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University Teaching of Co-operation in Various Countries: A Survey and Analysis

By George Davidovic

The Co-operative Union of Canada, Ottawa, Canada. 1967.

The study of university teaching of co-operation which Mr. George Davidovic completed virtually singlehanded, during his years as Director of Research of the Co-operative Union of Canada, is probably the first of its kind and, so far as this reviewer knows, unique. Even though the author feels obliged to point out in his foreword that the book embraces neither all countries nor all the universities in the countries included, the book is remarkably informative and thought-provoking. It reveals universities organising teaching at many different levels and engaging in various kinds of research, according to their differing national economic and social backgrounds and the specific types of Co-operative Association promoted in the communities these universities serve.

Mr. Davidovic has grouped his countries by continents, beginning with the Americas. In North America he deals with universities in Canada and the U.S.A., in Central America with the University of Puerto Rico and in South America with the National University of La Plata, Argentina. Each of these last two Universities has set up a special Institute for Co-operative Studies. Over 20 universities and institutions of university rank are listed for Canada and nearly twice as many for the U.S.A. In both countries, with a few well-known exception such as the St. Francis Xavier, University of Antigonish and the University of Wisconsin, the Co-operative Schools of which are of international importance and treat co-operation broadly because of its significance for the newly-developing countries, university teaching of Co-operation is closely bound up with the role of co-operation in rural economies, more especially the marketing of agricultural products.

Co-operative studies

In some, co-operative studies are still restricted to agricultural marketing, although Mr. Davidovic notes a tendency towards adopting a more comprehensive approach to co-operation. Here and there the initiative to induce the universities to provide courses in co-operation came from the co-operative organisations themselves, but in a chapter devoted to the general characteristics of the teaching of co-operation at American (U.S.A.) Universities Mr. Davidovic points out that numerous universities, which are state-administered and aided by grants of public land under Federal legislation dating from 1862, are bound to carry on teaching and research in agriculture and are therefore likely to introduce co-operation into their curriculum, particularly since the world depression of the 1930s and the encouragement given by President Roosevelt's New Deal. The courses are useful mainly to students who may find employment as officials of co-operative organisations or in government departments for promoting progress in farming and rural welfare. In Canada, co-operative organisations draw upon the extension (extra-mural) departments of universities for help with their member education. Generally speaking, co-operative theory and practice are taught in independent courses, optional to students. The number of specialised institutes of Co-operative studies is relatively quite small. Research depends on individual initiative rather than organisation.

In Europe, Mr. Davidovic mentions 13 countries and it may be said at once that the information about Great Britain already made available to members of the Society for Co-operative Studies through the Bulletin is more comprehensive than he was able to give. Most impressive, of

course, are the Institutes of Co-operative Studies or Research of certain German universities which have established effective working relations with the apex co-operative unions, national in scope, heading the four main branches of the German co-operative movement, and those Institutes, such as the Austrian and the Finnish, which have been powerfully influenced by German example.

Belgium has two notable examples: at Liege where the holder of the Chair of Economics, Professor Paul Lambert, is responsible for the direction of Co-operative studies, besides being an active co-operator on the national and international levels; and at Louvain, where the ancient Catholic University attracts many students from the newly-developing countries with a strong practical interest in Co-operative doctrine and practice. In France, university teaching of co-operation has a long history with a tradition of brilliant lecturing and writing associated with the names of Charles Gide, Bernard Lavergne and Georges Lasserre. At the present time, however, the most systematic work is done at the College Cooperatif in Paris which forms part of the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (Practical School of Advanced Studies) of the Sorbonne. The College attracts students from all over the French-speaking world and is the foster-parent of schools of Co-operation in several African countries.

The Asian countries listed are India, Pakistan, South Korea, Lebanon, Israel, Iran, Taiwan and Turkey. The first two, because of their great populations and the relatively early development of their co-operative organisations, possess a much wider network of university teaching in co-operation than the rest. In both of them, it is so far not so much the co-operative organisations themselves which draw their staffs from the universities, as the fully manned [sic] co-operative departments in the Federal states, which offer careers to civil servants with co-operative knowledge and training. Mr. Davidovic notes considerable differences in standards of attainment in different States and an all-over lack of university teachers who have made specialised studies in co-operation. This, like all the other co-operative problems of the Indian sub-continent, is a matter which because of its vastness, almost eludes comprehension.

Mr. Davidovic, if he has not been able to collect all the up-to-date information, has conducted a wide enough survey to embrace all the important considerations and the directions in which university teaching and research should develop in step with the need of all growing co-operative organisations for personnel with a scientific, rather than a traditional or rule-of-thumb training. However, the preparation of a complete directory on a world-scale of universities and equivalent institutions specialising in Co-operative studies is really a job for the International Co-operative Scientific Forum, if that were only financed and staffed to carry it out. International collaboration for advanced studies and research is no less a necessity of our time than international collaboration for technical assistance, trade and finance.

The Reviewer

Mr. W. P. Watkins, then President of the Society for Co-operative Studies, and former Director of the International Co-operative Alliance. First published in Society for Co-operative Studies, Bulletin 7, June 1969.

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