

WOMEN'S CO-OPERATIVE GUILD.

AUXILIARY BODIES.

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The Position Created by the Blackpool Congress.

The decision at the Blackpool Congress as regards Auxiliary Bodies is viewed with grave concern by the Central Committee of the Women's Co-operative Guild. They have carefully considered the position and now desire to place before Guild branches and before Societies the conclusions they have arrived at.

The Survey Committee's proposals make it necessary that Auxiliary Bodies, in order to be recognised by the movement and receive grants, should give "unqualified acceptance at all times on their part of the decisions of Congress and the authority of the Central Board of the Union," and give the Board the right to appoint representatives on all Auxiliary Bodies.

We do not understand what would be included in or is meant by "Congress decisions;" but it is obvious that the Central Board would have the right at any moment to interpose and prevent any subject or work taken up by the Guild, and that any decision of our Guild Congress might, if unacceptable at the moment to the C.B., lead to the Guild being refused recognition as an Auxiliary body. We would also point out that the presence of C.B. representatives (of whom not more than two may be appointed) would give the Board a voice not only in connection with the expenditure of the grant it makes, but also with the much larger part of Guild finances mostly subscribed by the branches themselves.

An Amendment to these proposals was sent in to the Blackpool Congress on behalf of the Guild by 15 Societies. It was on the lines of the agreement made in 1918 between the C.B. and the Guild, which ended happily the four years' controversy, when the Guild sacrificed £1,600 for the sake of maintaining its self-government. The Amendment (1) made Congress the authority for giving or withholding the grant, its decision being based on the Annual Report of the Guild, and (2) provided for joint meetings between the United Board and the Central Committee. The Amendment was lost, and the Guild is thus faced with the possibility of rules for the movement being passed embodying the Survey Committee's proposals.

The Central Committee believe that in any large democracy such as the Co-operative Movement, vitality and progress are best preserved by the initiative and enthusiasm characteristic of rank and file organisations free from official control. It is therefore on the general ground of securing this freedom, so essential to energetic life and so essential also to the "law and order" which belongs to responsible self-government, that we oppose the Survey Committee's proposals, which were accepted at Blackpool Congress last February.

Moreover, the necessity for free development applies with special force to a woman's organisation within the Co-operative Movement, which rests so largely on the support of women, and where men are so predominantly in possession of official positions. Now possession is nine-tenths of the law—for equal opportunity is not a reality, though a door be open, if all the seats are full. In order that the women's point of view should gain expression and have its due weight, it is vital that they should have an organisation of their own whose development along its own lines should be unhampered.

Belief in, and work for, the Co-operative Movement, is the strongest feature of the Guild. For over 30 years it has made use of its freedom as a pioneering body to work out co-operative principles, and to help in rousing the movement on the extension of Co-operation in Poor Neighbourhoods (now accepted by the Survey Committee), on a Minimum Wage for Women employés (now accepted by the C.W.S.), on the union of Labour forces (now accepted by the movement), on the National Care of Maternity and the establishment of a Ministry of Health (now accepted by the C.E.C. and the Co-operative Party), on the Parliamentary vote for married women (so essential to the political strength of the movement), on the necessity for Political Action (now accepted by the movement), on the menace of Capitalism, and on the development of International Co-operative Trade.

A further reason why the Guild should be left its self-government is that being an organisation almost entirely of married working women, it has been able to voice their special needs, which have been so long neglected by the country, and bring forward reforms which are of value not only to Co-operators but to the whole community. The effective work of the Guild in these directions is recognised nationally, and has also been a most useful advertisement of Co-operation.

We therefore propose, when the Rules for the Constitution of the Union come before Congress, to try and revive the arrangement concluded in 1918 between the Guild and the C.B., which has worked harmoniously since that time. We appeal to branches and societies to support us in a course which we wholeheartedly believe will make for the progress and best interests of the movement.

We are, yours fraternally,

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E. BARTON, <i>Vice-President.</i>	M. FERGUSON.
E. LAYTON, <i>Treasurer.</i>	J. GREEN.
A. BLAIR.	J. HUTCHINGS.

MARGARET LLEWELYN DAVIES,

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