

NEWSLETTER

Co-operators can be excused if, these days, they find themselves becoming confused over terms. Take 'movement' for example. To many of us this was synonymous with the consumer movement in this country. We knew that agricultural Co-operation was also quite well advanced and that other Co-operative forms such as housing, credit and industrial were also developing. But it has only been in the last few years that the term 'Co-operative Movement' has been widened to include these.

As a consequence of this development, different types of Co-operative activity now tend to be referred to as 'sectors' within the 'movement'. But 'sector' is another term which we have to be careful about and the context in which we use it. Besides the 'sectors' of the 'movement' there are also increasing references to the Co-operative form of social ownership becoming the third 'sector' of the British economy. The maxim 'define your terms' is as relevant today as it has ever been, particularly in the present Co-operative scene.

NEW BOOKLET ON THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT

There are encouraging signs of growing co-operation between the movement's sectors. For example, the Co-operative Forum, comprising representatives from each of the main forms of British co-operation, is producing a booklet which will be published in early 1981 and called 'Co-operation - Britain's Third Way'. This will give an overall picture of the

movement and then describe each sector within it. Further details will appear in later editions of the Bulletin.

ON THE FIFTH DAY

A new kind of Co-operative, whose rules have been agreed by the Registrar of Friendly Societies, is now appearing. It is the Neighbourhood Service Co-operative. The need for such a Co-operative was suggested by a study carried out by the Co-operative Development Agency in Lewisham. This showed that a number of local needs were not being met by conventional business enterprises. They were of the kind, however, which could well be organised on a Co-operative basis as, for example, office and window cleaning, vehicle repair and maintenance, refuse clearance and waste recycling, laundries, day nurseries, contract gardening and security services.

The essential features of a Neighbourhood Service Co-operative are:

- a) that only a small number of employees (full or part-time) will derive their main source of income from the Co-operative
- b) that the structure provides for participation by those who work for the Co-operative and those for whom it provides a service
- c) that the Co-operative is firmly based in a particular community from which members can be elected to the board of management

- d) that the objectives of such a Co-operative are to provide a service on a business basis and also to make some voluntary contribution to the community.

Let us give an example. If a Co-operative were set up to provide, say, a general gardening service, contracts will be made with a number of local firms, hospitals and house owners. This could generate sufficient income to employ two gardeners full time. Additionally, an accountant could offer his services for one evening a week and a local housewife might undertake other clerical work. Retired local gardeners might also offer their advice and services and these, like those of the housewife and accountant would be remunerated at the appropriate hourly rate. Service to the community would occur if the Co-operative found that its contract could be met within four days each week and on the fifth day the full-time workers could then provide a free service in looking after the gardens of the disabled or the elderly within the neighbourhood.

The idea of a Co-operative of this kind has already been tried out. The 25 members of the Merlin Works Collective Ltd., a registered Industrial and Provident Society operating in the Lewes and Brighton area, do not restrict themselves to one kind of activity but engage in a number of things such as building and decorating, carpentry, gardening, typing, tutoring, craft-work, baby-sitting, catering and dressmaking. They welcomed the general title of Neighbourhood Service Co-operative saying that 'It sounds just like Merlin - an identity at last!'

COMMUNITY CO-OPERATIVES IN THE BRITISH ISLES

Neighbourhood Service Co-operatives are one form of community Co-operative. Another kind with which we are more familiar are the multi-purpose Co-operatives found in the rural areas of Ireland, Wales and in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. Nora Stettner, a member of the Society, has recently written a lengthy article for the JOURNAL OF RURAL CO-OPERATION entitled 'Community Co-operatives in the British Isles'. In this Nora takes as her starting point the proposition that 'the most effective form of economic and social development, particularly in rural areas, is one that integrates community development and Co-operative structure'. She then reviews the progress of community Co-operatives in the British Isles and then goes on to show that although these have developed mainly in rural areas, they could also develop, albeit along slightly different lines, in urban areas. Nora shows where, in fact, this has happened. Her article is thought provoking and is recommended as the basis of a good discussion in regional meetings of the Society.

THE CONSUMER SECTOR

The consumer sector of the movement has made a welcome shift towards greater interest in community activities. Through the Co-operative Union's Education Department there is now an annual Community Awards Scheme. The 1980 list of awards was recently published and, welcome as this is, it is rather sad that no kind of Co-operative - housing, credit union or workers' - received an award. This is a pity because it would have been nice if the contributions that they make to their

local communities were acknowledged, particularly by another sector of the movement.

INDUSTRIAL CO-OPERATION

The general impression is that this sector of the movement has grown rapidly in the last five years. However, this growth is difficult to quantify. In his Annual Report, the Registrar of Friendly Societies does not provide a separate classification for industrial Co-operatives. Therefore, we do not have the kind of statistics which are available on consumer Co-operation. But 'guestimating' the size of the sector will now be easier following the publication of a Directory of Industrial and Service Co-operatives by the Co-operative Development Agency. It lists 320 such Co-operatives. It gives information such as their names, addresses and telephone numbers, the goods and services they produce and the numbers of their members. The Directory is available from the Co-operative Development Agency, 20 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7TJ price £5 plus 40p postage.

A feature of British industrial Co-operation at the present time is its diversity. There are a number of elements within it such as the alternative life style people, who are usually associated with start-up Co-operatives. There are also some Co-operatives which have come about through the stimulus of community initiatives in employment creation, and there are others which have resulted from the conversion of existing companies. This last section comprises a substantial element in the scene for the businesses

involved are well established and usually larger than the newer start-up Co-operatives. Not only do Co-operatives come about for different reasons but their members reflect most shades of the political spectrum and the strength of the present Liberal element should not be under-estimated. Nor should the part played by the Christian element be under-valued, particularly that of the Quaker persuasion. Yet again we are reminded of the wisdom of adhering to one of the basic co-operative principles, that of religious and political neutrality. And also of allying that to the first principle, namely that Co-operative membership should be open to all who are able to benefit from it and accept its responsibilities.

HOUSING CO-OPERATION

A feature of modern Co-operation which must be kept in mind is the effect on it of legislation. One contemporary example is the 1980 Housing Act. Those parts of it which have most relevance to housing Co-operatives, came into force in early October. The most significant of these is the one which lays down that tenants who move into housing Co-operatives which are not 'fully mutual' will be eligible for the rights laid down in the Tenants' Charter including the 'right to buy' their rented property even although it belongs to a Co-operative. A housing Co-operative which is not 'fully mutual' is one whose rules allow for there to be tenants who are not members of the Co-operative.

However, eligibility to the rights under the Tenants' Charter does not apply in 'fully mutual' housing co-operatives and it would seem that one way for Co-operatives round the threat of their property being sold is for them to become 'fully mutual'. Apparently, prior to the Act, almost all the housing Co-operatives in Britain were 'non-mutual' due primarily to the previous exclusion of tenants from eligibility for rent allowances. Now there would seem to be no reason why Co-operatives should not protect themselves against the 'right to buy' provision by becoming 'fully mutual'.

There are now just over a thousand co-ownership housing societies with something like 37,000 dwellings. There are also approximately 260 par-value Co-operatives which provide 11,000 dwellings and 50 management Co-operatives who are concerned with 2,000 dwellings.

CO-OPERATIVE EDUCATION, SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

How welcome are the moves by the Co-operative College to advance Co-operative education in schools. Last year the Schools' Pack was produced and more recently training courses for teachers have been held at the college. The Co-operative Education Working Group is also concerned with schools but, more particularly with further education. It will publish shortly a two-volume catalogue of Co-operative teaching materials. Although this is primarily intended to help Co-operative educationalists, it is also expected to be of interest to teachers in schools and colleges.

The Co-operative Education Working Group which comprises educationalists from each sector of the movement, is also running a pilot project in conjunction with the City of Sheffield Education Department. The Group has produced a library pack of Co-operative teaching materials and an accompanying pack for teachers which shows the kind of uses which can be made of the library pack. The scheme is being piloted in Sheffield but it is hoped that afterwards, the packs will be taken up by schools and colleges throughout the country. The materials included in them will be most suited to the needs of General Studies and Business Studies teachers.

SOCIETY FOR CO-OPERATIVE STUDIES IN IRELAND

The Society for Co-operative Studies in Ireland held its inaugural meeting on 25th September 1980. Details of how the Society progresses will be given in later Bulletins but we are sure that in the meantime all members of the British Society will wish to welcome the new organisation.

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Rita Rhodes