

NEWSLETTER

Study Syndicate on member participation

A new study syndicate was set up at this year's AGM of the Society, in September. The subject under study will be member participation in Co-operative organisations. The syndicate's first task will be to tackle a research project suggested by Will Watkins. The aims of the project are:

1. to identify
 - a) the constitutional rules and administrative practices
 - b) the methods and means of spreading information
 - c) the systems of education and training

adopted by Co-operative societies and their federations to enable their members to play the effective role in their affairs required by their principles of Economy and Democracy;

2. to assess, by impartial comparisons from movement to movement and country to country, the value of the constitutional features, informations systems and educational policies most conducive to maintaining at a maximum level the active and intelligent participation of individual members in primary Co-operatives and of societies in their secondary federations.

The syndicate has split into two groups, one examining constitutional aspects of participation, and the other looking at information/education aspects.

Anyone interested in contributing to this syndicate is urged to contact the convenor, Mark Craig of 94 Howard Street, Oxford OX4 3BG, Tel

(0865) 46718, giving details of their particular interests.

ICOM Changes

In the last Newsletter we reported on the constitutional amendments to be discussed at ICOM's AGM on 11 September. Many amendments were accepted and will result in some major changes to the character of ICOM.

The two major changes are as follows:

- the constituency of 'members in member firms' has been abolished and member firms can now vote by appointing representatives; voting will be weighted in favour of member firms which will have a majority control in ICOM, with two-thirds of the votes.
- promotional bodies like local CDAs can now qualify for membership of ICOM, and have one-third of the votes.

Two important proposals gained the approval of more than half the voters at the AGM, but failed to get the two-thirds majority required to change the constitution. These were:

- power over certain matters has not been devolved to committees, as proposed. Nevertheless, committees can now co-opt members, so widening the interest groups which can operate under the ICOM umbrella in matters concerning Common Ownership
- it is not required, as proposed, that the Chairperson should always be from a Co-operative. However, from now on no

member shall remain as Chairperson for more than two consecutive terms.

These changes will strengthen the democratic nature of ICOM and broaden its working links with outside bodies. But for the local CDAs the results were disappointing. They hoped ICOM's new rules would enable a committee for local CDAs to be set up with autonomy of action. This would have provided the stimulus needed to develop a federation of local CDAs.

New Co-ops. - Co-op. Union Help

The Co-operative Union has issued an informative leaflet on the ways in which it can help new Co-ops. Entitled "How can the Co-operative Union Help New Co-ops?" it explains that although the Co-operative Union is still predominantly an organisation of retail societies, it is flexible regarding the services it provides member societies. It suggests that many of its services would be of value to Co-operatives in the new sector: industrial, housing, services etc. The Co-operative Union regards its role as complementary to ICOM and has no wish to displace it as a promotional organisation.

This leaflet complements the Co-operative Union's information pack on the formation of new co-operatives. Recently revised and reissued, this pack discusses ways in which new Co-operatives can be established.

These two publications are the latest manifestation of the Co-operative Union's new policy towards new Co-operatives. In recent years it has upgraded its interest in them by establishing the Co-operative Productive Board and a semi-official New Co-operative Officers Group.

Anyone who would like a copy of either the leaflet or the information pack should write to Dick Bluer, Deputy General Secretary, Co-operative Union, Holyoake House, Hanover Street, Manchester M60 0AS.

Housing Co-ops. - No Comment

SCOOP, the Housing Co-op. Magazine published by the Society for Co-operative Dwellings has, effectively, ceased publication as a magazine of comment. It is now published as "SCOOP BROADSHEET - SCD'S Housing Co-op.'s Newsletter."

SCOOP combined informative articles, comment and letters with a peculiar brand of housing Co-op. humour. It provided both a refreshing insight into the workings of a secondary housing Co-operative and a platform for views on the wider issues important to all housing Co-operatives. Its disappearance should be lamented by all housing Co-ops. and all who wish to see this sector grow.

SCOOP's demise was the result of a decision by SCD's Board to reduce the time spent on the production of SCOOP by SCD's Education Officer, Selwyn Ward. The replacement SCOOP BROADSHEET is intended to be primarily a vehicle for news about SCD and its affiliated Co-ops. Nevertheless, it is also hoped to include letters from Co-op. members and short articles.

Let us hope that the embryo National Federation of Housing Co-operatives gathers enough momentum to sponsor a magazine of news and comment to fill the gap left by SCOOP's change of format.

European Community - Co-operative Activity

Since 1980 there has been growing interest in Co-operative enterprise within the European Community. The European Parliament has launched an initiative and the European Commission has carried out two studies. Ivor Richard, the Commissioner for Social Affairs, is a firm supporter of Co-operative enterprise and is keen to expand European Community assistance to Co-operative enterprises.

Albrecht Schone, the General Secretary of the Euro Co-op., has written a provocative, informative and valuable Co-operative Briefing on Co-operation in Europe. It gives inside information about Co-operatives in Europe and Co-operative structures at the European Community level and contains a strong plea for co-operation amongst Co-operative sectors at that level.

Albrecht Schone is one of the most experienced lobbyists in Brussels, having founded the Euro Co-op. office in Brussels in 1962. He is a staunch ally of the British Co-operative Movement. Albrecht is German and was educated at Cologne University. Prior to going to Brussels he worked with the German Federation of Consumer Co-operatives, Zentralverband deutscher Konsumgenossenschaften eV.

Copies of Co-operation in Europe by Albrecht Schone cost 40p plus postage. Orders of 10 copies or more, 10% discount, post exclusive. Obtainable from: Co-operative Party Literature Sales, 158 Buckingham Palace Road, London SW1W 9UB.

Notes of the Authors: JENNY THORNLEY is a research fellow in the Co-operatives Research Unit at the Open University, currently examining the role of trade unions in Italian workers' co-operatives.

PETER CLARKE has been Research Officer of the Co-operative Party since 1977. His interests run wider than retail Co-operatives, particularly into agricultural Co-operatives - see Towards Trading Links (of agricultural Co-operatives) with Retail Co-operatives in Bulletin 44 - and he is an Associate Member of the Plunkett Foundation.