

CO-OPERATIVE UNION LIMITED

THE CO-OPERATIVE PARTY

HD2

334

WOMAN—
in the Home,
the Store and
the State

By

Eleanor Barton, J.P.

*General Secretary, Women's Co-operative
Guild*

PRICE ONE PENNY

Serial No. N.58

CO-OPERATIVE UNION LIMITED

CO-OPERATIVE PARTY

Woman in the Home, the Store,
and the State

The Guild and Politics.

There has never been a time when women were not interested in politics. And "interested" is a mild word to use, for are not politics bound up with all that a woman is most concerned with—housing, food prices, the education of her children, the health of her family? Even in the days when woman's sphere was strictly confined to her home she could not fail to be interested in the building of that home, the wages of her husband and the cost of the necessaries of life. As woman's influence and participation in Government and the affairs of the nation has increased, so has her interest in politics, and now that at last she has acquired the full rights of citizenship and can vote on the same terms as men she knows, as never before, that politics is a matter of vital importance to her. After so long a fight for her right to vote, it is not likely now that she will not be interested in the using of her political power.

Co-operative Guildswomen, however, have been more than interested in politics. They have made it their business to gain real knowledge in the political sphere, because they belong to a great consumers' organisation with the definite purpose in view of production for use rather than for profit, and of the development of a higher and nobler system of society. This great purpose of the Co-operative Movement is not merely a sectional one, but is national and international, and therefore must of necessity enter the realm of politics. The Women's Co-operative Guild has for very many years realised this, and has consequently been strongly in favour of political action for Co-operators. Following on the aims of the Rochdale Pioneers, which included not only trading, but also education and government, the Guild has been true to these principles. The Co-operative Movement is great to-day, and what a debt of gratitude it owes to the idealists, those men and women who have worked so hard and so disinterestedly to make the world realise the value of Co-operation, as a new basis for trading and as a means of mutual help in the development of the higher phases of life both intellectual and moral.



Co-operative women have realised that if the principle of "Each for All, and All for Each" is good in their shopping, it is equally good in production, in education, and in the affairs of the nation and of the world. It is this broad view which has animated Guilds-women, and has made the Guild so useful a factor in all aspects of Co-operative life, and it is this view which long ago made Co-operative women take steps to urge the Movement into politics.

Co-operative Politics.

The Movement has always been closely connected with politics, as the resolutions passed at its congresses prove. The effects of the laws of the country in regard to trading and taxation, and acts of Parliament for facilitating or hindering associations for special purposes with regard to the workers' welfare, have always been of great concern to Co-operators. Yet the only way they had in the past to convey their ideas across the legislative barrier was to "lobby" a representative of another political party, who was usually also the representative of private interests. At the best this cap-in-hand method was both degrading and inefficient.

To-day the doubt as to whether the Co-operative Movement should enter the political arena has definitely passed, because the usefulness of the Co-operative Party has been proved. Some Co-operators still retain their doubts, but this is probably not so much because of their fear for the Movement, as because of their fear for the particular political party to which they and their fathers belong. The Co-operative Party is now an established part of the Movement and has brought advantages in which all societies have shared, whether affiliated to the Party or not. This has roused the supporters of the older parties, who are representing big business, to try and defeat the Co-operative Movement politically by using some members to attack the Co-operative Party from within. Nevertheless, the Party makes good progress, and although its experience is a comparatively short one its value cannot be denied. Such matters as food, coal, taxation, and insurance have a special significance to the Co-operator in that they are interwoven into the very texture of the Co-operative Movement. These matters are debated from time to time in the House of Commons, and laws are made relating to them. Co-operative M.P.'s have brought their special knowledge to bear upon these subjects, to the benefit of the public generally and Co-operators in particular.

Women and the Co-operative Party.

Now that women have full political power it rests with them to see that the affairs of the nation are adjusted, and carried on with that same earnestness and desire for the good of all as is to be found in the vast majority of cottage homes in this country. What women have to realise is that the State is nothing but a larger home, and that its problems, duties, and responsibilities should

be considered in the same spirit of mutual helpfulness as in the home. In the family, care and affection is given to each member, and if there is special need, as in the case of sickness or old age, particular care and attention is given to meet the need. No one would suggest that an old father or mother should be neglected because they are no longer contributing to the family income, and if a member of the family is unemployed he would not be rationed or made to live on a lower scale, but rather the whole family would share for the time being in the lower standard of living.

The Co-operative woman knows that this principle of "Each for All, and All for Each," on which the home is founded, is practised in the Co-operative Movement with good effect, and she therefore sees that this same principle can and ought to be applied to the State. Yet when she looks around, she sees a terrible amount of poverty and disease, old folk uncared for, widows and little children destitute, and unemployed unprovided for. So she asks herself why it is that these things should be so, and why the Co-operative principles of the home and the Movement are not practised in society generally.

The answer, of course, is that the State is run by those who believe in private profit before human welfare, and will not accept the Co-operative principle for the same reason as private traders will not accept it. The Co-operative woman knows how the Co-operative Movement differs from private trading, in that it produces for use rather than for profit, and is organised for the benefit of the whole membership rather than in the interests of a few individuals. It is because the Government, too, is run for the advantage of a few individuals who already have more than they need, rather than for the welfare of the community as a whole, that the country is suffering as it is. The remedy, of course, is to return to Parliament those people who believe in Co-operative principles and who are prepared to put those principles into practice when they form the Government.

Here, then, is woman's great opportunity, for there is already established a Co-operative Party, built on Co-operative principles and prepared to carry them out to the full. This Party has already been represented in Parliament for the last ten years, and in spite of the great odds against which it has been working, it has already achieved much that is of immediate help to the family in the home. For instance, when it was sought to compel those who wanted to change from one Insurance Society to another to make a declaration before a magistrate, the Co-operative M.P.s were successful in defeating this measure. Then, in regard to tea, a matter which so directly affects the housewife, the Co-operative Movement gave the consumer the full weight of tea, while others weighed paper with it, until everyone is now compelled by law to give the full weight of tea. When the Labour Government was in office, the Chancellor of the Exchequer reduced the tea duty from 8d. to 4d., which

meant much to the housewife and incidentally to the Co-operative Movement, as its sales of tea were increased by 5,000,000lb.

These are practical instances of the way in which the participation of the Co-operative Movement in politics has brought benefits to the consumer, and it is some indication of the way in which the Co-operative Party would apply Co-operative principles to the country if a Co-operative and Labour Government came into power. In order to get these principles applied, a radical change is needed, as is recognised by the Co-operative and Labour Parties, between which there is a working agreement, and such problems as Unemployment, Motherhood, Sickness, the Care of the Aged, and Mining, must be dealt with from a new point of view, that is a Co-operative viewpoint of giving the first place to human needs rather than to private profit. These are all national problems, yet they have never been tackled seriously by the Government, and as they are all problems which mainly affect the workers, it is only natural that the workers themselves should be the people to put forward constructive proposals for their solution. The Co-operative Movement realises that such problems as Unemployment are not merely national but international, and that in addition to making national reforms, which would do much, such as raising the school age and giving old age pensions at 60 instead of 65, the surest way of raising the status of the worker and of giving him security of employment is by developing International Trade. The development of Co-operative International Trade on a large scale, too, would be another means of carrying out a practical peace policy, and the close communication between the Co-operative Movements in various countries would be the best safeguard against war. For Co-operative women wish to see the principles of "Each for All, and All for Each" applied internationally as well as nationally, and the first step towards this must be disarmament and friendship between nations, and security from war. It is because of her fundamental belief in this Co-operative principle that the Guildswoman turns to the Co-operative Party.

The Movement's Need of a Co-operative Party.

Not only because of her desire as a woman to see Co-operative principles applied to the community, but also because of the needs of the Co-operative Movement, will the woman Co-operator use her political power in support of the Co-operative Party. The day of the small business man and of the single manufacturer has passed, and great mergings of all kinds of businesses into the same hands are taking place. Private trade is becoming more and more concentrated into a few great Trusts and Combines, and simultaneously with the growth and progress of the Co-operative Movement these Trusts are growing in power. As these two lines of development proceed, sooner or later a clash will inevitably come between them, and one or the other will go under.

For this reason private trade is becoming more and more bitter and hostile to the Co-operative Movement, and new and more forceful attacks on Co-operation are continually being made. The Movement has, of course, always been subject to attack, and all Co-operators are familiar with the boycott, which has raised its head again quite recently. Now that manufacturers are united in Trusts and Combines, however, they are in a stronger position to boycott the Co-operative Movement and in many cases are refusing to sell to Co-operative Societies certain goods, though this should tend to strengthen the Movement by encouraging C.W.S. production. A new form of attack is now being made through price fixing associations and the refusal to allow societies to give a dividend on certain goods. The Co-operative Movement is continually having to face attacks of this kind, and as the trustification of businesses leads to monopolies by a few individuals, these people are able to raise prices to the disadvantage of the consumer and the Co-operative Movement which represents the consumer.

The fact that business is now conducted on such a large scale, and that industries are concentrated in the hands of a few people who act in a national or international capacity, means that legislation is required to enable these people to force their will on the nations. It is, therefore, essential to them to be represented in Parliament, and it is only necessary to look at the membership of the House of Commons to see how firmly entrenched these interests are. The legislation required by these people will be directed more and more against the Co-operative Movement, and every thinking woman will see the necessity for Co-operators safeguarding their own interests by being well represented in Parliament too.

Instances of the Co-operative Movement being attacked by big business through the medium of Parliament are continually occurring. For example, one of the National Health Insurance Medical Benefit Amending Regulations that were introduced in 1928, refuses to Co-operators the dividend on prescriptions which are dispensed by chemists engaged by Co-operative Societies. This cuts at the root principle of Co-operation, and is the thin end of a wedge that will be driven further unless Co-operators bestir themselves, and the only way to counteract this kind of thing is increased representation in the House of Commons.

The Representation of Consumers by the Co-operative Party.

As every woman Co-operator knows, the Co-operative Movement is primarily a Consumers' Movement, the consumer often being personified by the "Woman with the Basket." Before the advent of the Co-operative Party the great army of consumers had no direct representation in Parliament, as the Labour representation was more industrial and represented the workers in their capacity

as producers rather than as consumers. The housewife in particular benefits by being directly represented by the Co-operative Party, for Co-operative M.P.s are able to deal with matters concerning consumers as experts qualified to speak authoritatively. Many times already the consumers' case has been put with a directness not possible from any other quarter of the House by Co-operative Members, and much good to the consumer has resulted. With a Co-operative and Labour Government in power, consumers would for the first time have their interests directly catered for, and this is another reason why the wise woman will support the Co-operative Party by every means within her power.

Women's Responsibility.

For many long years women have fought and sacrificed for their rights of full citizenship, and this year will bring the first fruits of their labour. A Tory Government will claim to have given them the right to vote, but women will remember that their struggle for equal franchise was carried on under both Liberal and Tory Governments who had the power to grant what was asked, but who refused to do so until popular opinion was too great for them to withstand, whereas the Labour and Co-operative Movements have always stood for equal citizenship of men and women.

Women can still claim to-day that they are not responsible for the distress and injustice that is rife in the country, but after the coming General Election they will not be able to make such a claim. Then they will have to take the credit or the blame for the Government that is returned, and women Co-operators have a wonderful opportunity now that they all have the vote of seeing that their Co-operative principles are put into practice nationally, and all those who are true Co-operators will use their vote in the interest of humanity and Co-operation rather than of private profit and capitalism.

If there is any hope for the world it lies in a closer co-operation and a greater fellowship of those who serve the world. That is why the Co-operative Movement is so great, for in a way that no other movement has done it brings together, on the basis of their homely interests, the working peoples of the world. It teaches them to serve and to help their fellows, whilst saving themselves and their own homes. It brings together on the foundation of their daily needs all the useful sections and classes of the community.

And now it seeks to bring that spirit into the life of the State and the municipality. Instead of a Parliament governed by separate and striving interests, dominated by the lust of gain and the accumulation of private riches, it seeks a community—

Where the health and welfare of the people is the first law.

Where old age is tended and honoured.

Where childhood is cherished and made lovely.

Where young people are trained to useful and capable social service in those things for which they are best fitted.

Where men have employment at reasonable human wages, and

Where the woman can survey her family and her home, and be happy that the State in which she lives is a home of homes, holding out the hand of affection and friendship to other homes in all parts of the world.

It is the spirit of Co-operation, of "All for Each, and Each for All" that will heal the world's wounds, and bring the hope of a new life, a life of fellowship and peace, the glorious vision of a better life "whose music is the gladness of the world."

