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Educational Funds :

THEIR

NECESSITY AND IMPORTANCE.



By Mr. OWEN BALMFORTH.



ISSUED BY
THE EDUCATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE CO-OPERATIVE UNION,
LONG MILLGATE, MANCHESTER.

EDUCATIONAL FUNDS:

Their Necessity and Importance.

THIS short paper is written specially for those co-operative societies which have no Educational Fund. There are, unfortunately, a large number of societies having no such fund, and we believe that if the members can only be convinced of the importance and necessity of some organised system of educational work within their societies, they will not long remain without that useful and valuable adjunct.

REAL OBJECT OF CO-OPERATION.

Firstly, let us enquire what is the real and fundamental object of co-operation? Is it not to make better men and women; to elevate human character; to improve the social, intellectual and moral condition of its adherents? If space permitted it would be easy to multiply extracts from eminent authorities to prove the truth of this answer. Let the following suffice:—To the unthinking, the highest dividend represents the best form of administrative ability and management, while in reality the best and highest form of co-operation is to be found where the making of character is considered as well as money."—Inaugural address to Congress, 1897, by Mr. Wm. Maxwell, J.P.

Again, as Dr. Westcott, the Bishop of Durham, well

says: "Co-operation, as I understand it, and as its founders understood it, deals with the final principles of life. It lays down that the co-operator's rule of conduct is not each for each, but 'each for all, and all for each;' that his aim is not in itself personal pleasure or profit, but effective service; that his reward is not wealth, but character."

So far as the improvement of the social and economic position of its members is concerned, every co-operative society succeeds in accomplishing this by the distribution of profits in the shape of dividends, and its other inducements to thrift. It must be admitted, however, that in directly promoting the intellectual and moral improvements of its adherents, the majority of societies are not doing all that they have it within their power to do. Those societies, therefore, who possess no educational fund, are not faithfully discharging their duty; are not, in fact, carrying out the principles they profess in their entirety.

WHAT IS BEING ACCOMPLISHED.

Let us now glance at the movement, and see what is actually being done at the present time by the aid of educational funds and educational committees. Take any large typical co-operative society which has an educational fund, such as Leeds, Dewsbury, Huddersfield, Bolton, Bury, or Oldham. We submit that these, and other societies who have educational funds, are doing three serviceable things—(1) educating their members in the principles of co-operation; (2) increasing the knowledge and intelligence of the members upon

general or non-co-operative questions; (3) making life more happy and enjoyable for their members.

If detailed proof is desired, we refer the reader to the syllabus of work which many societies issue at the commencement of each winter season, or to reports of the work actually accomplished, which they issue at the season's termination. A large number of meetings, lectures, and classes are held, dealing with co-operative and miscellaneous subjects; libraries and reading-rooms are maintained; concerts and entertainments are organised for the social enjoyment of the members and their families. The following figures give some particulars for the year 1900 of educational work by co-operative societies in the North-Western Section only:—

Number of Science and other classes	....	136
Number of lectures	.....	413
Number of concerts	.....	476
News and Reading-rooms open	.....	286
Weekly issue of books from libraries	.....	17,601

Educational funds enable all this work to be carried on, and such work must tend to elevate and instruct the minds of the members. It ministers to their intellectual and social requirements, and therefore such work ought to be extended and encouraged.

The following statistics giving particulars of each Section for the year 1900 may prove interesting:—

	No. of Societies in Section.	No. Making Educational Grants.	Amount of Grants. £
Midland	253	105	5,352
Northern	155	70	5,377
North-Western	498	209	35,650
Scottish	319	135	9,018
Southern	244	130	5,550
South-Western	55	27	1,931
Western	90	28	1,222
Total	1,614	704	64,100

The total number of adult classes held throughout the country in the winter session of 1900-1901 for the study of "Co-operation," "Industrial History," "Citizenship," and "Book-keeping," was 51, with 932 male students and 317 female students. In addition to the above, 1,475 children between the age of 10 and 16 years sat for examination upon the subject of "Co-operation." (Full particulars as to the organisation of these classes may be obtained from the Educational Committee of the Co-operative Union, Long Millgate, Manchester)

THE GREAT NEED OF EDUCATION.

There are two classes of people who stand in need of education in co-operative principles. (1) Many of those already inside the movement; (2) all those outside the movement.

Every zealous co-operator is painfully cognizant of the great indifference displayed by the bulk of our members to the best interests of co-operation. Take any large society with, say, 10,000 or 15,000 members. What a small proportion take any active interest in the work of the society! At the quarterly business meetings perhaps 300 or 400 members will attend. The sales of the *Co-operative News*—though offered at half price—may reach the absurdly low figure of 300 copies weekly! Then look at the want of "loyalty to the store," exhibited by the members generally. How large a proportion of their weekly expenditure is spent outside the movement! It is a well-known fact that large numbers of our members have joined the movement merely for the sake of pecuniary gain. This large class it is our duty to

educate in order to give them a fuller knowledge of our principles. Such work can only be done by the aid of educational funds.

Then look at the great mass of people who are still outside our movement. Here is an extensive field for propaganda work. Assuming that each member of a co-operative society represents a family of five (which is a liberal estimate), there is a population of 7,675,000 in Great Britain and Ireland belonging to our movement. As the total population in this country is about 38,000,000, there are no less than 30,000,000 unconnected with co-operation. Even in the counties regarded as strongholds of co-operation, like Durham, Yorkshire, and Lancashire, only from 40 to 50 per cent of the population belong to our societies; but in many counties, such as Glamorgan, Stafford, Shropshire, Surrey, Hereford, and Aberdeen, only from 1 to 8 per cent of the population are co-operators. Therefore there is great need of propaganda work to bring in the "unconverted," and this can be done most effectually by those societies possessing an educational fund and an educational committee.

OBJECTIONS ANSWERED.

Nobody now-a-days will dispute the value of education. But the objection is sometimes raised that this educational work is already being done by town councils and school boards, and therefore there is no need for co-operative societies to undertake it. There are three answers to this objection. In the first place there are hundreds of towns and villages where the local public authority is doing absolutely nothing to provide even reading-rooms

and libraries. And it is interesting to know that in many towns where such institutions are now provided out of the rates, it was the local co-operative society which was earliest in the field, and first set the example to the general public by establishing reading-rooms and libraries for the use of its members. The provision of reading-rooms and libraries, however, is only a part of the work which may be accomplished by the aid of an educational fund. And this brings us to our second and most important answer. There are a whole series of questions upon which members of co-operative societies need educating, questions which exclusively affect co-operators, and which, therefore, no outside body—whether town council or school board—will undertake. We refer, for example, to the holding of meetings and lectures, the organisation of classes, and the distribution of literature, for spreading a knowledge of the benefits of co-operation, teaching its principles and its history; instructing members of societies upon such problems as surplus capital, overlapping, production, high or low dividends, how to reach the poor, the “housing” question, and other matters pertaining to the inner working of our movement. This is the special work which educational funds will provide the means for carrying on, and this class of work it is absurd to expect will be done by any public body out of the rates. A third answer to the above-named objection is this:—If we grant that a part of the educational work undertaken by co-operative societies—such as the provision of reading-rooms, libraries, concerts, and lectures on general topics—is also undertaken by outside bodies and other voluntary

associations, even then the money expended will be productive of good. For the temptations, especially to young people, to lead a frivolous and wasteful life are so numerous, that the nation cannot afford to lose a single agency which is working for the intellectual and moral improvement of the people.

As to the objection that any society can make periodical grants, as occasion requires, for educational purposes, we wish to say that it is far better to have it set forth in the rules that a certain percentage of profits shall each quarter be set apart for educational purposes, and that such fund shall be managed by an educational committee; because then the income is certain and regular, instead of being fitful and haphazard, and then men are specially chosen, whose sole duty it is to attend to the educational department, instead of it being left to a general committee, to be dealt with along with other business as time and opportunity permits.

One word about the objection that small co-operative societies are unable to utilise an educational fund. No society is too small to undertake educational work. It is true that the smaller the society and less funds there will be to devote to educational purposes; but, however small a society may be, it can arrange an occasional meeting or lecture; it can have a small reading-room, or a few well-selected books to lend out; and, above all, it can form a mutual improvement class for the systematic study of co-operation and kindred subjects.

Remember the old adage, that

“KNOWLEDGE IS POWER.”

As the knowledge of co-operators increases, so will the power of co-operation increase. Every party in the State admits the advantages to be derived from education. Parliament admitted it years ago when it made elementary education compulsory and free. It is again admitting it to-day by considering a Bill to extend the teaching of technical and secondary education out of the public rates. Both political parties admit it by the holding of propagandist meetings and the distribution of literature. All religious denominations admit it by the support they give to their Sunday schools. The temperance movement admits it by the band of hope meetings and festivals. Are co-operators alone to neglect a policy which is so universally approved? If education is found to be so beneficial in other departments of social life, it will prove equally beneficial inside the co-operative movement.

Let us remember that material progress is not the highest and truest form of progress, either for a nation or an individual. Man is endowed with a higher nature, and when this is educated and trained, so that his character is in complete harmony with his highest aspirations, then, and then only, may we expect a real and lasting form of progress. This is the work which educational committees have to endeavour to accomplish.

O. BALMFORTH.



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