
Consumer Co-operation and Economic Crisis: The 1936 Roosevelt Inquiry on Co-operative Enterprise and the Emergence of the Nordic 'Middle Way'

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Abstract

In the wake of the Great Depression, Sweden and the other Nordic countries were widely perceived as a model region, a successful example of the 'middle way' between socialism and capitalism. Central to this idea were the Nordic co-operative movements, which became the focus of President Roosevelt's Inquiry on Co-operative Enterprise in Europe, conducted in 1936–7. Drawing mainly on the records of the Inquiry, the article explores the construction of the 'middle way' idea and examines the role of the Nordic co-operators in shaping international perceptions of the region, while also shedding new light on differences within the international co-operative movement during the same period.

Speaking at a regular White House press conference in June 1936, President Franklin D. Roosevelt announced his decision to commission an Inquiry on Co-operative Enterprise in Europe. 'I became a good deal interested in the cooperative movement in countries abroad, especially Sweden', the President told his audience.

A very interesting book came out a couple of months ago – *The Middle Way*. I was tremendously interested in what they had done in Scandinavia along those lines. In Sweden, for example, you

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have a royal family and a Socialist Government and a capitalistic system, all working happily side by side . . . They have these cooperative movements existing happily and successfully alongside private industry and distribution of various kinds, both of them making money. I thought it was at least worthy of study from our point of view.¹

The book referred to by Roosevelt was Marquis Childs's *Sweden – The Middle Way* (1936), which became a bestseller and was later named as one of the ten best non-fiction books of the year.² Central to Childs's 'story of a constructive compromise between socialism and capitalism' was the Swedish consumer co-operative movement and its central organisation Kooperativa Förbundet (KF), which Childs suggested had been particularly successful in tackling the problem of monopoly.³ In the context of the Great Depression, consumer co-operation seemed to offer a pragmatic solution to economic crisis, a moderate way of controlling capitalism rather than 'another of those fearsome European "isms"'.⁴

The focus of this article is President Roosevelt's Inquiry on co-operation, which is used first to shed light on the state of the European consumer co-operative movements during the 1930s, and second to examine the emergence of a Nordic or Scandinavian 'middle way'.⁵ Seeking new economic and political ideas in the wake of the Great Depression, many American thinkers were attracted to foreign models and in particular to the small countries of northern Europe. The Nordic region's relatively swift recovery from the crisis, and the apparent resilience of its democracies, had convinced observers on both sides of the Atlantic that the Nordic

¹ The 303rd Press Conference, 23 June 1936, reprinted in *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, Vol. 5 (New York: Random House, 1938), 227. See also Piebe Teeboom, 'Searching for the Middle Way: Consumer Cooperation and the Cooperative Movement in New Deal America', PhD thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2009, Ch. 4, 1–2; Carl Marklund, 'Bridging Politics and Science: The Concept of Social Engineering in Sweden and the USA, circa 1890–1950', unpublished PhD thesis, European University Institute, 2008, 281.

² Marquis Childs, *Sweden – The Middle Way* (New York: Penguin Books, 1948; first published 1936); also E. R. Bowen, 'Consumers' Cooperative Educational Methods', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 191 (May 1937), 76–83, 78. On the impact of Childs's book see Teeboom, 'Searching for the Middle Way', Ch. 3, 52–4.

³ As Lars Trägårdh has pointed out, Childs devoted a good third of *Sweden – The Middle Way* to the co-operative movement: Lars Trägårdh, 'Introduction', in Lars Trägårdh, ed., *State and Civil Society in Northern Europe: The Swedish Model Reconsidered* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007), 1–8, 3.

⁴ Report of the Inquiry on Cooperative Enterprise in Europe (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1937), 1; Ellis W. Hawley, *The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly: A Study in Economic Ambivalence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 199; see also Carl Marklund, 'The Social Laboratory, the Middle Way and the Swedish Model: Three frames for the image of Sweden', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 34, 3 (2009), 264–85, 269–71.

⁵ To avoid confusion I have generally used the term 'Nordic' in preference to 'Scandinavia' to refer to the four countries Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden (the Inquiry did not visit Iceland). In contemporary usage, however, the terms 'Nordic' and 'Scandinavian' were often interchangeable. The name of the organisation Nordisk Andelsförbund, founded in 1918, usually appears in the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) English-language records as 'Scandinavian Co-operative Wholesale Society', for example.

countries offered a glimmer of hope in an otherwise gloomy world, and generated a wave of books and articles extolling their virtues.⁶

The Inquiry itself may be seen as the culmination of what Piebe Teeboom has described as a 'co-operative moment' in America in the mid-1930s. No fewer than 235 articles on co-operation appeared in the American press in 1936 and at least ten books on the subject were published.⁷ Of course, this interest was not entirely new. There had been sporadic attempts to organise consumer co-operatives from the mid-nineteenth century, and co-operation flourished at the local level among certain groups of first-generation immigrants, in particular the Finns settled in the Great Lakes region and the Pacific North-West.⁸ The first permanent national organisation, the Co-operative League of America (CLUSA), had been founded in 1916, though this was dwarfed in comparison to the established societies of Europe.⁹ However, support for consumers' co-operation gained new impetus during the Great Depression as a means to tackle the perceived imbalance between supply and demand that had developed during the boom years of the 1920s. Consumer demand had failed to keep pace with the productivity gains in manufacturing, and, as Anthony J. Badger has put it, 'structural poverty, irregular employment and low wages meant that America was a consumer society without the capacity to consume'.¹⁰ According to its supporters, consumer co-operation would help to redress this imbalance, and thus offered, in Kathleen Donohue's words, 'a better means of attaining a classless, democratic and individualistic political order'.¹¹

We now know that American interest in consumer co-operation proved to be rather short-lived, and had started to wane even before the publication of the *Report on Co-operative Enterprise in Europe* in the spring of 1937. The report failed to generate the interest its authors had hoped for, either from the public or from the administration that had commissioned it, and its optimistic predictions that co-operative enterprise was on the verge of a major expansion in the USA were never realised.¹² For this reason, perhaps not surprisingly, the Inquiry on Co-operative Enterprise in Europe

⁶ Carl Marklund, 'The Social Laboratory, the Middle Way and the Swedish Model: Three Frames for the Image of Sweden', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 34, 3 (2009), 264–85; Kazimierz Musiał, *Roots of the Scandinavian Model: Images of Progress in the Era of Modernisation* (Nomos: Baden-Baden, 2002).

⁷ Teeboom, 'Searching for the Middle Way', Ch. 3, 1–3.

⁸ Johnston Birchall, *The International Co-operative Movement* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 193–5; Florence E. Parker, 'Consumers' Coöperation in the United States', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 191 (1937), 91–102, 91; Kathleen Donohue, 'From Cooperative Commonwealth to Cooperative Democracy: The American Cooperative Ideal 1880–1940', in Ellen Furlough and Carl Strikwerda, eds, *Consumers Against Capitalism? Consumer Cooperation in Europe, North America, and Japan, 1840–1990* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 115–34, 120; Clarke A. Chambers, 'The Cooperative League of the United States of America, 1916–1961: A Study of Social Theory and Social Action', *Agricultural History*, 36, 2 (1962), 59–81, 60.

⁹ Teeboom, 'Searching for the Middle Way', Ch. 1, 37–41; Parker, 'Consumers' Coöperation', 98.

¹⁰ Anthony J. Badger, *The New Deal: The Depression Years 1933–1940* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), 23, 29–30.

¹¹ Donohue, 'From Cooperative Commonwealth', 116. See also Alan Lawson, *A Commonwealth of Hope: The New Deal Response to Crisis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

¹² Teeboom, 'Searching for the Middle Way', Ch. 4, 55–6, 66, 71, 106–7; Report of the Inquiry on Cooperative Enterprise, 81.

seems to be largely forgotten in histories of the New Deal era.¹³ However, although American consumer politics took a different form after the Second World War, many of the concerns of consumer co-operation – the battle against monopoly, consumer rights and education – remained present. Indeed, a recent revisionist account of New Deal history has drawn attention to the nature of the New Deal consensus as ‘the long exception in American history’ that broke down with the resurgence of individualism in the Reagan era and after.¹⁴ As Daniel Scroop has suggested, the emphasis on the New Deal should not be allowed to obscure the importance of alternative forms of consumer politics, including a strong tradition of ‘populist anti-monopolism’ expressed through the anti-chain store campaigns of the 1920s and early 1930s.¹⁵ Calls for a more pluralist approach to reformist ideas also point to the importance of re-examining the interest in co-operation in the American context, as Piebe Teeboom has argued.

The 1936 Inquiry on Co-operative Enterprise is interesting to European historians for two reasons. First, the report itself, and the data that were collected for it, offer a comprehensive snapshot of the state of the co-operative movement in a number of European countries during the mid-1930s. Members of the Commission were scrupulous about seeking a broad cross-section of opinion in the countries that they visited, interviewing academics, private businessmen and politicians as well as co-operators. They also collected a vast amount of quantitative data from various sources, including the co-operative movement itself and national statistical offices. Second, examination of the Inquiry also sheds some light on the prominence of Sweden and the other Nordic countries in international debates during the inter-war period, and the emergence of the Swedish or Nordic ‘middle way’ between capitalism and communism.

There are of course some limitations to using the Inquiry records as a source. The eventual impact of the Inquiry was limited by its own ambitions to present ‘a purely objective, non-partisan, factual report’, in the words of its chairman Jacob Baker. This meant that the published report stopped short of making explicit policy recommendations, and although the Inquiry team was, for the most part, enthusiastic about the co-operative societies they had visited, they were cautious about expressing an opinion on the economic impact of co-operation, mindful of the many hyperbolic accounts which had appeared in the contemporary press.¹⁶ Co-operative trade statistics were expressed in American dollars in an attempt to make them comparable, but with the strong caveat that the exchange rate fluctuations of the period made it extremely difficult to express these with any confidence.¹⁷ Perhaps for that reason there was no

¹³ Teeboom, ‘Searching for the Middle Way’, Ch. 4, 3.

¹⁴ Jefferson Cowie and Nick Salvatore, ‘The Long Exception: Rethinking the Place of the New Deal in American History’, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 74 (2008), 3–32.

¹⁵ Daniel Scroop, ‘The Anti-Chain Store Movement and the Politics of Consumption’, *American Quarterly*, 60, 4 (2008), 925–49.

¹⁶ Jacob Baker to Charles Stuart, 23 Nov. 1936: Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library: President’s Committee on an Inquiry on Cooperative Enterprise in Europe Records, 1936–1937 (hereafter Inquiry Records): Box 2, appointments and correspondence.

¹⁷ Report of the Inquiry on Cooperative Enterprise, 271.

attempt to compile a comparative overview of the development of co-operative trade in the different countries visited. Second, the Inquiry team based their findings largely on their interviews with a small group of national co-operative leaders. Although they made some efforts to travel outside the urban centres, they had little contact with the members who accounted for most of co-operative trade, with one exception when they attended a member meeting in Glasgow. This bias towards co-operative institutions and the small group of activists who ran them is a problem which affects much historical research on the co-operative movement.¹⁸

Despite these limitations, the records of the Inquiry, especially the summaries of the interviews that were undertaken by its members, offer a fairly comprehensive snapshot of the ideological debates, internal organisation and business strategies of the consumer co-operative movement in a number of European countries. Moreover, the Inquiry sources also shed light on contemporary perceptions of the co-operative movement more broadly, offering a different perspective on a movement that has often been studied through the lens of its own organisations. For the purposes of this article, the Inquiry sources are supplemented with other contemporary published accounts of Nordic co-operation, and also with primary and secondary sources from the co-operative organisations themselves.

In the next section, the European and Nordic co-operative movements are examined in more detail, noting the importance of co-operation in the self-identity of the Nordic countries and the differences between co-operation here and elsewhere in Europe. There is also some discussion of the growing interest in the Nordic 'middle way' in the 1930s, and the influence of the co-operative movement in shaping this image. The article then turns to the Inquiry itself, examining the encounter between the Americans and the Nordic participants in particular. Finally, by way of a comparison, there is a brief discussion of some of the findings of the Inquiry elsewhere in Europe, especially in Britain.

Co-operation and the Nordic 'middle way'

The importance of the co-operative movement in the Nordic countries is widely acknowledged, above all in Denmark, where it is seen as being of crucial importance to the modernisation of the agricultural economy in the late nineteenth century, and remained a central plank of Danish national identity until the 1970s.¹⁹ In the scholarly literature, the Nordic co-operative movements are generally understood as part of

¹⁸ See Martin Purvis, 'Retailing and Economic Uncertainty in Interwar Britain: Co-operative (Mis)Fortunes in North-West England', in Elizabeth Baigent and Robert J. Mayhew, eds, *English Geographies 1600–1950: Historical Essays on English Customs, Cultures and Communities in Honour of Jack Langton* (Oxford: St John's College Research Centre, 2009), 127–43, 129.

¹⁹ Martin Jes Iversen and Steen Andersen, 'Co-operative Liberalism: Denmark from 1857 to 2007', 265–334, 279–80, and Mads Mordhorst, 'Arla: From a decentralised co-operative to an MNE', 335–64, 340, both in Susanna Fellman et al., eds, *Creating Nordic Capitalism: The Business History of a Competitive Periphery* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Niels Finn Christiansen, 'Denmark's Road to Modernity and Welfare: The Co-operative way', in Mary Hilson, Pirjo Markkola and Ann-Catrin Östman, eds, *Co-operatives and the Social Question: The Co-operative Movement in Northern and Eastern Europe c. 1880–1950* (Cardiff: Welsh Academic Press, forthcoming 2012), 25–40, 26.

the strong nineteenth-century popular movements which shaped the development of Nordic democracy, though they have been less extensively researched than some of the other organisations of civil society such as the labour movement.²⁰ Relatively few studies have considered Nordic co-operative history in an explicitly transnational perspective.²¹ The first permanent co-operative societies in the Nordic countries appeared from the 1860s, influenced in some cases by the famous Rochdale model of consumer co-operation from the UK, but also by the German Schulze-Delitzsch and Raiffeisen credit co-operatives, and in the case of Finland by the agricultural producer co-operatives of Ireland.²² They grew rapidly, and by the time the Roosevelt Inquiry visited the region in the mid-1930s they were major businesses with an enviable proportion of market share. The Roosevelt Inquiry reported that in Finland, for example, consumer co-operatives accounted for between 25% and 30% of total national retail trade, and they had over half a million members out of a population of nearly 3.6 million in 1935.²³ The membership of the consumer co-operative movements in the countries visited by the Inquiry is presented in Table 1.

Two features of the Nordic co-operative movements seemed to stand out in an international comparative context. First, the importance of consumer co-operation as a rural movement, which helped generate interest in its ability to span the rural/urban divide.²⁴ The main task of the American Inquiry was to investigate consumer co-operation, but two of its members – Robin Hood and Clifford Gregory – were agriculturalists and interested in co-operation as a means to overcome the conflict of interest between consumers and producers, town and countryside.²⁵ This potential had also been acknowledged by the League of Nations, and in the late 1920s the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) had established its own committee to explore the question of inter-co-operative relations.²⁶ Denmark in particular was

²⁰ Henrik Stenius, 'Nordic Associational Life in a European and an Inter-Nordic Perspective', in Risto Alapuro and Henrik Stenius, eds, *Nordic Associations in a European Perspective* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, 2010), 29–86; Kurt Klaudi Klausen and Per Selle, 'Frivillig organisering i Norden', in Kurt Klaudi Klausen and Per Selle, eds, *Frivillig organisering in Norden* (Copenhagen: TANO, 1995), 13–31, 20.

²¹ See, however, Mary Hilson, 'A Consumers' International? The International Cooperative Alliance and Cooperative Internationalism, 1918–1939: A Nordic Perspective', *International Review of Social History*, 56 (2011), 203–33; Hilson, Markkola and Östman, *Co-operatives and the Social Question*; for a comparative study see Katarina Friberg, *The Workings of Co-operation: A Comparative Study of Consumer Co-operative Organisation in Britain and Sweden 1860 to 1970* (Växjö: Växjö University Press, 2005).

²² Mary Hilson, 'Transnational Networks in the Development of the Co-operative Movement in the Early Twentieth Century: Finland in the Nordic context', in Hilson, Markkola and Östman, *Co-operatives and the Social Question*, 87–101.

²³ Report of the Inquiry on Cooperative Enterprise, 7; Finnish statistical yearbook: Suomen tilastollinen vuosikirja / Statistisk årsbok för Finland / Annuaire statistique de Finlande, 36 (new series, 1938), 142–3, also available at http://www.doria.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/69245/stv_1938.pdf?sequence=1, last accessed 10 March 2013.

²⁴ Christiansen, 'Denmark's Road to Modernity and Welfare', 29.

²⁵ For their biographies see Teeboom, 'Searching for the Middle Way', Ch. 4, 25–7.

²⁶ Hilson, 'A Consumers' International?', 223; Olof Ruin, *Kooperativa Förbundet 1899–1929: En organisationsstudie* (Lund: Rabén and Sjögren, 1960), 215.

Table 1. Membership of consumer co-operative societies in the European countries visited by the Inquiry, 1934 and 1935

	Czechoslovakia	Denmark	Finland	France	Great Britain ¹	Norway	Sweden	Switzerland
	1934	1935	1935	1934	1935	1935	1935	1934
Membership	817,731	354,000	517,763	2,540,290	7,483,976	138,557	568,161	402,535
No. of societies	903	1939	532	2908	1188	497	719	545
No. of stores	4500			9239		795	4144	2542
Population	14.7m	3.7m	3.8m	41.8m	46.1m	2.8m	6.3m ²	4.1m
Membership as percentage of population	5.6	9.6	13.8 ³	6.1	16.2	4.9	9.1	9.9

Source: Report of the Inquiry on Cooperative Enterprise in Europe (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1937).

¹ Includes the Irish Free State.

² Swedish population data are taken from Statistics Sweden (www.scb.se), last accessed 10 March 2013.

³ This figure is the combined membership of societies affiliated to SOK and OTK. The Finnish consumers' movement had split in 1916 into two factions: the so-called 'neutral' Suomen Osuuskappojen Keskuskunta (SOK), representing mostly the smaller co-operative societies in the rural districts, and the 'progressive' Suomen Osuustukkukauppa (OTK), representing mostly the larger societies serving the urban working classes. Each wholesale had an associated central Co-operative Union for propaganda purposes. The distinction was very complex socially and politically; neither organisation was formally affiliated to a political party. See Esko Aaltonen, *Finlands konsumenter i samarbete*, trans. Stig Malmström (Helsingfors: KK, 1954).

cited as the example of a country where co-operative organisations had helped to promote a more integrated, consensual relationship between rural producers and urban consumers,²⁷ and the perception was doubtless strengthened by the negotiation of 'red-green' coalitions between the social democratic and the agrarian parties in all five Nordic countries during the period 1933–7.

The second feature was the prominent position of the Nordic co-operative organisations within the ICA as the staunch defenders of the co-operative principle of political neutrality. The Americans arrived at a time of considerable difficulty for the ICA and its member organisations, as the cherished political neutrality of the co-operative movement was challenged from both left and right, and the ICA struggled to frame its response to the economic crisis.²⁸ By the 1930s, there was a marked division between the 'social democratic' bloc of Britain, Belgium and central Europe, which saw consumer co-operation as an adjunct to the social democratic labour movement, and the 'neutral' co-operatives of the Nordic region.²⁹ The reputation of the Nordic co-operative organisations as the principled defenders of neutrality helped to strengthen the notion of co-operation as a non-dogmatic, non-ideological 'middle way'; a practical example of a successful compromise between the extremes of the unregulated free market on the one hand, and centralised control and planning on the other.³⁰

American interest in the Nordic countries in general, and Nordic co-operation in particular, was not new, but appeared within an established context of a wider international fascination with the north as a model region, worthy of admiration and emulation.³¹ Nor was it confined to America; as Katalin Miklóssy has shown, interest in a Finnish co-operative 'middle way' was also found in 1930s Hungary, stimulated by contemporary notions of ethnic kinship.³² The small size of the Nordic countries meant, as Carl Marklund has commented, that they were ideal examples of the 'social laboratory' sought by inter-war social scientists.³³ Successes in other fields, in modern architecture and design, for example, also increased the visibility of the region.³⁴ Childs's portrayal of the Swedish 'middle way', according to Marklund, chimed with

²⁷ Frederic C. Howe, *Denmark: A Cooperative Commonwealth* (New York, 1921), pp. vi–vii; see also O. B. Grimley, *The New Norway: A People with the Spirit of Co-operation* (Oslo, 1939), 101.

²⁸ W. P. Watkins, *The International Co-operative Alliance* (London: ICA, 1970); Rita Rhodes, *The International Co-operative Alliance during War and Peace 1910–1950* (Geneva: ICA, 1995); Hilson, 'A Consumers' International?', 210.

²⁹ Hilson, 'A Consumers' International?', 208.

³⁰ ICA: General Secretary's report to ICA Central Committee, 24–5 September 1936: Helsinki: Työväen arkisto KOL 334.5 (hereafter TA), Box 11.

³¹ See for example, Peter Stadius, *Resan till norr: Spanska Nordenbilder kring sekelskiftet 1900* (Helsingfors, 2005).

³² Katalin Miklóssy, 'The Nordic Ideal of a Central-European Third Way: The Finnish Model of Hungarian Modernisation in the 1930s', in Hilson, Markkola and Östman, *Co-operatives and the Social Question*, 137–52.

³³ Marklund, 'The Social Laboratory', 267.

³⁴ Carl Marklund and Peter Stadius, 'Acceptance and Conformity: Merging Modernity with Nationalism in the Stockholm Exhibition of 1930', *Culture Unbound*, 2 (2010), 609–34; Sofia Eriksson, 'A Rarity Show of Modernity: Sweden in the 1920s', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 37, 1 (2010), 74–92.

a shift in New Deal thinking away from economic planning and the big state, for which the models might have been the politically problematic cases of the Soviet Union, Italy and Germany, towards a more moderate and pragmatic approach.³⁵

The transfer of ideas across national boundaries is not a linear or a one-sided process.³⁶ Ideas developed in one national context are rarely reconstructed accurately in another; rather, foreign examples are often used rhetorically to support established positions.³⁷ Kazimierz Musiał has commented on how Childs's enthusiastic account of Swedish co-operation was 'recycled and efficiently applied as a reliable and ultimately objective source of information' as a means to answer the contemporary critics of the New Deal, though he was also criticised for over-estimating the importance of co-operation in the Swedish economy and ignoring the significance of the commercial export sector.³⁸ As Sofia Eriksson has shown, during the inter-war period Sweden became an established destination for 'political pilgrims' attracted by the country's modernity, and this was only increased by the success of Childs's book: according to the *Review of International Co-operation*, its publication had 'resulted in a crowd of American visitors to Sweden to study co-operative enterprise on the spot'.³⁹ This interest was not just confined to Sweden. In 1921 another American, Frederic C. Howe, had lauded Denmark as 'quite the most valuable political exhibit in the modern world' on account of its agricultural co-operative movement, and co-operatives in Finland and Norway also attracted some foreign attention.⁴⁰

The American image of Scandinavia was not constructed unilaterally but was formed at the intersection of what Musiał calls auto- and xenostereotypes.⁴¹ The evidence of some Swedish texts suggests that Childs's concept of the 'middle way' was already becoming internalised as a self-image during the 1930s.⁴² The co-operators interviewed by the Commission were aware of the opportunity they had to shape international perceptions of their movement, and, as will be discussed further below, sometimes went to considerable efforts to present their organisations in a certain light. American knowledge of Nordic co-operation was also filtered through personal contacts and networks, especially those maintained by emigrants. While the Roosevelt

³⁵ Marklund, 'The Social Laboratory', 269–71.

³⁶ Henk te Velde, 'Political Transfer: An Introduction', *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, 12, 2 (2005), 205–21, 210.

³⁷ Pernilla Jonsson and Silke Neunsinger, 'Comparison and Transfer – A Fruitful Approach to National History?', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 32, 3 (2007), 258–80, 266; te Velde, 'Political Transfer', 217.

³⁸ Musiał, *Roots of the Scandinavian Model*, 179; John H. Vuorinen, review of *Sweden – The Middle Way*, in *Political Science Quarterly*, 52, 2 (1937), 283–4.

³⁹ Eriksson, 'A Rarity Show of Modernity', *Review of International Co-operation* (1936), 282–3.

⁴⁰ Howe, *Denmark: A Cooperative Commonwealth*, p. iii; Frederic C. Howe, *Denmark: The Coöperative Way* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1936); Musiał, *Roots of the Scandinavian Model*, 197–8. Among other books on Scandinavia discussing the co-operative movement, see J. Hampden Jackson, *Finland* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1938); Agnes Rothery, *Sweden: The Land and the People* (New York: The Viking Press, 1934); Agnes Rothery, *Finland: The Country and Its People* (London: Faber and Faber, 1936); Grimley, *The New Norway*.

⁴¹ Musiał, *Roots of the Scandinavian Model*, 21; Jenny Andersson and Mary Hilson, 'Images of Sweden and the Nordic Countries', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 34, 3 (2009), 219–28.

⁴² Sten Ottosson, 'Sverige som förebild: En diskussion om svenska självbilder med utgångspunkt från tre reseberättelser/reportage från andra hälften av 1930-talet', *Scandia*, 68 (2002), 109–20.

Inquiry finished its work in Europe in the late summer of 1936, a Finnish co-operative delegation was also touring America, while the Helsinki co-operative newspaper *Elanto* reported on the visit of a Helsinki-born emigrant who had returned to study co-operation in the country of his birth.⁴³

The visit of the American Inquiry was also followed with interest by the leaders of the ICA. In the summer of 1928 the Alliance's general secretary Henry May had undertaken a 12,000 mile tour of North America, as a result of which the Wheat Pools of Saskatchewan were admitted to membership of the ICA.⁴⁴ The arrival of the Roosevelt committee alerted the ICA executive to the extent of American interest in European co-operation, and raised again the question of strengthening links with North America. As one member put it, 'Now we are losing members in the East [a reference to the secession of the German co-operative movement after it was taken over by the Nazis], it would be well to try to gain back all we can in the West'. Others urged caution, and expressed their concerns that so-called co-operatives in the USA were actually 'following the methods of private business'. Because of the historic strength of co-operation among Finnish-American communities in particular, the ICA's Finnish president Väinö Tanner was urged to take up an American invitation to attend the 1936 CLUSA congress but he declined, partly on the grounds that his English was insufficient.⁴⁵ In his absence, May crossed the Atlantic once again, but his experience confirmed the suspicions of some of his colleagues about the weakness and the ideological position of the American movement, and the attitudes of some ICA members towards the Roosevelt Inquiry seem to have been lukewarm at best.⁴⁶

The Roosevelt Inquiry in the Nordic countries

The committee of six – five men, one woman – arrived in London in July 1936, where they interviewed the general secretary of the ICA before continuing by aeroplane to Stockholm.⁴⁷ Like other American travellers to Europe, the members of the Inquiry gained their first impressions of the co-operative movements they were studying from the buildings that they encountered, and they were clearly favourable ones. The new central headquarters of the Helsinki co-operative *Elanto*, opened in the 1920s and adorned with modern art and sculpture, were described as 'very well and modernly

⁴³ Teeboom, 'Searching for the Middle Way', Ch. 3, 11–12; 'USA:n osuustoiminta valtavana nousussa', *Elanto*, 21 Aug. 1936.

⁴⁴ Report of General Secretary to ICA Executive on visit to Canada, 26–7 July 1928: TA: Box 0.4.

⁴⁵ ICA: Report on Executive Committee meeting 27 Sept. 1936: TA, Box 11. It is possible, though not confirmed by the available sources, that Tanner's reluctance was at least partly due to the links between the Finnish-American co-operatives and communism; perhaps he feared that his association with these would introduce unwelcome ideological strife into the delicate political situation in his own country. See Auvo Kostiaainen, 'For or against Americanisation? The Case of the Finnish Immigrant Radicals', in Dirk Hoerder, ed., *American Labor and Immigration History, 1877–1920s: Recent European Research* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 259–75.

⁴⁶ ICA: Report of General Secretary on visit to USA, 1936: TA, Box 12.

⁴⁷ Teeboom, 'Searching for the Middle Way', Ch. 4, 43.

equipped and well decorated'.⁴⁸ The Commission members also commented on the modernity and efficiency of the co-operative factories they visited in Sweden, and the 'external neatness' of the farm they were taken to see outside Copenhagen, more like 'a fine American home' than a humble farm.⁴⁹ Another American writer, Agnes Rothery, who published books on Sweden and Finland in the late 1930s, commented on the 'immaculately kept shops' of the Stockholm co-operative society Konsum, and the 'dashing modernistic touch' that characterised the work of the society's own architects.⁵⁰ The managers of co-operative societies were themselves well aware of the importance of bricks and mortar, and societies devoted considerable resources to the construction of prominent buildings for both central federations and local stores alike.⁵¹ In a display of co-operative modernity, most of the organisations arranged to place motor cars at the disposal of their visitors, and to conduct tours of co-operative buildings and facilities. For their part, the American delegation also underlined their own embrace of modernity by making most of their European journeys by aeroplane.

Entertaining a foreign delegation was not a novelty in itself. By the late 1920s co-operative tourism within the ICA had become an established phenomenon, as different national federations competed with each other in organising increasingly lavish programmes to accompany ICA meetings in a succession of European cities.⁵² Stockholm hosted the triennial congress of the ICA in 1927, and in 1935 the Alliance met for the very first time in Helsinki, where delegates were also taken on a motor excursion to the cities of Tampere and Hämeenlinna.⁵³ From 1936, the factories and stores of co-operative societies had become an essential part of the itinerary for many American tourists visiting Europe, and the Finnish co-operative newspaper *Samverkan* noted that 'whenever an American comes to Finland he immediately asks for information about co-operation'.⁵⁴

The leaders of the Swedish co-operative union KF seem to have been particularly conscious of their role in shaping the outcome of the Inquiry, and the arrangements made for the Roosevelt Commission give every impression of its being a well-practised operation. Besides the usual tours of co-operative stores and factories, the American delegation attended a series of lunches

⁴⁸ Inquiry Records: Interview with Väinö Tanner, 20 July 1936.

⁴⁹ Inquiry Records: interview with Albin Johansson, Anders Hedberg, Axel Gjöres and Vitalis Johansson, 14 July 1936; visit to International Co-operative School, 15 July 1936; visit to co-operative dairy etc. on Sjælland, 28 July 1936.

⁵⁰ Rothery, *Sweden*, 110, 114.

⁵¹ The importance of co-operative architecture and design remains relatively under-researched: see Lesley Whitworth, 'Promoting Product Quality: The Co-op and the Council of Industrial Design', in Lawrence Black and Nicole Robertson, eds, *Consumerism and the Co-operative Movement in Modern British History: Taking Stock* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 174–96, 174; see also Purvis, 'Retailing and Economic Uncertainty', 142.

⁵² The programme for delegates attending ICA meetings in London in October 1929, for example, included dinners hosted by the Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS) and the Co-operative Union, a theatre visit, a motor-coach visit to the CWS chocolate factory, and attendance at a league football match. ICA: Programme for meetings in London, Oct. 1929: TA, Box 0.5.

⁵³ ICA: Report of Executive meeting, 26–7 June 1935: TA, Box 9.1.

⁵⁴ 'Kooperativa strävanden bland finnarna i Amerika', *Samarbete*, 6 Aug. 1936.

and other entertainments during their time in Sweden; indeed so many that Jacob Baker complained to the American Commercial Attaché in London of being ‘surfeited with Scandanavian [*sic*] food eaten at a great many official luncheons’.⁵⁵ But the conscious purpose of these seems to have gone beyond the usual diplomatic niceties of honouring a foreign delegation. One of the highlights of the Commission’s visit to Stockholm was a dinner hosted by KF, where the Americans also met representatives of Swedish business and politics from outside the co-operative movement. Indeed, the Commission went so far as to include the guest list for this dinner as an appendix to their interim unpublished report on co-operation in Scandinavia, intended for the President’s eyes. The dinner, they suggested, ‘dramatically illustrated’ the breadth of support for co-operation and its potential to overcome deep social and economic divisions. It was difficult to conceive of a similar occasion in America, but in Sweden ‘all had a common interest in and responsibility for the economic welfare of the nation and its people’.⁵⁶

Indeed, what is striking about the evidence gathered from Sweden is the outward display of unity in acknowledging the importance of co-operation. This came not only from the co-operative movement itself but also from individuals representing private business. Marcus Wallenberg, head of the prominent Sweden business dynasty of the same name, sought an interview with the particular aim of refuting what he saw as an erroneous statement contained in Childs’s book that his family was opposed to co-operation. His interviewers reported that, on the contrary, he ‘feels that the cooperatives on the whole are on his side of the fence in all relations with the state – they object to state interference, as does he; they believe in freedom of initiative and free competitive enterprise, as does he’.⁵⁷ There were also ringing endorsements from a group of leading Swedish retailers, the Crown Prince, the Prime Minister and the academic and social democratic politician Gunnar Myrdal.⁵⁸ This enthusiasm contrasted strongly with the much more hostile attitudes to co-operation that were later expressed by representatives of the private retailing sector in Britain.

This outwardly projected image of harmony and consensus concealed, however, some important internal conflicts within the Swedish co-operative movement, particularly over the relationship between KF and the agricultural co-operative organisations. Agricultural co-operative organisations had first appeared in Sweden from the late nineteenth century, but in contrast to Denmark and Finland this development took place independently from that of consumer co-operation and their growth was much less extensive.⁵⁹ During the 1920s KF had started to make

⁵⁵ Inquiry Records: Box 1, Jacob Baker to Lynn W. Meekins, 31 July 1936.

⁵⁶ Inquiry Records: Box 6, Preliminary report on Scandinavia, 7; Box 5, guest list for KF dinner 15 July 1936.

⁵⁷ Inquiry Records: Box 5, interview with Marcus Wallenberg, 13 July 1936.

⁵⁸ Inquiry Records: Box 5, interviews with Josef Sachs and others, 13 July 1936; with Axel Persson, 14 July 1936; with Crown Prince, 17 July 1936; with the Gunnar Myrdal, 17 July 1936.

⁵⁹ Ruin, *Kooperativa Förbundet*, 197; Fredrik Eriksson, ‘Modernity, Rationality and Citizenship: Swedish Agrarian Organisations as Seen Through the Lens of the Agrarian Press, Circa 1880–1917’, in Piotr Wawrzyniuk, ed., *Societal Change and Ideological Formation among the Rural Population of the Baltic Area, 1880–1939* (Huddinge: Södertörns Högskola, 2008), 141–68, 146.

some efforts to supply agricultural products through its rural stores, and in 1929 a conflict of interest emerged between it and the national agricultural organisation Svenska Lantmännens Riksförbund (SLR) when KF acquired an agricultural fertiliser factory.⁶⁰ The official line was that these conflicts were overcome through a series of central agreements during the early 1930s. The SLR's G. R. Ytterborn reported in an American journal in 1938 that 'friendly collaboration' between KF and SLR had replaced the earlier 'more or less extensive conflicts'.⁶¹ But he and his colleagues were less sanguine in the evidence they gave to the Inquiry, and expressed doubts about the sustainability of the agreements with KF.⁶² Particularly interesting are the comments made about KF's prominent secretary, Albin Johansson. He was clearly seen to be a dominating figure within the KF, and the formative influence on its policies, but some of his contemporaries offered a thinly-veiled criticism of what they saw as his willingness to sacrifice principle for business-minded pragmatism. Interviewed himself by the Inquiry, Ytterborn suggested that Johansson was 'a Manchester liberal, except when it is in the interest of KF to depart from a laissez faire policy'.⁶³ 'You Americans like to advertise; so do some of us', remarked the representative of the co-operative dairy organisation, giving no doubt of his own opinion that KF had been effective in its own self-promotion.⁶⁴

The Inquiry also discovered evidence of similar intra-co-operative conflicts in Finland, over the distribution of milk in Helsinki. The situation in Finland was more complex in any case. In 1916 the consumers' co-operative movement had split into two factions: a so-called 'neutral' group affiliated to the wholesale Suomen Osuuskauppojen Keskuskunta (SOK), and a so-called 'progressive' group with its own wholesale Suomen Osuustukkukauppa (OTK) and propaganda organisation Kulutusosuuskuntien Keskusliitto (KK). Both organisations professed political neutrality, but there were strong informal ties between KK and the labour movement, and likewise between SOK and the farmers.⁶⁵ Conflict arose when the large Helsinki society Elanto ceased to purchase its milk from the central milk co-operative Valio, preferring instead to deal directly with the farmers. Elanto's president Väinö Tanner initially refused to be drawn on the causes of the rift, but on further questioning by the Inquiry he suggested that Valio was motivated mostly by 'capitalistic' aims, and 'there wasn't a bit of cooperation left in it'.⁶⁶ The Inquiry also found Tanner's SOK counterpart, Hugo Vasarla, to be 'distinctly evasive' when it came to the question of relations with Valio, but Valio's own manager, K. W.

⁶⁰ Ruin, *Kooperativa Förbundet*, 203, 207–8; Eriksson, 'Modernity', 166.

⁶¹ G. R. Ytterborn, 'Agricultural Co-operation in Sweden', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 197 (1938), 185–99, 198. Ytterborn had connections with the US: the journal's author biography reveals that he had an MA from the University of Wisconsin, and he had studied American agricultural co-operation.

⁶² Inquiry Records: Box 5, interview with S. Jacobson, 21 July 1936; interview with Poul Kongstad, 30 July 1936.

⁶³ Inquiry Records: Box 5, interview with G. R. Ytterborn and Helge Gräslund, 23 July 1936.

⁶⁴ Inquiry Records: Box 5, interview with V. M. Aaroe and H. H. Gräslund, 21 July 1936.

⁶⁵ See Esko Aaltonen, *Finlands konsumenter i samarbete*, trans. Stig Malmström (Helsinki: KK, 1954).

⁶⁶ Inquiry Records: Box 4, interviews with Väinö Tanner, 13–15 August 1936.

Gottberg, was much less circumspect: he confirmed that his organisation was ‘just conducting capitalist business on a cooperative basis. We are losing the idealism that we had when we were young’.⁶⁷

The arrival of the American Inquiry presented opportunities to the different parties in these internal conflicts. On the one hand they could seek to use their interviews with the Inquiry as an internal legitimising strategy, to present their version of the story to the foreigners and to correct any erroneous impressions their rivals may have given. There is evidence that both the Finnish organisations had sought to use their relations with the other Nordic co-operative federations to do this in the years immediately following the split in 1916.⁶⁸ On the other hand, they could seek to avoid conflict altogether and to present a united front to the visitors. Whether or not this was a conscious strategy is not clear from the available sources, but the Inquiry notes certainly give the impression that the co-operators interviewed took care to make sure that this happened. The final report described the development of SOK and KK separately, but also commented that both organisations had told the same story of the split and subsequent separate developments.⁶⁹ Indeed, Agnes Rothery’s account of the Finnish co-operative movement suggested that she was entirely unaware of the division.⁷⁰ What all could share in instead was the sense of pride that the Americans were taking an interest in the small Nordic countries. ‘The West [i.e. America] wants to learn from us as well’, was the headline in the Helsinki newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* on the arrival of the Inquiry in Finland.⁷¹ It seems that this interest could not be squandered on settling internal conflicts; it was above all a means to legitimise the existence of a recently independent, small and relatively peripheral nation.

Alternative co-operative visions

The interviews conducted by the Roosevelt Inquiry in the Nordic countries confirmed the view of Nordic co-operation stated by Marquis Childs. The Inquiry team were able to reassure President Roosevelt that the Nordic co-operators ‘do not disapprove of the profit motive nor the capitalistic system’; instead co-operative enterprise was ‘a competitor of, a check on, a partial substitute for, and a supplement and aid to private business enterprise’.⁷² Co-operative respondents had insisted not

⁶⁷ Inquiry Records: Box 4, interviews with Hugo Vasarla and K. W. Gottberg, 14 August 1936.

⁶⁸ Mary Hilson, ‘The Nordic Consumer Co-operative Movements in International Perspective, 1890–1939’, in Risto Alapuro and Henrik Stenius, eds, *Nordic Associations in a European Perspective* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2010), 215–40, 224–5. This was also the case in the labour movement: see Jenny Jansson and Mirja Österberg, ‘Att resa i politikens namn: De svenska och finländska landsorganisationernas resor under mellankrigstiden’, *Arbejderhistorie/Arbetarhistoria*, 1 (2011), 44–9, 46.

⁶⁹ Report of the Inquiry on Cooperative Enterprise, 186–200.

⁷⁰ Rothery, *Finland*, 117–8.

⁷¹ ‘Pres. Rooseveltin osuustoiminnallinen tutkimuskomissioni Helsingissä’, *Helsingin Sanomat*, 18 July 1936.

⁷² Inquiry Records: Box 6, Preliminary unpublished report on Scandinavia, 10 Aug. 1936, 2, 6.

only on the pragmatic, non-ideological nature of their movement, but also its ability to promote a rational reorganisation of distribution, and to introduce a modern system of retailing similar to the commercial chain stores emerging in America.⁷³ This view was confirmed by interviewees from outside the movement, including the representatives of major Swedish retailers who insisted that they welcomed the presence of KF as a healthy dose of competition within the retail sector.⁷⁴ The extent to which this understanding of co-operation had shaped the thinking of the Inquiry may be discerned in the transcripts of the interviews carried out elsewhere on the continent after the Inquiry team had left the Nordic countries. In Switzerland, Czechoslovakia and France, direct comparisons were drawn with Sweden and the other Nordic countries, sometimes to the apparent irritation of co-operators in these countries. Asked to comment on the Swede Anders Örne's book, the French co-operator Cleuet responded rather sourly that 'the Swedes write lovely books, but they don't do anything about it'.⁷⁵

The situation was very different in the British Isles. Representatives of both the Scottish and English co-operative organisations expressed their firm beliefs in the potential of co-operation to transform the existing system of trading and to establish a 'Co-operative Commonwealth'.⁷⁶ A representative of the London Co-operative Society defined this as 'the elimination of profit from production by cooperative, municipal and government ownership of the means of production'.⁷⁷ As this suggested, for some co-operators the vision of a Co-operative Commonwealth was a subordinate one to a wider socialist reorganisation of trade and society, to be partly realised through co-operative support for the Labour Party. Of the twelve directors of the Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS), it was noted that seven had described themselves as 'socialist propagandists' and demonstrated 'a strong partisan attitude to the Labour Party', though they resisted the vision of co-operation as merely the distributive arm of the state.⁷⁸ The Inquiry's findings thus seem to lend support to recent revisionist accounts of British co-operative history, which suggest that the movement retained its idealism and radical social vision even after the First World War.⁷⁹ The Commission acknowledged the idealistic side of the movement, noting that the special emotional appeal of the movement was 'really necessary' for its growth. This appeal was complex and even contradictory: 'at once self-regarding and altruistic, businesslike and democratic', it combined 'scientific

⁷³ Inquiry Records: Preliminary report on Scandinavia, 2; Box 4, interview with Hugo Vasarla, 20 Aug. 1936; Box 5: interview with Albin Johansson et al., 14 July 1936.

⁷⁴ Inquiry Records: Box 5, interviews with Josef Sachs et al., 13 July 1936; Axel Persson 14 July 1936; Helmer Sten, 14 July 1936. A whole chapter of the final report was devoted to a discussion of the successes of co-operation in breaking monopolies.

⁷⁵ Inquiry records: Box 5, interview with M. Cleuet, 14 Aug. 1936.

⁷⁶ Inquiry records: Box 4, interview with CWS Directors, 20 Aug. 1936.

⁷⁷ Inquiry records: Box 4, interview with Mr Webster, 17 Aug. 1936.

⁷⁸ Inquiry records: Box 4, conference with Board of Directors of Scottish CWS, 24 Aug. 1936.

⁷⁹ For example, Lawrence Black and Nicole Robertson, 'Taking Stock: An Introduction', in Black and Robertson, *Consumerism and the Co-operative Movement*, 1–9; Nicole Robertson, *The Co-operative Movement and Communities in Britain, 1914–1960: Minding Their Own Business* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

efficiency' with 'progressive social and political views'.⁸⁰ Alongside the idealism of the Co-operative Women's Guild, 'frequently spoken of in terms which suggest a deep and vitalizing religious experience', the Commission also noted the material importance of the dividend – or 'patronage refund' as they preferred – for ordinary co-operative members. Such was the impact of this in some districts that on quarterly 'divi days' even the local private stores would provide special offers to persuade co-operators to spend their dividends.⁸¹

In contrast to the efforts of their Swedish counterparts to reveal the modernity and efficiency of their organisation, and its important position within the national economy, British co-operators took care to draw attention to the more idealistic aspects of their movement. While the Swedes entertained their visitors to dinner in the company of business and political elites, the Scottish co-operators made arrangements for the delegation to attend the monthly meeting of the St George Co-operative Society in Glasgow. The Americans regretted that they were formally introduced to the meeting, rather than being allowed to observe it unannounced, but were pleased to find that their presence did not appear to inhibit the members. Rather, they found that 'the democracy exhibited in the absolute freedom of expression by the membership in this meeting was striking', and left convinced of the significance of co-operation as 'a great and living force both for democracy and for the kind of education known as "learning to do by doing"'.⁸² Outside the movement, they also encountered similarly strong expressions of opposition to co-operation. Representatives of private traders did their best to portray co-operation as a socialist attempt to destroy private trade and to use its political clout to gain favourable legislation on the taxation of co-operative profits.⁸³ A visit to Smithfield meat market in London elicited a 'uniformly violent hatred' towards co-operatives expressed by the traders there.⁸⁴

Conclusion

The reasons why the predicted breakthrough in American consumer co-operation failed to materialise are beyond the scope of this paper, though it could be argued that it was in some way pre-emptive of post-war developments in Europe. The shortcomings of the 1930s co-operative stores cited by an American businessman as a reason for why he foresaw no threat from them – the 'limited selection and [the] waiting for a receipt or for having a card punched in order to secure a saving of a single penny' – proved to be in some ways a prophecy for the post-war era.⁸⁵ Despite their early adoption of innovations such as the self-service store, after 1945 consumer

⁸⁰ Report of the Inquiry on Co-operative Enterprise, 22.

⁸¹ Report of the Inquiry on Co-operative Enterprise, 35, 54.

⁸² Inquiry records: Box 5, visit to monthly meeting of St George Co-operative Society, 25 Aug. 1936.

⁸³ Inquiry records: Box 4, meeting at Grocers' Federation, 19 Aug. 1936.

⁸⁴ Inquiry records: Box 4, interviews at Smithfield meat market, 8 Sept. 1936.

⁸⁵ Clem D. Johnston, 'A Business Man's View of Consumer Coöperatives', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 191 (1937), 186–91, 190.

co-operatives were already losing customers to new commercial forms of retailing, and by the 1980s were widely acknowledged to be in crisis across Europe.⁸⁶

This story of post-war decline should not, however, diminish the extent of American interest in European co-operation during the 1930s, when it had not yet become subsumed by the wider statist ideals of the New Deal. The members of Roosevelt's Commission certainly had no inkling of these later developments as they conducted their enquiries, and the statistical material that they collected presented a movement that was in robust health. As this article has discussed, what their work revealed above all was the heterogeneity of European consumer co-operation, reflecting divisions within the ICA and within the national movements. These divides were clearly expressed in the ways in which the different organisations were presented to the American Inquiry: while the Nordic co-operators showed off the efficient operation of their businesses, their British counterparts sought to convey the vibrancy of co-operation as a social movement. What stands out above all is the extent to which Nordic co-operators seem to have conceived of their role as part of a *national* endeavour to present their small country in a positive light, mindful of the growing interest in it shown by outsiders. Nikolas Glover's research has demonstrated how the Swedish Institute made conscious efforts to shape foreign perceptions of the Swedish nation after 1945. The example of the Inquiry suggests that ideas of how to do this were already well-established in the 1930s, and, to use Musiał's terms, the xenostereotype of the Nordic 'middle way' was partly shaped through its presentation as an autostereotype by the Nordic co-operators who participated in the Inquiry.⁸⁷

Further, this article has investigated how the example of co-operation also helps to illustrate the emergence of a Nordic bloc during the 1930s, and the ways in which the individual nations were subsumed into a wider Nordic identity. Jenny Jansson and Mirja Österberg have, in a recent article, suggested how ideas and information from the international trade union movement were introduced to the Nordic region via a Swedish filter during the inter-war period.⁸⁸ This filter also worked the other way, where Sweden stood as the representative for the wider Nordic region, and examples from the different Nordic nations were elided. Marquis Childs included a chapter on Danish agricultural co-operation in *Sweden – The Middle Way*, and was criticised by his reviewers for doing so, but a long extract from Childs was included by Frederic Howe in his book on Danish co-operation, as the Swedish case provided a better illustration of the appeal of co-operation as a 'trust-busting adventure'.⁸⁹ Although the Inquiry members travelled to the other Nordic countries, their main

⁸⁶ Johnston Birchall, *The International Co-operative Movement* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), Ch. 3; Johann Brazda and Robert Schediwy, eds, *Consumer Co-operatives in a Changing World* (Geneva: ICA, 1989), Vol. 1, 22; John K. Walton, 'The Post-War Decline of the British Retail Co-operative Movement: Nature, Causes, Consequences', in Black and Robertson, *Consumerism and the Co-operative Movement*, 13–31.

⁸⁷ Nikolas Glover, 'Imaging Community: Sweden in "Cultural Propaganda" Then and Now', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 34, 3 (2009), 246–63.

⁸⁸ Jansson and Österberg, 'Att resa i politikens namn', 49.

⁸⁹ Vuorinen, review of *Sweden – The Middle Way*, 284; Howe, *Denmark: A Cooperative Commonwealth*, Ch. 13.

interest was in Sweden, and their investigations seem to some extent to have been dictated by a Swedish agenda. If one of the main influences of Childs's book was, as Musiał suggests, to present Sweden 'as the first country in the Nordic countries in the American mind', then this elision of Sweden and co-operation, Sweden and Scandinavia (*Norden*), was certainly confirmed by the Inquiry.⁹⁰

**Mouvements coopératifs de
consommateurs et crise économique:**

**L'Enquête de Roosevelt sur les
entreprises coopératives en 1936 et
l'émergence d'une 'voie médiane'
nordique**

À la suite de la Grande Dépression, l'image de la Suède et des autres pays nordiques était généralement celle d'une région modèle, exemple de réussite du compromis sur la 'voie médiane' entre socialisme et capitalisme. Cette perception est largement due aux mouvements coopératifs nordiques, qui firent l'objet de l'enquête sur les entreprises coopératives en Europe menée à l'instigation du président Roosevelt en 1936–1937. Largement fondé sur les archives de cette enquête, l'article explore la genèse de l'idée d'une 'voie médiane' et examine comment les coopérateurs nordiques ont contribué à forger l'image de leur région dans le monde. Il apporte en outre un nouvel éclairage sur les disparités au sein du mouvement coopératif international à cette époque.

**Verbraucherbeteiligung und
Wirtschaftskrise: Die**

**Roosevelt-Kommission zur
Untersuchung genossenschaftlicher
Unternehmensformen (1936) und die
Herausbildung des nordischen
'Mittelwegs'**

Im Gefolge der Weltwirtschaftskrise wurden Schweden und die übrigen nordischen Länder weithin als Region mit Vorbildfunktion, als erfolgreiches Beispiel für einen 'Mittelweg' zwischen Sozialismus und Kapitalismus wahrgenommen. Besondere Bedeutung kam dabei den genossenschaftlichen Bewegungen in den nordischen Ländern zu, die in den Mittelpunkt der von Präsident Roosevelt initiierten, 1936–37 durchgeführten Untersuchung genossenschaftlicher Unternehmensformen in Europa rückten. Der vorliegende Beitrag setzt sich gestützt auf die Unterlagen der Untersuchungskommission mit der Konstruktion des Leitbilds vom 'Mittelweg' auseinander und analysiert den Einfluss der nordischen Genossenschaftler bei der Ausprägung internationaler Wahrnehmungen der Region. Zugleich wirft er ein neues Licht auf Unterschiede innerhalb der internationalen Genossenschaftsbewegung in dieser Zeit.

⁹⁰ Musiał, *Roots of the Scandinavian Model*, 178.