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IN GREAT BRITAIN**

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CONSUMERS' CO-OPERATION IN GREAT BRITAIN

*An Examination of the
British Co-operative Movement*

by

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INTRODUCTION

THE Consumers' Co-operative Movement is the largest organization in Great Britain which is both democratic and voluntary. It has 7,500,000 members, and it is roughly true to say that in every second household in the country at least one person is a member. Its funds amount to more than £300,000,000, and its annual trading operations exceed that sum. These figures are sufficient to show that the movement is of great importance both in the social life and in the economic activities of this country. Nevertheless, with the exception of Mr. and Mrs. Webb's book published in 1922, no comprehensive examination of its aims, methods and results has been undertaken; indeed, even studies of single aspects are rare. The need for such an investigation is widely felt. The general public wants information about a matter concerning which very contradictory judgments are passed both on the platform and in the press; co-operators themselves desire to learn more about an organization of which they are members, but of which they only see a very small part; economists wish to have data concerning a trading organization which is neither on the "capitalist" nor on the "socialist" model; social students would like to know something of a movement which has always pursued social as well as economic aims, and finally politicians are interested in its entry into the field of national politics.

This book is an attempt to fill the gap and to satisfy in some measure all those interested in the movement from the points of view mentioned above. The idea that a survey should be undertaken arose in the following manner. At meetings of the Association of Tutors in Adult Education it was discovered that there were often requests to lecture on the movement and that many tutors brought the subject of Co-operation into their lectures, but that the lecturers were hampered by the lack of information. Discussions were then initiated between members of the Association and officials of the movement. The C.W.S. offered to provide facilities for a thorough and impartial survey; the Scottish C.W.S. and the Co-operative Union associated themselves with the C.W.S. As a result a committee was formed of the persons whose names appear on the title-page, and who are associated with the Universities and Adult Education, in order to take advantage of this opportunity. The Committee decided to

invite the C.W.S., the Scottish C.W.S. and the Co-operative Union to send representatives to the meetings of the Enquiry Committee.

The Committee held several meetings, at which Professor J. Hilton presided. Various aspects of the movement were considered in turn, and descriptive material was placed at the disposal of the members. The presence of the co-operative representatives enabled the Committee to discuss with those best acquainted with the movement the interpretation of this material. In addition, every facility was given to the members of the Committee to visit premises, to examine books and accounts, to question officials and employees and to investigate methods and operation. It soon became evident that it would be necessary to carry out certain special investigations, and for these purposes the Committee was fortunate enough to obtain the assistance of certain research students from various universities.

A group of students at the University of Birmingham, working under the direction of Professor P. Sargent Florence, undertook many of the preliminary studies. Mr. O. F. Troutman and Miss G. Jenkin investigated the distributive and manufacturing operations of co-operative retail and wholesale societies. Miss Jenkin also made a study of the comparative consumer tastes for co-operative and non-co-operative products, and, assisted by Miss J. Le Mesurier, made by means of a questionnaire a survey of the shopping habits of a section of the community. Mr. H. Mars undertook a long and detailed investigation into the methods, costs and problems of co-operative production and investment. Mr. W. G. Symons examined the methods and problems of management and democratic control, and the trading structure of co-operative retail societies, and in the later stages of the enquiry gave secretarial assistance. Among other students were Mr. J. A. Hough of the University of Manchester, who made a study of the co-operative method of distributing profits in the form of dividends on purchases, and Mr. H. Briggs, who, working under Professor Hilton at Cambridge, studied the question of employment in co-operative societies.

The planning and supervision of the work of these assistants fell to certain members of the Committee, and in particular to Professor P. Sargent Florence; indeed the analysis of the economic aspects of the movement is entirely due to him and his helpers. Thus, at a certain period in the progress of the enquiry, two or three members of the Committee began to assume the chief responsibilities, and it was

decided to leave the task of assembling the material, conducting the analysis, and writing the book to Professor P. Sargant Florence, Professor R. Peers, and Professor A. M. Carr-Saunders. Mr. G. Darling, who had been the secretary of the Committee from the beginning and had put into manageable form a large amount of material presented to the Committee at its earlier meetings, was asked to assist the three persons mentioned above.

It is not possible to say exactly what part each of the many persons concerned have played in the writing of the book. It must be sufficient to mention that, after the majority of the members of the Committee had ceased to be actively concerned, the work went through three stages. Taking as a basis the documentary material which had accumulated and the evidence which had been collected, the three members of the Committee whose names have been given in the preceding paragraph and Mr. Darling each undertook to draft certain chapters. As these drafts became ready, they were considered by all four persons concerned at a number of meetings, and in consequence of the discussions at these meetings there was much redrafting. The second stage was completed when the drafts were found to be satisfactory in themselves. It was realized, however, that there was overlapping and lack of unity in style and mode of presentation. The final stage was, therefore, a revision of the whole book by Professor R. Peers. He undertook a most troublesome task, and the other members of the Committee are greatly indebted to him.

The thanks of the Committee and of the authors (for it seems proper so to describe the three members of the Committee) are due to the research students, whose names have been mentioned already, to all members and officials of the Consumers' Co-operative Movement, far too numerous for individual mention, who, with unfailing courtesy, have given up so much time and taken so much trouble in providing information and in answering questions, and especially to Mr. G. Darling, who acted not only as secretary of the Committee, but also as secretary to the authors. He organized the work of the enquiry from beginning to end, arranged all meetings, maintained all contacts and interchanges. Without his devoted assistance the book could not have been written.

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APPENDIX I

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Industry	YEAR ENDED:					
	January 1874	January 1875	January 1876	December 1880	December 1885	December 1890
Biscuits, etc.	£ 2,987	£ 13,189	£ 13,664	£ 19,155	£ 21,480	£ 51,916
Soap, etc.	—	(b) 2,099	9,264	11,732	17,911	28,456
Woollen	—	—	—	—	—	13,069
Clothing	—	—	—	—	—	6,203
Boot and Shoe	(a) 3,422	29,456	53,686	87,717	132,130	241,633
Total	(a) 6,409	44,744	76,614	118,604	171,521	341,277

(a) One quarter's trade only.

(b) Six months' trade only.

Industry	YEAR ENDED:								
	December 1895	December 1900	December 1905	December 1910	December 1915	December 1920	December 1925	January 1931	January* 1936
Biscuits, etc.	£ 100,254	£ 131,493	£ 164,208	£ 189,677	£ 264,758	£ 842,473	£ 584,939	£ 725,465	£ 706,491
Preserves, etc.	—	163,927	261,687	353,912	591,703	2,602,626	1,362,366	1,327,426	1,546,020
Glass	—	—	—	—	—	42,620	28,024	69,104	194,993
Soap, etc.	59,164	278,933	458,946	924,809	1,449,698	4,076,499	2,330,712	2,615,023	2,005,979
Flour and Provender	408,006	679,489	1,124,044	2,899,562	7,175,385	12,906,612	11,040,505	8,304,841	8,003,660

Tobacco	—	222,540	471,126	690,930	824,362	1,595,818	1,594,889	1,409,991	1,310,233
Lard	—	118,499	90,647	128,516	149,062	438,707	298,343	500,280	170,528
Margarine, etc.	—	—	—	—	—	2,955,516	2,563,544	2,958,311	2,560,338
Oil and Cake	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	851,326	877,069
Printing, etc.	7,511	65,340	106,451	183,514	259,663	843,455	670,224	833,303	1,095,308
Rope and Twines	—	—	—	—	—	—	97,026	93,738	90,310
Colliery	—	—	—	—	—	80,493	90,880	173,003	188,759
Bacon, etc.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	943,901
Butter	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,271,651
Drug, Confectionery, and Grocery Packing ..	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	52,753	2,084,782
Canning	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	619,500
Milk Products	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	169,815
Miscellaneous Grocery, etc.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	263,691
Flannel, Blankets, etc.	—	20,086	22,399	25,188	39,780	214,055	100,837	103,970	97,439
Hosiery	—	—	67,457	85,642	185,419	561,775	307,624	388,220	440,857
Corset, etc.	—	—	5,142	29,237	49,943	197,068	270,801	169,446	234,232
Shirt	—	—	—	96,139	199,373	784,286	423,108	510,922	511,886
Mantle	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	105,052	97,397
Belmont Garment	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	68,740	173,660
Quilt	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	82,183
Woolen	24,026	44,168	48,991	51,908	75,407	531,354	374,036	313,676	265,451
Fellmongery, etc.	—	—	—	—	—	—	818,137	346,700	382,275
Cotton	—	—	27,620	98,124	208,285	1,245,642	450,591	477,293	419,102
Clothing	35,717	89,488	122,648	145,181	242,858	620,659	380,216	530,337	568,586
Boot and Shoe	324,278	434,869	511,658	541,573	865,586	1,885,728	1,306,995	1,630,833	1,589,838
Tanneries	—	—	—	—	—	261,123	114,469	130,288	170,931
Cabinet and Bedding	8,571	13,256	48,140	61,062	93,173	419,718	445,077	560,426	903,484
Brush and Mat	—	—	12,337	29,003	43,529	93,858	98,523	111,074	127,662
Ironworks	—	—	—	17,234	32,189	80,656	68,650	73,370	89,026
Bucket, Fender and Electrical	—	—	—	23,567	41,122	92,626	76,267	54,350	96,671
Tinplate, etc.	—	—	—	6,512	6,745	14,911	14,420	30,355	104,740
Paint, etc.	—	—	—	—	14,914	89,188	72,691	110,489	168,599
Pottery	—	—	—	—	—	—	20,367	18,101	27,115
Cycle	—	—	—	—	—	—	143,792	172,100	278,112
Aluminium and Cutlery	—	—	—	—	—	—	67,009	60,184	164,061
Total	967,527	2,264,088	3,543,501	6,581,310	12,812,954	33,404,466	26,900,865	25,825,426	32,296,406

* It will be seen that some of the items differ from the appropriate figures given in Fig. 44b. This is due to a different grouping of the smaller plants in the two tables. In Fig. 44b the grouping has been arranged to coincide with that of the comparable retail societies' plants, and in the above table with their original associated plants.

APPENDIX II

NOTE ON SOURCES OF STATISTICS

THE main source of the statistics relating to all co-operative societies is the statistical section of the *Annual Report of the Co-operative Congress*. This is now also published annually as a separate book under the title *Co-operative Statistics* and can be obtained from the Co-operative Union, Hanover Street, Manchester. Additional information about the trading activities of the wholesale societies is published annually in the *People's Year Book*, obtainable from the C.W.S., Balloon Street, Manchester. For detailed figures of retail societies' trading operations the quarterly or half-yearly balance sheets and trade reports of representative retail societies should be studied. The main sources of the statistics used in this book are shown below:—

- Chapter I. Figures of membership, capital and trade of societies in different years are taken from the *Annual Reports of the Co-operative Congress*.
- Fig. 2, page 62. *Co-operative Statistics, 1935.*
- Fig. 3, " 63. *Annual Reports of the Co-operative Congress.*
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APPENDIX III

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