

Society for Co-operative Studies

Conference at

Stanford Hall, April 20/21, 1979

POLITICS AND CO-OPERATION

(The following report has been submitted by the Secretary/
Treasurer of the Society)

FRIDAY APRIL 20

The opening session entitled "A Party, A Loyal Opposition and a Pressure Group - Co-operative Politics in a Pluralistic Society" was led by Mr O. O'Brien, Vice-Principal of the Co-operative College and an active member of the Labour and Co-operative Parties. The session was introduced by Mr R. Byrom, who expressed the hope that the Conference Sessions would improve our understanding of the role of Co-operative politics and provide a forum for the discussion of our assumptions about the Co-operative Movement in the present and the future.

1. MR. O. O'BRIEN

Mr O'Brien explained that he was not altogether sure of the origins of the title or its meaning. What he would attempt to do in this session was to look at the three concepts suggested in the title. Firstly he would examine the character of the Co-operative Party. He would then consider the role of the Party as a loyal opposition with respect to the Labour Party and within the Co-operative Movement. Finally he would take up the role of the Co-operative Party as a pressure group.

The Co-operative Party

From the outset we have to recognise that the Co-operative Party is a bona fide political party even though in certain important respects its character differs markedly from the major political parties.

First we have to note that the Party has a general membership rather than the kind of mass membership we associate with the Labour, Conservative, or Liberal Parties. Certainly the Co-operative Party in terms of its structure and its activities appears much like any other political party but even here certain distinctions have to be recognised. As a body of the wider Co-operative Movement the Co-operative Party does not have the independence of the other political parties. Though this may be a disadvantage in other respects it does mean that the functions of the Co-operative Party are more specifically defined. Mr O'Brien suggested that these functions were the defence and promotion of the Co-operative Movement and its trading interests, the encouragement of Co-operative and democratic participation in society, the advocacy of the consumer interest and the development of international links. However, the Party is not entirely autonomous in deciding how it will pursue these objectives.

A Loyal Opposition

A further feature of the Co-operative Party is that it does not seek power in its own right. The agreement which has evolved between the Labour and Co-operative Parties restricts the latter to a specific number of candidates in Parliamentary elections and determines the extent of representation which the Co-operative Party can have at the various levels of Labour Party organisation.

Not surprisingly the question of whether the Co-operative Party would benefit from a more independent existence has

been raised on several occasions. Mr O'Brien felt that lack of independence either from the Co-operative Movement or the Labour Party has not been a very great hindrance. There was certainly the possibility of a clash of opinion between the Party Conference and the Co-operative Congress but this has not occurred for many years, primarily because of the wide agreement between Co-operative Party members and Co-operators in general. Nevertheless this eventuality had obviously occurred to the authors of the Interim Report which was to have been submitted to the, now postponed, 1979 Co-operative Party Conference which argued for a clearer role for the Party.

By and large the agreement between the Labour Party and the Co-operative Party has worked amicably. Co-operative M.P.'s have in the main been located to the right or centre of the Parliamentary Labour Party and are therefore unlikely to go out on a limb in opposition to the policies of a Labour Government or the P.L.P. Even if this were not the case the agreement between the two parties does allow some room for Co-operative M.P.'s to abstain from voting with a Labour Government. The ceiling placed on the number of Parliamentary candidates to be fielded by the Co-operative Party could also provide an area of contention. However, in practice the Party has never been in the position of sponsoring more than the thirty candidates and in the current election was again putting up less than the agreement would allow the Party. Rather than argue for the raising of the ceiling, Mr O'Brien thought our efforts would be better directed to ensuring that the Co-operative Party fielded the full quota of candidates allowed by the agreement.

It is often remarked with some regret that the Co-operative Party has too little influence on the Labour Party. True, it is present alongside the Labour Party and the Trade Unions in the National Council of Labour but the

Council meets only rarely and is itself without a great degree of influence. This has led some Co-operators to suggest that influence would be enhanced by direct representation to the Labour Party, along the lines already adopted by the Royal Arsenal and London Societies.

Mr O'Brien did not feel that such a move would be advantageous. For a start direct representation would necessitate the disbanding of the Co-operative Party Parliamentary Group without necessarily increasing the influence which Co-operators could wield in other areas of the Labour Party. A further objection is that Co-operative M.P.'s do have specific loyalties arising out of the ideals of Co-operation which might well be at variance on some occasions with the overall programme of the Labour Party. Direct representation within the Labour Party could well restrict even further the ability of the Co-operative Movement to place those interests before Parliament.

Historically the basis for the agreement between the Labour and Co-operative Parties was provided in the fact that the political purposes of both were broadly similar. It was undeniable that the Co-operative Movement had more in common with the Labour Party than the other political parties. Nevertheless in recent years something of a gap between the Co-operative Movement and the Labour Party has been opened. At a surface level this is evidenced by the number of Labour Party members who do not appreciate the purpose of the Co-operative Movement and who are inclined to identify the Co-operative Movement and the Party with trading and therefore private enterprise. This reflects possibly a basic differentiation between the political orientations of the Labour and Co-operative Movements. On the one hand the Labour Party through its demands for public ownership has sought to uphold the interest of producers. By contrast, the Co-operative Movement has sought through the voluntary organisation of Co-operatives to meet the needs of consumers.

A Pressure Group

Despite these differences of emphasis the primary role of the Co-operative Party is to provide a constant reminder to Co-operators of our links with the wider Labour Movement. This role is particularly significant within the contemporary Co-operative environment since there has emanated, primarily from the commercial sector of the Co-operative Movement, certain tendencies to promote a stricter interpretation of the principle of political neutrality as well as a devaluation of the need for democratic participation in Co-operative enterprises. Such views have a corollary in the reduction of the Co-operative Party to a pressure group restricted to the representation of the Movement's commercial interest. It was the speaker's opinion that the Co-operative Party could not survive if its role were so limited.

The existence of the Co-operative Party since the 1920's has been of no little value to the Movement. This was recognised by the Committee chaired by Lord Jacques which reported to Congress in 1969 and whose report met with the approval of 95% of the Societies represented at that Congress.

Though the existence of the Co-operative Party and a number of Co-operative M.P.'s the Movement has an influence on Government which is significantly greater than that made possible by our membership of the Retail Consortium or that which the Co-operative Movement could hope to exercise as an extraParliamentary pressure group.

There was no doubt in the speaker's mind that the voice of Co-operation had been strengthened rather than weakened by the existence of the Co-operative Party, its work over the last fifty years, and its close association with the Labour Movement. The hope for the future is

that the Co-operative Party will become an even stronger voice for Co-operation bringing under its wing the new forms of Co-operative enterprise currently emerging and the developing consumer movement.

Questions and Discussion

Throwing the session open to the floor, Mr Byrom highlighted the major points in Mr O'Brien's contribution. He shared the speaker's disappointment with the lack of sympathy which Labour Party activists and trade unionists often showed towards the co-operator and the Co-operative Party. Possibly this situation might be improved if Co-operative Parliamentarians were somewhat more willing to step out of line in the Parliamentary Labour Party and if there was more opportunity of an exchange of views within the National Council of Labour. That would at least provide an opportunity for the other sections of the Labour Movement to reach a better understanding of the purpose of the Co-operative Movement. The results might also provide a useful response to those people in the Co-operative Movement who are either opposed to Co-operative politics or who question the usefulness of the political association with the Labour Movement. He felt that Mr O'Brien had posed a number of questions which we have to consider carefully if Co-operative politics and the Co-operative Party were to become more of a reality and less of a concept.

- (a) Mr W. Todd (Leeds Society) asked about the significance of new forms of Co-operation.

Mr O'Brien thought that this resurgence of Co-operation had a strong bearing on the distinction he drew between the Statist orientation of Labour Party politics and the greater voluntaristic stress within Co-operation. Certainly he felt that many young radicals

were disillusioned with State control of industry and the failure of nationalisation to give people a greater degree of control over their lives. For that reason they had turned to Co-operation.

Returning to the introductory remarks made by the Chairman, Mr O'Brien thought that our views should be raised more in the Labour Movement. That this has not happened, should not be put down to timidity of Co-operative MPs. Within the Parliamentary Labour Party MPs now have more freedom than at any other point in history to defy the Party Whips. Indeed it is now more widely acknowledged that argument within the Party provides a ready source of new ideas and is thus to be welcomed. Perhaps our Parliamentary representatives could be more effective and more influential. But we should not measure the effectiveness of the Parliamentary Co-operative Group by whether they always achieve Co-operative objectives. This came back to a point already argued that the Co-operative Party should not be seen merely as a pressure group for sectional interests.

- (b) Mr David Hutton (London) referred to the shared memberships of Labour and Co-operative Party local branches and the similar arguments which occurred in the local branches. Under the circumstances, he wondered whether there was any need for the Co-operative Party to maintain local branches.

Mr O'Brien acknowledged that he had said little about the local level of the Co-operative Party because his brief had been to cover the national level. There were, he thought, several reasons why the Co-operative Party should retain a local presence. In view of the need for the Co-operative Movement to defend its trading operations, one obvious benefit of local organisation is an influence, direct or indirect, over planning applications.

More important, though, was the local role of the Co-operative Party as a democratic watchdog to ensure that the Co-operative Movement does not veer away from Co-operative principles and practices. Mr O'Brien's own participation in the Co-operative Party had led him to place great value on the role of the Party in political education; indeed our contribution in this area is greater than that of any other political party. Finally, he argued that discussion at the local level was an important element in stimulating developments at a national level.

- (c) Dr R L Marshall referred to differences between the directions in which Co-operators and Labour Party members would wish to influence political decisions. Assuming that co-operators do wish to influence political decisions, the other question raised is how should we go about it. Most other examples of organisations wishing to influence Parliament do not involve the establishment of a separate political party; it would be useful to develop the case for this separate Party.

Mr O'Brien suggested that whilst recognising the differences between Labour Party and Co-operative politics we should not exaggerate their character. Most Co-operators would, he felt, accept the need for some degree of Government intervention and public ownership. The only variation was in the Co-operative Movement's determination to make Government itself more accessible and accountable. Here we older co-operators shared a common ground with the younger people involved in the new Co-operatives. Political discussion for the rest of this century would, the speaker envisaged, revolve around the questions of greater participation in political and industrial decision making. It was our experience over the decades in this particular area which gave the Co-operative Party its greatest potential for growth.

Whether we needed a separate political party to represent Co-operative interests was a crucial question. If we examine just how much the Co-operative Party costs the Movement Mr O'Brien thought we would find that it is far less than the alternative of paying large retainers to MPs of other parties. He did not think the Co-operative Movement could sustain its influence over the decision-making process without some kind of close involvement with a political party. Nor would a Co-operative Party in isolation ensure the degree of influence which Co-operation enjoyed through the association with the Labour Party. As co-operators we can identify to a great extent with the Labour Party's programme. There is also much room in the agreement between the Labour and Co-operative Parties for Co-operators to promote their own specific point of view. What Co-operators needed to do was to use those opportunities to a greater degree and to voice our differences more loudly.

- (d) Mrs Prichard (Leeds) argued that, after a lifetime's involvement in the Co-operative Movement, she was most unhappy at the failure of Co-operative MPs to pursue Co-operative policies within the present Government. She was particularly concerned that the Co-operative Development Agency has been set up with such a limited remit and with very few powers.

Mr O'Brien did not agree that Co-operative MPs alone should take the blame for any deficiencies in the form that the CDA has taken. As a matter of principle he felt that Co-operative MPs should, like MPs in other parties, be given the freedom to decide for themselves. More than that he believed that the Co-operative Movement as a whole gave much too little guidance to the Government on the form the CDA should best take. In this way the Movement has not done very much to encourage our MPs to be positive in promoting Co-operative ideals within the last Parliament.

- (e) Cllr. W Hynes (Leicester) returned to the earlier question of relations between Co-operators and Labour Party members at the local level. Whilst he agreed that cross-fertilization of memberships was healthy, he had himself noticed a great deal of suspicion attached to Co-operators attending Labour Party meetings and towards Society directors who were known by other Board members to be involved in the Labour Party.

Mr O'Brien acknowledged that this was often the case. However, were such suspicion did exist it was up to Co-operators to justify their belief in Co-operative principles to other Labour Party members and for Labour Party activists to explain their support for the party to their fellow society directors. Those who are active in both the Labour Party and Co-operative Movement have a great opportunity to make our views known. We have to realise those opportunities fully, look at dual membership in a positive way and encourage others to do so.

- (f) Mr E E Stephens (Solihull) insisted that the primary purpose of the Co-operative Party was to defend the Co-operative Movement and that our MPs have done a good job in this respect. This role would be even more important in the future since there was still much opposition to Co-operation.

Mr O'Brien reiterated his view that to reduce the purpose of the Co-operative Party to that of pressure group for the trading interest would be a negative step. The trading side was, he recognised, the backbone of the Co-operative Movement and, especially in the current economic environment, the promotion of our commercial operations was an important role of the Co-operative Party. He did recognise the irony that whilst Co-operative MPs have done so much to raise the living standards of the population,

the Party and the Movement as a whole has not received its due rewards. The Co-operative Movement has put more money into the pockets of the population but that money has been spent in the shops of our competitors. This was the crux of our commercial problems.

- (g) Mr M Kirkman (Leicester) suggested that the speaker had skated over the advantages to the Co-operative Movement of direct affiliation to the Labour Party. He felt that direct affiliation would give Co-operation a greater influence in the Labour Party. He reminded Conference that the concept of political neutrality advanced by the Rochdale Pioneers did not preclude political involvement. Rather they saw Co-operation as a political movement starting with retail operations but ultimately leading to a Co-operative Commonwealth involving many different forms of co-operative activity.

Dr Alex Wilson (Manchester) echoed the view that direct representation to the Labour Party of a body the size of the Co-operative Movement would give the Movement an enormous influence.

Mr O'Brien accepted Mr Kirkman's interpretation of the principle of political neutrality, but did not see this as justifying direct affiliation to the Labour Party. Before we reached this situation we would have to consider a number of problems.

First, direct involvement may open the doors for the selection of more Co-operative MPs but we are already in the situation where we cannot get enough candidates selected to take up the present entitlement. In that respect there is no obvious advantage to be gained by direct affiliation.

Secondly it might be argued that our role at Labour Party Conference might be enhanced by direct affiliation. However, the cost of affiliating the ten million members of Co-operative Societies to the Labour Party would be enormous. Even were that not an important consideration, Mr O'Brien was still doubtful whether the Co-operative voice at conference would be enhanced by a block vote comparable with that of the trade unions. For a start, those in the Labour Party complain that Party Conference is merely an arena for the exchange of views and has little effect on the decisions of the Parliamentary Party. If we want a greater opportunity to share in that exchange, this can be achieved by making more use of those existing avenues for representation at Party Conference.

Perhaps the most fruitful involvement of Co-operators in the Labour Party would be to call for an examination of the functions of Labour Party Conference in general to allow for greater and more realistic involvement of the local members of Labour Parties and affiliated organisations in policy making and Party organisation. This would be a more beneficial move for all concerned with the extension of democracy within the Labour Party than the establishment of yet another block vote.

(h) Mr Todd (Leeds) asked whether the significance of the National Council of Labour could not be enhanced.

Mr O'Brien agreed with this suggestion and thought that the Council should meet more frequently and should take to itself responsibility for examining the thinking of each section of the Movement.

Dr R Houlton added that the Central Executive of the Co-operative Union had pressed for more frequent meetings of the National Council in the face of a lack of interest of the trade union representatives.

- (i) Mrs J Ferguson (Rochdale) reminded Conference that all the political role of the Co-operative Movement and Party would be wasted if we did not pay due attention to the need to attract young people both as customers and activists. She had worked hard at this in Rochdale and called on other Co-operators to put in a similar effort.

Mr O'Brien agreed that this was the fundamental task facing the Movement. Both its commercial and political future were dependent on publicising the Movement's commercial operations and social philosophy.

SATURDAY, 21ST APRIL

Dr R L Marshall, introducing the second Conference session on the Politics of Co-operation advised that this would be restricted to one speaker. David Wise, Secretary of the Co-operative Party, was unable to attend due to election commitments. The speaker for this session, Dr Tom Carbery, would, however, touch on some of the ground which David Wise would have covered in his contribution.

Dr Marshall welcomed the opportunity to introduce his old friend and colleague Tom Carbery. He would already be known to most Society members as a very distinguished speaker with a wide range of interests. Aside from his professional commitment at the University of Strathclyde, he has been a long-serving member of the Independent Broadcasting Authority and Chairman of its Scottish Committee, a member of the Government Working Party on Gambling, and a most experienced figure in politics and "consumerism". We know him also to be someone who has always searched diligently and objectively to find practical solutions to the problems faced by the Co-operative Movement.

2. DR T F CARBERY

In view of the points arising from the first session, Dr Carbery thought it would be useful to introduce this topic by reminding us of the commitment of the Co-operative Movement to political neutrality. In this Society, there are members with a wide range of political persuasions. We should not assume then that all Co-operatives are members of, or even sympathetic to, the Labour Party.

Mr O'Brien's contribution provided us with a background to the problems now confronting the Co-operative Party. The situation reminded Dr Carbery of Alanbrooke's comments on Churchill. During the war years the Prime Minister was always having bright ideas, nine of which would result in chaos while the tenth might have won the war. The problem was always to identify the one good idea.

Michael Young provides us with an example of a latterday Churchill. After the war it was Michael Young who called for the development of a party representing consumers. The idea was submitted to the Fabian Society which, not surprisingly, rejected it. Michael Young was not alone in broaching this idea. Iain Macleod at one time argued that the Conservative Party should move into this position.

Dr Carbery thought that Michael Young's more recent intervention in the area of Co-operation through the Mutual Aid Centres was a timely warning to the Movement. The suggestion in some of the articles in the Bulletin is that the Co-operative Party is in danger of being outflanked by those outside the Movement.

Mr O'Brien in the first session had identified five objectives for the Co-operative Party. Dr Carbery thought that this could effectively be reduced to three strings

the Co-operative Party's bow.

- (a) the protection of the trading and other interests of the Co-operative Movement
- (b) the advocacy of consumerism
- (c) the development of other fields of Co-operation.

It was Dr Carbery's view that the second was the most important, though he had doubts whether the CWS would agree with him. However important the first objective might be it would not and could not sustain a political movement. It is the general advocacy of consumerism which is our most fruitful area of political involvement. That was Dr Carbery's opinion some twelve years ago, and it remained his view today.

Nevertheless, the situation had changed in some respects. The most important aspects of such change were indicated by Ian Cameron in Bulletin 35 in reply to the points made by Dr Carbery in the previous Bulletin. In his article Dr Carbery had argued first that Co-operators needed the consumer movement and the consumers needed the Co-operative Movement. Secondly, he had warned that the Co-operative Movement in its advocacy of consumerism was being outflanked by a new generation of professional consumerists. Ian Cameron has taken this argument a step further, suggesting that if these new consumerists begin to seek political power, then the Co-operative Party as a whole may well be outflanked. Aspirations to Parliament on the part of these consumerists may not be entirely surprising since Cameron feels that Co-operative MPs no longer display a sufficient interest in consumerism.

This is not a new development. Max Wood was warning as early as 1975 of the emergence of a new class of

professionals within the Consumer Movement. The biography of the new Co-operative candidates in the General Election published in the Co-operative News provided much evidence of the decline of consumerism within the Co-operative Party. Not once is there any reference to consumerism in these biographies. More than this, for the first time in many years, the Co-operative Party had produced no women candidates. Ian Cameron's argument has, therefore, the ring of truth about it.

Dr Carbery went on to itemise some of the other arguments in Mr Cameron's article. He suggested that the Co-operative Party in Parliament mirrors the Parliamentary Labour Party. The right wing Co-operative MPs follow the Government's line while the left wing is aligned closely with the Labour Party Left. Dr Carbery questioned whether there was anything new in this situation and asked if Co-operative MPs have ever, as a whole, been the champions of consumerism. The real hand-fighting in defence of Co-operative interests and consumerism has always been left to a minority of Co-operative MPs.

How then do we explain the assumption of a great interest in consumerism on the part of Co-operative MPs? Three possibilities were suggested by Dr Carbery.

- (i) Commentators on the Co-operative Movement have sought to disguise the Party's role in the protection of Co-operative interests by dressing it up as consumerism.
- (ii) More likely, Co-operative Party officers have very effectively translated our general interest in consumerism into a practical defence of consumerism.

- (iii) Finally, it might be argued that consumer champions have been an important element in the development of the political platform of the Co-operative Party, even if their numbers are less than we often imagine.

Whichever explanation we adopt, the speaker foresaw greater difficulties in the future for the Co-operative Party in playing the consumerist card. If that proves correct, it may well be that the third card - the development of other fields of Co-operation - will become the most significant platform for the Party. But even this area is not without problems, some of which were referred to by Dr Carbery.

First, there is a similar danger that the Party will find itself outflanked by the more eager advocates of new forms of Co-operation. Secondly, the trading side of the Movement has always been wary of new Co-operatives. Many have arisen out of responses by workers to economic disaster so that their prospects are not always good. When and if they fail, there is a fear that they bring Co-operation in general into disrepute. Thirdly, even if new Co-operatives succeed, there is a suspicion that they might impair our own trading prospects. Fourthly, in the Co-operative Party there may be a similar division as in the Labour Party between Statists and voluntarists. Finally, in stressing the need to extend the ideals of co-operation, we have to consider the local environment. Co-operation as a *cri-de-coeur* sounds pretty hollow if local Co-operative practice is seen by people as relatively dismal. Dr Carbery illustrated this point by referring to the closure of Co-operative stores in the declining areas of Glasgow and other cities. In areas bereft of Co-operative stores, it would not be an easy task to persuade people of the value of Co-operative organisation.

If the Co-operative Party cannot or is not prepared to champion consumerism, or if the obstacles to the extension of Co-operative organisations prove insurmountable, what is there left for the Party? Dr Carbery advised against undue pessimism. There remained, he argued, an element of truth in the need of consumers for the Co-operative Movement. To return to Michael Young, the example of Mutual Aid Centres indicates the potential for Co-operation when given an injection of reforming zeal.

Dr Carbery's own projection was that the Co-operative Party would survive perhaps out of inertia, if for no other reason. Any moves to restrict the Party to the defence of Co-operative interests were, however, doomed to failure. Even if this does become the prime objective of the Party additional areas of interest will be needed to make this advocacy less blatant. No doubt there were other areas which the Co-operative Party could develop, some of which were indicated by Mr O'Brien. If new reservoirs are going to be tapped effectively by the Co-operative Party, the main prerequisite is the development of greater resources. A good start to this development would be closer vetting of Co-operative MPs. If the Co-operative Party is to have an enhanced political role in the future, we cannot, as Mr O'Brien seemed to suggest, be satisfied in the knowledge that the Co-operative Party vetting procedures are better than the Labour Party's.

Questions and Discussion

Dr Marshall reiterated the major points of Dr Carbery's contribution and referring the speaker to his initial remarks on political neutrality, wondered whether this commitment did not stem ultimately from the capacity of Co-operative principles to serve a wide range of political and economic interests.

Dr Carbery acknowledged this point and added that Co-operative Societies had indeed been run by directors of very different persuasions.

(a) Mr Kirkman (Leicester) argued that the primary objective of the Rochdale Pioneers in espousing political neutrality was to bring together the different strains of socialism which were current at the time. The Rochdale Pioneers were not politically inactive themselves and very clearly saw Co-operation as a political movement leading ultimately to the establishment of a Co-operative Commonwealth.

Two interjections from the floor at this point requested Dr Carbery to define "neutrality" and "political".

Dr Carbery expressed himself suspicious of attempts to define such concepts. Defining "political" was likened to saying where the ripples stopped after a stone has been thrown into a pond. His own belief was that most groups, especially those with designs to becoming pressure groups, were political whether they accept that or not.

(b) Mr R Donnelly wondered how the Co-operative Party was to be funded if it was to expand in the way Dr Carbery envisaged.

Mr D Munson (Colchester) suggested that the funds would still have to come largely from the trading side and asked Dr Carbery if this in itself would not influence the activities of the Co-operative Party.

Dr Carbery thought that there was a parallel between the situation of the trades unions and the Co-operative Party. We in Britain had got trade unionism on the cheap for too long and the same could be said of the way the Co-operative Movement had paid for the Co-operative Party.

Certainly the funds from trading operations would be significant but, as he had already pointed out, he did not feel the Co-operative Party could exist on the defence of the Co-operative trading interest alone.

Cllr. Hynes (Leicester) thought that the speaker was not recognising sufficiently the extent to which Co-operative politics was dependent on the viability of Co-operative trading. Nor was he acknowledging the problems which the trading side had to face.

Dr Carbery replied that he did not recognise the considerable trading problems facing the Movement. What he did not want to do was to over-state those problems. Nor did he accept that there existed an easy relationship between successful Co-operative trading and successful Co-operative politics.

(c) Mrs Rita Rhodes felt that the present times were potentially a most fruitful period in some kinds of Co-operative development. She was worried, however, at the antagonism which existed between old and new forms of Co-operation, though she did not feel that this was entirely new. The advent of the CDA did reflect the need for a national structure which was capable of bringing the old and the new together. The major problem to be overcome was the tendency of new Co-operators to see the consumer Co-operatives as capitalist big business and therefore something with which they could not identify.

Dr Carbery suggested that this was the story of the older generation feeling that the young ought to be grateful to the old for everything they had done for them.

By now we should have realised that new Co-operatives were no more likely to love the Co-operative Movement than consumers had been. In the same manner as many consumerist resented the claim of the Co-operative Movement to be the

champion of the consumer, so new Co-operatives are unlikely to be any happier if we claim to champion their cause. This was understandable. After all the new Co-operatives have grown up very much on their own resources. The Co-operative Movement did not send them any missionaries when they were experiencing their teething problems because at the time we were too concerned with our own problems.

(d) Cllr. Prichard (Leeds) thought that the speaker had been unjust in criticising Co-operative MPs for their failure to take up the cause of consumerism. Co-operative MPs to survive have to win support from the Labour and Trade Union Movement. His own experience of working with young trade unionists indicated that their concerns were those of producers. They would support the Institute of Workers' Control but would have no sympathy with the idea of greater consumer representation. Perhaps the need to secure the loyalty of trade unionists might explain why Co-operative MPs have not taken up consumerism more forcefully.

Dr Carbery thought there was some justice to this view. However, his criticism was not directed at Co-operative MPs in general as much as those who simply tag on to the Co-operative Party to become MPs but whose policies are largely those of the Labour Party and have very little interest in consumerism and Co-operation. Though, even then, he was not arguing that the ideas they do bring into the Co-operative Party should be dropped, that those ideas run counter to the interests of Co-operation.

Concluding this session Dr Marshall thanked Tom Carbery for his provocative and thoughtful contribution.