

## **Muriel Russell's response to Barbara Blaszak's article 'A Study in Female Leadership', Journal 31.3**

I am saddened by the article by Barbara Blaszac in the last issue of the Journal. It is described as a study of "female leadership". I do not object to persons who write about or research the lives of prominent co-operative guildswomen but I take objection to one who titillates her text by half-suggestions that the subject - Margaret Llewelyn Davies - should have her sexual orientation questioned because she looked, to quote, "arrowy and decisive". Whilst it is true the writer does not specifically judge her as a lesbian, her petty references in the article suggest she thinks this is likely to be the case. The fact that on one holiday Margaret, together with Lilian Harris, took a snap of a sculpture of a woman holding a small naked man in her lap really means nothing; they probably had a good giggle, took the photo and later threw it in a drawer. That photos of Margaret herself were sold does not surprise me - few women in those days had personal cameras, besides which this was probably a useful source of funds for the Guild at national level.

Although I did not actually meet Margaret Llewelyn Davies, I grew up among many women who had worked with or been influenced by her. I think of Mabel Ridealgh who won a seat in the 1945 Labour Government and Eleanor Barton, both of whom were successors as national officers. Eleanor Hood, another member of my society, Enfield Highway, had been appointed to sit on a National Commission during the 1914-18 war. All these, besides many others worked close to her and expressed great appreciation of her service; never once did I hear even a hint that she was a lesbian or "a bit queer" as my mother might have said. In a women's organisation it could not have been suppressed.

I think Dr Blaszak's efforts are not only an insult to the memories of both Miss Llewelyn Davies and Miss Harris but also a great dis-service to the Co-operative Women's Guild which has contributed so much to the social history of this country.