses, "Next Steps in Co-operative Advance" were study groups organised in conjunction with the senior members of R.A.C.S. Youth Clubs, and were precursors of an examination in the same subject for those seeking a scholarship award to a Co-operative Youth Summer School. Each course consisted of seven weekly meetings of 1½ hours each.

Unsuccessful attempts were made to form additional classes in Balham, Peckham, Surbiton, Belvedere, New Eltham, Plumstead, Blackfen and Well Hall.

CLASSES AND COURSES - COMPARATIVE SUMMARY

	1944-45		1945-46		1946-47	
	<i>Classes</i>	<i>Students</i>	<i>Classes</i>	<i>Students</i>	<i>Classes</i>	<i>Students</i>
University Tutorial 3 year Courses	-	-	-	-	2	31
University Sessional Classes (20-24 meetings)	2	31	2	38	1	26
One-year Courses (20-24 meetings)	26	495	37	767	*59	1324
Terminal Courses (12 meetings)	5	100	8	117	17	243
Short Terminal Courses (6 meetings)	-	-	11	99	12	133
Employee Classes	-	-	5	81	Now undertaken by Staff Training Council	
	<hr/>		<hr/>		<hr/>	
	33	626	63	1102	91	1757
	<hr/>		<hr/>		<hr/>	
Lecture Courses with Women's Guilds (6 meetings)	-	-	83	1994	78	1906

*27 continued for the summer term 1947 of 12 extra meetings.

CLASSES - SESSION 1946-47

	<i>Authority</i>	<i>No. of Meetings</i>	<i>R.A.C.S. Members</i>	<i>Non-Members</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Average Attendance</i>
UNIVERSITY CLASSES							
Tutorial Classes (3-year courses) University of London							
WOOLWICH							
ECONOMICS							
Co-operative Institute, S.E. 18	L.U.	24	13	6	10	9	14
Tutor: Mr. W. Bruce, M.A.							
University of Oxford In conjunction with Kent W.E.A.							
BEXLEYHEATH							
THE DEVELOPMENT OF BRITISH DEMOCRACY							
Girls' Secondary School, Upton Road ..	O.U.	24	11	1	6	6	11
Tutor: Miss N. Nicholson, B.A.							
Sessional Class 20-24 meetings. University of London							
MORDEN							
PSYCHOLOGY							
R.A.C.S. Branch Room, Morden	L.U.	24	20	6	11	15	20
Tutor: Miss A. Frankenstein, B.A.							
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITIES AND WORKERS' EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION							
ABBEY WOOD							
APPRECIATION OF MUSIC							
"Shornells," Bostall Heath	L.C.C. Eltham	35	60	10	18	52	28
Tutor: Mr. T.G. Eastop, F.R.C.O.							
SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY							
"Shornells," Bostall Heath	L.C.C. Eltham	34	26	-	-	26	16
Tutor: Dr. R.S. Birch							
CITIZENSHIP							
R.A.C.S. Hall, Federation Road	L.C.C. Eltham	24	19	-	-	19	11
Tutor: Dr. R.S. Birch							
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS							
"Shornells," Bostall Heath	L.C.C. Eltham	32	13	7	4	16	10
Tutor: Dr. R.S. Birch							
CURRENT AFFAIRS							
The Hutment, McLeod Road	L.C.C. Eltham	36	22	2	13	11	13
Tutor: Mr. J. Hargreaves, B.LITT.							
CHORAL MUSIC							
"Shornells," Bostall Heath	L.C.C. Eltham	36	25	8	12	21	18
Tutor: Mr. D. Williams, A.R.C.M.							
BALHAM							
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS							
R.A.C.S. Branch Room	L.C.C. Clapham	24	15	-	10	5	8
Tutor: Mr. R. Pugh, B.A.							
BEXLEYHEATH							
CURRENT AFFAIRS							
R.A.C.S. Hall, Pickford Lane	K.E.C. Bexleyheath	23	30	-	20	10	17
Tutor: Mr. A. Eden-Green, Dip., Econ.							
BRITISH ECONOMIC PROBLEMS							
(Single Lectures)							
Broadway R.A.C.S. Hall	W.E.A. Kent	7	12	2	7	7	11
Tutor: Mr. H. G. Seivers							

By 1947 there was a panel of 150 tutors available for duty. They were all interviewed and clearly understood that the role of co-operatives would appear in all our work. The classes were organised in association with the three London County Council (LCC) Literary Institutes in south London, the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) and the University of London. We were represented on the University Extension Committee. They all understood our role and supported us strongly. In the LCC Literary Institutes the RACS provided the majority of their social study classes. The syllabuses of all classes were checked and supervised for co-operative content. Frequent visits were made to the classes. Copies of weekly and monthly co-operative papers and journals, including the International Co-operative Review, were provided to all tutors. The annual weekend school for tutors attracted about 40 persons and Will Watkins and Bob Marshall were among the lecturers¹. Music, drama and literature were not neglected. Here the emphasis was also on education for co-operators. How could these studies enrich the lives of members? The Shornells Music Appreciation group wanted to study some piano music in depth and for two weeks they were provided with a grand piano.

After July 1947 when a new Education Secretary took over this education programme it steadily declined. Once again it was claimed that the local authorities had taken over the work. That was not the view of the Senior Education Secretary who in frustration tried unsuccessfully to move to Stanford Hall and on 1st October 1947 wrote to me "At the moment I feel I would weep to see how your work is being destroyed", and proceeded to explain how it was being done. Over a ten year period the adult education programme of RACS declined until in 1958 the Education Secretary resigned saying there was no future for adult education in the Co-operative Movement. He had proved it so and moved over to concentrate on staff training. I accepted the challenge and returned to the RACS as Education Secretary in January 1959 resolved to prove that "Education for Co-operators" was still a worthwhile policy. The following reveals our measure of success. It was reasonable but limited, mainly because I now had the administration of the whole department to cover, including youth work, Guilds, accounting and office organisation. In the earlier period I had been responsible for Adult Education only:

Classes and Courses 1959/60

Comparative Summary of Classes and Courses 1959/60

A. Arranged with L.E.A.s, W.E.A. and Universities

	1958-59		1959-60	
	Classes	Students	Classes	Students
University Courses:				
University Tutorial Classes - 3 years	2	36	2	30
University Sessional Classes - 20-24 meetings	-	-	1	16
University Extension Lecture Courses - 6 meetings	-	-	1	39
	<hr/> 2	<hr/> 36	<hr/> 4	<hr/> 85
Other Courses:				
CO-OPERATIVE, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SUBJECTS:				
One Year Classes - 20-24 meetings	5	97	6	97
Terminal Classes - 12 meetings	-	-	3	37
Short Term Classes - 6-12 meetings	-	-	4	55
	<hr/> 5	<hr/> 97	<hr/> 13	<hr/> 189
CONSUMER EDUCATION				
Terminal Classes - 12 meetings	-	-	2	23
LITERATURE, MUSIC AND FILM APPRECIATION:				
One Year Classes - 20-24 meetings	5	127	4	86
Terminal Classes - 12 meetings	-	-	1	10
	<hr/> 5	<hr/> 127	<hr/> 5	<hr/> 96
All Classes - Social and Liberal Education - TOTAL ..				
	<hr/> 12	<hr/> 260	<hr/> 24	<hr/> 393
LECTURE COURSES - 6 meetings - fortnightly - W.E.A. (Social Studies)				
	-	-	24	599*
Choral, Drama and Orchestral Classes				
	17	344	15	343
Arts and Crafts, Keep Fit ..	16	280	15	243
	<hr/> 33	<hr/> 624	<hr/> 30	<hr/> 586
GRAND TOTAL - all classes (not including Lecture Courses*) ..				
	<hr/> 45	<hr/> 884	<hr/> 54	<hr/> 979

(In 1957 there were 1,049 students in 53 classes.)

B. Not Qualifying for Ministry of Education Support

	1958-59 Classes	1959-60 Classes
Writers' Circle - One Year.. .. .	1	1
Lecture Courses (Co-operative and Social Studies) (6 meetings) - weekly (independent)	1	-
Lecture Courses (Co-operative and Social Studies) (6 meetings) - fortnightly (independent)	6	-
Lecture Courses (Co-operative and Social Studies) (6 meetings) - monthly (independent)	39	32
Discussion Group Meetings (part of Guild programmes) monthly (independent) ..	30	-
Discussion Group Leaders' Training Course (6 one-day conferences)	-	1
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	77	34

Subjects 1959/60 (Classes only)

Economics of Retail Distribution	2
Social History	2
Background to British Politics	2
Political Theories	1
Consumer Protection and Research	1
Contemporary Social and Economic Problems ..	3
Current Affairs	3
English Literature.. .. .	3
Design in Our Homes.. .. .	2
Writers' Circle	1
Film Appreciation	1
Appreciation of Music	2
Art of Speaking	1
Russian	1
Choral Music	7
Orchestral Music	1
Drama	7
Arts and Crafts	13
Keep Fit	2

Drama and Music

ALL CLASSES IN drama and music have been provided with the support of the appropriate local education authority. This year the Education Committee has not been responsible for the teacher's fee in any class and hopes to continue to implement this practice. A notable change occurred with the Westwood Co-operative Drama Players who had been maintained by the R.A.C.S. for several years and who this year successfully proved their claim as an adult class under the Kent Education Committee. Two R.A.C.S. members attended the Southern Sectional Week-end School on Drama at "Shornells" in November.

To help with the staffing problem, an approach was made to the University of London Extra Mural Committee and the WEA. After months of slow and careful negotiations, a package was agreed where the University and the WEA, jointly with RACS, would appoint three Tutor Organisers to work with the RACS Education Committee in the three areas of south London covered by the RACS. The committee was kept informed and in early April 1961 they voted on the proposals. There were seven for and six against. It was a matter of great importance and this decision was a fudge, so they agreed to come to the next meeting in two weeks having reflected on the matter carefully and to take a vote at the beginning of the meeting without further discussion. They did and the verdict was unanimous, 13 against. Finally and completely the last bastion of Education for Co-operators surrendered to the forces of so called popular education. Like Joe Reeves before me I had to learn that ill-equipped committee members can make bad decisions, and I left to rejoin the United Nations. Perhaps the Committee later regretted their error. The official history of Co-operative Education the RACS published in the 1970s contains no mention of the work done in 45/46 and 59/61.

Addressing the Education Committees of the London area soon after the war Will Watkins said:

It is personal qualities and capabilities which are the concern of education, not acceptance of this or that Co-operative doctrine. The educationist is concerned with individual men and women, their faculties and powers - not with "instilling" a doctrine, but with developing by the right exercise and discipline the capacity of individuals to find facts, weigh evidence and reach education is to provide the right social milieu in which original thought, keen but just criticism, good fellowship, a willingness to bear a fair share of all common tasks and a pride in combined achievement rather than individual prowess are encouraged and cultivated - to promote the kind of intercourse which leads people to recognise from actual experience that it is only in fellowship that they can make the most and the best of themselves and most effectively apply their talents to the tasks of social construction.

Will Watkins understood and supported "Education for Co-operators". The RACS was proud to have him as one of its lecturers in 1945-46. It is not only co-operatives which have been diminished by the failure to pursue an education programme. Adult Education and the nation are both the poorer. Examine any local adult education programme and there is little contribution to the social aims of democracy. And we had so much to give.

Basil Loveridge spent 20 years working in co-operative education in the UK followed by 25 years with the United Nations and co-operatives in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean.

Notes

- 1 Will Watkins later became Director of the International Co-operative Alliance. Bob Marshall was Principal of the UK Co-operative College (and editor of this Journal).