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# The Women's Co-operative Guild:

Notes on its

## HISTORY, ORGANISATION, AND WORK

### Objects and Early Years.

#### I. Objects of the Guild.

These are: (1) To promote Co-operation in every possible way and to help women to take their full share in every side of the work of the movement.

(2) To express the views and needs of married women and to get the reforms they require in their own lives and their homes, in their towns and in the State. Co-operation is mainly a married woman's movement, because at the bottom it depends on their purchasing power. Therefore it is through Co-operation that married women are best able to organise and to take their part in the Labour movement, and as citizens.

(3) To work with and support the aims of the Co-operative Party.

To carry out these objects, the Guild has been built up by Co-operative women, and is managed by themselves, on a thoroughly democratic basis.

#### II. The Early Years of the Guild.

The Guild began in 1883, the first proposals for its formation coming simultaneously from Mrs. Lawrenson, of Woolwich, and Mrs. Arthur Dyke Acland, then Editor of the "Women's Corner." Letters suggesting a "Woman's League for the spread of Co-operation" appeared in January and February, 1883. On April 13th, 1883, a notice was inserted asking all who wished to join to send in their names to Mrs. Acland, and the following note was made on an early Guild record:—"April 15th. We now number seven."

The League was finally formed at the Edinburgh Co-operative Congress in June, 1883, the membership rose from 14 to 50, a subscription of 6d. a year was decided on, the formation of local Branches suggested, and the first leaflet issued.

In 1883, three Branches were formed—Hebden Bridge (Yorkshire Section), Rochdale (Lancashire Section), and Woolwich (Southern Section).

The reports of the Branch Meetings show that prices and quality were frequent subjects of discussion. From the very first the immediate result of forming Branches was that women began to attend

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Quarterly Meetings. In 1884 Mrs. Lawrenson and Mrs. Sheldon were elected on the Woolwich Education Committee, but the possibility of women sitting on Management Committees had hardly been thought of, though one of the very earliest writers to the "Woman's Corner" (Mrs. Newman, of Norwich), said boldly: "In fact, I think there ought to be women on Store Committees."

Mrs. Acland was the first Secretary, and the Balance Sheet for the first year was—

	£	s.	d.
Received—Subscriptions and donations.....	3	10	9
Spent—(Printing 25s., stamps 8s. 6d., paper 5s.)...	1	18	6
	<hr/>		
Balance.....	£1	12	3
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The first grant from the Co-operative Union—£10—was received in 1886.

In 1884 the name was changed to "Women's Co-operative Guild," and Miss Allen (Manchester) became Secretary. In 1885 Mrs. Lawrenson became General Secretary, and on her resignation in 1889, she was succeeded by Miss Llewelyn Davies, who held the position until 1921, when Miss A. Honora Enfield was elected as General Secretary and Mrs. Eleanor Barton as Assistant Secretary.

Miss Enfield resigned in 1925, and Mrs. Barton was elected General Secretary.

Miss Enfield is the Secretary of the International Co-operative Women's Guild.

A prominent early Guildswoman was Mrs. Benjamin Jones (wife of Mr. Ben Jones, late Manager of the London C.W.S.). She was a member of the first Central Committee, President from 1886 to 1891, and on the Central Committee from 1893 to her death in 1894. In 1885 she advocated that women should speak on public platforms, and herself led the way. The Mrs. Jones Guild Convalescent Fund was established as a memorial to her in 1894.

During the first ten years the Sectional and District Organisation of the Guild was gradually built up. It became recognised that Guild Meetings were different from "mothers' meetings," that women had public duties of every kind, that the Store was a training ground for citizenship for women as well as men, and that the Guild was a body of reformers, whose influence must be exerted in the solution of Labour questions.

The first period closed in July, 1892, with the first gathering of delegates from Guild Branches at a festival in Manchester, to celebrate the formation of 100 Branches. It was attended by 120 delegates from 77 Branches. Many of the delegates had not been from home for eight, 12, or even 20 and 21 years. The Festival lasted three days, two for business, and one for sightseeing. The subjects of the papers might have been taken to-day: "The Guild and Store Life," by Miss Webb (a very early Guild member and for many years

Secretary of the Guild Convalescent Fund); "A National Alliance" (of Co-operators and Trade Unionists), by Miss Clementina Black; "Co-operative Productions and the Needs of Labour," by Mrs. Rosalind Nash; "Women and Municipal Life," by Mrs. Knott; "Future Guild Work," by Miss Spooner, so many years Secretary of the Southern Section. There was a different Chairman for each Session, and among them was Miss Reddish, of Bolton (Lancashire), one of the most remarkable and valued of Guildswomen.

The success of this festival led to the establishment of the Guild Annual Congress, in place of the Annual Meeting at the time of the Co-operative Union Congress, which was only attended by the few Guild members who happened to be present at the Union Congress. The first Annual Congress was held at Leicester in July, 1893, and was attended by about 100 delegates from 67 Branches.\*

## Organisation.

Since 1893 the Guild organisation has been much developed, and is now as follows:—

### *Branches.*

Branches are self-governing, with their own Committees and Rules. Model Branch Rules are supplied from the Central Office, but each Branch adopts them or not as it likes with the exception of the first six rules which are binding on all Branches.

### *Districts.*

Branches in the same neighbourhood are grouped together to form a District. There are now 63 Districts. Each District elects its Committee and has its own District Fund raised by subscriptions of not less than 3d. per member per annum from the Branches. In addition, where necessary, substantial grants are given from the Central Fund. Each District adopts its own rules. Model District Rules are recommended.

The work of the District Committee is—

- (a) To arrange Conferences (two to four annually).
- (b) To form new Branches.
- (c) To look after and help weak Branches.
- (d) To supply speakers on the Guild Special Subjects at the invitation of Branches. (Branches pay fares.)
- (e) To arrange One-Day and Two-Days' Schools.
- (f) To arrange Officials' Classes. †

\* Further particulars of the early years of the Guild and of the early members are given in "The Woman with the Basket," the history of the Guild, 1893-1927.

† See "District Work."

*Sections.*

Branches are grouped in larger areas called Sections. There are now eight Sections. Each Section has a Sectional Council and a Sectional Secretary, elected by all the Branches in the Section. The Central Committee member for the Section is *ex-officio* member of the Sectional Council and acts as its Chairman. The General Secretary is *ex-officio* member of all the Councils. The work of the Councils is governed by the General Rules of the Guild, and their funds are provided by grants from the Central Fund.

The work of the Sectional Councils is:—

- (a) To arrange the Half-yearly Sectional Conferences for the discussion of subjects remitted to them by the Central Committee.
- (b) To provide Lecturers for Schools.
- (c) To provide Speakers on the Guild Special Subjects and on Guild work.
- (d) To provide Lecturers for Officials' Classes and District Committee Schools. (Taking these is specially the work of Sectional Secretaries.)
- (e) To provide Speakers for District Conferences as required.
- (f) To help generally the Districts and Branches.

Sectional Councils meet four times a year; and once a year, about January, all the Councils meet together with the Central Committee at the All-Councils Meetings. This meeting is most valuable and important. New questions arising during the year are explained and discussed, so that the Council Members may in their turn bring them before the Districts and Branches. Full discussions on questions of policy take place, and all Sections are kept in touch with each other, thus securing unity of work throughout the Guild.

*The Central Committee.*

The Central Committee is the Executive of the Guild. It consists of nine members, of whom eight are elected annually by the Branches in each Section, and the General Secretary is elected by all the Branches.

While the work of the Guild is voluntary, the growth of the Guild made it necessary to appoint an office staff with a paid General Secretary.

The Central Committee is responsible:—

- (a) For making the whole organisation of the Guild as effective as possible.
- (b) For carrying out the resolutions of the Annual Congress.
- (c) For organising the special campaigns of the Guild, such as those in connection with the movement for great Co-operative Developments, for the National Care of Maternity, &c. It supplies the "Hints to Speakers" in connection with these campaigns.
- (d) For developing the Guild Schools, and providing the Lecturers with "Hints" and papers.

(e) For supplying the Branches with suggestions about their work, thus helping forward united and progressive action throughout the Guild.

(f) For the papers published by the Guild.

The Central Committee represents the Guild in its relation with the Co-operative Union and other Co-operative bodies.

It also represents the Guild in its action in regard to National affairs, and has to deal with Government Departments in matters affecting Guildswomen both as Co-operators and as citizens.

Its members have to be ready to take part in deputations to the Government, and in both Co-operative and National Committees.

An important side of the work is that of speaking at meetings, and Central Committee members must be able to speak at large public meetings as well as at Guild meetings and conferences. They also take a considerable share in lecturing at Two-Days' Schools.

The Central Committee Meetings are usually held in London, and last two days; in between, the business is carried on by correspondence.

*The Annual Congress.*

The Annual Congress is the governing body of the Guild. It consists of delegates from Branches (one for every 100 members, for whom the Central Fund subscription for the current year has been paid), from District Committees and Sectional Councils (one from each), and the members of the Central Committee.

Its business is:—

- (a) To consider the Annual Report of the Guild.
- (b) To make the General Rules of the Guild (every third Year).
- (c) To consider resolutions which, if passed, govern the policy of the Central Committee throughout the year. These resolutions are binding on the Central Committee and Councils. They are not binding on the Branches, but should exercise great influence on them, and Branches whose delegates have voted for them are morally bound to carry them out.

(The Lecturer should give an interesting account of an Annual Congress. The 1932 Congress was attended by 1,363 delegates from 1,162 Branches. For deputations, official representatives, &c., see reports in *Co-operative News*)\*

*The Central Fund.*

The Central Fund of the Guild is under the control of the Central Committee. The chief sources of income are:—

- (a) Branch subscriptions to the Central Fund.

\* Chapter II. of "The History of the Guild" gives some interesting points in connection with the Guild organisation, though the figures, of course, are out of date

(b) Grant from the Co-operative Union (£500).

(c) Grant from the C.W.S. (£500).

(d) Sales of Papers, Business Books, Cards of Membership, and Badges.

The chief items of expenditure are:—

(a) Central Office Expenses (rent, cleaning, firing, light, telephone, &c.).

(b) Salary of the General Secretary.

(c) Clerks' Wages, at the N.U.D.A.W. London Men's Scale.

(d) Postage, Stationery, Printing (Annual Reports, List of Branches, Voting Papers, Circulars to Branches, &c.).

(e) Central Committee Meetings.

(f) Representatives' and Speakers' Expenses.

(g) Supplies of Pamphlets, Business Books, Badges, &c.

(h) Grants to Sections and Sectional Conference Speakers.

(i) Grants to Districts, Conferences of District Secretaries and Council, &c.

(j) Sundry Expenses.

For details each year, see the Statement of Accounts at the end of the Annual Report.

### Co-operative Work.

The Guild organises Co-operative women, and its first aim is the progress of Co-operation.

*Loyalty to the Store, the Co-operative Wholesale Society, and Co-operative Production* is the foundation of all its work.

The Guild continually and persistently advocates this loyalty, and explains the need for it, with the object of increasing loyalty, Branches carry on propaganda, get in touch with new members, support the complete loyalty of the Society to the C.W.S. and the stocking of C.W.S. Productions solely by the Society as far as possible, urge further production to meet the needs of the members, arrange visits to the Productive Works of their own Society, invite the departmental managers to address the Branch from time to time, &c.

The Guild Propaganda Scheme, 1916-17, was practically adopted by the Survey Committee.

*The Special Need for Capital.*—During the war the Guild advocated a "Save in Your Store" Campaign, and thousands of the Guild leaflets were distributed by Societies. The need for Capital has been steadily pressed since, and a number of Branches have formed Share-Savings Clubs.

*Extension of Co-operation.*—The Guild has always worked vigorously to increase trade and membership. About the year 1900 it made special efforts to show how the poor could be got in: (1) by adaptation of

Co-operative methods to their needs, such as abolishing entrance fees, selling in small quantities, stocking the kinds of goods suitable, &c.; (2) by special forms of propaganda. The well-known experiment made by the Sunderland Society in one of the poorest districts of the town was the largest scheme. The block of buildings included a grocery store, butcher's shop where cooked meat was sold, a yard for coal and oil, a charming little hall, and miniature rooms for a resident worker. The results of two years' work showed that special propaganda and suitable business methods will draw in the poorest. And although the experiment of the resident worker was not continued, the Store has maintained a successful career.\*

*Co-operative Education.*—The Guild has always supported the provision of Education Funds and separate Education Committees.

In 1895, Co-operative education was in very low water, and in that year the Co-operative Union Educational Committee had been amalgamated with the Productive Committee. A paper was read at the Guild Annual Meeting in 1895, suggesting new educational developments, which foreshadowed the proposals being made for a Research Department and College. At the Woolwich Co-operative Union Congress a resolution for a full inquiry into the educational position in the movement was carried. The resolution was seconded by the General Secretary of the Guild, who was appointed on the Committee of Inquiry. The Guild can, in fact, claim a considerable share in the resuscitation of Co-operative education which resulted.

*The Co-operative Party.*—The Guild has for many years advocated Co-operative political action, and urged that Co-operators should work together with the other Labour forces. It strongly supports the Co-operative Party and the proposals for a political alliance with the Labour Party and Trade Unions.

*Relations with Labour.*—The Guild has always worked for the closest alliance with the Trade Union Movement. One of its earliest campaigns was for an alliance between Co-operators and Trade Unionists in London in 1891, when leading Co-operative and Trade Unionist speakers, men and women, took part in a series of meetings. Among the Trade Unionists were leaders of the great Dockers' Strike in 1889—Tom Mann, Ben Tillett, and Tom McCarthy. The importance of the alliance has always been pressed from then till the present day, when the Guild is supporting schemes (a) for a close alliance with the Trade Unions and Labour Party; (b) for mutual help between the movements in strikes and in the supply of capital; (c) for special propaganda amongst Trade Unionists' wives.

Inside the Co-operative Movement the Guild has always supported—

Shorter Hours.

Payment of Trade Union Wages.

That Co-operative Employees should be Trade Unionists.

The Minimum Wage for Co-operative Women Employees.

\* "The History of the Guild" gives some account of various Co-operative Campaigns before 1904, especially of "Co-operation in Poor Neighbourhoods," chapter vi.

This last was one of the biggest pieces of work undertaken by the Guild. The campaign for the minimum wage began in 1907, when a Committee of the Co-operative Union was considering putting forward minimum scales for men and women. The rates at first suggested for women were very low. While the Amalgamated Union of Co-operative Employees had a scale for men, there was none for women, and only about 2,000 women were members of the Union. A deputation from the Guild Central Committee interviewed the A.U.C.E. Executive, and it was agreed to press for a scale beginning at 5s. at 14, and rising by 2s. a year to 17s. at 20. This was accepted by the Co-operative Union Committee and endorsed by the Co-operative Union Congress. A paper explaining the proposal, called "A Co-operative Standard for Women Workers," was read at the Guild Congress, 1908. Many district conferences were held, and the Guild Branches took up the work of getting the scale adopted by their own societies, by means of deputations to Management Committees and resolutions at Quarterly Meetings. They worked with the A.U.C.E. and got women to join it, &c. There was much opposition and many prophecies of ruin to Co-operative Societies, but the Guild worked on. Gradually, Societies adopted the scale without any terrible results. In 1910, the Guild began to press for the adoption of the scale by the C.W.S. A petition was signed by 13,330 members, which measured 200 yards and weighed 12lbs. It was presented to the Directors by a deputation from the Central Committee, who made a full statement on the subject. Societies were asked to raise the proposal at the C.W.S. Quarterly Meetings, and a number gave it their hearty support. A resolution asking the C.W.S. to adopt the scale was brought forward in December, 1911, by a number of societies. Resolutions were brought forward by Guild Branches in the Quarterly Meetings of many Societies, instructing the delegates to vote for the Minimum Wage at the C.W.S. Meetings, and leaflets were distributed by branch members to the delegates. This resolution was defeated, but received a very good vote, and the Directors began to put the scale into force in several departments. In December, 1912, a resolution was again brought forward that the scale should be put into force throughout the C.W.S. within a year. This was carried by a majority of 139.

*The Training of Women to be Enlightened and Progressive Co-operators and to take part in the Work of the Movement.*—The Co-operative Movement has in the main admitted women on equal terms with men, except that a considerable number of Societies had restrictions on membership, which in practice excluded the married women. Positions on Boards and Committees have been nominally open to women, but before the Guild was formed in 1883, in practice women took hardly any active part in the work of their Society. Women did not attend Quarterly Meetings. To this day we hear occasionally when a new branch is formed, that previously no women had attended the Quarterly Meetings, and that when the Guildswomen put in an appearance, the men looked askance at them. This was a common experience in the early days. It was almost unheard of that women should stand for Management and Education Committees;

still more unheard of was the idea of their election on to Sectional Boards or the C.W.S. Board.

Slowly, as the Guild progressed, this prejudice was broken down, though it still exists as regards the more important official positions.

The Guild has steadily worked for the removal of all restrictions on membership of Co-operative Societies, and owing to the action of the Guild Branches restrictions have been removed in many Societies.

### Women and Societies' Business Meetings.

Everywhere, the effect of the Guild has been to increase the attendance of women at Quarterly Meetings. Such a campaign as the one for the Minimum Wage shows what women can do through Quarterly Meetings. Therefore, it is very important that all women should understand their powers as members of Co-operative Societies.

The Business Meetings are usually held quarterly and are, therefore, known as the Quarterly Meetings. But in large Societies it is most desirable to hold monthly meetings (as is done in a number of Societies) because there is too much business to be dealt with properly at Quarterly Meetings.

It is most necessary to elect the best people, women or men.

It is very important to put forward good women candidates. No Branch should be satisfied until there are four good women on the Management Committee of its Society, but care should be taken not to endanger the re-election of a retiring woman member if her work has been satisfactory.

(a) The Business Meeting passes the Report and Balance-Sheet of the Society.

It is essential that members should understand the Balance Sheet, in order to see if the Society's business is efficiently conducted, and to be able when necessary to criticise helpfully and intelligently.

(The Lecturer should recommend Branches to study "How to Read a Balance Sheet," and to get their Store Secretary to explain their Society's Balance Sheet from time to time.)

(b) The Business Meeting has the power to pass resolutions declaring the policy the members wish the Management Committee to carry out.

It must be understood that the Management Committee is the body to whom all powers necessary for the business management of the Society are delegated. The following are extracts from the Model Rule 90 issued by the Co-operative Union:—

Rule 90. *General Powers of the Committee.*—The Committee shall control all business carried on by or on account of the

Society, receive and give receipts for all moneys due to it, determine all purchases or sales, and the prices to be paid or charged for the same. They may, from time to time, engage, remove, or discharge all managers, salesmen, or employees of any description required to conduct any such business, and fix their duties, salaries, or other remuneration, at such rates, and require them to give such security, either in the forms hereinafter contained, or in such other forms approved of by them as they determine.

The Quarterly Meeting cannot, therefore, interfere about details of Management, such as wages paid to individual employees, where supplies are bought, &c.

But they can lay down the policy they wish the Committee to pursue. For instance, they can resolve that it is desirable that only C.W.S. soap shall be stocked, or that all employees shall belong to a trade union, or that a minimum wage scale shall be adopted.

The Management Committee is not bound to act on the resolution, but they very rarely fail to do so. If they persist in refusing to act on it, the Quarterly Meeting can elect others in their place.

This power of Quarterly Meetings is most important, because it gives members the power to secure reforms and developments.

The Lecturer should illustrate by reference to the Guild Campaign for a Minimum Wage for Co-operative Women Employees.

Branches should understand clearly that if they want to raise questions of policy on business matters at the Quarterly Meetings, they must not put forward a resolution *instructing* the Management Committee, because then the resolution can be ruled out of order under Model Rule quoted above. But if it is in the form of a suggestion beginning: "This meeting considers it *desirable*," the Management Committee have no power to refuse to put it on the agenda, and if they do, the Branch should insist on the opinion of the Co-operative Union being obtained. Quarterly Meetings can *instruct* on matters not connected with business management.

(d) The Business Meeting has the power to elect representatives to the Co-operative Union Congress, Co-operative Union Sectional and District Conferences, C.W.S. Quarterly Meetings, and similar Conferences.

The custom of Societies varies very much in this matter. In some all delegations are kept entirely in the hands of the Management Committee. In others, the Management Committee and the Education Committee, and occasionally the Guild Branches appoint. In others, again, the members appoint a certain proportion from the Quarterly Meeting.

Every Branch should see to it that in their Society, both the Management Committee and the members in Quarterly Meeting appoint a proportion of the different delegations. It is also very valuable that the Management Committee and the delegates to the C.W.S. Quarterly Meetings and Co-operative Union Congress should

meet together to consider the agenda, and decide how to vote in cases where the Quarterly Meeting has not given instructions. This is done in various large Societies, such as Newcastle and Eccles. It is desirable that delegates to the C.W.S. Quarterly Meeting should be appointed for a year, as they thus learn to understand and follow the business more effectively.

(e) The Business Meeting has the power to instruct the Society's delegates to the Co-operative Union Congress, C.W.S. meetings, &c. This power is very important, and was used effectively in the Minimum Wage Campaign when the Guild Branches brought forward resolutions instructing the delegates to the C.W.S. meetings to support the Minimum Wage resolution.

(f) The Business Meeting has the power to nominate and vote in elections of Co-operative Union Sectional Boards, C.W.S. Board, Co-operative Union District Committees, National Co-operative Publishing Society.\* But hardly any Quarterly Meetings have used this power except Plymouth, and in the case of the C.W.S. Director, Eccles. Practically everywhere else these elections are in the hands of Management Committees. This is one of the great reasons why it is so difficult to get women on to these Boards and Committees.

Wherever there are monthly meetings it is quite practicable to bring the elections before the members' meetings.

Where there are several Branches connected with a Society, they should take joint action at Quarterly Meetings and in propaganda work for their Societies. The organisation of such joint work is one of the principal objects of the Joint Guild Councils now formed in many places.

## National Work.

### A Married Woman's Organisation.

The Guild organises Women Co-operators, and as the vast majority of women Co-operators are wives and mothers the Guild is mainly composed of married women. It is on these women that the whole Co-operative Movement rests, because their work is to lay out the family income on behalf of the family, and it depends on them where they will spend that money. They therefore have the closest interest in how the Society is managed, and it is most important they should thoroughly understand what Co-operation stands for, and take their full part in the work of the Movement.

In Trade Unions it is seen how the common interest of wage-earning has united men. So, in the Guild, married women have the common interest of wage-spending. Again, just as men have used their Trade Union organisation to press for many national reforms in their lives outside their workshops, so married women use the Guild

\* For details about dates of these elections, &c., see Appendix "Methods of Election," pages 17 and 18.

as a means of pressing for national reforms needed in their lives as wives and mothers and housewives. Some of these have been:—

*Public Health and Housing.*—The Guild organised special lectures and published pamphlets by experts on these subjects in 1898 to 1900. Ever since, Guild branches have taken an active interest in the position regarding these matters in their towns.

*Health of School Children.*—The Guild was the most active organisation supporting the Medical Inspection of School Children and the establishment of School Clinics, until these much-needed reforms were widely established. They are now following up that work with an effort to establish a regular supply of milk to school children, through the local authorities.

*Divorce Law Reform.*—This question provides a remarkable illustration of the need for married women to have an organisation of their own to express their needs. When asked to give evidence before the Divorce Law Reform Commission in 1910, an inquiry was made amongst Branches as regards their views on equality before the law for men and women and for rich and poor, and their experience of cases where divorce was required but could not be obtained. The response showed that the Branches were overwhelmingly in favour of these reforms, and the letters telling of cases laid bare the terrible hidden misery caused by our Divorce Law. A further inquiry as to extending the grounds for divorce was made amongst 124 Guild officials and ex-officials, which met with a similar response. The evidence was published as a booklet, "Working Women and Divorce."

When the Divorce Law Reform Commission reported, several papers explaining its recommendations were published by the Guild, and very thoroughly discussed by the Branches. Strong resolutions in support of far-reaching reforms were passed by Annual Congresses, the latest being at Birmingham in 1914 as follows:—

"That this Congress calls on the Government to introduce a bill dealing with Divorce Law Reform and expresses its support of the proposals of the Majority Report with the further ground of Mutual Consent, and the appointment of women as assessors in Divorce cases."

In 1918 a Divorce Law Reform Bill was likely to be introduced and a leaflet was sent to all Branches.

It is obvious that this question affects Married Working Women with special force, and that it is most essential that they should express their views on it.

*The Insurance Act and Maternity Benefit.*—The Guild pressed that the Maternity Benefit should be included in the Insurance Act. Before that Act was introduced, the Guild obtained information showing the need for the Maternity Benefit, and sent a deputation to the Government about it. The Maternity Benefit included in

the Insurance Act was on the lines suggested by the Guild. But at first the benefit was the property of the husband. Later on, therefore, the Guild had a great campaign to get it made the property of the wife. Cases were collected showing the necessity for this. Representatives of the Guild attended daily when the matter was before the House of Commons, and a lawyer was engaged to help in drafting the necessary amendment to the Insurance Act. Branch representatives came up to the House of Commons to see M.P.s and the General Secretary and Miss Bondfield went to the House of Commons to see supporters and opponents in order to explain the Guild position. In five days over 700 signatures of midwives, nurses, and women engaged in public work were collected in a petition circulated to all M.P.s. Although opposed by the Insurance Commissioners and officials of Approved Societies, the reform making the Maternity Benefit the property of the wife was finally carried, entirely owing to the work of the Guild.

In 1917-18, the Guild again succeeded in protecting the position of mothers. It was proposed by the Approved Societies, officials, and Government Departments, that when a woman left work on marriage she should entirely cease to be insured, and should receive a sum of £2 instead of any further benefits. The Guild on the other hand urged that the money should be reserved for a Maternity Benefit for the first child born after the woman ceased work. The Guild failed to get the question raised in the House of Commons, so had to concentrate on securing an amendment in the House of Lords. Although, as one of our members has said, the Guild is not usually much in love with the House of Lords, it was fortunate enough to find a good friend there in Lord Knutsford, who agreed to bring in an amendment. There followed busy weeks of drafting amendments, circularising Peers, and writing to the press. After Lord Knutsford's speech on the second reading of the Bill, expressions of support began to pour in. The Government grew nervous, negotiations took place, and finally the Marriage Benefit was withdrawn, and an agreed amendment was arrived at which gave the full Maternity Benefit for the first child born within two years of leaving employment on marriage, Sickness Benefit at a rate of 5s. a week for six weeks within a year of leaving employment, and a year's Medical and Sanatorium Benefit. The effect of the amendment was to save over a quarter of a million pounds a year for health and maternity.

*National Care of Maternity.*—After Maternity Benefit was secured, the Guild, in 1913, put forward big schemes for the National Care of Maternity. It was to a deputation of the Guild that the Government announced in 1914 that national grants would be made in aid of Maternity Centres and other maternity work organised by Local Authorities. Many of the Guild suggestions were adopted by the Local Government Board and now by the Ministry of Health (such as Home Helps, Maternity Homes, &c.). The letters from Guildswomen, published in the book "Maternity Letters from Working Women," had a wonderful effect in arousing public opinion, not only in England, but in America also.

The Guild supported the formation of the Ministry of Health, and was to the fore in urging the establishment of a Consultative Council of the public in connection with it.

*Women's Suffrage.*—The Guild worked hard to secure the franchise for women, and would not be satisfied with any proposal which, like the earlier ones, excluded married working women from the vote. It was largely due to Guild advocacy that the vote for married women became practical politics.

*International Brotherhood and Opposition to Militarism.*—During the war and since the Guild has kept alive these points of view. (See recent Annual Reports).

*Prices.*—The Guild collected valuable facts to show the effects of rising prices in the early days of war.

A Guildswoman, Mrs. Cottrell, was appointed on the Consumers' Council.

Deputations to each of the twelve Government District Milk Commissioners took place in November, 1919.

Many Branches took local action in connection with the Food Control grievances.

*Representation on Public Bodies.*—The Guild organisation is of immense value in securing the representation of married working women on the numerous Local Authorities and Public Committees. As early as 1894, the Guild pressed for the election of Guildswomen as Poor Law Guardians. The National Health Insurance Commission ask the W.C.G. and Railway Women's Guild to recommend jointly suitable women for appointment on Local Insurance Committees. Several Government Departments ask for nominations from the Standing Joint Committee of Women's Industrial Organisations, to which the Guild is affiliated, and recommend Local Authorities to secure representatives from the Guild and Labour Women's Organisations on such Committees as Food Control, Profiteering, &c. Many Guildswomen have now been appointed as Magistrates.

(For list of Guild representatives on public bodies see Annual Report).

#### GUILD FOUNDATIONS.

*The Self-Government of the Guild.*—The secret of the Guild's success has been that it has been self-governing, working on its own lines inside the movement, but not subordinate to any official body. In this way it has secured freedom of initiative and sense of responsibility. It has shown a way in which one of the great difficulties of democracy may be met—that of developing the action of the rank and file and enabling them to bring both initiative and knowledge to the control of policy, a control which is so essential to keep a proper balance between the rank-and-file members and the official bodies. One of the difficulties of all democracies is how to prevent the natural tendency

of official bodies of national movements from becoming conservative, and an outward mechanical unity from being considered more important than a living progressive spirit among the members.

Official control over rank and file educational bodies like the Guild is bound to be disastrous. One of the chief values of rank and file bodies is the advancing of new ideas and the doing of pioneer work. It is impossible and undesirable that every one should immediately agree with new ideas or proposals, but if any body of people which does disagree with such ideas shall have the power, through official control, of preventing their discussion, freedom within the movement and Co-operative education will suffer badly.

In the case of the Guild, the effects of control would be peculiarly disastrous, because it would, in practice, be exercised by men over women. The point of view of women is often overlooked, and their needs are not often realised. Actual experience has proved this, for such subjects of special importance to women as the Suffrage and Maternity have been looked on coldly by official bodies, and the Guild was called upon to give up the subject of Divorce Law Reform after working at it for *four years*. Every subject taken up by the Guild is discussed and considered most thoroughly by the Central Committee and branches before action is taken on it. But a body like the Central Board, with its great amount of work, would perhaps devote an hour to its consideration before requiring it to be given up, and no direct Guild representative would be there to put the Guild point of view in the discussion. It must be remembered that a deputation does not at all give a fair chance of replying to objections and pressing the Guild point of view in support of some new reform.

Rank and file bodies speak only for themselves, and cannot commit the movement in any way. The members should, as in the Guild, provide a considerable proportion of their funds, and grants from official bodies should not give control. The C.W.S. does not claim control.

It is interesting to note that the new proposals for developing adult education, which would be financed by the Government, expressly lay down the principle that there should be entire freedom from Government or municipal control as regards subjects and methods, the only test being efficiency.

It will be recalled how splendidly the Guild branches resisted control in 1914; how they doubled the Central Fund subscription and sent generous donations, and how the Guild sacrificed £1,600 to maintain its position. Then a satisfactory agreement was made with the Central Board, and the grant renewed in 1918. The grant was made dependent on the acceptance by Congress of the Guild Annual Report for the past year, and a conference was to be held annually between the Central Committee and United Board. This operated until 1931, when the United Board decided it should be discontinued as an annual meeting, but that they could meet at any time when the Board or the Guild have any subject of importance or emergency to discuss.



*Voluntary Work.*—Another principle which has been of great value to the Guild is that of voluntary work, which was endorsed by the Guild Congress, 1920, by a large majority. The position is summarised in the following quotation from “Guild Finances and Voluntary Work” :—

“ We ask you to give your most earnest thought to the questions we have been dealing with before coming to a conclusion. We recognise fully the difficulties branches will meet in giving up honorariums, where they exist, and in asking their members for a higher subscription. But in the past we have been able to rely on the enthusiasm of our members both in giving free service and in providing funds. The Guild has been built up on such enthusiasm, and has achieved a position and power unique in the history of working women. Without realising it, we may be losing this priceless inheritance if we fall away from the spirit of the women who have made their own organisation what it is. The gift of an honorarium may seem an unimportant and purely local matter, but we know the effect of a small hole in a big dam, and we have had experience both in the Guild and other organisations of how much of the greatest value is lost if the voluntary spirit is in any way undermined. If our members think over what the Guild has done for married working women, how it has given them knowledge, a sense of comradeship, widened their home life, shown them their power as Co-operators, and their place in the Labour movement, how it has brought them reforms, made their voice heard on national and local public committees, and provided them in our Congress with a real Parliament of women; when we think of these things, we believe our members will decide that every effort should be made to retain the devotion and public spirit which has hitherto animated the Guild.”

*Guild Education.*—In developing the spirit and work shown in the history of the Guild, a special system of education has been gradually built up. Most of our members are too busy to become students, and what they want is to do practical work to help forward and develop the Co-operative movement, and to improve the conditions of life for all the workers and for themselves. So they need information which they can apply practically.

To gain reforms isolated action is not sufficient, and the backing of the whole organisation is needed.

Our methods are adapted to these two ends.

Each year special subjects are selected, and the whole Guild is asked to take them up. Speakers are found from the District Committees and Sectional Councils; these are supplied from the Central Office with “Hints” and papers, so that they may study the subject and prepare addresses on it. Every District Committee member is asked to take up at least *two* subjects, and each Sectional Council member to be prepared to speak on all the special subjects for the

year. Branches should think, when electing District Committee and Sectional Council members, of this side of their work.

Every branch should arrange to have speakers on every one of the special subjects for the year, and should carry out the practical work recommended in connection with the subject.

To give further information, either Two-Days or One-Day Schools are arranged in each District to deal more fully with two or three of the subjects. We now arrange special schools for Sectional Council members to prepare them as lecturers for the Two-Days Schools.

Another side of the work for which education is needed is to keep the whole organisation business-like and alive. Therefore, there are Officials' Classes for Branch Officials, and this year special District Committee schools to deal with district work are being arranged.

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## Appendix.

### METHODS OF ELECTION.

(These methods are those which are in operation now or will be put into operation during the next year.)

#### I. CO-OPERATIVE UNION SECTIONAL BOARDS.

Nomination papers are sent out 13 weeks before Whitsuntide, and must be returned within a calendar month.

Voting papers are sent out about five or six weeks before Whitsuntide, and must be returned not later than one week before Whitsuntide.

Throughout the Co-operative Union's seven sections and Scotland and Ireland the method of election is on the basis of area nomination and representation and Sectional voting.

The number of members elected to each Board is as follows: Northern Section, eight members; North-Eastern Section (Yorkshire), eight members; North-Western Section (Lancashire), 13 members; Midland Section, 11 members; Southern Section (South-Eastern and Southern), 11 members; Western Section, six members; South-Western Section, six members; Scottish, 10 members; Irish Executive, five members. These 78 members comprise the Central Board.

Candidates must be fully qualified shareholding members of some society, member of the union belonging to the Sectional district for which they are nominated, and resident in the Section; also they must have been for twelve months immediately preceding nomination a member of a society member of the union, and must have the

purchasing qualification (if any) for position of director in the society of which they are members, but need not be members of the society by which they are nominated.

## II. CO-OPERATIVE WHOLESALE BOARD OF DIRECTORS.

Under the Co-operative Wholesale Society, the country is divided into three districts—Newcastle (covering the Northern counties), Manchester (covering, mainly, Lancashire, Yorkshire, and the greater part of the Midlands), and London (covering the South Midlands, South Wales, and South-West), and the directorate of 28 members is elected from these districts as follows: Newcastle, six members; Manchester 14 members; and London, eight members. Each member of the Board is elected for a period of four years.

Four Directors retire in January and three Directors retire in July. Directors retire at the age of 68.

Candidates for the C.W.S. Board of Directors must be members of the Society nominating them for twelve months preceding the nomination, and must be under the age of 50 years at the date specified by the Board for receiving nominations.

## III. NATIONAL CO-OPERATIVE PUBLISHING SOCIETY.

In 1933 the Board of this Society will have 15 (now 18) members, elected as follows: Ten from English and Welsh shareholding societies and five from Scottish shareholding societies. Provision is to be made for direct representation of the English and Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Societies and the Co-operative Union, and if these seats are accepted those to be filled by shareholding societies will be reduced.

Nomination forms are sent out six weeks prior to the half-yearly meetings.

Candidates must be members of a shareholding society, and not over the age of 67.

The election is for three years, five Directors to retire each year.



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