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International Co-operative Day 1926.

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Manifesto of the E. C. C. I. for the International Co-operative Day.

To the Proletarian Cooperators of all Countries!

Workers by Hand and Brain, Proletarian Housewives!

The International Cooperative Alliance again issues its call for the celebration of the International Cooperators' Day. On July 3rd there will be demonstrations and "popular festivals" in all countries which are to demonstrate to you the "economic achievements" of the Co-operative movement. We urge you to participate in these manifestations in order to render them powerful demonstrations of the struggling proletariat.

Do not allow yourselves to be doped by the reassuring statement that the Cooperatives are on the whole beginning to cope successfully with the serious crisis of the post-war period.

In the epoch of the supremacy of banks, syndicates, trusts, multiple shops, big food concerns, stores, etc., the trade results of the Co-operatives alone cannot contribute much to the improvement of the standard of life of the masses. During such an epoch co-operatives cannot do justice of their tasks unless in the struggle for lower prices and a higher standard of living for the working class they form a united front with the trade unions and the other organisations, fighting together with them against the high cost of living, the price dictatorship of the syndicates and trusts, against the customs and taxation policy of the capitalist governments and against the capitalist regime in general.

The general strike of the British workers so shamefully

betrayed, has shown once more that not a single section of the proletariat class army can fight alone against capitalism.

The British example has shown that the mass of the workers have realised the necessity of complete solidarity between all class organisations — the Co-operatives, trade unions and the political organisations. But the reformist leaders frustrated this struggle by their unprecedented treachery. This is shown by the refusal of the majority of the leaders of the International Co-operative Alliance (a world organisation with a membership of 50,000,000) to even lift a finger in support of the big mass struggle of the British workers. This shows to what a pass the reformist leaders have brought the self-aid organisations of the proletariat as a result of the passivity of large sections of their membership.

Therefore, down with passivity and indifference towards the Co-operative organisations!

Do not allow reformist leaders to rule the roost uncontrolled in these important mass organisations!

Make the Consumers' Co-operative Movement an instrument of the organised will of the proletarian masses!

Take as your example Soviet Russia where the Co-operatives of the revolutionary workers and peasants are one of the most solid props of Socialist construction.

On July 3rd, the International Co-operators' Day the Co-operatives, the organised workers and peasants of liberated Russia will also demonstrate. They will once more give ex-

pression to the solidarity of which they have given practical proof in the days of the General Strike.

Class conscious workers join the Co-operatives!

Point to this example! Fight unceasingly in the Co-operatives in order to make these mass organisations a powerful instrument in the struggle of the masses for the improvement of the standard of life and for liberation from the capitalist yoke. Fight that the Co-operatives together with the trade unions meet capitalism in a proletarian united front. Carry on your fight at all the meetings and demonstrations for the slogans:

Every class conscious worker — a co-operator!
Every proletarian co-operator — a class fighter!

Every Co-operative — an instrument of the organised will to fight!

Solid alliance with the trade unions!
Close collaboration with the Co-operatives of Soviet Russia!
Solidarity with the victorious Russian proletariat and the revolutionary proletariat of all countries!
Long live the united power of the proletarian mass organisations!
Long live the liberation of all workers under the leadership of the proletariat!

Executive Committee of the
Communist International.

Moscow, June 16, 1926.

Theses of the Agitprop of the E. C. C. I. for International Co-operative Day.

(July 3rd, 1926).

Material for Speakers.

I. THE GENERAL AND CO-OPERATIVE POSITION.

1. The origin of International Co-operative Day.

International Co-operative Day was introduced in 1922 on the basis of a resolution of the **International Co-operative Alliance**. It was fixed for the first Saturday in July, and the idea of the majority of the Alliance was to make it a counterpart of the May celebrations of the trade unions. On this day the petty bourgeois and Reformist "co-operative ideal", of the power of the co-operative movement to reconcile the classes, of a peaceful victory over capitalism, of evolution into socialism should be propagated as extensively as possible.

International Co-operative Day which has already been celebrated three times was, as far as the entertainments organised by the official co-operative authorities in capitalist countries goes, nothing but a series of popular fêtes, processions etc. with business advertisements of the co-operative stores and propaganda for the above mentioned illusions without any deeper proletarian value.

2. The proletarian significance of Co-operative Day.

The class-conscious proletarian has long recognised that peaceful evolution into socialism is only an empty phrase and a harmful illusion and that he can only gain his freedom by an organised class fight for political and economic power and by overthrowing the bourgeoisie by force of arms.

The proletariat which represents the overwhelming majority of the co-operative members has a different conception of the aims and tasks of an international Labour Day. Days such as the 1st of May, International Women's Day, International Young People's Day and now also International Co-operative Day, have always been for the working masses an occasion for re-examining the momentary phase of the class fight and the share taken in it by the various organisations; each of them is a day for manifestations and demonstrations for the demands of the day and for the ultimate aims of the organised fight of the exploited masses, a day of challenge to the bourgeoisie both of their own country and of the world, a day of assembly and review of their own ranks and of proclamations of solidarity, on the one hand with the exploited and oppressed in all capitalist countries and on the other hand with the victorious workers and peasants of the Soviet Republics. To-day we must examine into our relation to the co-operative movement from this point of view.

3. The economic and political situation.

In all capitalist countries, the events of the past year have shown up more clearly than ever the contradictions between labour and capital which cannot be bridged over. The bourgeoisie has endeavoured further to consolidate its rule which was shaken by the results of the war and has collected and organised its forces. With directness of purpose it is continuing its concentrated attack on the standard of living of the workers. Its

method of doing this are more and more systematic, more and more cunning. In the name of rationalisation, millions are being thrust into the misery of unemployment and part-time work. The "process of stabilisation" of capitalist economy is taking the form of further monopoly of large industry and commerce in the hands of a few financial concerns, of the growth of trusts, cartels, food-rings and the department stores connected with them etc.

This monopoly of production and of trade gives the hyenas of capital the possibility of dictating usurious prices to the buyers. In addition to this we see more and more shameless and wide-spread plundering of the national treasuries by so-called measures of support for capitalist undertakings and the bleeding of the masses by taxes and customs duties. This is the path of the "stabilisation" of capitalist economics. The dream of stabilising the conditions of living of the broad masses has long ago vanished. What remains is the sober reality of the stabilisation of misery and want.

The bourgeoisie knows that it can only carry through its programme of stabilisation if it consistently and energetically carries on its attack against the political positions and rights of the working class, if it disintegrates and splits up all other organisations of the proletariat or sets them together by the ears. The methods of Fascism in Italy and the tendencies in the "democratic" States in Europe and America, which are becoming clearer and clearer, are examples of how the bourgeoisie understands how to profit by the lack of directness of purpose and resolution of the proletarian mass organisations.

4. The anti-Labour policy of the Reformist leaders.

In this situation it cannot be a matter of indifference to the class-conscious proletariat what part the co-operative mass organisations assume.

In most countries the co-operative count hundreds of thousands or millions of members. From the international point of view they have, for the past 31 years, been united in the **International Co-operative Alliance**, an organisation embracing 50 millions of members. If the gigantic power of organisation which lies concealed in the co-operatives were to join wholeheartedly in the fight against capitalism, the defence of the vital interests of the working masses would be considerably easier. In all capitalist countries, however, these forces are lying fallow.

In the co-operatives, cliques of leaders, alienated from their class, who deliberately keep the co-operatives aloof from these tasks, carry out their own sweet will with even less restriction than in the trade unions. Some of them deny altogether that the co-operatives are class organisations of the working class and talk at random of their being "non-political" and of it being necessary to have consideration for all classes of capitalist society. (Germany, Switzerland, Sweden etc.). In other countries (Austria, Belgium, to a certain extent England and France etc.), the official co-operative leaders admit, it is true, in word that the co-operatives are labour organisations, but in deed they

lead them along Reformist and social democratic side-paths of collaboration and friendship with capital, or they isolate themselves from the other class organisations of the workers, carry on their own policy and are only concerned with their own commercial interests without bothering about the common interests of their members.

5. The "stabilisation" of the co-operatives.

The so-called "process of stabilisation" of capitalism is reflected also in the domain of the co-operative movement, in the first place in the urban co-operatives. Apart from France, Belgium and Poland, i. e. the countries with a falling currency, the turnover of the wholesale buying departments of the co-operative stores has fallen in other countries by 35%, in Sweden by 12%, Finland by 15%, Czechoslovakia (German section) by 41%, England by 7%, Norway by 1.1% (wholesale prices having fallen by 27% during the year), in Switzerland by 1.5%. Figures of the turnover of the co-operative stores for the past year are not available except in Germany, Finland and partly in Czechoslovakia, but in these also the tendency is to increase. The Reformist and petty bourgeois leaders of the co-operative movement will try, on the strength of these figures to appease the masses of their members and to convince them once more of the "aimlessness" and harmfulness of the class war and of the necessity and importance of the principle of neutrality.

The commercial success of the co-operatives however offer very slight advantages to their proletarian customers at the present stage of capitalist economics. The essential question is whether the co-operatives fulfil their part as proletarian mass organisations, whether they personify the organised will to fight of the masses of consumers or are merely agents of the capitalist industrial concerns and the banks.

Even in the co-operatives, rationalisation is only too often carried out at the cost of the workers, of the co-operative organisation and undertakings (increasing number of conflicts with the workers in Germany, Switzerland, France, Great Britain and Sweden). In spite of the arbitrary rights of the masses of members and against their will, the Reformist leaders bluntly refuse to give direct help to the fighting proletariat (**general strike in Great Britain**). In order to be able to distribute dividends at the end of the year, the bureaucracy carries on a policy of high prices and bad wages. By election manoeuvres and tricks with the statutes, the poorer proletarian members are deprived of the right to express their opinion with regard to the management of the co-operatives. Some of the better-situated workers are egged on against their class brothers, the fate of the co-operative as a business is placed above the fate of the co-operative as a mass movement and a mass organisation.

6. The lessons of the strike in Great Britain.

The strike of the English workers which is instructive from every point of view for the fight of the international labour movement, is a warning and enlightening example for the whole proletarian co-operative movement. This strike has shown the proletarians the great necessity for solidarity and mutual support among all labour organisations, it has also shown the working class what risks it runs if it entrusts the management of its affairs to the Reformists.

For months the class-conscious workers in England had demanded that the trade unions and the co-operatives should previously conclude a mutual agreement and that the provision of food to the workers on strike should be undertaken by the numerous distributing centres of the co-operatives and by their large and experienced personnel. They had demanded that the co-operatives should prepare for and ensure the granting of credit to the strikers on generous lines. The slogan issued by the Communist Party of Great Britain and the Minority Movement in the trade unions that the co-operative stores must be the commissariat of the fighting proletariat met with warm approval on the part of the broad strata of the members. Under the pressure of the masses, the leading bureaucracy of both movements carried on negotiations with regard to this question, but the treachery of the Trade Union Council which did not believe in the fight and the attitude of the supreme leaders of the co-operatives which was commercial and not proletarian, prevented their coming to an agreement.

Thus it came about that the English workers, in one of the greatest fights of their history, were left without the help of their own co-operatives whilst on the other hand, the Workers' Co-operative Unions appealed in many cases to the police and

the strikebreakers' organisations in order to keep their "business" going. The general picture is not much modified by the few local exceptions in which there was collaboration between the local co-operative stores and the strike committees.

II. THE NECESSITY OF A PROLETARIAN CO-OPERATIVE POLICY.

1. The question of prices and the class war.

What is the proletarian conception of the role, the tasks and the possibilities of the co-operative movement?

The co-operative stores of the working class were first started with the object of combating the exploitation by commercial capital. They were intended to supplement the fight of the proletariat for higher wages by an organised struggle for cheaper prices. In earlier days, when the only opponents of the co-operatives in the field of trade were the unorganised retail dealers, they could grant a number of advantages to their members merely by improved technical commercial methods of organisation, by concentrated wholesale purchase, by getting hold of a large number of regular customers, even by simply doing away with the gross imposition with regard to quality, measure and weight.

Nowadays, under the rule of financial capital, of the all-mighty banks, trusts and cartels, in the epoch of department stores, of chains of middlemen, provisioning concerns however, the co-operative stores can only offer their members very slight advantages through mere commercial methods. The co-operatives must of course establish the best methods of business and organisation but they can only really fulfil their tasks if they carry on the fight for cheaper prices and for raising the standard of living of the workers as an organised proletarian class war in common with the trade unions and other proletarian class organisations, as a fight against the increase of prices and against the price politics of the capitalist governments, thus ultimately as a political fight against the whole capitalist regime.

2. Against trusts and cartels.

The fight of the proletariat against the dictating of prices by the large capitalist concerns, trusts and cartels can and must be furthered and supported by well-managed organisations of consumers. Various sections of the working population which cannot be included in the trade union organisations, such as home-workers, proletarian housewives etc. can be mobilised for the fight against the monopolist control of the market by bank and financial capital, through the co-operative stores, in connection with the prices of the most important articles of food and of necessity.

3. Against Taxes and Customs Duties.

The customs and taxation policy of capitalist governments everywhere aims at shifting the burdens of the public expenditure, of armaments and wars on to the shoulders of the working masses and letting a large part of the scanty wages of the workers flow back into the pockets of the financial magnates, bankers, large industrialists and large landowners. This capitalist customs and taxation policy makes itself most keenly and painfully felt where the worker or, as is usually the case, his wife who keeps house, has to purchase with the pennies he has earned, articles of necessity which he requires to restore the energy he has used up in his work. It is therefore an absolute and fundamental duty of the co-operative stores to take a share, nay, to take the initiative in organising the mass fight against the customs and taxation piracy of the ruling capitalist class.

4. Help for the Unemployed.

The co-operative organisations can and should take their place in the foremost ranks in the fight against unemployment. It is not enough that they themselves should undertake measures of relief for the unemployed such as selling food on credit or at reduced prices, organising child welfare, public feeding etc., they should also demand special State and municipal credits so as to organise emergency work for the unemployed through the co-operatives. Instead of using public means for the support of the capitalist industrial magnates, they should be advanced for the construction of co-operative works, in the first place slaughter-houses, mills and bakeries, in order to provide work for the unemployed and at the same time to strengthen the position of the proletarian consumers in the fight against food profiteering.

5. Cheapening of the cost of living.

Pressure can and should be exercised for the purpose of supplying the workers' co-operative stores direct with cheaper industrial products so as to reduce the cost of transport of articles of general necessity which help to cheapen the cost of living of the working class members of the co-operatives, thus increasing their actual wages and raising their standard of living; this can be done through closer connection between the co-operative stores' movement and the organisation of the workers in the factories and in transport, the trade unions and the factory councils.

6. Proletarian Agitation and Education.

We must demand that the co-operative managing bodies carry on their extensive press activities and publications, their work of training and education, with a view to educating the working masses on class lines. In this respect also, all dissipation of proletarian forces and means must be avoided.

The co-operatives and the revolutionary and political class organisations of the workers must join forces to resist the fiery breath of the dragon of the capitalist Press and schools.

7. Trade Unions and Co-operatives.

Among the most elementary duties of the proletarian co-operative organisations are: the support of the economic fights of the proletariat, the granting of material support to strikers and locked-out workers, supplying food on credit in the days of struggle, welfare work for the families of the fighting workers.

With this object in view, binding agreements with the trade unions must be prepared. Even in times of industrial "peace", the trade unions and the co-operatives must cultivate a close brotherhood in arms, so as to be able in times of actual fighting, to oppose aggressive capital in a united front, with determination and without misunderstandings. For this reason, the trade unions on their part, must do everything in their power to support and promote the co-operatives. They must see to it that the masses of their members join the co-operatives and participate in active work for them. They ought to invest their trade union funds — to a certain extent at any rate — in the proletarian co-operatives, in order to consolidate and increase their economic power of resistance.

8. Help for Proletarian Housewives.

For many women the co-operatives are the only proletarian mass organisation with which they come into direct touch. "The woman with the shopping bag" must be trained into a class-conscious proletarian fighter through the co-operative stores. The co-operatives must endeavour as far as possible to relieve the proletarian housewife from the heavy burden of the household by establishing feeding centres, dress-making departments, laundries, children's homes etc., thus turning her into a faithful member of the co-operative union and a fellow-fighter in the class war.

9. Alliance with the Peasants.

An alliance with the working peasantry which is of decisive significance in the fight for power of the proletariat, can and must be promoted and cultivated through the co-operatives. By direct connection and exchange of goods between the co-operative stores of the workers and the agricultural co-operatives of the working peasants, it will be possible to do away with the usurious profits of the middlemen, to bring the peasantry more under the influence of the working class, gradually to wrest them from their adherence to the large landowners and clergy and to win them over as fellow-combatants in building up a worker and peasant government.

10. A Glimpse at the Soviet Union.

After the overthrow of the capitalist regime, in the period of the proletarian dictatorship and the construction of socialist economy, the co-operatives are destined to play a decisive part. In the Soviet Union, the co-operative movement has begun to flourish. In that country, 10 million families of workers and peasants belong to co-operative stores, 5 million farms are organised in the various agricultural co-operatives. In the Soviet Union, the co-operatives are the chief and predominant means by which, with the active participation of the masses themselves, the products of socialist State industry reaches the consumer most cheaply and rapidly and by which, on the other hand, the products of small industry and of peasant agriculture are brought on the market through good organisation, 30,000 co-operative societies with 50,000 shops in town and country, con-

trol the fixing of prices of all articles of necessity and successfully keep private trade within bounds.

A vast network of co-operative educational and training centres, libraries, village reading rooms, children's homes, convalescent homes, feeding centres etc. exists for the benefit of the working masses of all the Republics and nations of the great Socialist Soviet Union. Favoured and promoted by the Soviet Government, supported by the most powerful trade union organisations, maintained by the activity and initiative of the broad masses of their members, the Soviet co-operatives form a chief factor in the economic life, a powerful tool in the hands of the workers and peasants for building up socialism.

III. THE CO-OPERATIVE INTERNATIONAL.

The International Co-operative Alliance might play a very important part if it were taken out of the hands of the reactionary leaders. This united, undivided organisation of 50 millions of the proletarian co-operators in 32 countries might, by its initiative, contribute a great deal to the establishment of the international trade union unity demanded by the revolutionary proletariat. What could not the Alliance do, were it to join in a united front with Trade Union Internationals for the international fighting demands of the proletariat!

A Co-operative International, really carried on in the interests of these masses by real representatives of the working masses of consumers, could, with the sheer weight of its millions of members, engage in a fight for an international programme of action, economics and peace and reveal to the masses in its true light the hypocritical tissue of lies, pregnant with war, of the economic and "disarmament" conferences of the so-called League of Nations at Geneva. How great would be the value of a mobilisation of the co-operators of all countries in a fight against Fascism, which is recognised, even by the present leaders of the Alliance, as the fiercest enemy and destroyer of the co-operatives!

Every suggestion of the co-operatives of the Soviet Union — which also belongs to the I.C.A. — proposing that the Alliance should adopt a policy of proletarian action and solidarity, has fallen on the deaf ears of the reactionary majority of the leaders; these latter barricade themselves behind the characterless paragraph of "political neutrality" and will hear nothing of an active, international co-operative policy. The most recent and shameful treachery of these "leaders" was their rejection of the proposal made by the representative of the co-operatives of the Soviet Union on the day of the outbreak of the general strike in Great Britain, that international co-operative relief work should be organised for the British proletariat. The proletarian co-operators of Great Britain and Germany should make particular note of the fact that it was "their" representatives who prevented this relief work being carried out.

IV. THE PROLETARIAN CO-OPERATIVE SLOGANS.

Thus we see that the co-operative mass organisations of the working class are, in common with the trade union organisations, and in a local, national and international respect, important and necessary implements of war in the fight for the existence and the emancipation of the exploited. It is only where the lead is in the hands of bureaucrats estranged from their own class, who regard the co-operatives as business concerns and do not care a straw for the vital interests of the members, that this position of power of the proletariat does not carry the weight that it might. If the co-operative stores are to fulfil their truly great task, deliberate and active intervention of the masses of proletarian consumers is the first essential.

International Co-operative Day 1926 must therefore be celebrated under the following slogans:

Join the co-operatives!

Get at the masses of co-operators!

Every Communist, every class-conscious proletarian an active co-operator!

Every co-operator a proletarian class fighter!

No hunting for dividends, but cheap prices in the co-operatives!

Fraternal united fight of the co-operatives and trade unions! Away with political neutrality and isolation of the co-operatives!

Unity and solidarity of all workers' organisations!

Away with the petty bourgeois and Reformist leaders of the co-operatives and trade unions, take the lead into your own hands!

Think of the lessons of the general strike in Great Britain!

Practical solidarity with the British miners!

Fight for the demands of your unemployed class brothers!

Fight against the predatory customs and taxation raids of the capitalist governments!

The Red Front against Fascism!

Red aid for the victims of the proletarian class war!

Learn from the workers and peasants of the Soviet Union!

Send delegations to the Soviet Union!

Demand that the International Co-operative Alliance adopt an active proletarian policy!

Down with the Geneva League of Nations with its lust for war!

Create an alliance of workers and peasants, fight for a worker and peasant government!

Long live the United Socialist States of Europe!

Complete Failure of the International Co-operative Alliance.

A Report on International Co-operative Day.

By Ernst Baumann.

The "International Cooperative Alliance" (London) issued a manifesto in which it calls upon the millions of cooperative members to celebrate also this year international cooperative day on July 3. The Alliance, however, has again not found the courage this year to publish simultaneously a report on its work. It contents itself with a fantastic phrase mongering. That is the favourite method of concealing its impotence and its false policy from the masses and to mislead them. As it is, the masses of members of the consumers societies are miserably informed on international cooperative affairs. This cooperative day is therefore an opportunity for speaking of the role and significance of the cooperative movement on an international scale.

Let us ourselves give a sketch of the achievements of the Alliance since the last International Cooperative Day in July 1925. Remember that the last International Cooperative Congress took place in Geneva in September 1924. This congress of leaders concerned itself essentially with the problem of how the Cooperative International, in spite of the misery and poverty of its exploited Cooperative members, in spite of the organised attacks of international capital on the masses, in spite of the forward march of Fascism and the menacing danger of war, can sail onward without concern for the events happening in the world, like a fairy ship with rainbow sails. All the art of the cunning reformist leaders was concentrated at the Congress to split the Cooperative Movement by so-called "political neutrality" from the whole labour movement and to prevent the Cooperatives for ever from fulfilling the most obvious requirements of proletarian cooperative policy. The Congress was conducted on a level of unheard of labour and class antagonism. Had not the proletarian opposition fought with tough energy for certain fundamental questions, Geneva would have become the grave of the Cooperative International. The decisive point of contention was the demand for direct joint action between the cooperative movement and the labour movement. Especially an alliance with the trade unions was to be brought about. Under the pressure of the class interests of the millions of members of the cooperatives in all countries, a compromise resolution was finally adopted in which the Soviet Russian proposal for a permanent coalition of the Cooperative International with the Trade Union Internationals of Moscow and Amsterdam was rejected, because of the "menace to neutrality", but still the following was decided:

"The Congress at Geneva, however, endorses the continuation of joint activity with the International Trade Union Federations (in Moscow and Amsterdam) in special questions which might arise from time to time, with the understanding that every question is submitted beforehand to the Central Committee of the Alliance and endorsed by it."

This incomplete, defective and ambiguous decision is actually the only positive result of the whole Geneva Congress. If it had been carried out it would still have been a certain step forward as compared with the former policy of self-castration and isolation. Almost two years have gone by since then and absolutely nothing has been done to carry it into effect. For 21 months the Executive and Central Committee of the Alliance has succeeded in sabotaging and avoiding carrying out the decisions of the Geneva Congress.

It is obvious that there was sufficient provocation, that the necessity existed and that also sufficient attacks were made to

warrant doing away at last with the fatal isolation and neutrality game and to rank the Cooperative movement in the united front of proletarian organisations, for only in this way can the forces of the Cooperative mass organisations be utilised for the difficult fight for existence and for the liberation of the proletariat. An acute situation confronts the working class. The capitalist offensive is forcing down the standard of living of the masses of workers and peasants, the cooperatives themselves are suffering from the reduced purchasing power of their members. The attacks on wages and hours of labour are unintermittent; unemployment and short time work are excessive. The greed for profits of the capitalist class is bringing with it higher prices, unlimited taxes and tariffs. Fascism raises its head more insolently day by day, particularly in Italy where it has demolished the cooperative movement with fresh blows. There is a constant menace of war. The acute economic crises in a number of countries have made the international united front of the proletariat more necessary than ever. But the cooperative movement concerns itself with none of this. The Cooperative International reacts to no signal of alarm. And the various national leagues of cooperatives pass by the life and death problems of their masses of members without raising a hand.

Let us follow the events in the Cooperative International for the past year in order to get an insight into the workshop of international cooperative policy:

In June 1925 an Executive Meeting took place in Stockholm. The agenda included the carrying out of the afore-mentioned decision with relation to the coalition with the trade union internationals, as well as a report on the International Cooperative policy from January 1925 on. Besides this there was the question of measures against Fascism in Italy. The first point was postponed together with the three motions of the Soviet Russian Delegation, making practical proposals for a joint struggle against high prices, taxes, danger of war and Fascism, and for a united international conference. It was announced that the government in spite of its assurances, would not permit a cooperative delegation to come to Italy. It was now no longer "compatible with the dignity of the International Cooperative movement", to continue begging from Mussolini.

Officially it reads: "It was therefore decided to consider the whole matter as settled"! The "horrible and ruthless destruction" was to be branded in the Co-operative press. The Executive affectionately indulged in the usual anti-Communist campaign against the Soviet co-operatives in order to have an excuse for reducing the 14 seats of the co-operative federation of the U. S. S. R. in the Central Committee to 7 (which was demanded by Kaufmann from Hamburg). A resolution which was adopted was a direct provocation to the exclusion of the Soviet Co-operatives.

In October 1925 the Central Committee met in Paris. The agenda included 20 points. On the point "Carrying out the decisions of Geneva", the General Secretary, May, declared that he recommends that relations be entered into with Amsterdam, but that he considers relations with Moscow undesirable. The Soviet Russian Delegation proposed that in view of the economic and political situation, a joint conference of the Co-operative International and Trade Union International should be called as soon as possible. The British proposal, however,

was adopted, which provided that no relations with the trade union internationals should be entered into at present. Sabotage remains trumps. The point on international co-operative policy on which a memorandum with concrete proposals from the Russian Delegation had been submitted, was again postponed since the Reporter Goedhard was not present. The aforementioned three proposals were rejected without discussion. With reference to "neutrality" a new interpretation was found which formally recognises coalition on certain questions with the international trade union bodies. But no decisions were practically made.

In February 1926 another Executive Meeting took place in The Hague. Four days the conference lasted without a single question being decided. "International Co-operative policy" was again postponed. With reference to the Fresh Fascist destruction of Italian co-operatives in November 1925, it was announced that with the exception of certain correspondence, nothing could be done. The proposal of the Profintern (Moscow) to organise joint defence, had to be rejected on "grounds of neutrality". The Alliance wished, however, "to do everything in its power immediately to start an inquiry on the actual situation of the movement in Italy". As far as one can see from the minutes, the only decision taken was the following: "Preparation of a draft for a plan for the formulation of a scheme for a comprehensive programme of international Statistics of the co-operative movement, the expression of the desirability of an extension of the distribution of the official bulletin, and the final decision that the colours of the co-operative flag shall be the colours of the rainbow". Holy Alliance! you are an organisation of 50 million, the majority of whom are proletarian members of Consumers' Co-operatives...

Now in May there was an Executive Meeting in Antwerp. Decisions; no participation in the May Day Demonstration and no international solidarity activity on behalf of the British strike. Goedhart, the President, acted with such "Intransigence" — writes the Social Democratic "Peuple" (Brussels) — that "even the most neutral members of the Executive were roused to protest". The report on International Co-operative policy, the final settlement of which would at last open the eyes of the masses with regard to the pitiful role of this Co-operative International, was not even dealt with. All other questions were insignificant.

We believe that this short report suffices. If, in addition, we examine the monthly Bulletin of the Alliance (which, to be sure, does not appear for the general public), we find dry business reports and figures on the co-operative movement, but

absolutely no dealings with any actual questions confronting the proletarian masses of members.

From the last year of "work" of the Co-operative International, we therefore recognise a complete failure of the Alliance. The most serious questions confronted this body, but it did nothing to solve them. The leaders have revealed themselves as representatives of the interests of the bourgeoisie and as enemies of the proletariat. We see this not only in an international, but also on a national scale: the failure of the co-operatives during the general strike in Great Britain, the sabotage of the fight against the Ruling Houses expropriation campaign in Germany, the strikes in the co-operatives of all the countries, the dissatisfaction of the members with its achievements.

What is there to be done in this situation? The answer is quite simple; the class-conscious masses of the proletariat must see to it that they themselves get the leadership of the movement into their own hands. The co-operative movement is an important and necessary proletarian mass organisation. Its tasks can be fulfilled only when a goal-conscious proletarian co-operative policy is conducted. The international organisation of the co-operative masses is also important. Fifty million members organised into 100,000 individual organisations — that is a tremendous factor when it becomes a link in the united front of the proletariat! What material and moral force that might have meant for the British general strike! But the clique which still has the leadership of the co-operatives in its hands today, regards it as its principal task to prevent even the smallest Proletarian activity of the co-operatives. That is the desire and command of the ruling class; that is loyally carried out by its lackeys. Not until this "political neutrality" is done away with, not until the masses themselves make efforts in the co-operative movement to carry out the fundamental principles of proletarian solidarity, will the Co-operative International become a leader of an international class conscious Co-operative policy.

On International Co-operative Day on July 3, the day on which the co-operative leaders demonstrate their neutrality and their hostility to labour by hoisting a flag with the colours of the rainbow, the slogan of the millions of members of the Co-operatives in town and countryside must be: **Fight for a Proletarian Co-operative Movement; Link the Co-operative movement up with the class front; the Co-operatives a class tool in the hands of the toilers themselves! Down with the rainbow flag — hoist aloft the red flag of a class conscious militant international co-operative movement!**

The Requirements of Proletarian Co-operative Policy.

By A l g o.

For years the Cooperative movement of practically all the capitalist countries has been forced more and more out of the ranks of the labour movement. The petty-bourgeois reformist groups of leaders are endeavouring to sever contact completely between the Cooperative movement and the labour movement. They are bringing every effort to bear on making the Cooperatives independent, "politically neutral", business organisations, with special, detached, purely economic tasks. In this connection, these same leaders are more and more relinquishing their former showpiece of imposing upon the Cooperative the task of effecting a reorganisation of economy. Hardly any mention is now made about the aim of a Cooperative Socialism. And yet these illusions were once the agitational zenith of social democratic Cooperative policy.

Today the bourgeois influence on the Cooperative movement has progressed so far that Socialist phrases are considered unnecessary. A programme is quite frankly considered satisfactory if it gives the Cooperatives no further tasks than to bring about a certain degree of reform in capitalist trade. The Cooperatives should do away with certain excrescences within

capitalist economy and bring about certain improvements, without affecting the capitalist system itself.

The Cooperative movement today is already so far removed from the class movement of the proletariat, and so strongly intertwined with bourgeois economy, that it no longer needs to speak of Socialist aims. Only an ordinary cooperative capitalism remains.

The deeper reasons for this limitation to capitalist Cooperative tasks and aims, lie not only in the actual conditions, but also in the lack of faith, nay the antagonisms of the Cooperative leaders towards the class-conscious labour movement in general. The Consumers' Cooperatives, whose special tasks, when they were founded, were to conduct a fight against exploitation by trade capital, were easily able to win certain results and victories from the petty trader. It is a well-known fact that through the organisation of consumers and with progressive methods of doing business, they were useful to the workers against the petty traders and shopkeepers. They forced down prices, gave full weight and better quality, and last but not least they paid their dividends at the end of the year.

During such times it was nothing but an illusion to think that with a systematic development of the Cooperative movement still greater benefits could be obtained. It was prophesied that not only retail but also wholesale trade could be ousted by the Cooperatives. The successes of certain bakeries led to the belief that it was even possible for the Cooperatives to penetrate seriously into production, especially by centralised productive plants run by wholesale societies. Even banking was to be brought under control through the institution of Cooperative trade union, and labour banks. Those Cooperative Utopias which were to find their culminating point in making the Cooperative movement a "guarantee for world peace", lost large circles of supporters during the war and as a result of the numerous failures of the cooperative movement. Even such a relatively strong movement as the old **British Cooperative movement**, went through a serious crisis after 1920 and has even today not been able to regain its former prestige. Indisputable facts have revealed the weaknesses and limitations of the Cooperative movement.

Today the masses have become aware that, in order to overcome capitalist economy, it is absolutely necessary to find other and stronger forces on the part of the working class than the Cooperatives possess. The whole working class must carry on a well-organised and intelligent fight against high prices, to raise the standard of living of the working class, against the danger of war and Fascism — this fact becoming clearer and clearer in the consciousness of the proletarian members of Cooperatives. In this fight labour organisations have their concrete tasks in the frame-work of an active proletarian class policy.

The requirements of a proletarian policy of the cooperative movement, which must be in the closest relations and have good contact with the whole labour movement and consider itself as an integral part of the labour movement, must, in view of this state of affairs, be formulated clearly and concretely in all countries. In the **British General Strike** it was revealed what important tasks devolve upon the Cooperatives as relief organisations in time of struggle. The more clearly the will of the Cooperative officials becomes to separate the Cooperative movement from the labour movement, in order to make the Cooperatives into insignificant capitalist Cooperative business affairs, the more sharply must the will of the proletarian masses within the Cooperative movement come to expression, against the will of the bureaucracy and the officials, to make their Cooperative into an effective instrument in the fight for existence and for liberation. The longer the proletarian members of the Cooperatives wait before determining on this struggle, the more difficult it will become to break the ever-growing power of the bureaucrats and to take the Cooperatives into their own hands. Every year shows that the general situation and the condition of the Cooperatives is becoming more serious for the proletariat.

During 1926 an acute economic crisis prevails in a number of capitalist countries in Europe. The bourgeoisie has succeeded in forming a united fighting front against the toilers on an international scale. The capitalist offensive is pressing down the standard of living of the working class. Great masses of workers and employees are being thrown onto the street. Inflation and taxes have ruined the toilers even among the middle classes. The bourgeoisie is trying to reduce wages, lengthen working hours, and throw fresh taxes and tariffs onto the shoulders of the exploited. Simultaneously with the worsening of the economic condition of the working class, the Fascist organisations are developing and the political, trade union and cooperative persecutions are progressing. Tremendous wage fights are the order of the day, for the capitalist method of reconstructing Europe is insupportable for the broad masses in town and countryside.

Certainly these are sufficient reasons for making more serious preparations within the Cooperative movement — just as within the trade union movement — for defence against the capitalist offensive. But the Cooperative movement is con-

cerning itself with none of these questions which are life and death questions of the working class, today. Nothing about these questions is mentioned in the meetings of the Consumers Societies, nothing in the Cooperative press, nothing at the Cooperative congresses. It is as though the cooperatives are living in some fairyland. "Political neutrality" is the stupid commonplace which kills all class energy in the Cooperatives and reduces them to societies absolutely without significance for the working class.

A Cooperative membership which retains only a trace of class-consciousness must bring about a change in this condition without fail. If no fundamental change were brought about through the will of the members in such situation, it would mean that the Cooperative movement from the proletarian class standpoint would be sacrificed and buried. The most immediate task, besides the individual concrete tasks, is to determine now with all clarity whether the Cooperative movement considers itself as part of the proletarian class and fighting front, or whether it is to be in the service of the capitalist government and of the bourgeoisie in order to assist in rebuilding capitalism. It is the concern of the proletarian masses to confront the Cooperative leaders clearly with this question and to compel them to show their colours openly. Are they on the side of the class-conscious proletariat or on the side of the bourgeoisie? Do they support the united front of the proletariat or make pacts with the bourgeoisie and make common cause with these? Everywhere clarity is wanted on these questions so that the fight — with or against the leaders — can be taken up along the whole line.

We Communist Cooperative workers adopted an absolutely concrete standpoint on these questions at our **International Cooperative Conference** on the occasion of the Plenum of the Enlarged Executive of the Comintern in March 1926. On the basis of an analysis of the present Cooperative situation, we formulated the practical demands in our Cooperative theses (published in „Inprecorr“), which a Cooperative movement must fulfil if it wishes to be a link in the class front. It is especially important that the Cooperative movement thoroughly carry on its fight for its original tasks — lower prices and higher standard of living for the working class — as the organised proletarian class struggle together with the trade unions and other proletarian class organisations: the fight against high prices, against the price dictatorship of the cartels and trusts, against the taxations and tariff policy of the capitalist governments, the fight against the capitalist regime as a whole!

To make these requirements of the proletarian Cooperative policy clear to the masses of members in the consumers' societies is the decisive task of the **Communist Cooperative members**, who must work systematically in fractions in the Cooperatives. Our Cooperative Conference has shown in detail the practical way for the methods of this work of enlightenment and especially of convincing the members. The points of departure are the demands which are permanently on the agenda of the Cooperative movement, and which therefore are the central point of interest for the masses. These every-day demands must be skilfully advocated by the Communists with revolutionary enthusiasm in practical every-day work. They must link up with the hundreds of little practical questions in order to lead the masses with conviction to the great line of proletarian Cooperative policy.

Because we Communists regard the Cooperative movement as an important mass organisation in the fight for existence and for freedom of the proletariat — which before, during, and after the political seizure of power has definite important historical tasks — we call upon the masses no longer to allow the Cooperatives to go the way of complete degeneration into reformist business affairs, but to make them fulfil their original tasks under changed economic and political conditions as mass organisations of the proletariat.

The Co-operative Stores in the Countries of Western Europe.

By E. Varjas.

The partial stabilisation of capitalism makes it possible for the co-operative stores' movement of Western Europe to extricate itself to a certain extent from the serious position in which it found itself during the post-war crisis. Although the membership of the co-operatives on the whole did not grow much in 1924/25, their turnover increased on the average by 10%. Thus in Germany 35.4%, in England 5%, in the German co-operatives in Czechoslovakia 40.89% and in Finland 11.1%. The turnover in France and Belgium on the contrary, have fallen if the millions of francs are reckoned according to the gold standard. Further success is evidently uncertain, for the economic crisis in Western Europe, the growth of the army of unemployed up to 5 millions, the increasing number of short-time workers, also amounting to some millions, have a serious effect on the proletarian masses, and that, in its turn, affects the turnover of the co-operative stores.

Another factor which must be taken into consideration is the change in the organisation of trade. The trusts, syndicates and commercial concerns which used not to interest themselves in retail trade but left this branch of trade to the co-operatives and small shops, are now making every effort to get even this field of trade into their hands.

The trading concerns are organising a broad network of large stores, provision shops etc. in every country.

The managers of the co-operative stores' movement in the countries of Western Europe hope to overcome the crisis by cheapening production, and to strengthen the position of the co-operative stores by improving the methods of work. They are turning the co-operatives into purely capitalistic business undertakings.

The rationalisation of the co-operative undertakings finds expression in the tendency to centralisation in the co-operative stores. The directors of the co-operative movement are aiming at a condition in which only one co-operative organisation should exist in each locality and in which the small co-operatives should amalgamate with the larger and stronger ones, so that a broad system of co-operative branches will be organised. Co-operatives which are working at a loss, should be dissolved. A few examples: in Belgium, where before the war 205 socialist co-operatives existed, there are now only 54; in the same period of time the number of co-operative distributing centres has risen from 221 to 831. In Germany there were still 1350 co-operative stores in 1922 and only 1100 in 1925. The number of distributing centres rose from 6,705 in 1922 to 8,282 in 1925. The process of centralisation is still going on.

The second measure to which the co-operatives have resorted so as to be able to stand against the competition of private capital, is the production of their own goods. Whereas in 1919 the sale of goods of their own production of the English Co-operative Wholesale Society amounted to 29.2% of the total turnover, this percentage rose in 1925 to 35.2%. In the German G. E. G., the sale of goods produced by themselves amounted in 1922 to 10% of the total turnover, in 1925 it was 15.8%. In Denmark these figures are for 1919, 21% and for 1925 28.2%. Exactly the same applies to other countries.

The third method practised by the co-operatives is that of seeking loans from banks and goods-credits. In former times it was, on the whole, a rare event for co-operatives to be in debt. "Self-help" was at that time the chief slogan of the co-operative movement. The inflation and pressure of the commercial concerns with large amounts of capital at their disposal, compelled the co-operatives to contract loans also. The co-operatives in Germany which, before the war, had almost no debts, contracted bank loans to the amount of 10.1 millions and took up goods-credits to the amount of 32.2 millions. The Czech co-operative were obliged to demand long period credits to the amount of 100 million crowns from the State. We need not waste many words on the Hungarian co-operative movement which is completely dependent on State subsidies for its existence and has already been "reconstructed" several times.

Even the workers' co-operative union in Hungary had to yield up its rights to the Bethlen Government in order to gain the good-will of the Fascist Government; credits were only granted to this union, when 5 representatives of the Government were given seats in the administrative council of the union.

The dependence of the co-operatives on the banks, on wholesale trade and on the regime of the State increases every year. Banks and commercial firms are gradually gaining great influence in the co-operatives, are using pressure on the movement to an increasing degree and are permeating it with capitalist methods of work etc.

During the war and the post-war period with their great demand for goods and with other war phenomena, the system of sale on payment by instalments and on credit was almost abolished. The critical condition of sales has caused a revival of this system. The stocks of goods which absolutely had to be sold, were brought into circulation by the system of payment by instalments. The system of payment by instalments is being introduced everywhere — above all in America — by capitalist undertakings on a large scale, and is spreading enormously. This system draws thousands of customers from the co-operatives. The members buy from the trading organisations which sell on the hire purchase system and from whom they can have the use of the goods immediately after the first payment (it is chiefly a case of clothing, furniture, sewing machines etc.). Very often they can only meet their obligations towards the credit-giving firms by cutting down their outlay for food and articles of necessity as far as possible, thus lowering their own standard of living.

The retail dealers also, who at the same time have to compete with the co-operatives and the wholesale trading concerns, grant credit to customers from the ranks of the workers. For this reason the co-operatives are also compelled to employ this method, contrary to their principles if they do not wish to risk losing their members. The so-called "compulsory granting of credit" to co-operative members has assumed enormous proportions in the last two years. Thus, the indebtedness of the members in the German co-operatives in Czechoslovakia amounts to almost 30% of the share capital, in Norway the debts of the members amount on an average, to 61.17 crowns per member in Sweden to 8.21 crowns and in Germany, where sale on credit used to be entirely unknown, this method is also being practised; the same is the case in other countries. The attempts to put an end to the granting of credit will not in any way improve the situation of the co-operatives but may, on the contrary, seriously endanger the existence of a number of societies. The co-operatives cannot allow themselves the luxury of losing to private traders some of their members who are quite unable to pay for the goods in cash. The question must be decided by the co-operatives without delay. The co-operatives of Western Europe can only organise the regular granting of credit to their members on the system which is in force in Soviet Russia i. e. when the goods are handed over to members of the co-operatives on organised credit with the guarantee of the trade unions and factory councils.

The increase of the exploitation of the workers and employees of the co-operatives is another factor in the methods of rationalisation of the co-operative organisations of Western Europe. Unfortunately we lack exact statistics which would enable us to compare the wages of the workers and employees in the co-operatives and in private concerns.

Attempts to prolong the hours of work, to reduce wages, to restrict the measures of social insurance (we refer to the insurance and superannuation schemes and the mutual aid societies etc.), all these are well-known phenomena in the co-operatives of Western Europe. It is no wonder that conflicts, strikes and lockouts are the order of the day in the co-operative organisations of Western Europe.

In some countries the attempt is being made to reduce the quota of expenses of the co-operatives by amalgamating the individual central unions into a united central union. Such

attempts have been carried through for instance in **Poland**, where the unions of co-operative stores are now united into one central union. In **Czecho-Slovakia** also efforts are being made to bring about an amalgamation of the Czech and German consumers co-operative societies.

Other endeavours are also being made to strengthen the co-operatives. The directors are, for instance, trying to perfect the technical methods of work, to establish direct relations with the co-operatives for the production and distribution of agricultural products, with the object of doing away with the middleman. Measures are being taken to protect goods from spoiling, the methods of packing and storing are being perfected, cooling apparatuses constructed, the possibilities of transport are being developed etc.

The co-operative bureaucracy in Western Europe hopes, by these methods to perfect the co-operatives in such a way that they will be able to enter into competition with the trading concerns. It is nevertheless a matter of course that however much the European co-operative movement be rationalised and its methods of trading perfected, there is absolutely no possibility of its keeping pace with the big trusts and commercial concerns in the war of competition. But the dream of "a transmutation of capitalist economy into a socialist one" by pure, non-political co-operative activity, has faded into nothing.

United Front of Trade Unions and Co-operatives.

By G. Bartels.

The strike of the British working class and the role the **Consumers' Cooperatives** played therein, should act as an incentive for the toilers of all countries to concern themselves seriously with the question of the tasks of the cooperative movement, in periods of violent clashes between labour and capital. The **British Consumers' Cooperatives**, which are composed almost exclusively of workers, brought their class comrades no help or support at the decisive moment, although the economic power of the British cooperators is greater than that of any other capitalist country.

There are not as yet adequate reports illustrating this question in all its details. But it has already become absolutely clear that:

1. **The Consumers' Cooperatives** did not organise any extensive campaign in aid of the striking comrades.

2. **The Trade Unions** failed to take sufficiently into consideration the tremendous significance of the cooperatives during the strike, and did not bring the necessary pressure to bear on the cooperative officials to make due arrangements for aid in case of strike.

3. **The workers and employees** of the cooperatives themselves and their trade unions also did not have the proper conception of the tasks of the Consumers' Cooperatives during the general strike, went on strike themselves and in this way crippled the activity of the cooperatives instead of increasing it to the highest pitch — as relief organs for the proletariat.

These three facts must serve as food for thought for the workers of all countries. The fight between proletariat and bourgeoisie will become more and more acute, and the question about the correct use of their cooperative organisations in the class struggle obstinately confronts the working class.

It is certainly no small matter with the present leadership of the cooperative movement to establish really close relations between the cooperatives and the trade unions. In many countries the relations between the trade unions and the upper bureaucracy of the Cooperatives are very tense. The perpetual conflicts between the trade unions and cooperatives in questions of night work in the bakeries, in wages questions, etc., have caused sharp conflicts which have often resulted in strikes.

These questions create the "hostile background" for the development of the relations in general between trade unions and cooperatives.

It is absolutely necessary in order to solve these problems that the masses of workers in the trade unions and

The masses of proletarians must recognise that, from the class standpoint, the chief significance of the proletarian organisation of co-operative stores is that it should strengthen the front of the labour movement, that it should act as a factor in the class fight and, in its character of a proletarian mass organisation, become a weapon of the united front against capitalism. One of the first conditions is the inclusion of the co-operatives in the systematic fight of the working class against the increase of prices and for an improvement of the standard of living of the workers and that they should join in the fight against trusts, cartels and commercial concerns, in the fight against the policy of taxes and customs of the capitalist governments, in short in the fight against the capitalist system.

The chief task of the co-operative movement in Western Europe under the dictatorship of capital is that of strengthening the united front of the proletariat. The fact that the class interest is emphasised, will activate the masses who to-day are largely indifferent, will give a stronger class significance to the co-operative movement and strengthen its economic forces, thus making it an essential component of the labour movement, with the result that the working masses will pay it more attention, collaborate with it with greater zeal and support it more enthusiastically.

cooperatives get a clear understanding of the social role of the cooperative movement and its significance in the proletarian class struggle. The trade union organisations so far have held themselves absolutely aloof in their activity from the cooperatives. It is no rare occurrence that trade unions themselves assume the functions of Consumers' Societies and independently provide the workers with articles of necessity. This activity of trade unions undoubtedly has an injurious effect on the cooperatives, while on the other hand they also impede the freedom of movement and fighting ability of the trade unions. The trade unions should rather advocate with all the weight of their social influence the encouragement of a proletarian cooperative policy. They must exhort their members to take part en masse in cooperative work. They must ensure that the cooperatives have a proletarian leadership, and must support the demands of the Cooperatives on the capitalist state. In this manner the trade unions will have in the Cooperatives a loyal ally in the class struggle, in the fight for the liberation of the toilers.

For the Cooperative movement itself, the question of alliance with the trade union organisations is absolutely a question of life and death. Experiences in practical life have long since exploded all the theories of independence and self-sufficiency of the Cooperatives. The concentration of capital, growing more intensive day by day, and the strangling of independent trade capital by all powerful finance capital renders an "independent development" of the Cooperative movement absolutely illusory and leads to a closer and closer interlacing of the cooperatives with capitalist economy. Historic development refutes all the old and new editions of the Bernstein theory of the decisive significance of the process of commodity distribution and of the possibility of the Cooperative organisations seizing control of this process.

In those very countries where the social reformists most strongly cultivated this theory of the conquest of capitalism by the seizure of the process of distribution — trade and banking — the process of the interlacing of the Cooperative movement with the capitalist economy is most apparent. In **Belgium**, for instance, the cooperatives have developed from the notorious "white rolls", with which the social reformists promised to raise the fortress of capitalism to the ground, into **stock companies**. Not only private bank capital, but also private trade capital is working here side by side with the cooperatives. The so-called enterprises run by the Cooperatives themselves,

as for instance the textile factories of the Belgian workers' Cooperatives, work with private capital.

The cooperatives are therefore transforming themselves under historic necessity into genuine capitalist organisations and in most cases they remain insignificant subsidiary organs of private trade and private industry in the economic life of the country.

Under these circumstances of present-day capitalist economy, how can the Cooperatives really fulfil their social role? There is only one answer to this question: by **class struggle for the improvement of the life of the toiling masses and for their final liberation; by the united fighting front with all labour organisations defending the interests of the toilers, though it be over the heads of the leaders of these organisations.**

This united front between Cooperatives and trade unions is of absolute necessity to both. The aggressive and defensive fights of the proletariat must be supported by the Consumers' Cooperatives. The Consumers' Cooperatives must increase the fighting power of the trade unions by providing fighting, striking, locked-out workers with food on credit, and — if necessary — even gratis. The solidarity of the Cooperatives with the fighting workers, the united front between the cooperatives and other labour organisations, will draw the members of the Cooperatives who are often still very backward, into the class struggle. The cooperatives, which receive an important part of the wages of the working class, can create reserve funds which can be used during periods of unemployment and of struggle. Active relief work for unemployed on the part of the Consumers' Cooperatives, the organisation of public dining places for unemployed, and the support of unemployment demands, etc., will save the permanent army of millions of unemployed, from physical and moral collapse. Only such a close union between the Cooperatives and trade unions will create the necessary respect for the Consumers' Societies among the toiling masses and transform them from small shops into real class organisations of the workers.

It is quite obvious today that the Cooperatives cannot conduct their own fight for existence, the fight for their further development within the framework of monopolist capitalism,

isolated and alone with their own efforts. With the insistence and active support of all the labour organisations, the Consumers' Cooperatives must fight under the bourgeois state government for advantages and privileges which under one form or another usually only benefit their class enemies. **Tax exemption of the Cooperatives, lowering of the freight rates for Co-operative transport, the grant of state and municipal credits,** would place the Cooperatives in a position where they could successfully compete with private capital.

But the common interests of Cooperatives and trade unions go beyond these immediate demands. For the destruction of the Cooperatives by the Fascist governments in **Italy, Bulgaria and Roumania,** confront the Cooperative movement with far-reaching political questions. Also in the so-called democratic countries the fight against Fascism is becoming one of the immediate tasks of the Cooperative movement, because it is for them the elementary question of existence. But the Cooperative movement must understand beyond this, that even the "peaceful" hegemony of the bourgeoisie robs them of the possibility to be effective in the real interests of the toilers. The realisation of the Cooperative tasks, even the fulfilment of the most dauntless Utopias of the Cooperative romanticists, can be brought about only under a **Workers and Peasants' Government.**

This proof was given by Soviet Russia. What was achieved in no country by Cooperative self-aid on the basis of political neutrality, is being realised on the basis of political conquest of power by the proletariat. In the U.S.S.R. the widest perspectives exist for the development of the Cooperatives. The social revolution has created the firm basis for the work of the Cooperatives in the development of Socialist economy. The close union with the Communist Party, the trade unions and the Soviet organs, rooted in the broad masses of workers and peasants, gives the Cooperative movement a tremendous force and power in the whole economic life.

Historic development links together most closely the paths of the trade unions and of the cooperatives. A **close fighting alliance between the Cooperatives and trade unions** offers the only possibility for transforming the Cooperatives into an important instrument in the proletarian fight for liberation.

The English Co-operative Societies and the General Strike.

By Harrison (London).

As is well known, 95% of the English Co-operative Societies are workers Co-operative Societies, representing an organisation of 4½ million working class consumers. Of course the question of uniting of forces of the workers Co-operative Societies and Trade Unions during great class struggles is of tremendous interest, both from the point of view of the co-operative movement and with regard to the general tasks of labour policy.

Although the members of Trade Unions and Co-operative Societies are mostly identical, the leaders of the Co-operative Societies have always endeavoured to separate themselves from the Trade Unions and their struggles. On the other hand the Trade Unions have given very little attention to co-operative questions, although lately, not only the revolutionary workers, but also the members of the General Council have more realized the necessity of co-operation and of united action on the part of Trade Unions and Co-operative Societies, as well as a profound change in the policy of Co-operative Society leaders.

There exists already a mixed commission of Trade Unions and Co-operative Society representatives for the discussion and settlement of conflicts arising between the Co-operative Societies on one side and their employees and workers on the other. Recently attempts have been made towards the organising of a common workers University, but on the whole the English Co-operative Societies have refused any closer connection with the Trade Unions and have considered any such attempt as an attack upon the independence of the Co-operative movement.

The question of united actions became especially acute before the coal crisis in July 1925 and during the preparations

for the May strike. The miners have attempted several times to get into connection with the Co-operative Wholesale Societies in regard to supplying food to the coal districts and the granting of loans to workers in the case of lock-outs or strikes.

The Communist Party, the so-called **Minority Movement** and the miners' leaders (in the person of Cook) have done their utmost to come to an understanding in time with the Co-operative Societies with regard to organisatory measures for the granting of credits and supplying food, in view of the inevitable struggle. Shortly before the outbreak of the General Strike the **General Council of the Trade Union Congress** also attempted to come to an agreement with the Co-operative Societies or rather with the Scotch and English Co-operative Wholesale Societies, but their efforts were of no avail. The result of this lack of unity of action and coordination between Trade Unions and Co-operative Societies was, that during the **General Strike** the situation of the English working class was very precarious with regard to food supply and that the Co-operative Societies had to suffer a considerable financial and moral loss.

The situation developed as follows: The Co-operative Societies naturally refused to have recourse to the services of strike-breakers and voluntary workers for the transport and the unloading of food stuffs. No agreement had, however, been made with the General Council and the Transport workers Trade Union regarding the transport and the unloading of food stuffs and other goods belonging to the Co-operative Societies. With regard to the strike as such, the Co-operative Societies

(through their economic and organisatory centres) did not adopt any plain standpoint, except for vague utterances about the injustice done to the miners, etc. The Co-operative Societies did not place themselves on the side of the fighting class and have received blows from the strikers as well as from the bourgeoisie. Not without reason did the Government seek to take advantage of the situation by declaring in an issue of its official paper, the "British Gazette" (which appeared during the strike) that the General Strike was causing great damage not only to the population but also to the Co-operative Societies, and that the Co-operative Wholesale Societies restricted their commercial transactions during the strike. It must be emphasized that this applies in the first instance to all the economic Co-operative Centres of Great Britain (English and Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Societies), and to their ideological and organizational Centre — the British Co-operative Union.

As far as the local Co-operative Societies are concerned, many of them actively assisted in the strike (exact statistics are not available at present) and some of them have joined the committees of action etc. The local organisations were, however, of course not in a position to organise the food supply of the strikers on a large scale because their centres deserted them.

The working class of England and the International labour movement will learn numerous and manifold lessons from the General Strike. One of the most important will be the understanding of the enormous damage which arises for the working class from the fact that the workers Co-operative Societies, — one of the most powerful workers' organisations — is in the hands of strangers who are often hostile to the workers. (Among the directors of the English Co-operative Wholesale Society there are numerous Liberals and Conservatives). It is also a serious lesson for those members of the Co-operative Societies who are sincerely convinced that the holding aloof

from class struggles is the best policy for the Co-operative Societies. The result of this reserved attitude towards the class struggle led, as mentioned before, to considerable financial and moral damage to the English Co-operative Societies.

Of still greater importance is the fact that the lack of close contact between the Co-operative Societies and the Trade Union movement deprived the working class of Great Britain of the possibility of organising the food supply for the working population by their own efforts and their own means at a time of sharp class conflicts. Under such circumstances the organising of the food supply for the population is placed in the hands of the Government and forms one of the most powerful weapons in its fight against the strikers.

This question arose not unexpectedly during the strike. The Communist Party had already frequently placed it before the working class co-operators. Appropriate resolutions had been passed several times at the conferences of the Minority Movement and the conferences of the Trades Councils, but all these attempts at raising this question to its full extent were considered only as a malicious, communist propaganda and as an interference in "purely co-operative matters".

The class struggle teaches cruel lessons and creates more clearness than could be done by any agitation. This time the co-operators and trades-unionists of Great Britain are faced with the question of the necessity of a General revision of the theory and practice of their co-operative movement, in the direction of close contact of the English Co-operative Societies with all forms of the English labour movement. It is essential now to place the leadership of the English Co-operative movement in the hands of the true representatives of the proletariat, and to win the broad masses of the proletariat, not only formally but actually for the administration and leadership of the co-operative movement.

The Development of the Co-operative Movement in Soviet Russia.

By W. Formitzky (Moscow).

The co-operative movement in the Soviet Union fulfils a task of tremendous importance as a prominent factor in the building up of Socialist economy. In the U. S. S. R. co-operation is the true way to Socialism, for it is this which, in the process of the circulation of goods, strengthens the economic relations between the working class, the producers of manufactured articles, and the peasantry, the producers of agricultural products. The progress of Socialistic economy in the Soviet Union is inseparably bound up with the industrialisation of the country and the absorption of the populace into the co-operative movement.

The co-operative societies of Soviet Russia are working hard towards the fulfilment of this latter task and each year ever-increasing success can be recorded. About 35% of the peasant undertakings and, in the towns, over 75% of the members of the trades unions are organised in the consumers' co-operative societies. These figures will give some idea of the extent of the army of volunteers fighting for the cause of the co-operative movement. It may be said without exaggeration that the whole of the population is intimately connected with the co-operative movement, for co-operative purchase and sale have proved to be the most advantageous and convenient method.

The economic progress in the country is accompanied by a rapid and energetic development of the connection between the peasantry and the co-operative movement. About 6 million peasant families are already organised in village co-operative societies, while the members of the co-operative societies recruited from the ranks of the industrial workers total about 5 million.

The Co-operative societies of Soviet Russia are intimately connected with the trades union organisations and the Communist Party, as well as with the different social organisations of the rural population (self-help committees, etc.). This connection is absolutely voluntary; indeed, it is the natural and

immediate result of the uniformity and common nature of the socialist tasks with which the Communist Party, the trades union organisations and the working peasantry, on the one hand, and the co-operative organisations, on the other hand, are faced. The Party and the trades unions do their very best to further the work of co-operative development by carrying on intensive co-operative propaganda, by supporting the societies in their efforts to recruit new members, by collaborating in the endeavours to improve co-operative methods and by fostering the co-operative initiative in the masses of their members. It is hardly conceivable that a Party or trade-union congress could take place in the Soviet-Union without it dealing in one form or other with co-operative questions. The co-operative questions form part of the every day work of the Party and trade-union organisations of all grades. The Soviets and the trade-unions deposit their ready money in the co-operative banks in order to strengthen the financial basis of the co-operative societies. The Party and trade-union press also devotes considerably attention to co-operative development, strives to correct the shortcomings of co-operative work, registers its successes etc.

In their economic activity the co-operative societies are closely associated with the Socialistic State industries and the State bodies exercising economic control. The connection with the State industries takes the form of general contracts for the wholesale purchase of industrial articles for the whole system of the Soviet co-operative societies. For the purpose of clearing up misunderstandings which might arise in the process of the execution of these general agreements, there are special parity commissions formed by representatives of the co-operative movement and of the State industrial concerns. In the same way representatives of the co-operative societies take an active part in the State departments for the control of trade and the co-ordination of economic projects. In this manner is achieved the extremely important linking up and co-ordination of co-operative work with the entire economic life of the Soviet Union.

The relative role of the co-operative societies in trade turnover becomes more important year by year. From 10% in the year 1922/23 it advanced to 20% in the year 1924/25 and shows still further increase for the year 1925/26. If the commercial turnover in articles of consumption alone be taken into consideration, the rise in the activities of the co-operative societies must be estimated at over 50% even for the year 1924 to 1925.

The total turnover of the co-operative societies in the Soviet Union will reach a level of over 5 milliard roubles. About 80% of the workers' expenditure flows into the coffers of the co-operative societies. The co-operative societies are recognised by the highest departments of State as the principal channel for the distribution of goods and they carry out satisfactorily the responsible tasks entrusted to them.

The co-operative societies are constantly improving their working methods and decreasing their overhead costs. At the moment the working expenses of the co-operative societies average from 7% to 8% of the turnover. By reducing working expenses it is also possible to diminish the price factor and approximate the prices in the retail shops more and more to those of the factories and trusts. It is well known that even now the co-operative shops sell their goods 10% to 12% cheaper than shops in private hands.

In moments of economic complication and difficulty experienced in Soviet economics the co-operative societies remain loyally at their posts and work with all their might in order to surmount the obstacles. Such was the case in the year 1923 during the sales crisis, when the co-operative societies took the

lead in price reduction and thereby gave impetus to the revival of trade. The same thing took place during the introduction of the stabilised currency, when the co-operative societies contributed largely to the successful execution of the currency reform by modifying their price level. The societies are again rendering valuable service through energetic improvement of their work and reduction of their overhead costs in counteracting and preventing the unhealthy market tendencies which occasionally develop as a consequence of the prevailing shortage of goods in the country.

The Soviet co-operative societies naturally have their shortcomings and these are chiefly connected with the technical side of trade. These weaknesses are being gradually overcome, for both the societies themselves and the general public of the Soviet Union are doing their utmost to eliminate them. This struggle shows considerable success, particularly because the State and the societies use every means at their disposal to foster and develop the general appreciation of co-operative methods and to further specialisation in co-operative technic. The ordinary member of the co-operative society shows constant cultural progress, the general and special training of the co-operative society functionaries is improving and becoming more thorough, and all these facts tend towards the consolidation of the co-operative movement, the strengthening of its relations to the masses, as well as towards the enhancement of the already important rôle being played by the co-operative societies in the Socialistic construction of the first workers and peasants' Republic.

Appeal of the Fourth International Conference of Women Communists for International Co-operative Day.

To All Working Women!

On July 3, the International Propaganda Day of the Co-operatives, come forward in great masses! Take part in the arrangements and demonstrations to be held on this day! Do your part so that these arrangements become a demonstration of the exploited working masses against the exploiting class!

Upon you, working women, there presses with double weight the yoke of capitalist exploitation. Therefore, you must fight in the ranks along with the working men against your exploiters and suppressors. An important point of support in this struggle is provided in your organisation in the Co-operatives.

By means of organised, mutual help in the Co-operatives you must defend yourselves against the efforts of big capital, which, by its profiteering concerns, by means of customs duties and pressure of taxation, is seeking to reduce, still further your scanty daily bread. But the Co-operatives can do still more. By organising the food supply they can render the working masses practical support in all their fights against the capitalist class. They must become the Commissariat Department of the fighting working masses.

If to-day the Co-operatives in the capitalist countries are not yet what they can and must be, the fault lies with the reformist leaders who seek to avoid the fight with your class enemies.

Think of the example of the recent severe fight of the British workers! The Co-operatives of the revolutionary Workers and Peasants of the Soviet Union were among the first to come forward and actively support the struggling Workers by means of material help. On the other hand, the International Co-operative Alliance, dominated by the reformists, refused to render any support.

Working Women and Housewives!

The reactionary attitude of the Co-operative bureaucracy must not be a reason for your remaining aloof from the Co-operatives. It rests with the working masses themselves to convert the Co-operatives into an effective weapon for the pro-

letarian class struggle. The working women must help especially in this respect. Your slogan must be:

Every working woman, every housewife of the toiling people, into the Co-operatives!

Make use of every opportunity in order to work in and influence the Co-operatives. There are many important tasks which the Co-operatives can only fulfil when the women actively work in them. Oppose in the Co-operatives the reactionary policy of the reformist leaders! Strive in order that the Co-operatives shall take their place in the class front of the fighting proletariat, that they exert the whole force of their mass organisations for the following tasks:

Fight against high prices, against robbery of the masses by the big capitalist trusts, by taxes and duties on articles of necessity! Fight against the capitalist governments and against the entire capitalist system!

Solidarity with the workers in all their fights against exploitation and suppression! Granting of credits to strikers and unemployed or supplying them with provisions free of charge, setting up of feeding centres and institutions for the care of children!

Firm fighting alliance with the Trade Unions and all class organisations of the fighting proletariat!

Alliance with the workers and peasants of the revolutionary Soviet Union! Close co-operation with the Co-operatives of the Soviet Union!

Do not be intimidated by the attempts of the Co-operative bureaucracy to stifle your revolutionary will. Fight unweariedly for your demands and make them your slogans, to which you must give loud expression on International Propaganda Day!

Long live the International Solidarity of all toilers!
Down with the murderous capitalist system and all its agents!

Long live the fight and the victory of the proletarians of all Countries!

Moscow, June 10, 1926.

The IV. International Conference of
Women Communists.