

The Co-operative Movement and its Press

Some General Reflections

The Consumers' Co-operative Movement and its Press

by

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The battles before the Consumers' Co-operative Movement have to be fought and won, not in the market place alone, but in the mind - the minds, that is, of the general public and also its own membership and working personnel, nowadays so large as to be almost indistinguishable from the public. The invitation "Come Co-operative Shopping" can only be an introduction. It is not enough to attract people into Co-operative shops, unless their minds can be sooner or later penetrated by the Co-operative idea and its relevance to their consumer needs. If they are not, people can be too easily attracted away again. It was Jawaharlal Nehru who used to speak of "catching the mind" of the Indian peasantry for Co-operation. The Consumers' Co-operative Movement needs, not merely to catch the mind of people as consumers, but also to keep hold of it, not merely to awaken their interest in Co-operation, but also to deepen their understanding of its true nature and strengthen their imaginative grasp of its long-term objects and possibilities.

For ages the written (or printed) word has been recognized as the most effective means of carrying conviction to people's minds - as distinct from stimulating their appetites or arousing their emotions. The very permanence of the written word permits it to be

scrutinized and analysed in cold blood, put aside for a time and later re-examined again and again. Historically, Co-operative Movements are as old as their Press, or perhaps the converse is truer, that the Co-operative Press is as old as the Movement. Witness George Mudie's "Economist" of 1821 which coined the term "Co-operative Society" and for which an unidentified writer wrote the immortal phrase "Unrestrained Co-operation ... for every purpose of social life". Nowadays, the Press is only one of a number of media for conveying ideas, even though it retains its superiority for carrying conviction. Moreover, while the economics of the newer media are what they are, the Press remains the most accessible financially to the Co-operative Movement. The very fact that the Press has to compete with other media is a reason why the Co-operative Movement must constantly look to its Press equipment and the efficiency of that for the purposes which it has to serve. To neglect it is false economy. A national Co-operative Movement lacking an adequate Press system is like a modern army without an air force to bring in intelligence or defend it from attack.

What Scope and Content?

What should be the dimensions and components of a national Co-operative Press system? How large a public should it endeavour to reach? What kinds of periodicals and other publications are needed to meet the different requirements of the membership and the important specialised groups on which the Movement's efficiency depends? What authorities should be responsible for supervising and financing Press activity? What principles should determine the relations of the Press and its personnel to the Movement's governing and policy-making institutions?

Answers to these and numerous related questions have been sought for fifty years now by leaders, editors and educators of the national Co-operative Movements in the international conferences and working parties on the Co-operative Press convened by the International Co-operative Alliance. Over the same period the I.C.A. has regularly collected information about the Co-operative journals produced in the countries represented in the Alliance. This information is made available and is periodically brought up to date in the Alliance's Directory of the Co-operative Press, the latest edition of which appeared in 1975. One of its main purposes is to encourage and facilitate inter-communication between Co-operative editors and journalists all over the world, but it also serves as a unique source of factual information about the character, periodicity, age, contents, circulation and readership of journals published by the Co-operative organisations of nearly 70 countries, besides international Co-operative organisations. The Directory also indicates whether these journals are offered for sale or subscription or distributed gratis. Given this groundwork of fact it is possible to sketch a reasonably accurate picture of the Press networks with which the national Co-operative Movements in their various stages of development have equipped themselves.

From the discussions in the I.C.A. Press Conferences, as well as from direct exchanges of experience between the directors and editors of the national Co-operative publishing organisations, there emerged, even before the second world war, the outlines of a general pattern which, though naturally varying in details, was common to nearly all Movements. From general Co-operative newspapers serving all purposes, like the "Co-operative News" in England and Schulze-Delitzsch's "Blätter für Genossenschaftswesen" in Germany, to name two of the oldest, there gradually evolved a series of publications catering for the

interests of certain important groups within the Movement. The most obvious point of differentiation was and still is where the professional interest of societies' full-time officials in problems of management and other technical questions diverges from the members' interest as consumers in prices, commodities, services and facilities, to say nothing of principles like democracy and equity. Thus in the national Consumers' Co-operative Movements it is usual to find one journal with a relatively large circulation intended for the information and enlightenment of the general body of members, reinforced by a larger or smaller number of periodicals for special readerships, such as the whole body of the Movement's employees, or simply those with managerial or executive responsibilities, or the part-time elected members of boards of management or other groups with identifiable common interests or viewpoints. The concrete meaning of this general statement can probably be better appreciated by an examination of the facts, recorded in the I.C.A. Press Directory for 1975 relating to consumers' Co-operative publications in 10 countries of central, northern and western Europe and assembled in the following tables. The figures indicate the position in 1973 or 1974. Because of their importance and for the sake of convenience the national members' journals have been tabulated separately from the more specialised periodicals and will be considered first.

National Journals for Co-operative Members

Country + Central Organisation	Individual Members	Title of Journal	Period	Circulation
AUSTRIA, Konsumverband	632,000	Wir vom Konsum	M	417,000
BELGIUM, Bien-être	325,000	Coopération Nouvelle	Q	25,000
Epécé	60,000	Effort Coopératif	M	50,000
Fébécoop	330,000	Le Consommateur	M	100,000
DENMARK, FDB	940,146	Samvirke	M	750,000
FINLAND, K.K.	648,000	ME	F	328,000
		E. Konsumenten	M	13,000
S.O.K.	602,000	Yhteishyvä	W	400,000
		Samarbete	W	35,000
FRANCE, FNCC	3,757,000	Le Coopérateur de France	F	1,475,867
NORWAY, NKL	436,000	Vårt Blad	F	255,000
SWEDEN, K.F.	1,757,000	Vi	W	400,000
SWITZERLAND, Coop Schweiz	895,000	Coopération,) Cooperazione) Genossenschaft)	W	838,140
U.K., Co-operative Union	10,846,000	Co-operative News* incl. Scottish Co-operator	W	35,000

Key to Periods: W = weekly; F = fortnightly;
M = monthly; Q = quarterly; Y = yearly;
X = times; NA = not available.

One remarkable fact to emerge from this table is that in only one country, Switzerland, does the aggregate circulation of the three regional language editions of the members' journal of the central federation, Coop Schweiz, approximately equal the total individual membership of the Consumers' Co-operative Movement. At the other end of the scale is the United Kingdom, with by far the largest individual membership but an almost incredibly small circulation for its national Co-operative organ - a fact due to the British Movement's historical evolution, which there is no need to consider here. For the most part in the other national Movements the ratio of circulation to total membership ranges from about 1:3 to about 2:3. These variations result from manifold differences of policy, resources and circumstances from Movement to Movement. Our present concern, however, is to indicate common features and tendencies.

The national members' journals have from the beginning been produced in newspaper, review or magazine format. All have been influenced, of course, by technical progress in periodical production in the last half-century, notably the use of photographic and other illustrations to supplement the printed word and the reinforcement and eventual substitution of the traditional black and white by colours. Probably the high point of Co-operative journalism in this respect was reached in the early 1930's by the "Volksblatt" of the German Consumers' Co-operative Movement. This was produced by a colour photogravure process at the rate of 1½ million copies per month by the "Verlagsgesellschaft", the special publishing organisation of the Central Union and the Wholesale Society G.E.G. With the passage of time the newspaper format seems to be replaced by the magazine, the latest convert being "Le Coopérateur de France", the journal with the largest circulation in the table, which made the change as this article was being written.

The changes in methods and styles of production have been accompanied and influenced by the evolution of editorial policy. The more the actual and potential Co-operative membership became indistinguishable from the general public, the more Co-operative members' journals had to face and overcome the competition of the reading matter produced commercially for the information and entertainment of better educated, more literate and sophisticated readers. If Co-operative journals were to be read and, what is more, paid for collectively by societies or individually by the Co-operators themselves, their presentation of Co-operative news and ideas had to be as skilful, as readable and technically acceptable as any printed matter produced for profit. The members' journal properly conceived and produced can become the most important and effective weapon in the Co-operative Movement's Press armoury. It can enable Co-operators to look beyond their special jobs and functions and keep aware of the structure and operations of the Movement as a whole. It can ensure that matters of common concern become matters of common knowledge. It can keep much wider circles than the officials, elected officers and militant minority constantly aware of the Movement's developing needs and policies. It can make the Movement's voice heard on those questions of public concern on which Co-operative experience and principles entitle it to speak with authority.

Even so, the members' journal needs supplementing by other publications for more specialised groups of readers, as is indicated by the practice of the national Movements summarised in the following table.

Technical and Professional Journals and other technical
Specialised Periodicals

Country + Central Organisation	Title	Circulation	Period	Readership
AUSTRIA, Konsumverband	1. Die Konsum- genossenschaft	N.A.	2 x M	Employees
	2. Im Blickfeld der kg.	500	20 x Y	Managers Executive
	3. Marketing Aktuell	N.A.	10 x Y	Employees
	4. Konsum-Press	500	W	Gen. pub.
DENMARK, FDB	1. FDB-Nyt	30,000	M	Employees & elected officers
FINLAND, K.K. O.T.K.	1. "E"	22,000	M	Employees
	1. LT- Laatutietoa	28,000	Q	Members & employees & general Press.
S.O.K.	2. Myyntituki	6,000	10 x Y	Employees
	3. OTK:n Renkaat	9,300	M	Employees
	1. Handelslaget	2,500	M	Employees
	2. Osuuskauppa- lehti	14,000	M	Employees
Elanto	1. "Elanto"	125,000	N.A.	Members of local Society.
FRANCE, FNCC	1. Cooperation - Distribution - Consommation	3,000	M	Members, employees & public
	2. Liaisons cooperatives	13,000	M	Members & elected officers
	3. Bulletin C. d'Information	1,000	W	Affiliated Societies

(Table continued)

Country + Central Organisation	Title	Circulation	Period	Readership
FRANCE, Laboratoire coopératif Institut françois de la Coopération	1. Bulletin d'Information 1. Revue des Etudes Coopératives	12,000 8,000	2 x M Q	General public. Co-operators, scientists & general public.
GERMANY, FEDERAL REPUBLIC Coop Zentrale, A.G. "Produktion", Hamburg	1. Der Verbrau- cher Coop Rundschau 1. Pro-Magazin 2. Pro-Mitarbei- ter	15,000 130,000 10,000	F M M	Employees, general public. Local members. Employees.
NORWAY, NKL Handelsbest- yrer Forbundet	1. Forbrukeren 2. Vart Marked 1. Handels- bestyreren	6,500 14,000 1,400	10 x Y 10 x Y M	Officials & members. Employees. Managers.
SWEDEN, K.F. K.F. Inform- ation Dept. Swedish Coop Centre	1. Kooperatören 2. Var Tidning 3. Information (4 languages) 4. S.C.C. News	11,000 40,000 5,000 1,300	M M N.A. Q	Members, employees. Employees. Employees, public. Members, public.

(Table continued)

Country + Central Organisation	Title	Circulation	Period	Readership
SWITZERLAND, Coop Schweiz	1. Fachblatt für Unternehmens- führung - Revue d'econ- omie d'entreprise	7,500	M	Employees, general public.
U.K., Co-operative Press	1. Co-operative Management and Marketing.	10,000	M	Managers & Executives
Co-operative Union	1. Co-operative Review (Supplement to C. News). Information Bulletins	35,000	M	Executives elected officers & members.
C.U. Educ- ation Dept.		8-900	Var- ious	Members, elected officers & employees.
Regional Societies	1. Contact (Nottingham)	25,000	Q	Members.
	2. Link (")	6,600	Q	Employees.
	3. Link (Portsmouth)	N.A.	F	Employees.
	4. Your Voice (Birmingham)	5,000	2 x M	Employees.
	5. New Horizon (Chelmsford)	600	Q	Employees.

The contents of the above table may seem at a first glance somewhat miscellaneous, in that the readerships of the various publications listed are not separately grouped. In fact, however, they are not always sharply distinguished or separately catered for by the publishing organisations, for one reason because the same kinds

of information, ideas and stimulus are often needed by different groups within a Movement or a primary Co-operative. For example, both the full-time managers and the part-time board members equally need for their guidance clear conceptions of the economic situation and the way it can be expected to evolve. What the table does depict is the range of periodical publications at present at the disposal of the national Consumers' Co-operative Movements in some European countries. What it lacks for completeness are statistics of the various groups with which the circulations of the respective Press organs can be compared as in the first table - statistics which are not readily available and which would require considerable time to collect. Nevertheless, it seems not unreasonable to assume that these groups are on the whole more adequately covered by their appropriate journals than the great mass of the membership.

A principal aim of the technical and professional journals is to promote the efficiency and effectiveness of the Movement's commercial and democratic organisation. That means increasing the knowledge, understanding, motivation and enthusiasm of the people who compose and operate it. The Press is thus an essential element in maintaining internal communications and the continuous dialogue between individuals and groups performing different functions without which a Co-operative can be neither efficiently managed nor democratically administered. For this reason the discussion of the more difficult Co-operative problems cannot be conducted in the popular members' journal but must be entrusted to a technical review in which articles of adequate length by writers of recognised authority treat abstruse questions in detail and in depth. The Austrian "Konsumgenossenschaft", the French "Cooperation - Distribution - Consommation", the

Swedish "Kooperatoren", the Swiss "Fachblatt für Unternehmungsführung" and the British "Co-operative Management and Marketing" are examples of this type of publication, though they may differ in scope and style according to national circumstances and preferences.

It is vital to the existence of the consumers' Co-operative Movement that its working personnel - the whole body of its employees - should fully understand its nature and its mission. That is the primary purpose of the numerous journals and bulletins for employees noted in the table, as well as the proper foundation of their loyalty to their employing society or federation and their esprit de corps. The Finnish list is impressive, partly because there are two vernacular languages - Finnish and Swedish - and two Consumers' Co-operative Movements, and also because the Wholesale Society OTK has come in to reinforce the Unio KK as a publishing organisation. The Swedish magazine "Var Tidning" originated in the Co-operative College to express the community spirit of its present and former students, but as, under the Swedish system, the great majority of employees receive training from or at the College, it has become effectively an employees' professional organ. It must be remarked, however, in this connection that certain important Consumers' Co-operative Movements are conspicuous through not possessing any Press organ for their employees.

The French National Federation of Consumers' Co-operatives is unique in having published for the last 18 years a special magazine for "militants" or active Co-operators and especially those who hold elected offices in their societies or the local "sections" in which the membership of most progressive Co-operatives is grouped. The material presented is naturally more specialised in a Co-operative sense than the contents

of "Le Coopérateur de France", and it makes a valuable contribution to the background knowledge required by the present-day Co-operative administrator. Noteworthy also are the specialised information bulletins published by the Education Department of the British Co-operative Union for the use of members of management boards and education committees, as well as the employees and general membership in their various spheres of action. The same Department has produced a bi-monthly wall newspaper which Co-operatives may display in their shops and offices.

Four British Societies are listed as publishing bulletins for their staffs - Greater Nottingham, Portsea Island, Birmingham and Chelmsford - and one of them, Greater Nottingham, also distributes 25,000 copies of an information bulletin quarterly amongst its members. In this respect it follows at some distance the example of the famous Societies "Ålanto" (Helsinki) and "Produktion" (Hamburg) whose members' journals have circulations of 125,000 and 130,000 respectively. It can hardly be said that these specialised and local publications appreciably make up for the circulation deficiencies of the national Co-operative journals, for they are most likely to circulate amongst the limited numbers of active Co-operators, that is, the already converted, rather than gain new converts. It is, of course, a long-standing custom in several national Movements for the publishing organisations to cater for the special interests of primary Co-operatives by producing localised or regionalised editions of their national journals.

Lessons to be Drawn

To sum up, the impressions gathered by the present writer from the information extracted from the I.C.A. Press Directory and from personal observation are:

- first, there exists a common, even normal, pattern of national Co-operative Press organisation, catering for the several needs and interests of the general membership and three lesser groups - elected officers, employees, bearers of managerial and executive responsibilities;
- second, each of these distinct groups is, in this day and age, large enough to require its own periodical publications;
- third, while progress, considerable but by no means uniform, has been made in developing these publications, no national consumers' Co-operative Movement has a complete Press armament which effectively meets all its needs;
- fourth, in certain respects the national Movements of some countries are, in relation to their size, less well armed journalistically for the battle of ideas than they were forty or fifty years ago;
- fifth, in the third quarter of this century much valuable Co-operative journalistic activity has been stunted, suspended or sacrificed entirely, owing to rising printing costs and the - assumed - necessities of the competitive struggle to retain Co-operation's share of the retail market.

The time seems to be ripe now that, with one or two exceptions, the power of consumers' Co-operative Movements to hold their ground in the market and even extend it is being once again successfully demonstrated, to bring about a better balance between the Movement's economic and its educational action. This cannot be done without displaying the social, alongside of the economic virtues of the Co-operative idea. The interest of the public and, more especially, of the

rising generation, must be recaptured and a unique opportunity of making a start is offered by the current exposure of the weaknesses of the so-called affluent society. There is no better - maybe in practice no other - medium for bringing home to the Movement's millions of torpid adherents, as well as the public at large, the world-wide extension of Co-operation and the value and diversity of its achievements and potentialities than the Press. Not any Press, of course, but a co-ordinated national system of publications serving complementary purposes, adequately financed and capable of attracting men and women of outstanding ability into its service as editors and administrators, dedicated to the creation and employment of a powerful instrument of Co-operative education of the people by the people for the people.