

DIRECTORS ADVISORY SERVICE

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Presenting this account and explanation of Directors Advisory Service, I shall give a general review of the purpose and organization of the program, while George Wilkey, Secretary of the Co-operative Union of Ontario, will describe its use and application in one province (state).

Directors Advisory Service, or DAS as it is better known, is an educational and training program for helping directors of cooperatives in Canada to equip themselves to do a better job as directors and to develop themselves for board responsibility. It is carried on jointly by the Co-operative Union of Canada (CUC) and a number of provincial cooperative unions (there are eight in Canada), and is offered as an educational service to any board that wishes to undertake a simple but systematic plan of self-improvement.

It should be understood that this is not the only way open to co-op directors in Canada for education and training in board work. There are also directors schools, refresher courses of various kinds and regional monthly meetings of directors, usually sponsored by the wholesales or central cooperatives, as well as the press, directors bulletins and newsletters, literature especially for directors, and tours. In addition we have begun a basic correspondence course in the cooperative movement, which though mainly designed for employees is also recommended for co-op directors. So DAS should be viewed as only one of several instruments in the overall program of director training and education as we see it in Canada.

I should also like to make it clear at the beginning that DAS is neither a well established nor a fully developed program as yet. It has completed only three years of operation, one of which was purely experimental in just one province. It cannot be considered to have proved itself; we can only say that it has promising signs of being a good and useful program. It has to be improved upon and perhaps changed in some respects, although we do not anticipate that its basic set-up or method will be greatly altered.

Directors Advisory Service springs from three fundamental assumptions:

- (1) We believe that education of directors is of great importance to sound and proper growth of cooperatives, both individual co-ops and the movement as a whole. If directors do not receive special training for their job on the board, most of them will never be able to realize their full potentiality or provide the unique leadership that has to come from the board. If directors are not capable of fulfilling their role in the running of cooperatives, the management group will move into the vacuum and the inevitable result will be a sort of managerial dictatorship that is alien to true cooperation. Some cooperatives have already reached this point. The ideal situation in a cooperative is one in which the board and management constitute a leadership team but this team-work is thrown badly out of balance if management makes all the important plans and the board fulfills only a secondary role

of deciding whether or not to allow the manager to go ahead with the plans he has made. Directors can be effective directors only if they are informed, well grounded in the knowledge of cooperation and trained in the procedures of decision-making.

- (2) We also assume when we start this program that many co-op directors - perhaps most of them - are willing and ready to undertake something in the way of training when it is put to them in terms of self-improvement in order to get a better job done. There must be thousands of directors who are eager to play their part in the best possible way on the board but somehow feel that they are rather poorly equipped for board work. Every year at least 5,000 men and women (unfortunately rather few women) are elected to the board in co-op meetings in Canada, most of them for the first time and with relatively little experience in board functions. (The number in the USA would be perhaps ten times). They are people with leadership qualities or they would not have been chosen, and moreover they have technical skills and knowledge in their own field. But board work is a new experience for them and they often feel that they lack the know-how to play their full part. A new director is fortunate if he is named to a board in which there are sound traditions and good procedures; but if he takes his seat on a board with bad traditions and procedures he simply follows in the groove. Sometimes it is rather startling when a director discovers what he should be doing on the board, or when he finds out how to go about something he has long felt should be done. DAS is based on the belief that co-op directors are anxious to improve themselves for the task to which the members elected them.
- (3) This program is also based on the common knowledge that most directors are busy people who cannot take much time off from their regular work and must therefore get their training for the job through an in-service program. It takes them at the board meeting, which is monthly in most co-ops. It asks the directors to set aside a short period (perhaps $\frac{1}{2}$ hour) at five board meetings a year to focus attention on a chosen subject of fundamental concern to the progress and well being of the cooperative. DAS "steals" just a short period from the board meeting for on-the-job training. It's as simple as that.

The idea of Directors Advisory Service was first put forward by R.S. Staples, president of CUC, and was approved in principle by the 1958 Canadian Co-op Congress in Quebec City, the delegates stating in resolution that they wanted it made a "major educational project" of the Union. It was begun in an experimental way in Ontario in 1958-59.

The organization of DAS is relatively simple. The CUC prepares the bulletins for study and discussion and distributes them to provincial unions (in some regions other cooperative organizations too) in quantity. At the provincial level DAS is offered by the provincial union to any co-op that registers for the program. The co-op board selects one series of five topics for the year (often 2 topics in the fall months and 3 during the winter) for study, undertaking to concentrate on the subject of the series and consult from time to time with the provincial union or elsewhere for further information and advice.

Three series of bulletins have been produced so far (they are on display here) on these subjects: (1) The Co-op and Its Members; (2) The Co-op and Its Board; (3) Better Board Meetings. The topics of the series are as follows:

1. The Co-op and Its Members
 - (1) The Annual Meeting
 - (2) Selecting Directors
 - (3) Calling on the Members
 - (4) Keeping the Members Informed
 - (5) Meetings of Neighborhood Clubs
2. The Co-op and Its Board
 - (1) The Board is the Key
 - (2) What Boards Should Do
 - (3) The Board and the Manager
 - (4) The Board and the Members
 - (5) Building the Board
3. Better Board Meetings
 - (1) Preparations
 - (2) Procedure in Board Meetings
 - (3) Reaching Board Decisions
 - (4) Good Board Members
 - (5) After the Board Meeting

The bulletins are kept short and to the point. Their purpose is to focus attention quickly on a problem, a situation, a principle or a method, and to encourage the directors to discuss it in a purposeful way. A few questions are given at the end in order to stimulate further thought and searching for information. It should be emphasized that the aim of DAS is not to distribute more literature, to add to the volume of paper now going to co-op directors. We look upon the bulletin simply as the means of flashing a ray of light in a provocative way on matters that should concern the directors. If the program proves successful, the CUC will put out one, two or even more new series each year so that in time a board will have a wide range of subjects from which to choose. Printing plates for the bulletins are held ready and we run 1000 or more at a time according to demand.

During 1960-61 about 400 boards of directors in Canada used DAS, but we have no way as yet of knowing how effectively. Before long we shall have to do something by way of evaluation of the program.

