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# Society Notes

The Society indeed will have noted and is noting its AGM and Conference at the Co-operative College on 21-22 September, and we hope, is arranging to move in large and purposeful numbers to the occasion. The topic for the Conference is "Roads to Success" for the consumer Movement in the UK and for the AGM the Secretary and Treasurer have provided below the Annual Report and Accounts as grist to the democratic mills.

## Journal 54: Local Innovation –

Two of the main themes in this issue of the journal are particularly related to the preoccupations of the Conference. First, "Retail Societies – Local Innovation" opens a detailed exploration of some Co-operative successes, all meeting what W.H. Farrow was stressing in the last issue: the need for "innovation in practice" and "for change to meet changing conditions". He was not forgetting or deprecating the validity of familiar principles of trading organisation: As Rodney Aspray, Chief Executive Officer of the Norwest Pioneers Society, wrote to me: "... the very major improvements which we have been able to bring about at Norwest Pioneers since the mergers of 2½ years ago, have not been brought about by any new innovation whatsoever, but by sheer hard slogging action of rationalisation, consolidation and removal of all overlapping services in the five societies which joined us ...".

Nor was Mr. Farrow advocating innovation for its own sake: he was arguing for responses of innovation to match changing economic and social conditions. So now F.L. Round and A.L. Cooke report on comparatively general developments in the Colchester and East Essex and the Greater Peterborough Societies, and Peter Paxton and D.T. Hughes from Cambridge Society and from the North-East region, analyse more particular developments.

## – And National Shape?

The report by Mr. Hughes, with its examination and assessment of a partnership between a federal Co-operative organisation and individual retail societies in chilled food distribution, offers a link indeed to our

second theme: "The Consumer Movement – National Shape?" The role of CRS and, in particular, its relations with the CWS, will be a crucial element in determining that shape, and indeed the various issues involved are high on the agenda of the consumer Movement at the present time.

The journal hopes to share in their informed discussion. For a start there is now the descriptive piece by W.H. Farrow on the CRS at present and analysis and assessment – and advice – on the present position of the Movement by James Wood from his experience in both Co-operative and private retailing.

### **Forty Years On – from VE Day**

The third special feature adds Co-operative voices to the varied chorus that has already taken note of the 40th anniversary of VE Day. Incidentally and quite *sotto voce* my personal response to the occasion had indeed a Co-operative connection. After Dunkirk and the fall of France, my service was spent in Army education, particularly in the preparation of booklets for discussion groups throughout the Army, under the general title "The British Way and Purpose". The titles taken for the three series of booklets were "Soldier - Citizen", "Report on the Nation" and "Today and Tomorrow". It was a courageous preoccupation for any Army to cultivate and, undoubtedly, it was one of the reasons for the result in the General Election of 1945 – and for ensuring that the reforms that followed the victory had the popular understanding and support needed by any radical programme. The Co-operative association for me is that I went into my Co-operative appointment after the War in anticipation of serving much the same social objectives as I had done in the Army scheme. It was, if you like – and if Clausewitz will forgive – a continuation of part of my war by other means.

### **Restoration and Achievements**

However, the journal has much more substantial greetings for the anniversary. Werner Blum reports on "Democracy in Dortmund Society", a complement to the record in Number 53 of the Society's economic achievement in the study there "Three Largest Societies Compared" and W.P. Watkins looks back to his service as Adviser on the Co-operative Movement to the British Control Commission. As a measure of his achievement, let me add this note of a tribute that must have moved him mightily.

With the foundation in 1949 of the German Federal Republic, the British Government ceased to have any responsibility for Co-operative affairs. German officials took over, and WPW prepared to go home. He began a series of farewell visits to his German colleagues, but when he got to Hamburg, Henry Everling would not hear a word of his going. Completely without WPW's knowledge, he and Dr. Andreas Hermes, leader of the Agricultural Co-operative Movement, sent letters in identical terms to the British High Commissioner saying that they valued their connection with

the Control Commission through Mr. Watkins and wished it to continue. There followed a letter informing WPW that his appointment had been extended for a further twelve months, and he had a year of freedom from responsibility in which he could go more deeply into the matters that interested him such as Co-operative teaching and research in an increasing number of universities. When in September 1950 he came to say farewell, surely he was touched to hear German Co-operators say: "Er gehört zu uns". (He belongs to us.)

Supporting these special features are the Newsletter from Peter Clarke, the Reviews by Jonathan Hill, and Letters to the Editor from the varied interests and experience of Rita Rhodes, T.E. Stephenson and Brian Rose.

### **Future Issues**

Looking ahead to future issues? For the printing of the journal we continue our warm appreciation to the CWS: we pursue still the ambition of finding within our resources further improvement in the format and typography that would serve even more effectively the interests of authors, readers, the Society's role and status, and indeed the devotion of the Editors. The contents of the journals in 1985/86 will be discussed at the AGM. However, in Number 55, due out in December, we hope to continue the reports of local innovation in retail societies and also to elaborate the issues and options for the national shape of the consumer Movement.

Within the year's programme we should find scope for some analysis of Co-operative production within the consumer Movement — what has happened to it, why and with what consequences — and for a return to "Co-operation Internationally", and particularly to the scope for trading links among various national Movements.

Finally, we are indebted to Peter Pyne, author of "A Latin American Project" in number 53, for pointing out that a first version of his report appeared in the Year Book of Agricultural Co-operation 1984, pages 215-229, under the title "Setting Up a Co-operative Education and Training Project in Latin America".

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R.L.M.