

# News from France and Germany

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## FRANCE: AN EXCHANGE OF VIEWS

The French Institute of Co-operative Studies arranged in the autumn of 1967 an exchange of views on questions of current interest to co-operators between co-operative leaders and eminent university teachers who possess special knowledge of co-operative problems and are interested in co-operative studies and research. The meetings was held at Heiligenstein in Alsace, where the consumers' co-operative society has a hotel on the foothills of the Vosges.

The question for discussion, according to a recent report in "Le Co-opérateur de France", national organ of the consumers' Co-operative Movement was: What is the current problem of your Movement? Answers were given by representatives of all the main branches of the Co-operative Movement in France—agricultural, consumers', fisheries, housing, workers' productive,—in specially prepared papers. The audience included professors from the Universities of Paris, Lyon, Montpellier and Strasbourg and eminent co-operators present included Mr. Charles Veverka, the newly-elected president and director-general of the Wholesale Society (SGCC) and Professor Desroche, director of the Collège Co-opératif.

## SOME PROBLEMS

The problem of the agricultural Co-operative Movement was stated to be the maintenance of its competitive power in a market in continual evolution on both the national and international planes. Agriculturists are henceforward subject to the limitations imposed by the market and the iron law: if you do not sell, you will starve.

The spokesman for the consumers' movement was Mr. Jean Lacroix, president and director-general of the Union of Lorraine, France's largest consumers' co-operative. He expounded the policy of development to which this branch of co-operation is now committed. He struck a balance between the internal and external constraints with which the movement had to contend and showed how they were taken into account in the national plan approved by recent congresses.

Among the housing co-operatives the great problem is no longer the supply of materials or man-power but money. The two speakers for this branch of the movement dealt with the problems of raising enough money to finance a programme of socially-inspired housing. Their solution comprised the reduction of repayment rates and the lengthening of the period allowed, together with rigorous repression of the speculation which raises the price of land.

A decision of the congress of workers' productive societies in 1966 to require of every society that it should present to its members each year a "co-operative", in addition to a financial balance sheet, has created a veritable ferment among the societies. The object is to oblige them to consider how far the character of the societies as genuine co-operatives was being maintained or whittled away. The management therefore submits a report indicating which of their features were assets and which were liabilities in a co-operative sense, and what were the gains and losses in the accounting period.

## GERMANY: THE INSTITUTE OF CO-OPERATIVE STUDIES

The Institute of Co-operative Studies of the University of Hamburg, directed by Professor Dr. R. Henzler, has just issued its report for the year 1967. The Institute's regular work programme includes two lecture series on Co-operation, complemented by practical exercises, seminars, contacts with co-operative leaders and study visits to co-operative establishments. In addition, the Institute provides lecturers for conferences of the Co-operative Unions and their training courses. It receives every year a number of visitors from Germany and abroad with whom it discusses questions of co-operative information and research.

### STUDENT RESEARCH

Prominent among the subjects chosen for research by the students were: co-operative education and training in various countries; the participation of members in the internal values of co-operative societies; co-operative consolidation; advertising in co-operative business enterprises; co-operative principles; problems of financing and investment.

A considerable part of the year was taken up with the preparation and editing of the full report of the International Co-operative Scientific Conference, held at Hamburg in September 1966. An abridged version of this report is also available in English.

In the course of the year one dissertation and nineteen studies were submitted for examination. The subjects chosen were drawn from the current problems of all branches of the Co-operative Movement—agricultural, artisanal, consumers' and housing. The theme of the dissertation was: The Validity of the Rochdale Principles, examined with special reference to the French Co-operative Movement. Other dissertations under preparation include: International Collaboration among Co-operative Societies; Investments and Investment Policy of Co-operative Societies and Federations; Agricultural Co-operation in Denmark and Western Germany—a Comparison; The Tendency toward Co-operative Consolidation—Recent Developments of Federal Enterprises in The Consumers' Co-operative Movements of the Federal German Republic, Great Britain and Sweden.