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**The Consumers' Co-operative
Movement in Germany**

The Consumers' Co-operative Movement in Germany

BY

DR. THEODOR CASSAU

Translated from the German by
J. F. MILLS

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

This volume on the Consumers' Co-operative Movement in Germany is of interest for three several reasons. In the first place, it is the first standard work issued in this country which describes the foremost co-operative movement on the continent of Europe. In the second place, the work is more than a description; it, also embraces an explanation, and so partakes of the character of a sociological study as well. And in the third place, it has a practical value as illustrating the national aptitude for organisation embodied in the German co-operative movement, which has seriously tackled the problem of combining democratic rule and co-operative efficiency; and has dealt with the problem on advanced lines. To the translator, at all events, the description of the methods adopted for the purpose of making the whole membership a vital factor in the whole organisation, and also for promoting effective responsibility as regards both management and supervision are of particular interest, as they cannot fail to be also to every reader who realises the outstanding importance of scientific methods for a movement whose avowed aim is the establishment of the Co-operative Commonwealth and the transformation of the old anti-social order.

Furthermore, it is worthy of note that the composition and ideology of every co-operative movement, together with its economic and political environment, are factors which play a determining

part in moulding its character and shaping its destiny, and that in the history of the German movement all these factors stand out in more than ordinary relief, and so it must be accounted as one of the features of the book that it traces not only the origin, growth and development, structure, struggles, and achievements of the movement, but also shows the inward and outward forces which have been at work or at play, and which have moulded it into shape and directed its course.

With regard to the author of this work it is sufficient to state that he possesses the dual advantage of knowing the German movement from within and without, and of having made our own movement his study as well. As editor of the *Konsumgenossenschaftliche Rundschau* (the leading organ of the German movement) in pre-war days, he possessed special facilities for penetrating into the co-operative arcana and acquiring that inside knowledge which is shown in this volume. And as the author of the two German standard works on the respective co-operative movements of Great Britain and Germany he has made his mark. And last, but not least, the objective attitude which is so requisite in an author who deals with an important social movement is betokened by the judgments pronounced in this volume.

In conclusion it may be stated that the inclusion in the present edition of the salient statistics for 1924, brings the figures up to date and affords a basis of comparison with those of earlier years. As regards the financial figures (as far as available) relating to the calendar year 1924, the inclusion is particularly serviceable since these are the figures

for the first complete year of the stabilised currency, that is to say the first substantial figures (in their particular connection) since the ending of the period of abnormal inflation when currency was expressed in figures of such astronomical dimensions that calculation became a mathematical feat and comparison practically impossible.

J. F. MILLS.



AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION.

It is with particular pleasure that I write the preface to the English edition of this book. On the occasion of my first tour of investigation through the British co-operative movement in the year 1913, I was overwhelmed by the business superiority and by the great expansion both of the membership and the volume of trade. When, several months afterwards, as one of the conductors of the tour of investigation undertaken by German co-operators and arranged by the Central Union of German Consumers' Societies, I had the opportunity, along with a hundred experienced German practitioners, of seeing the British societies and the undertakings of the Co-operative Wholesale Society, it was a further pleasure for me to witness the lively interest shown by the German co-operators with regard to all the tokens of the matured and older development of the English co-operative movement. Then, again, in 1914, when I made a tour of investigation through Germany, I had abundant opportunities of converse with those who had taken part in the English tour and learnt, again and again, what a strong impression had been made on them by the English societies.

This superiority is essentially traceable to the fact that the British co-operative movement is of a much older growth. In the fifties of the last century people in Germany had certainly not only

heard of the Rochdale Pioneers but had also made various visits with the object of copying their organisation ; but the economic development of Germany took place from a half to three-quarters of a century later than that of Great Britain, and so, in the German co-operative movement, the great and ardent growth, combined with new ideas and development at a new pace, was experienced only from the year 1895 onwards. Strictly speaking, we had but two decades of tranquil development ; then came the war and the post-war complications, the extent of which can only be imagined with difficulty by foreigners, and which, moreover, have proved to be a source of trouble even in this book. Despite the fact that the German currency has now been stabilised a year and a half, it has been impossible to give really adequate statistics such as the German co-operative movement gives indications of for the last year. And so in this book the English reader will find comparatively little that is new or unknown to him in the sphere of business operations, except, perhaps, in the business organisation internally.

But although the German workers' movement is very much younger than the English, yet it appears to me that it displayed a very timely development in the sphere of organisation—a development which cannot fail to be of interest to every investigator of sociology and social policy. Owing to the general organisational life of the German workers' movement, the German consumers' co-operative movement also presents a series of features which are assuredly of international and universal interest. Here, strange to say, we are concerned with a development which has

not been in the least impaired by the youthfulness of the movement. The German consumers' movement is a part of the great German co-operative movement, and has the same legal bases as the tens of thousands of agricultural co-operative societies, but in its inward life it has little in common with the co-operative societies of the peasant farmers and of the urban industrial middle class. This inward life is based on the specific character of the German workers' movement as a political and trade union force. And so, it would appear, that in the year 1913, the German consumers' co-operative societies which gratefully derived incentives from England, had also something to bestow on their part.

As for me, having not only had the most enjoyable time of my life in England, but also being indebted to the English co-operative and trade union movements for innumerable incentives, it is a particular gratification to be able to give a description of foreign achievement to British co-operators in return for the incentives and the tokens of friendship of which I have been the recipient—a description which, I trust, will also afford incentives to them in the sphere of co-operative organisation.

Despite all international arrangements, despite all international relations, the knowledge possessed by the rank and file throughout the whole co-operative world with regard to neighbouring countries with a different language is still very limited. Recognition and appreciation of the specific character of other countries—recognition and appreciation based on a good knowledge of the movement to which the individual heart is attached,

constitute, however, one of the most important means of combating international friction and misunderstandings. Therefore I commit this book to the English public and the English co-operative world, not only as a token of gratitude, but also in the hope of having facilitated the approach to a mutual understanding between England and Germany in one domain at least.

THEODOR CASSAU.

May, 1925.



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APPENDIX.

I.

ADVANCE ON A MEMBER'S CHECKS (PAGE 50).

The shop manager is controlled through the checks he gives out ; and for every check he gives out he must be able to produce cash. Now when a member was in need and wanted dividend at once, instead of waiting till the year end, the member would go to the shop manager, who would advance the 7 to 10 per cent dividend out of his own pocket, and received therefor the checks (which were re-usable). These checks the shop manager could again give out to another purchasing member ; the result of this process being that the cash control was put out of equilibrium to the extent of the difference between the sum of the checks and the amount of the dividend advanced by the shop manager.

II.

BAKERY TURNOVER IN 1924.

During the years 1922 and 1923 serviceable statistics could not be compiled in consequence of the fluctuating currency value (inflation). The first year of stabilisation was 1924, but as the business year of the societies, in most cases, is reckoned from July to the end of the following June the statistics for 1924 are based on figures which partly belong to the period of inflation ; and, consequently, the statistics of the Central Union are here reproduced with all due reserve. These statistics show an average bakery turnover amounting to 17 per cent of the total turnover of the societies as a whole. The bakery turnover ranges between 8 per cent and 21 per cent. In five sub-unions it ranges between 19 and 21 per cent, and in four others between 11 and 15 per cent.

For the year 1924 the sales statistics of the Co-operative Wholesale Society are more serviceable, inasmuch as they embrace the whole of the societies belonging to the sphere of the Wholesale's operations (that is, on the whole, the same sphere embraced by the Central Union), and relate to the calendar year, and also record the figures showing the extension of the productive operations of the retail societies as well. According to these figures there were 326 bakeries among the 1,127 societies embraced in the statistics ; and the turnover of the bakeries figured at 16 to 17 per cent of the total turnover. Data relating to the bakery turnover of the whole of the societies are not available, but this circumstance cannot essentially affect the percentage recorded. All the large societies carry on baking, the turnover of which amounts on an average to 19 per cent of their total turnover. Specifically speaking, the proportion of the bakery turnover

to the total turnover goes as low as 5 per cent, but that is an exception; and a proportion of 10 to 11 per cent occurs but seldom. With most of the large societies the proportion revolves round 20 per cent. The normal minimum is about 15 to 17 per cent, and the normal maximum 24 to 25 per cent; while 30 and 32 per cent is the highest extreme. These figures signify a very large increase in the proportion of the bakery turnover to the total turnover as compared with the pre-war period. This is doubtless attributable, on the whole, to the circumstance that the large bakeries with their output capacity have suffered less from a setback in turnover than the grocery departments. It is a notable circumstance that the baking of small bread rolls has everywhere increased at the expense of the bread turnover, and that no fewer than 14 societies have even proceeded to set up confectionery establishments.

III.

CORN MILLS.

According to the statistics of the Co-operative Wholesale Society 29 societies have corn mills, 18 of which, however, are purely barley-crushing mills which are in operation for the production of cattle food. Three mills are flour and crushing mills, and only seven mills are actually large mills with an output capacity of 50,000 double zentner* per year. The largest has an output capacity of 300,000 double zentner, and four other mills have an output capacity of 100,000 double zentner. Moreover, 10 societies have shares in corn mills, but these are generally small undertakings, with the exception of the corn mill of the Munich Society, which figures in the statistics as a participation concern.

It may also be stated that 13 societies carry on the production of edible paste (macaroni), and amongst these societies are five of the seven largest.

IV.

SOCIETIES WHICH CARRY ON BUTCHERING.

According to the statistics of the Co-operative Wholesale Society there are 48 societies which carry on butchering. Five of these societies belong to the group of seven with a turnover of over 10 million marks per society. Here the proportion of the butchering turnover to the total turnover amounts to 3 per cent, in two societies to 16 per cent, and in one society to 25 per cent, or to 28 per cent if the wholesale sales are not included. In the group of 15 societies with a turnover ranging from 5 to 10 million marks each, seven carry on butchering, and the butchering turnover ranges from 6 to 30 per cent of the total turnover, the proportion being pretty equally distributed

* A double zentner = 220 lbs. avoirdupois, or roughly 2 cwt.

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over this scale. In the next group, in which the turnover of the societies ranges from 2 to 5 million marks only six societies out of the 34 carry on butchering, and the butchering turnover of these six societies respectively amounts to 2 per cent, 8 per cent, 10 per cent (in two cases), 17 per cent, and 20 per cent of the total turnover. Of the 42 societies which have a turnover ranging from 1 to 2 million marks each, four have butcheries. With regard to the smallest societies with a butchering business one or two figures may be reproduced in conclusion. There is one society with 1,400 members and a turnover of 111,000 marks, and another with 1,100 members and a turnover of 150,000 marks, and, finally, there is one with 343 members and a turnover of 63,000 marks, and another with a membership of 391 and a turnover of 53,000 marks.

V.

SOCIETIES DEALING IN TEXTILE GOODS AND FOOTWEAR.

Of the seven large societies with a turnover exceeding 10 million marks the Saxon societies of Leipzig and Dresden were the only two which sold textile goods and footwear before the war; to-day all the societies belonging to the group sell textile goods except one, and all but two sell footwear. Of the 15 societies with a turnover of 5 to 10 million marks only five before the war dealt in textile goods, to-day there are eight; and the number of societies with boot and shoe shops has increased from four to six. Of the group of 34 societies with a turnover of 2 to 5 million marks one half sold textile goods, and nearly as many, namely 15, sold boots and shoes. In this case comparative figures are not available, but the survey as a whole shows distinctly the great expansion of trade.

VI.

SOCIETIES WITH DAIRIES.

According to the statistics of the Co-operative Wholesale Society for 1924, the following retail societies possess dairies:—

- The Hamburg "Produktion" Society with 115,000 members.
- The Essen "Eintracht" (Concord) Society with 99,000 members.
- The Frankfort-on-the-Main Society with 47,000 members.
- The Oldenburg Society with 150,000 members.
- The Rütstringen Society with 14,000 members.

VII.

THE FISH TRADE OF SOCIETIES.

Among the retail societies there are two which smoke herrings. One of these two societies is situated on the North Sea coast.

VIII.

THE RENTENMARK (PAGE 83).

"The Rentenmark was introduced in November, 1923, as an intermediate means of stabilising the internal value of the German currency; and later a gold discount bank was created with a capital of £10,000,000 to carry out the financing of foreign trade. As a result, calculations on a gold-mark basis became general, and thus furnished a fixed basis for the purchase and sale of goods. The stabilisation of the currency while allaying to some extent the industrial unrest resulted in an increase of prices and general shortage of working capital, and consequently rendered sales more difficult, especially in overseas markets.

"The new currency—the Reichsmark—was introduced on October 11th, 1924. The old paper-mark currency is to remain legal tender until June, 1925, it being laid down that one billion paper marks are equal to one Rentenmark. The Rentenmark is to be abolished, but pending its total withdrawal it has been fixed that one Rentenmark is equivalent to one Reichsmark."—Extract from *The Survey of British Overseas Markets*, 1925, issued by the Committee on Industry and Trade.

IX.

Particulars with regard to the turnover of the German consumers' societies according to the statistical survey of the German Co-operative Wholesale Society for the calendar year 1924:—

REGION.	Societies with a turnover up to 1 million marks.	Percentage of total turnover in the region.	Societies with a turnover from 1 to 2 million marks.	Percentage of total turnover in the region.	Societies with a turnover from 2 to 5 million marks.	Percentage of total turnover in the region.	Societies with a turnover from 5 to 10 million marks.	Percentage of total turnover in the region.	Societies with a turnover above 10 million marks.	Percentage of total turnover in the region.
Bavaria	80	44·7	3	10·8	...	...	2	44·5	...	...
Central Germany ...	166	51·9	...	...	...	5	32·1	1	16·0	...
N.-W. Germany ...	143	9·2	8	11·3	5	15·4	5	36·0	1	35·1
East Germany	109	30·3	3	8·7	2	10·4	...	...	1	50·6
Rhineland- Westphalia	38	10·5	2	3·6	1	3·7	3	27·0	3	55·2
Saxony.....	117	27·7	9	14·1	3	8·7	1	8·0	2	41·5
Silesia.....	62	39·8	1	4·0	3	25·4	1	30·8	...	...
S.-W. Germany ...	82	32·0	6	17·6	6	37·1	1	13·3	...	...
Thuringia	155	52·6	3	9·4	6	38·0
Württemberg.....	77	36·8	7	26·1	3	22·0	1	15·1
TOTAL.....	1019	29·6	42	10·4	34	17	15	18·7	7	24·3

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X.

THE HAMBURG CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY.

The statistics of the Hamburg Co-operative Society recorded here-with afford an illustration of an up-to-date German distributive society with a large membership and conducting operations on an extensive scale.

Membership at the end of 1924, 132,129.

Share capital, 1913, 1,192,884 Marks; 1924, 597,062 Marks, 550,000 Marks of which constituted the re-estimated value of the old shares.

Emergency Fund, 1913, 1,100,683 Marks; 1924, 800,247 Marks.

Amount of Savings Deposits as revalued on January	Marks
1st, 1924	4,440,000
Amount of Savings Deposits in 1924	4,375,554
Amount of Withdrawals.....	2,951,554
Increase	1,424,000
Total Amount of Deposits at the end of 1924	5,824,000
Plus Interest	64,259
	<hr/> 5,888,259

Turnover in 1913, 23,556,908 Marks; 1924, 35,406,859 Marks.

In the course of the year 1924 prices somewhat increased. It may be calculated that the average scale of prices was from a fourth to a third above the pre-war scale.

The differentiated turnover in the Society's shops in 1924 was as follows: General stores, 16,301,028 Marks; Bread shops, 4,334,553 Marks; Butchers' shops, 9,176,585 Marks; Special shops, 902,859 Marks; Coal depôt, 79,465 Marks; Furniture shop, 1,578,343 Marks.

In the bakery 373 persons were employed, and the turnover was as follows: Bread, 2,033,392 Marks; White Rolls, 2,360,533 Marks; Confectionery, 1,129,323 Marks; Biscuit manufactory, 226,784 Marks.

In the flour mill 4,69½ tons of corn were ground, including 3811·4 tons of rye corn.

The purchases for the slaughter-house were as follows:—

Live Stock—	Marks.
3,542 head of Cattle.....	959,838
29,031 Swine	3,748,889
1,604 Calves	148,268
1,596 Sheep	114,402
	<hr/>
Total	4,971,397

The purchases of dead meat were as follows :—

Flesh Meat.....	209,149
Frozen Meat	2,870,592
• (Including Frozen Beef, 2,605,514 Marks.)	
Bacon, &c.....	388,020
Lard	456,726
	<hr/>
Total	3,924,487
	<hr/>

At the end of 1924 there were 428 persons employed in the butchery department, viz., 223 in connection with the slaughter and 205 in the shops, the products being sold in the 63 butchers' shops of the Society and in its general stores. The turnover in this connection amounted to 12,463,992 Marks in 1924, as compared with 7,519,472 Marks in 1913.

The sales of milk in 1924 amounted to 3 million litres. The furniture manufactory had a turnover of 423,056 Marks.

The total number of persons employed by the Society at the end of 1924 was 2,087, and 991 of them were engaged in production.

The retail stores' expenses averaged 7·7 per cent, in the bread shops 5·2 per cent, and in the butchers' shops 7 per cent, but in the warehouse 21·7 per cent.



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