

REVIEWS

by

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By way of contrast to the last issue of the Bulletin the outstanding books which have come to me this time are both from the retail movement and, as disturbingly often with the retail movement, are historical narratives.

James Kinloch and John Butt's History of the Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society Limited is a most welcome addition to the literature of Co-operative business history. It is many years since a full-scale history of the SCWS has been attempted and this, of course, is the first such enterprise to cover the period right up to and including the merger with CWS. Kinloch and Butt have succeeded in combining the care and precision required of scholarship with a plain readability - a combination all too rare in official histories. We are taken smoothly through the origins of Scottish Co-operation, the growth of the retail movement and foundation of the SCWS, its expansion over many years and encounters with the trading problems of the mid-twentieth century, to the "historic day in the long record of the British Co-operative movement" (to quote the Scottish Co-operator) - when Scottish societies voted for a merger between the renamed Scottish Co-operative Society and the CWS, and to the merger itself. Of particular interest to this

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reviewer was the story of the intricate relationship between the two Wholesales, a difficult balancing act which was performed with a remarkable degree of success for over a century.

All in all, a most worthwhile piece of work, and an example of business history which deserves a wide readership.

One of the speakers at the conference on Co-operative History organised last May by the Society for the Study of Labour History was John Attfield. His subject then was the monumental activity of Joseph Reeves, working between the wars to sustain the ambitious programme of what would today be called "committed" education in the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society. This is one of the principal foci of Attfield's new book With light of knowledge (RACS/Journeyman Press, £3.75 paperback) which sets out to chart the course of education in the society from 1877 - 1977 - and does so in general admirably. The inter-war years have to take pride of place because of the innovations, not least the Woodcraft Folk which put Co-operative education very much within the political context of the wider labour movement. But other periods repay study also, especially as this book is unique among retail society histories in concentrating exclusively on educational development, and rare in pursuing the story almost up to the present. There can be a danger of an archive - based history of this sort turning into a mere catalogue of events: occasionally a touch of this appears in Attfield's book, but not often. In general, the text reads easily enough, though it is ill-served by a cramped layout which leads one to expect - wrongly - a dull book.

In contract to John Attfield's history of a hundred years of Co-operative education in the

metropolis of London stands A brief History of the Co-operative College, Moshi and the Co-operative Education Centre, Moshi produced recently by these two Tanzanian institutions. Founded in 1963 and 1964 respectively, the College and Education Centre are now moving towards merger, bringing the primarily staff-related work of the College and the member education of the Centre into an integrated unit. This history outlines - rather uncritically - the background to the foundation of the two institutions and the various courses which have been run, as well as explaining their relationship to the Co-operative Movement and the concept of ujamaa in Tanzania, and setting out objectives for the future.

Those who attended the September conference of SCS will already be familiar with the Co-operative Union Education Department's video on Roch Valley High School and the work which was done there by first-year pupils working on Co-operation as the theme of a term-long integrated studies project. The video shows a selection of the work produced - paintings, drawings, models and figurines, and the whole of a short drama acted by children involved in the project. The children and the artefacts they have produced have been presented straight, without narrations, so that the video is probably best used within the context of an outline of the project to an informed group - of active Co-operators, perhaps, or of teachers interested in running a similar project - which has the basic knowledge to make its own assessment of the material presented. The video is available on VHS, from the Co-operative Union Education Dept.

Brief Notices

Producer Co-operatives in Eastern Europe:
lessons for the West by Alastair Campbell (ICOM

10.90) takes a very swift look at some features of East European Co-ops., drawing six "lessons" for Co-operators elsewhere. Inevitably a pamphlet of just fourteen pages on such a broad subject raises more questions than it answers - but if it really poses six questions rather than justifies six lessons, the resulting re-assessment of ideas may be worthwhile.

Housing Co-operatives in Developing Countries by A.C. Lewin (Wiley, £11.75 hardback, £5.75 paperback) is a revised edition of the author's Self-help Housing through Co-operatives, and essentially a guide to the management of self-help schemes. The ICA's Co-operative Housing: an Overview is another recent publication in this field, much recommended.

Finally, Work-aid by Tony Naughton (Common-work, £2.95) is a practical guide to basic business techniques for workers' Co-operatives. It contains a good range of helpful advice, though some of it seemed perhaps a little technical to me, bearing in mind that it might well be taken up as an initial aid by people with absolutely no prior knowledge.