

Politics and the Co-operative Movement

A FOREWORD

First, what we mean: by Co-operative Movement we intend the consumer Movement because in Britain other Co-operative organisations have different traditions, methods and ambitions for political action. Our intention had three points of reference:-

1. Generally to examine the case and the various methods for the Movement to influence political discussion and decision.

We intended this to cover both the legislative processes i.e. the making of the laws and also the "executive" process i.e. the application of these laws. We wanted to look at two levels - national government and also the local authorities, the latter perhaps a comparatively neglected area of Co-operative preoccupation and effort. And all the various methods of exercising influence should come into consideration - lobbying formal and informal, special relations with M.P.'s of one party or more, "retaining" or sponsoring M.P.'s within an existing Party or Parties etc.

2. Secondly and more particularly we wanted to examine the role of the Co-operative Party and its relation to the Labour Party.

What is the case, ideologically and practically for a Co-operative Party? Should it be related as it is, with the Labour Party? What are the consequences of the role and relationship both for the politics of the Movement and for its extension in membership and trade?

3. Finally we hoped to consider Co-operative attitudes and policies on some specially significant issues.

The theme seemed especially timely when the Co-operative Party following its 1978 Conference is undertaking a process of self-scrutiny and redefinition.

We invited a considerable variety of contributions: from professional experience in Co-operative political and trading services; from the Labour, Conservative and Liberal parties; from academic interest in politics and in Co-operative democracy; and from the experience of other countries and Movements. In the event we have not been able to obtain the full range of material we sought - particularly from the areas of academic interest and of Co-operative organisation and practice in conditions of state communism. Perhaps we shall return to the topic again - but in the meantime we are well served in scope and depth by the contributions we received and are most grateful to the authors.

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R.L.M.