

THE JUNIOR COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT IN PUERTO RICO

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During the last decade the cooperative movement has become a powerful force in Puerto Rico's economic life. We are conscious of the unsuspected advantages of the cooperative practices for the achievement of a better standard of living, especially in countries, like our own, where the social and economic development does not run apace with the increase in population.

We deem it necessary for our young people to get in close contact with such a movement since they will be the ones to carry on the work begun by the older generations. Thus we have considered it mandatory that the teaching of cooperative ideals be included in the school curriculum and be given practical application.

The Department of Education of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico recognizes the significance of the cooperative movement. This Department is launching a program intended to familiarize our teachers and students with the philosophy, objectives and principles of cooperativism, and also to offer practical opportunities for the organization and operation of different types of school cooperatives.

Our school children are learning the ideals of cooperation through cooperative enterprises where they have the opportunity of putting team work into practice. Through the organization and management of school cooperatives they are getting an insight into elementary economics. They are learning to develop self control, the art

of working together, leadership and responsibility. They are being trained in community living.

Our junior cooperative project offers opportunity to develop initiative, resourcefulness and the ability to face and solve problems. The enterprise is operated by the children themselves so that they learn the method of doing business in a practical way. They become business-wise. Practical problems come up in a natural concrete setting. There are innumerable opportunities for the integration of the activities of the cooperative with other aspects of the curriculum, thus vitalizing the school program. Young cooperators grow in knowledge, skills, attitudes, appreciations and ideals.

Furthermore, through school cooperatives our students are providing themselves with various services and goods. In the first place they are selling at regular prices school supplies and other materials through thirty-five consumer cooperatives already established. Most of these cooperatives are operating in rural communities. There is one credit union or school bank and, recently, several industrial cooperatives have been established. The organization of other types of school cooperatives is being planned.

Meanwhile an intense educational program is being fostered. Teachers and students are receiving orientation and cooperative education through a variety of interesting activities, such as: short talks, excursions to visit cooperatives, lectures, exhibits, readings, radio talks, study circles, work shops, university extension courses,

panel discussions, films, and the like. The Agricultural Extension Service and other government agencies are effective collaborators in the educational program.

A Congress of junior cooperators will be held before this school year ends. We will meet at Aibonito, a small town in the center of the Island. There, our young people will profit from the experiences of their companions. Norms and procedures will be established by the children. Recreational activities will be part of the program.

An educational project goes on in Puerto Rico. We assure you that it will be most helpful in preparing our children to live a rich abundant life.