

Co-operative Studies in Other Countries

W. P. WATKINS, J.P., B.A.

*(Mr. W. P. Watkins, a President of the Society for Co-operative Studies,
is a former Director of the International Co-operative Alliance)*

The establishment of the Society for Co-operative Studies is cordially welcomed by a number of older organisations with similar aims which are already linked together in the International Co-operative Scientific Forum. Yet because of the endless differences in national circumstances and conditions, there are many differences in constitution between them, even though their objects are approximately the same.

IN WESTERN GERMANY

In Western Germany, for example, there is no national association for promoting co-operative studies, but there exists a number of Co-operative Research Institutes created by universities in various parts of the country. These Institutes work more or less closely with the apex unions of the four main branches of the Co-operative Movement—agricultural, artisanal, consumers and housing—on study, research and teaching projects. They also publish jointly a quarterly review "The Review of the Whole Co-operative Movement" (to translate its German title) which, as its title implies, takes the whole Co-operative field as its province. It was they who took the initiative of convening the triennial International Co-operative Scientific Congresses which bring co-operative educationists together from every continent.

IN FRANCE

The organisation most nearly resembling what our young Society for Co-operative Studies might eventually become is probably the French Institute of Co-operative Studies which is a national body with headquarters in Paris. It shares its home in the Champ de Mars district with the Collège Coopératif, which itself forms part of the School of Advanced Technical Studies of the Sorbonne. The chairman of the Board of the Institute is Professor Georges Lasserre, professor of economics at the Faculty of Laws and Economic Science.

The Institute is the joint creation in 1959 of the central organisations of the Agricultural, Consumers' and Workers' productive Co-operative movements. Its management board consists of their representatives together with two members of the university. One of these is Professor Bernard Lavergne, a former colleague of the great apostle of Co-operation in France, Professor Charles Gide, with whom he collaborated to establish the Review of Co-operative Studies in 1921. This Review still continues to appear under the auspices of the Institute.

The main object of the Institute is to promote and encourage research, study, information and documentation about all branches of the Co-operative Movement. In addition, it takes part in the study of all important questions relating to co-operative theory and practice, and does much to introduce and develop the teaching of Co-operation in the public educational system at all levels, in youth movements and in all institutions where knowledge of Co-operation can be usefully spread.

LOCAL ACTIVITY

One of the most notable features of the Institute is the rapid growth of its network of local and regional groups and study circles. Through this type of action it pursues a twofold aim: to bring together the various types of co-operative enterprise in a given region or district and to forge close links between those who practise Co-operation and those who have to teach the subject. More often than not, the action is based on the local government division known as a *département* and it comprises seminars, discussions, study-visits, etc., considerable freedom being allowed to the groups in regard to method.

IN AMERICA

There is just space to mention the American Institute of Co-operation. This grew out of the agricultural Co-operative Movement and its primary object was to encourage the teaching of agricultural co-operation in schools, colleges and universities. In recent years, however, it has extended its interest to other forms of Co-operation and has become one of the most important agencies working for closer working relations and mutually defensive action, in both the economic and political spheres, between all branches of the Movement. The headquarters of the Institute are in Washington, D.C. and in addition to carrying on research, it organises an annual study session which attracts leading co-operators from all parts of the country.