

THE
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Society Notes

The Conference 1987 had a good attendance, a varied and vigorous panel of lecturers and a sense of relevance and progress which made it one of our best occasions. The topic "The Small Co-operative Shop - Problems and Prospects" must be on any consumer Co-operative agenda for action, and in it we obviously face not only technical and operational questions but rather more basic ones. Are the Co-operative resources committed to small shops less profitably employed there than they would be in other areas of our enterprise? If so, is the commitment still justified by the social service it gives? More generally, do small shops managed by societies face any greater difficulties in motivating staff effort than do the franchised CWS Late Late Supershops, where the franchisees, who are quite often husband and wife, are in a distinctive sense working for themselves?

From my impression of the Conference let me select one more credit and one more speculation. Its quality owed a great deal to the fact that it was based on a significant input from the Society of new analysis and advocacy: the book by Dr. Birchall "Save Our Shop" and his update of that survey in Journal 60. This kind of service to Co-operative thought and practice is certainly one of the contributions which the Society was set up to achieve. The speculation is why there was so little representation in the Conference from the management authorities of societies. This, of course, is a question for such authorities, both in boardrooms and in managerial offices but it is a question also for the Society which must be concerned about its connections with that area of experience in the Movement.

Present Joys -

Full reports of the Conference and of the AGM are printed in this Journal.

We also look forward. Following various discussions within the Movement, the Co-operative Union towards the end of 1986 set up a Working Party to examine the question of capital resources for retail Co-operative development and its report is awaited. In preparation for that, there are two articles by Mr. G.L. Fyfe and Mr. F.E. Creed, identifying

and assessing problems and possibilities both for increasing the capacity of societies to make the investment needed and also for including in these efforts measures to link members more closely with their societies. John Gallacher offers some practical suggestions for "Co-operativising" rather than privatising state monopolies, and a Japanese manager, Mr. Koichi Sato, reports from his society on their experience in building a structure of small local joint buying groups of members which have become such a strong feature in his country.

Read on then - including the familiar delights of Peter Clarke's Newsletter and Jonathan Hill's Reviews. There is also a particularly lively portfolio of "Letters to the Editor" in reply to the suggestion by Lord Taylor in Journal 60 for exploration of some forms of Co-operative-capitalist collaboration.

- And Joys to Come

In the next Journal we plan to revisit housing Co-operatives which were examined in Journal 52: the attention to them in the Government's election manifesto and in its present plans and the liveliness and variety among the housing Co-operatives themselves is attractive. And the organisation of the Review of Retail Co-operative Performance proceeds. It will have a first section prepared by Mr. Steve Worthington of the Institute for Retail Studies at the University of Stirling and Professor Thomas F. Carbery of the University of Strathclyde, giving indicators from the various areas of Co-operative performance in 1987 along with indicators from relevant areas of private trade. Then each of five independent and informed commentators will give their views on the implications of these indicators and on any lines of Co-operative action which they care to suggest: Professor Noel Branton, formerly Dean of the School of Business and Administration at the University of Strathclyde; Professor John A. Dawson, head of the Institute for Retail Studies, University of Stirling; Mr. W.H. Farrow, until very recently Chief Executive officer of Co-operative Retail Services; Mr. T.E. Stephenson, author and lecturer on Co-operative organisation and management, both now and in his time at the University of Leeds; and Mr. James Wood, now Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company Inc., after considerable Co-operative experience in the UK. In the third section Professor Carbery will look over the contributions, notably their agreements - and differences.

One certainty about the project is that in view of all the difficulties about selecting and summarising the comparable indicators, it will be hard to get it exactly right in our first report, try though we shall "with every faculty braced". Another certainty is that the effort is worthwhile for the service it can give to the continuing discussion (and action) the Movement needs and perhaps particularly to the activists and lay leaders pursuing the aim: "If we

but know whence we come and whither we are tending we shall the better know what to do and how to do it".

"But westward look, the land is bright"

Friendly greetings to the Centre of Co-operative Studies set up in the University of Exeter and to its first Director, Ken Penney, who is also Regional Secretary of the SCS. The Centre is at present defining its role and its programme in various explorations: a one year course for staff of Co-operative Development Agencies - and there may be later development of an MA course; inclusion of Co-operative elements in other existing courses; a Conference on Co-operative Education in 1988; a Conference in 1989 designed to lead to the publication of a symposium of high academic quality; and so on.

The Director asks in particular for any help members of the Society can give: in preparing papers on some aspect of Co-operative enterprise for an issue of the Journal of Inter-disciplinary Economics which he edits; in acting as honorary research fellows at the Centre; and in preparing papers for the 1989 Conference. Further enquiries to him, please, at: Centre for Co-operative Studies, University of Exeter, Amory Building, Rennes Drive, Exeter EX4 4RJ. Tel: University (0392) 263263; personal (0392) 263215.

And Further Westward Still

Peter Davis, Vice-Chairman of the Society, whose appointment as Co-operator in Residence at the University of Michigan was reported in Journal 59, has now returned from that visit. He delivered a series of lectures to a group of postgraduate Co-operative students and local Michigan Co-operators on the Co-operative Movement in Britain; addressed the Education Convention of Co-operative Services Inc., one of America's largest housing Co-operatives in Detroit, and visited a number of consumer, rural, electric, community and worker Co-operatives in the State. He was also able to undertake a consultancy project for the Michigan Federation of Wholefood Co-operatives, submitting recommendations which were very positively received by the board, management and unions concerned. And despite the busy schedule, he undertook further research for his study on the life and work of John Francis Bray.

"As expeditiously as possible"

These words are the plea, the hope, with which Mr. G.V.J. Pratt is concluding the approaches he is now making for information of all forms of current research into consumer Co-operation within the U.K. It is

intended to publish this Calendar in the Journal and Mr. Pratt, Manager - Economic and Research Services of the Co-operative Union, is undertaking the collection of material for us: his address - Co-operative Union Limited, Holyoake House, Hanover Street, Manchester, M60 0AS.

P.S.

The committee of the SCS recently settled the date and location for the 1988 Conference and AGM - Tuesday 16th/Saturday 17th September at the Co-operative College.

November 1987

R.L.M.