

NEWSLETTER

Co-operation is topical. It is discussed with varying degrees of enthusiasm by all the major political parties. The Labour Party's interest in workers' Co-operatives was underlined last year by its Discussion Document. Unusual for such a publication this completely sold out and is now being reprinted.

Local Authorities

Local authorities are now very interested in housing and workers' Co-operatives. Under Section 137 of the 1972 Local Government Act (1973 Scotland), local authorities can spend up to a 2p rate in 'the interests of their areas and their inhabitants'. An increasing number of authorities are interpreting this to include support for co-operatives. They include Sheffield, Leeds, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Tyne and Wear, Greater London, Camden, Birmingham and many others.

Local Co-operative Development Agencies

Local Co-operative Development Agencies continue to grow in number and in effectiveness. With the appointment of development workers some of them are showing an increasing degree of professionalism. Local Co-operative development bodies work closely not only with the Co-operatives they represent but also with their local authorities.

An interesting feature of the local CDA scene is that within a number of the larger agencies smaller, more local development groups are forming. This will make it easier for more immediate help to be given to Co-operatives.

The composition of local CDAs remains much the same with representatives from new Co-operatives, retail societies, trades unions and trades councils, Labour and Co-operative Parties, Industrial and Common Ownership Movement and community organisations, being the mainstays. An interesting new element is that provided by the churches who, increasingly concerned at the evils of unemployment, see some hope in the formation of Co-operatives.

The Media

Interest in Co-operatives by the media continues. The highly successful Horizon programme on Mondragon last November has been followed by a seven-part Granada series on workers' Co-operatives. With the imperative title of 'Co-operate!', it showed a wide range of societies from the long-established Equity Shoes and Metropolitan Cabs through to more recent Co-operatives. These examples included cycle repairers, plant hire Co-operatives, a village pub and engineering co-operatives. There were also interviews with Peter Walker, Business Development Manager of the Co-operative Bank, Dennis Lawrence, Director of the Co-operative Development Agency and James Prior, Secretary of State at the Department of Employment who revealed that he was a member of two Co-operatives, both farming societies.

The Wales TUC

A most significant development has been the conversion of the Wales TUC to the Co-operative idea. Concerned at the increasing level of structural unemployment in Wales it is trying to develop Mondragon-style Co-operatives in Wales. These would be backed by a financial institution which would tap local communities'

savings and channel these into Co-operative development, adequate provision of education and training and a new Co-operative resource centre.

We can only wait and see with what success they meet. Naturally we hope that it will be considerable. If it is, it could have repercussions on the rest of the British trade union movement and on existing Co-operative institutions such as the Co-operative Bank and the Co-operative College. Institutions outside the movement may also feel some back-wash. Already the Wales TUC has been pressing the Manpower Services Commission to make its training provisions more suitable to Co-operatives' needs. They have asked for them to be more flexible and have suggested taking training to Co-operatives rather than taking co-operators away from their businesses during the early stages when it is difficult to afford both the time and the money of being away.

It was S.C.S. member Raymond Donnelly who advanced the view several years ago at a Scottish Co-operative Party Summer School that workers' Co-operatives require a formula of the kind that Rochdale provided for retail societies. Perhaps the Wales TUC initiative will provide this. Most of the Co-operative expansion in the last five years has been haphazard and small scale. The Wales TUC has a well thought out development plan for large-scale co-operative development. It is an organisation with an overview of its area's problems and also good communications with local links. It is also an organisation of sufficient standing for organisations like MSC and other government bodies to heed its views.

Co-operative Courses at Manchester Business School

Whatever reservations the Wales TUC might have about MSC provisions, it is encouraging to learn that MSC's Training Services Division is to go ahead with a course, under the New Enterprise Programme, which has been specifically designed for workers' Co-operatives. The course is a follow-on from the Granada series 'Co-operate!' and groups which are about to set up Co-operatives and who entered the competition in the Granada series will be eligible to apply. So also will Co-operatives in other parts of the country though under the New Enterprise Programme regulations only two members can join the course from any one Co-operative. The course begins in June, and its programme will be in two parts. The first month will take the form of an intensive residential training period at Manchester Business School. Lasting three months, the second part of the course will be geared to the practical considerations of actually setting up Co-operatives.

The course will be led by David Watkins of the Manchester Business School and a member of this society, Paul Chaplin. Readers of the Bulletin will recall Paul's article 'Co-operative Research - Body or Spirit' and his contributions to last year's Annual General Meeting. Besides being a founder member of the Co-operative Education Working Group, he has been directly involved with workers' Co-operatives for several years and was one of the panel of judges for the 'Co-operate!' programme prize competition.

Beechwood College

Promoted by the Industrial Common Ownership Movement and supported by the EEC Social Develop-

ment Fund, Beechwood College, Leeds, is mounting a course to train trainers to work with industrial and service Co-operatives. Further details of the course which begins on 1st July and lasts til 31st March, 1982, can be obtained from Tony Gough, Course Co-ordinator, ICOM Ltd., Beechwood College, Elmete Lane, Leeds LS8 2LQ. As with the course at Manchester Business School and that leading to a Certificate in Co-operative Studies at the New University of Ulster which begins this autumn, it is good to welcome a further course specifically designed for Co-operatives. No pre-entrance qualification is required for the Beechwood College Course and participants may receive sponsorship from local authorities, Co-operative development groups and voluntary organisations.

Co-operative College

Congratulations to the College for its educational innovation of the Policy Studies Course, which will be offered at the College from January, 1982. It will comprise four eight-week terms, one four week term and a nine-week project period which students will spend in their own communities or organisations. The course is open to 'mature' students who are defined as being over the age of 20. No previous academic qualifications are required. Instead, the course is designed to build on students' experience and is aimed at developing their confidence, understanding and skills. It will study in depth the policies and structure of central and local government, voluntary and arts organisations, industry, trade unions, the nationalised industries, the social services, Co-operative societies, the mass media and government departments such as the Department of Health and Social Security. Grants covering fees, accommodation and personal and dependants'

"Co-op Development - How Councils Can Help" by Alan Taylor

Written by a member of this society, this publication makes a most useful contribution to the question referred to earlier, namely the assistance which local authorities can give to Co-operative developments. Alan Taylor argues that they could do more and then goes on to show how. Published by the Socialist Environment and Resources Association the pamphlet also looks at worker take-overs, community run business Co-ops, education for Co-operation and making the most of voluntary commitment and co-operative economic planning. Most usefully it gives the addresses of some thirty local Co-operative development agencies. It is available from Socialist Environment and Resources Association, 9 Poland Street, London W1V 3DG and costs 50p.

Work Aid - Business Management for Co-operatives and Community Enterprises

'Work-Aid' is the name given to the training developments devised by Beechwood College, Leeds. The label has now been extended to a short book entitled 'Work-aid, Business Management for Co-operatives and Community Enterprises.' Written by Tony Naughton, MBA, FCCA, Lecturer in Finance and Accounting at the School of Accounting and Applied Economics, Leeds Polytechnic, the wealth of practical examples in the book make it almost a manual. It deals with the basics of Co-operative management such as legal aspects, accounting records, understanding annual accounts, business planning, marketing, financial planning, raising finance and taxation. This is the first publication produced by Commonwork Publications from whom it can be obtained at Bore Place, Bough Beech, Edenbridge, Kent TN8 7AR and costs £2.95.

allowances are available. For further details please contact Mr. Ossie O'Brien, a member of this Society and Director of Studies, Co-operative College, Stanford Hall, Loughborough, Leics. LE12 5QR (050-982-2333).

Members of the Society are likely to be interested in an autumn course - the College programme - 'Co-operative History and Archives'. The tutors for this will be Stephen Drodge, Librarian at the Co-operative College, and Malcolm Hornsby, a tutor at the College. Both are members of this Society. The course will be held over the weekend of 9 - 11th October. Although designed with retail society members in mind, it will be of interest to members of other Co-operatives because it will deal with how Co-operative principles have been applied and developed. Special use will be made of the historic documents and archive material housed at the College. Fee for the course, accommodation and all meals, is £37 for Co-operative members and £41 for non-members.

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Note on the Author

RITA RHODES: is Education/Liaison Officer of the Co-operative Development Agency. Has been student of the Co-operative College, lecturer in Industrial Relations in further education and Education Officer of the Scottish Section of the Co-operative Union.