

Co-operative Studies at Strathclyde

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A private report recently submitted to Holyoake House by an academic in the sunny south observed that by and large the Universities of the United Kingdom ignored the Co-operative Movement so far as teaching was concerned and that in only two of the Universities could the teaching situation be regarded, by those interested in co-operation, as being "satisfactory". Strathclyde was one of those two.

CO-OPERATIVE CONTENT IN COMMERCE

On learning this I was not surprised for although I cannot speak of the school of Arts and Social Studies I am aware of the content of classes in the other non-technological, non-scientific, school—that of Business and Administration. This is not to say that the co-operative content of certain classes could not be increased: it could. Moreover, the current situation, however "satisfactory", is still very far from that which a co-operative zealot would desire. Furthermore, what is taught is put over with more objectivity and less partisanship than the most dedicated co-operators would like. Thus, in the Second Year Commerce class, a class taken by some 70-90 students in the School, there are four lectures and two seminars on the Co-operative Movement. In the first two lectures and seminar, the class determines and examines that which is distinctive about the Co-operatives and in the concluding lectures and seminar goes on to examine the current trading position of the Movement, particularly that of the retail societies. The vices and virtues of the Movement's shops are examined with candour.

In the third year of the B.A. curriculum, the Commerce class has recently taken as its theme the responsibility of the business concern *vis-a-vis* those around it and in it—its employees, its management, its shareholders, its suppliers, its consumers, society in general. In the second term when this class deals with the business's relationship to its consumers, there are two lectures and one seminar on the Co-operatives as Defenders of the Consumers' Faith. Another third year class which has been running in its existing format for a few years now is primarily concerned with the public sector and it in turn has four lectures on the Co-operatives as a form of social ownership. A new fourth year Honours class in Government-Business Relations examines the ways in which governments and business enterprises endeavour to influence, pressurise, and finally control, one another. Here again the Co-operative Movement is discussed—for example on the merits and demerits of direct political action.

CO-OPERATIVE CONTENT IN MARKETING

All the classes discussed so far, are offered by the Department of Commerce and that, foreby, by the main Commerce stream of that department. But the department has sub-sections dealing with Marketing and Business Economics.

The Marketing section is, in fact, the biggest "department" of Marketing in the country and it, naturally, devotes a fair amount of time to the trading questions of the Co-operatives in such classes as Marketing I and Distribution. Moreover, the sub-department offers a Post-graduate Diploma in Marketing in which the students undertake a piece of market research and submit a report thereon. Last year, the three female students in this class conducted a 100-interview survey of housewives in a Glasgow suburb on their concept of a Co-operative shopper and on whether they themselves went into such shops.

In view of the considerable Co-operative content of the Commerce and Marketing classes, there is little or no need for the Business Economists on the staff to deal with the Movement in teaching, though some of these economists joined teachers of Commerce and Marketing in a recent open seminar arranged by the Department and addressed by Mr. Tom Taylor, President of the S.C.W.S.

STUDENT REACTION

One of the interesting questions which arises from all this is how the students react to it. Initially their reaction is one of surprise, if not disbelief. Almost to a man (and woman) they regard the Movement as dreadfully anachronistic. That any Society is as successful and as efficient as, say, St. Cuthberts of Edinburgh, they find hard to accept. Unfortunately, if their written work is anything to go by, the deficiencies and problems of the Movement stay in their minds much more clearly than do the successes and virtues. Nevertheless it seems to me to be fair to say that those who attend such classes leave, at the end of their courses, at least with the realisation that it would be foolish to ignore the Co-operatives. Indeed, last year two of our Honours students took this a stage further and concluded the Movement was worth an investment—their careers. Accordingly, they applied to, and were accepted by, the Graduate Management Scheme and are now at the Co-operative College.

Academics for all their supposed cosy living, can on occasion lead perilous lives. It is difficult to deal with matters of political and social consciousness and controversy with complete objectivity. In our naivety we expect our judges to be unbiased, yet this they cannot be. The best we can really expect of them is that they examine their consciences for bias and endeavour to affect what they find. So too then, for teaching in such subjects as Politics, Government, Public Administration, Economics and some sectors of Commerce. The academics cannot assure society of objectivity—they can but set out to achieve it. It says much for the latent strength of the Co-operatives in Britain that when we try to attain the heights of academic objectivity the results are not unfavourable to the spirit of co-operation.