

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP IN THE
CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETIES.

"Co-operation is a form of an organisation, wherein persons voluntarily associate together as human beings on a basis of equality for the promotion of the economic interest for themselves"¹. Thus the definition of co-operation itself, being a voluntary association of people and not of capital, as is a limited liability company, emphasizes the importance of personal elements in a co-operative society.

Social co-operation has always been prevalent in a Malay society but economic co-operation has been introduced with the purpose of improving the lot of the economically weak by means of their working together in order to form a strong economic unit, for mutual benefit. Working together is a basis of economic co-operation and therefore it must go hand in hand with the feeling of solidarity.

A society which contains groups of related families can be of considerable help to the growth of co-operative society because the solidarity and loyalty generated by the sociological ties can be utilized when the members of these related groups become members of the co-operative society. But, on the other hand, any slight misunderstanding between two persons can easily result in uncordial relations between two groups to which the two persons belong. Therefore a co-operative society in a Malay village can be conceived as an economic unit which is influenced by sociological relationships.

The success of a co-operative society depends on the support and loyalty shown by the members, and its strength comes from efficient organisation. The co-operative societies in Beserah can wield the support and the loyalty of their mem-

1. Herbert Calvert. "The Law and Principle of Co-operation (Calcutta and Simla 1926) p. 13.

bers not only by offering economic benefits in the form of fair prices for their fish and easier credit facilities but also by avoiding any bad feeling to any of the members.

The Kg. Di-Pantai Co-operative was formed with the initiative of the Tok Nebeng of the village. There are advantages and disadvantages of making such a man of high social standing in the community in the "lynch-pin" of the co-operative society.

The Advantages Are: A person the Kg. people know and esteem inspire confidence more readily than a less well-known person. Hence greater local support for the co-operating. Being the community leader, he also acts as the village arbitrator and his neutrality ensures support from all groups in the village.

The Disadvantages Are: Once he is made the leader of the co-operative society, the tendency is for him to be at society's helm for a long time especially if the ballot system is not used during the election of committee members.

He cannot exert his authority as the co-operative's chairman to the extent required of him because he has to consider his responsibility as the head man.

In Kg. Di-Pantai Co-operative Society, the chairman who practically assumed the responsibility of running the co-operative had two other roles to play. He was the Tok Nebeng of the village - a position which carried considerable prestige. He also ran a coffee shop in the Co-operative Society's premises free of rent in appreciation of his services to the society.

Therefore when carrying out his duty as chairman of the co-operative society, he also took into consideration his other function as well. For example, it was to the interest of the co-operative society that he should take effective steps to get back overdue loans members especially those who were no longer pursuing handline fishing but were doing

other work. If he were to make persistent effort to recover the loans as usually done by a Sikh cloth seller who waits on the door step everyday till he gets back his money, he would not only scare them from patronising his shop but he would also cause "masam muka" or discordant relationship between him and the members concerned which would effect his position as Tok Nebeng.

So he rather forwent the sum so long as there was social stability in the society.

The Kg. Seberang Che' Let Co-Operative.

The Kg. Che' Let Co-operative was formed without kampong headman's initiative. The leadership was open to men with initiative in the village.

Seberang Che' Let Co-operative Society gives us a contrasting illustration of the problem of related group which can be a source of disintegration of the society. The honorary general secretary who ran the society was a man with considerable ability in running a society. He also ran the coffee shop in the society's premises.

When he was elected the general secretary of the society, the general secretary took strong action against the former secretary who had embezzled \$219/- of the society's money without the knowledge of the other members. The latter having his dishonesty ^{been} discovered, reacted against the society by intentionally selling his fish outside and thereby breaking the society's regulations. Although he was in the wrong, his three other relatives who were members of the co-operative society took his side and deliberately sold their fish outside too. After repeated warning the four members were expelled from the society.

Each of these men was a leader for the three-man fishing groups and as a result of their dismissal from the society, eight other men who were in their groups did not sell their share to the society. So we see that an action taken against

one member affected other people as well.

The clique allied themselves with those who held similar attitude towards the secretary because of personal reasons.

The general secretary had a rival in coffee shop business. Before the society built its own premises, it was occupying the coffee shop and the members patronised the shop. But now the society had its own house, a part of which was rented by the secretary for his coffee shop to which the members had switched their patronage. His rival was also lending three boats to six of the co-operative's members whose attitudes were being turned against the secretary.

Therefore just because of personal reasons, these people become "subversives" against the co-operative society which was under the personal control of its secretary.

Fishermen in Berserah spent quite a high proportion of their income on drinks and snacks. The co-operative societies there were closely connected with coffee shops. Coincidentally, the "manager" of the two co-operatives were the owners of coffee shops in each of the societies' premises.

In Kg. Di-Pantai, the coffee shop in the society's premises did not have any rivalry from the other coffee shop owners in the village because the owner was the Tok Nebeng. But the coffee shop in Seberang Che' Let Co-operative's premises faced strong rivalry from the nearby coffee shop and this rivalry was not healthy to the progress of the Co-operative Society.

Rivalry Between The Two Societies:

—It is said that a business unit thrives on competition but co-operatives thrive on co-operation and in fact a co-operative movement will not be effective if the various units are not co-ordinated.

The co-operative relationship between the two neighbourly societies was non-existent in Berserah. Contrary to the very aims of the co-operative movement, each society regarded the other as its rival although, in the early stage of Che' Let

Co-operative Society, it was organised with the help of the Officials of Kg. Di-Pantai Co-operative Society.

One of the reasons why Seberang Che' Let Co-operative Society tried to minimise the use of Di-Pantai Co-operative Society's van was due to this unhealthy rivalry between the two societies. In fact it is cheaper and quicker to use the van for carrying its fish to Kuantan but the society preferred to transport its fish by bicycles which charge \$2.50 cents per bakul of 120 katis (dearer by 50 cents than by the van). Another reason was that the cyclists gave some helping hand in arranging and putting the fish in the baskets.

This rivalry sprang from the traditional village pride but this can be eliminated if the people are given more education or propaganda on well-known co-operative principles and aims.