

The Inter-Sector Forum and Working Parties

In Journal 59 (May 1987), Dr. Birchall related the different traditions of Co-operative objective to the question of collaboration among the various sectors and traced the efforts of the Society for Co-operative Studies and of the Forum to develop some practical arrangements - particularly through the establishment by the Forum of Working Parties from the sectors on areas of common interest. To indicate progress since then, and encourage more to come, we print below a note from the Co-operative Development Agency of the meeting of the Forum on 4 December 1987, including reports from the Working Parties. Clearly there is more movement to be made, but as someone said in another connection and sense: E par si muove.

The series of half-yearly meetings of the Forum was continued on 4th December 1987 at Holyoake House, Hanover Street, Manchester, the headquarters of the Co-operative Union.

In spite of a long list of apologies, over 20 people were in attendance including representatives from Co-operative support organisations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the Industrial Common Ownership Movement (ICOM), the Plunkett Foundation, and the Manchester based consumer movement institutions (Co-operative Union, Co-operative Bank, CWS and CIS).

George Jones (Director of the national CDA) acted as Chairman. He introduced the meeting by giving details of the new CDA Board. He explained that the Department of Employment had recently conducted its three-yearly review of the Agency, and was now asking the Board to consider the Agency's role beyond the current funding period up to 1990.

Education, Training and Marketing Working Party

A review of the past half-year's activities was circulated. There had been one meeting of the Working Party with the major outcome being that the Working Party is to link with the Co-operative Union Education Convention to provide workshops on training support at Stanford Hall, Loughborough at Easter 1988. A whole series of other initiatives have been progressed and firm results are expected in 1988.

Taxation Working Party

A draft report on subjects surfacing from discussions was currently being prepared. Major topics involved were the proposed re-introduction of

special rates of taxation for Co-operatives, tax relief for capital retentions, how to make use of the Business Expansion Scheme, and relief from taxation when companies were converted to Co-operatives especially where employee share schemes were involved.

Finance Working Party

An abbreviated draft report was circulated which sought to bring together the views of all sectors. No further meetings of the Working Party were planned, but there was still scope for adjustments of the recommendations.

Law Working Party

There had been a good involvement of all sectors, except housing and credit unions and meetings were now arranged with these two groups. There was firm agreement on aims but some argument on the issues involved. Of prime importance had been discussions on the possible need for a specific Co-operatives Act.

Subsequent general discussion concentrated on the role of the CDA and the possible extension of its terms of reference. There was a fear that "Co-operative" aspects might be swamped by the new enthusiasm for employee participation and ownership aspects. The future of an Inter-Sector Co-operative Forum might then be in doubt, which most participants thought would be undesirable. It was agreed to meet again in Manchester on Wednesday 8th June 1988.