

AS IT SEEMS

The transfer of the engagements of London Society to Co-operative Retail Services has been duly completed. London is satisfied that within the organisation, resources and policies of C.R.S., the capital needs of the Society will be met, its trade developed and its efforts to realise its democratic potential maintained. Congratulations then to the Board and the senior management of the Society for the courage of this decision: and good luck to its authorities in the future, including the Regional Manager - incidentally one of the early participants in the Co-operative College scheme for recruitment from Universities and Colleges.

Implications for the Future?

In this conjunction of retail giants there are, of course, wider implications for the future of the Movement* and here are some of the questions round which they congregate:

1. The Movement needs an identity publicly accepted of consistently offering selling prices as good as or better than its competitors: this will depend partly on the capacity of Societies to buy at prices which if they do not give an

*There is useful background (and foreground) in A.B.C. of C.R.S.: A Factual Guide for London Co-operatives, written by David Hutton and available from him at 28 Lanchester Rd., London N6 at 50p including p.&p. and Bulletin 24 of the Society, published in 1975 with a special feature on C.R.S.; copies of the latter, however, are no longer available from the Society.

advantage over other retailers at least involve no disadvantage. How far is this identity achieved now? To the extent that it is not does the explanation lie in the failure to achieve good buying prices or in the failure to pass on to the consumer the benefits of the competitive buying prices we do achieve?

Now - will the expanded C.R.S. address itself still more widely to this problem?

2. Secondly - and not separately - relations between the C.W.S. and C.R.S. are not perfect.

Will the power and influence of C.R.S. help in defining a role for each in which both will be confident that their interests are compatible and are being tolerably served?

3. The Co-operative Union depends on offering essential services to its member societies which they cannot provide so economically or so effectively for themselves and it is more difficult in some areas of work for the Union to do this for large societies than for small.

What will be the impact and influence of C.R.S. on the role of the Union?

I am sure somebody is examining these questions with more authority and competence than I can muster.

C.S.D. and C.P.

Contemplating the entry of J. (Roper), I. (Wrigglesworth) and M. (Thomas) into support for the Council for Social Democracy and their exit from the Co-operative Party, the poet of Private Eye might say:

So farewell
J.I.M.
Some might say
You are out on a limb
Will it snap?

I can see the view the Co-operative Party takes of them but there is still the interesting question - what view do they take of the Party?

On the Labour Party their judgement is that it no longer expresses nor can it be made to express the beliefs and policies to which they are committed. When, however, the Co-operative Party declared that the three M.P.'s were no longer within its ranks, it took the occasion to restate its principles and the kind of society it seeks. I could not see anything in this which the three would obviously reject. If, however, the Party and the M.P.'s differ, what are the differences? If, indeed, they agree, would the M.P.'s argue that the logic which took them out of their association with the Labour Party should do the same for the Co-operative Party?

Who will get the Invitations?

So 29th July will be a national holiday. Will it also be a truly national occasion? I return, after undue interval, to an advocacy which is probably becoming tediously familiar but is still sound.

Britain, in spite of some improvement, is a depressingly class-divided country. In the past some dangers from this were moderated because the "lower orders" maintained their respect for their "superiors" and were content to keep their proper station. That has rightly disappeared and the pernicious effects of the divisions work their poisonous chemistry in many areas of national life, including industrial performance and industrial relations.

State occasions such as the 29th could help, if only in a trivial way, by being given a more obviously national character. Let miners and steel-workers and dustmen walk in places of honour and sit in places of esteem - in addition to their trade union and political leaders and in place of many of the society and court figures who inescapably will be there. In initiating or accepting this the monarchy would do a small thing for social cohesion and incidentally for its own acceptability.

March 1981

R.L.M.