

Community Enterprise

A conference report on a meeting held at St. Patrick's Dumcondra, to explore how COMMUNITY ENTERPRISE actually operates gives a very useful summary of what is happening at present, and the potential for job creation at this level. Pauline Faughnan (U.C.D. Social Science Research Centre) gave a detailed presentation on her research into COMMUNITY ENTERPRISE in Tallaght and in Dublin's North Inner City. She outlined how the groups involved setting up COMMUNITY ENTERPRISES face many difficulties at various stages. Tom Collins (Maynooth) gave a very lively presentation on the struggle facing community groups when they move into COMMUNITY ENTERPRISE work.

The conference attracted a very big turn - out, which indicated a high level of interest among community groups in developing community enterprise. However the conference report brought out by Jim Walsh of the COMBAT POVERTY AGENCY highlights a range of difficulties which are facing groups.

The main difficulties are these:

- 1) There is a huge drop in income for those on social welfare, if they try to move into community enterprise; our social welfare system is not linked properly to the needs of those trying to move into community enterprise;
- 2) Wages in community enterprises tend to be low;
- 3) Support from state agencies does not provide enough financial support: it is often given on a year-to-year basis - but needs to be much longer: up to three years is recommended;

OURTOWN
GARDEN PRODUCTS
CO-OP.



The conference highlighted the way COMMUNITY ENTERPRISE has developed in other places; STRATHCLYDE, a special agency has been established to help with training and funding community enterprises. In Pittsburg, the University provides training and specialized support. The word "community" is often presumed to be worth promoting. In association with the word enterprise "community enterprise" is presented as a desirable goal, as a way for creating enterprises and for creating employment at local level. This seminar report by the Combat Poverty Agency has highlighted the widespread interest in the idea of community enterprise.

However, it also teaches several important lessons. There is a need not to expect local communities to create enormous numbers of jobs: the numbers of jobs capable of being created by local communities is relatively small, in comparison with the jobs that can be created through private enterprise and the state sector. A further point which the seminar highlighted is that there is a danger that by channeling a great deal of local energy into enterprise development, many other important community activities like community education, community care, community development work - may be weakened.



CONFERENCE REPORT: Community Enterprise
An adequate response to unemployment?
By Combat Poverty Agency,
8 Charlemont Street, Dublin 8.