

THE
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Society Notes

The "democratic rendezvous" of the Society, its annual AGM, is reported below but here we anticipate its sober and authoritative prose with a welcome to the Officers elected for 1984/85 and particularly to those assuming their high offices for the first time. That certainly includes Dr. Wilson, who was one of the "main begetters" of the Society in its founding days in 1966/67, and now adds his distinction to the roll call of Presidents.

The AGM also agreed that a working party should be appointed to review the Society Constitution which has remained unchanged, at least in letter, over the seventeen years of our history. Two members were nominated from the Meeting, Nancy Scott and Fred Broughton: and the National Officers have now added Basil Loveridge, R. J. Birchall, Dr. Marshall, Dr. Wilson, Keith Brading, Alan Rhodes and, as Secretary, Brian Rose. They have an exacting timetable if they are to report in good time for the 1985 AGM, but they have already started work.

The 1985 occasion and the Annual Conference will take place, and once again at the Co-operative College at Stanfrod Hall, on 21/22 September 1985. The National Officers considered the attractions of other possible venues, as instructed by the AGM, but found those of Stanford Hall still irresistible.

The 1984 Conference

The theme of the Conference "The Labour Movement in Crisis?" had an incidental topicality — about the same time the Fabian Society has been celebrating the centenary of its foundation and indeed from some similarity of ambition, if not achievement, we send greetings to the Fabians.

Quite apart from that fraternal coincidence, the theme seemed, and still seems, attractive for the Society — in summary, a comparison of the post-war development of the three sectors of the Labour Movement — the consumer Co-operatives, the trade unions and the Labour Party, and of the responses they should be making to present or predictable conditions. The Conference was well served, as the later report indicates, by the introductory speakers — yet the discussions seemed marked and limited by a dominance of attention to the Labour Party. That perhaps is inevitable. Not only are we inclined to chase after the lures of the large political

issues, but we also have to acknowledge that there is difficulty, and even lack of interest, in identifying any distinctive agreed social objectives that emerge from the immediate functions of the trade unions and the consumer societies in practical service to their members.

Anyhow the Bulletin continues to explore the theme but the next Conference will turn, at least for the consumer Co-operatives, to these more immediate functions – the conditions of success for retail societies in the United Kingdom at both local and national level.

Other Initiatives

Before the 1985 Conference there will be the Researchers' Seminar on Workers Co-operatives organised for the Society by Professor Tony Eccles and grant aided by the Greater London Enterprise Board. It is set for 18th January in London and we hope, of course, to carry a report in the next Bulletin.

On the conversion of small Co-ops to workers Co-ops which the Society has been exploring inside and outside the Bulletin, the National Officers hope to commission a report which will survey various efforts so far, examine the conditions for success and offer some guidelines for further practical action. The Society is also in touch with the Co-operative Development Agency about the further cultivation of "Co-operation between Co-operatives" which, from an initial impetus by the Society, reached agreement on a "Co-operative forum" for the exchange of information and views among representatives of the various sectors.

Regionally and locally in the affairs of the Society the record reported to us is limited in scope but rich in effort. The Metropolitan and Southern Region has published its programme of five discussion meetings for 1984/85 and the efforts towards a South coast branch has now moved to an exhibition and demonstration featuring the S.C.S. at Southampton Institute of Higher Education on 1st December.

The Bulletin

In the present issue in addition to the familiar refreshment from the Newsletter by Peter Clarke we continue some explorations already begun – *Labour in Crisis?* and the *Wider Search for Co-operation*. The latter takes us into the organisation of the John Lewis Partnership and into the initiative of Fine Fare in promoting workers Co-operatives.

New themes are inaugurated: *Consumer Co-ops – Towards Success* and *Co-operative Housing*. Both will be continued in future issues, and the first will lead up to the preoccupations of the 1985 Conference. We also include opposing views on the amendment of the present legal control of shop hours, which is particularly timely in view of the Auld enquiry and

report: and Brian Townsend in *Pioneers Past* brings together Co-operative past, present and future. To his regret, and ours, Jonathan Hill has had to postpone his *Reviews*.

In the next issue we hope to take up some important aspects of the international Co-operative Movement and this seems specially timely with the adoption at the ICA Congress in October 1984 of a programme of action and of the entry into office of the new Director about the same time: warm greetings to him.

We are still comfortably enough in business under the old title of *Bulletin*. Our proposal to change to *Journal* appeared to have the favour of AGM and it is hoped to clear the change with the National Officers at their next meeting. We are grateful, also, to the Information Department of the Co-operative Union, who do our typesetting, for their promise to review with us soon the typography and lay-out etc. and advise on any measures that might add to the improvements already achieved.

Certainly whatever criticisms the changes may attract, needless impetuosity on our part is unlikely to be one of them — *e pur si muove*.

November 1984

R.L.M.