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Co-operation in the face of conflict: the Lincoln Society and the First World War, 1914-15

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Abstract

The First World War has been extensively documented and much studied. Nonetheless, there was still scope remaining for the centenary years to stimulate fresh exploration and the discovery of a great deal that was alternative, unfamiliar, and challenging. The home-front experience attracted particular and long-overdue attention. Meanwhile, another history, that of the co-operative movement, has generated considerable general survey and analysis as well. However, it has left neglected deep local study, and understanding of the complexities, nuances, and contradictions borne out in individual society contexts. This article, on the Lincoln Co-operative Society, brings these two lines of historical together. It yields both new insight on the First World War at home, and different perspective on the shifting nature and enhanced significance of co-operation at this time of crisis, local, national, and international.

Introduction: 'War and co-operation at home and abroad'¹

From the mid-nineteenth century until the early twentieth, the co-operative movement steadily expanded. It was rooted in the ideal of providing unadulterated food stuffs at a fair price for its members, and attending to their broader economic, social, and cultural well-being. Co-operation established itself as a strong dimension of the wider labour movement in Britain and elsewhere. The scope of its retail and production operations diversified, and the length and sophistication of its supply chains advanced. Local societies also developed their education, leisure, and improvement outreach, with the intention of supporting the physical, material, and political advancement of its membership. The Lincoln Society followed suit from the 1860s, finding a footing around a retail-centred model, growing its member

1. *Lincoln Co-operative Quarterly Record (LCQR)*, 'War, and co-operation at home and abroad', October 1914, 5.

numbers, adding branches, but also gradually diversifying into other forms of economic and social provision.

The First World War provided a great test for the movement as a whole and for individual societies. This is a detailed study of one society over two of the wartime years, 1914 and 1915. These saw two sharp shifts, which brought both unwelcome jarring and sense of unease, but also unexpected opportunity and unique contribution. International co-operation, politically and philosophically, had to reconcile itself with conflict, one that was not of the making of the social classes who it aimed to serve. Economically, its relatively independent socialist and community-self-help trading model had to align itself with a more corporate and centralised management of the national economy. The dynamics of these major transitions have to be understood at the local level, and how they were understood, accepted, and applied in practice by individual societies and members. The life and work of the Lincoln Society is preserved in an extensive archive, and provides a special and illuminating opportunity for such investigation.

War, the enemy of progress, the sum-total of all evil, the last relic of barbarism, has suddenly sprung upon us, in such a manner that for its vastness, the like was never known before in the history of the world. Perhaps the one gleam of hope in this dark hour is that the effects of this conflict may be so far-reaching, and its toll of human sacrifice so great that never again will the working-classes of all countries allow themselves to be drawn into such a catastrophe.²

It was this declaration that greeted the readers of the Lincoln Co-operative Society's news-sheet in the Autumn of 1914. The First World War presented the co-operative movement with a series of major challenges, locally and more widely. How would the employees, members, and customers of local societies contend with the considerable stresses and anxieties brought by war? Would co-operation be able to keep up the pursuit of its national and international ideals, and achieve the greater representation, influence, and integration that it was seeking, but now during a time of fierce global conflict and domestic emergency?

2. *LCQR*, 'War, and co-operation', 5.

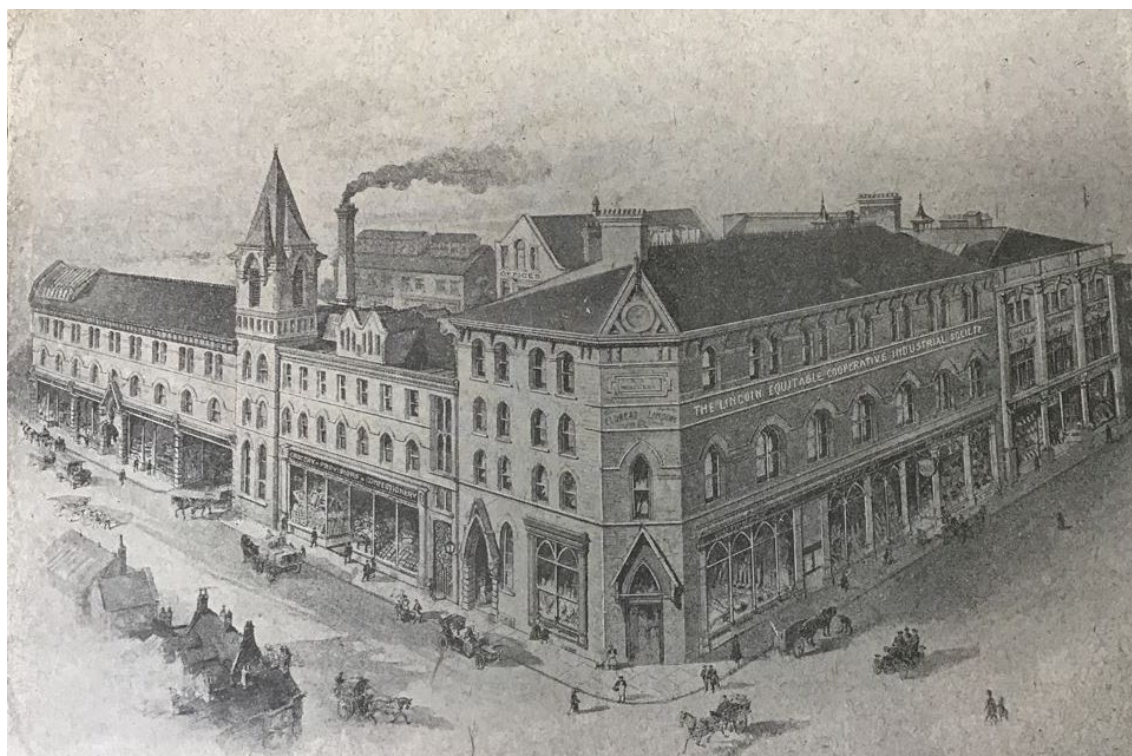


Figure 1: Central Stores, Lincoln Co-operative Society, Free School Lane and Silver Street, Lincoln (front cover, *Quarterly Record* editions, 1914-15) (Source: courtesy Lincoln Co-operative Ltd).

The reports published by the Lincoln Equitable Co-operative Industrial Society (LECIS), together with its accompanying news-sheet, the *Quarterly Record*, articulate the various and changing responses of co-operation to the conflict, at its onset and through the war years themselves (Fig. 1). Indeed, the period saw the *Quarterly Record's* final years, with the last edition ending with the Winter quarter, 1919. The articles contained in it show shifts between different spheres of attention: the international, the national, and the local. In addition, the content also conveys the concerns relating to a range of evolving and contrasting areas of political, economic, and social priority. The document, as a primary source, provides rich insight into how the war was perceived and experienced, and how it was faced at the level of a local society in Lincolnshire, by national co-operation, and by co-operative endeavour world-wide. The publication expresses how co-operators sought to come to terms with the war and to engage with its conduct, and to tackle critical moments when the cause and position of co-operation were called into question and appeared threatened.

The First World War imposed various demands upon society and the economy, many of them considerable. For most of the population the onset of the conflict came as both a great shock and surprise. The nation was far from ready, in both practical or psychological terms.

This said, as the crisis established its course, it also opened up unexpected opportunities in some quarters. The impact of the war has attracted considerable attention from historians and commentators more broadly.³ Perspectives and interpretations are numerous and diverse, among which are a set of prominent and critical questions. Was the war welcomed, for example, or at best accepted? How did it facilitate the hopes and ambitions of some sections of society, but thwart others? Did the intervention of a world war at this moment in the twentieth century speed, divert, or distract forms of advancement that were in evidence before August 1914? More specifically, had the working classes and labour interests achieved a stronger position and greater influence by the closing months and in its immediate aftermath?

Similar queries run through histories of co-operation. As both a business and movement, it shared in shouldering the strains, while also seizing new possibilities where they presented themselves.⁴ Co-operation's involvement in production, distribution, and supply of food and other commodities was already well developed, as was its stance as a protector of the well-being of working-class consumers. Yet, the need arose for co-operators to grow and develop their operations, and to participate within an economic regime that fell subject to more comprehensive management by government, local and central. The position of the movement politically and socially came under closer external scrutiny as well as internal self-evaluation, so much so that it decided to assume more formal parliamentary representation in the defence of its members' interests, as employees, consumers and citizens. Co-operation was progressive in calling for, and modelling, approaches to price control and rationing, but found itself ignored and pushed to the margins by the strength of private-trader influence in

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3. K. Adie, *Fighting on the Home Front: The Legacy of Women in World War One* (London, 2014); J. Bourne, 'The Midlands and the First World War', *Midland History*, 39 (2014), 2, 157-62; H. Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), pp. 149-66; P. Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford, 1975); A. Gregory, *The Last Great War* (Cambridge, 2008); J. Paxman, *Great Britain's Great War* (Harmondsworth, 2014); R. Van Emden and S. Humphries, *All Quiet on the Home Front: An Oral History of Life in Britain during the First World War* (London, 2017); G. Sheffield, *World War I: 100th Anniversary Commemorative Edition* (London, 2017); J. Winter, *The Legacy of the Great War: Ninety Years On* (Missouri, 2009); J. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in Cultural History* (Cambridge, 2014).
 4. C. McCabe, 'Irish railwaymen and the retail co-operative movement, 1917-23', in Black, L. and Robertson, N., *Consumerism and the Co-operative movement in Modern British History: Taking Stock*, (Manchester, 2009), pp. 110-18; M. Hilson, 'The consumer co-operative movement in cross-national perspective: Britain and Sweden, c. 1860-1939', in Black and Robertson, *Consumerism*, pp. 76-81; N. Robertson, 'Co-operation: The Hope of the Consumer? The co-operative movement and consumer protection', in Black and Robertson, *Consumerism*, pp. 222-39; D.J Thompson, *Weavers of Dreams: Founders of the Modern Co-operative Movement* (Davis, CA, 1994), 100-2; J.F. Wilson, A. Webster, and R. Vorburg-Rugh, *Building Co-operation: A Business History of the Co-operative Group, 1863-2013* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 150-65.

government. On the matter of taxation, co-operators felt themselves to be singled out for unfair treatment.

Co-operation's place in the labour movement as a whole would also be re-assessed, as the war prompted new arrangements for the representation of trades unions and ushered in new levels of militancy – including within co-operative business operations. Organised labour had expanded considerably and now expected far more by way of the management of the economy and social reform during the war years and in the years to follow. Furthermore, the extension of conscription exposed societies to additional pressures. Societies were very proactive in supporting the war effort and enlistment, although, as the war rolled on, the departure of personnel to the Front would place their functioning under ever greater strain. The advancement of women, in politics and the economy, was also reflected in co-operative custom and practice in this period. Female employment expanded, the Guilds extended their external political outlook and strengthened their campaigning position. Women also rose to more influential roles in local and national government as the representatives of co-operation. Through the war years, co-operative media and propaganda activities played an essential role, in local societies, and on the larger political stage.



Figure 2: Former branch store, Coulson Road, Lincoln.

The Lincoln Society was just over fifty years of age at the outbreak of the First World War. In many respects it would simply carry on meeting, and benefitting from, the well-established and growing demands of an expanding, industrialising, and developing city and its hinterland. In other respects, the pace of change would accelerate or activities would be considerably delayed or disrupted.⁵ Retail would continue to dominate its operations, although the Society would further diversify its production, processing and distribution activities. New Coulson Road premises were opened on 16 October, 1915, the Society's twenty-third branch store (Fig. 2). It would also extend its provision beyond foodstuffs, and

5. F. Bruckshaw and F. McNab, *A Century of Achievement: The Story of Lincoln Co-operative Society* (Lincoln: Lincoln Co-operative Society, 1960), 54-9; A.J.H. Jackson, 'The Lincoln Cooperative Society, Silver Street and Free School Lane', in A. Walker (ed.) *Lincoln's City Centre: North of the River Witham* (Lincoln, 2015), pp. 51-4; A.J.H. Jackson, 'The co-operative movement and the education of working men and women: provision by a local society in Lincoln, England, 1861-1914', *International Labor and Working Class History* 90 (2016), 32-6; A.J.H. Jackson and Hazel Kent, 'The Lincoln Co-operative Society and the Lower High Street', in A. Walker (ed.) *Lincoln's City Centre: South of the River Witham: From High Bridge to South Park* (Lincoln, 2016), pp. 60-1; Middleton, A., *150 Years of Lincolnshire Co-operative* (Lincoln: Lincolnshire Co-operative Ltd, 2011), 43, 68-71.

expand its involvement in the agriculture and housing sectors. Through each of the five years of war, different pressures emerged and grew. Meanwhile, fresh opportunities arose and were taken, to the advantage of both the local society and co-operation as a whole. These were explained to local members through updates provided in the 'Half-yearly Report and Balance Sheet' (HYBS). These were published in early January and July each year, and, at mid-points between, in the 'Quarterly Report and Cash Account' (QRCA) issued in early April and October. Inserted into all of these publications was an edition of the *Lincoln Co-operative Quarterly Record (LCQR)*. A striking feature of the editorship of the *Quarterly Record* was its sampling, balancing, and conveying of news, whether from the international scene, the national domain, or the Society's local and regional setting. This is an examination of the second half of 1914, and the whole of 1915. Over this time the repositioning of the Lincoln Society and the wider movement was rapid, intense, and dramatic.

1914: 'For King and Country'⁶

What vacant chairs and anxious hearts there have been this festive season... To all our homes, where anxious ones are bravely bearing great burdens, employees and members alike, the Society as a whole, from the centre to the circumference, as with one voice express to you their indebtedness for the patriotism and devotion your brave lads are now showing.⁷

Shortly after Christmas 1914, this message went out to the members of the Lincoln Society in its *Quarterly Record*. The city and the county were settling into the likelihood of a longer conflict. The response of the population to the outbreak of war was complex, and indeed its character shifted through the opening months of the conflict through to the year's end.⁸

In the first instance, the country's entry into the war secured sufficient acceptance by politicians and from the national media. However, this was not without strong expressions of

6. *LCQR*, 'For king and country', January 1915, 11.

7. *LCQR*, 'For king and country'.

8. Adie, *Fighting on the Home Front*; Beckett, J. 'Patriotism in Nottinghamshire: challenging the unconvinced', *Midland History*, 39 (2014), 2, 185-201; Beeching, N., 'The provincial press & the outbreak of the war: a Unionist view in Worcestershire', *Midland History*, 39 (2014), 2, 163-84; Bell, S., "'Soldiers of Christ arise: religious nationalism in the East Midlands during World War I', *Midland History*, 39 (2014), 2, 219-35; Fussell, *The Great War*, pp. 3-5; Middleton, *150 years*, p. 69; Sheffield, *World War I*, pp. 6-41; Winter, *Sites of Memory*, pp. 205-7

regret from many quarters that this major catastrophe had not been averted. History today rather plays down the idea of a universally felt urge to rush to the colours, with eager recruits charged up, heady with enthusiasm and a sense of adventure. There was a euphoric reaction among some certainly, but also much reluctance and reticence among many others faced with the prospect of whether to join up or not. Recruitment tended to follow pre-war patterns in terms of the sectors of society from which the military traditionally formed its ranks. Through the autumn and winter, various military reverses or heroic defensive stands, together with news of the fate of the Belgian population, prompted fresh rounds of enlistment. The mood, though, was more generally one of a sober-minded and collective sense of duty and the sharing of patriotic concerns for the security of the nation and its people, as opposed to jingoistic fervour. Moreover, the language of mobilisation also reached for religious reference points, to notions of sacrifice and of having God on one's side.

On the home front, meanwhile, the first five months of the First World War did require some rapid responses from various organisations and groups, the co-operative movement included.⁹ This said, there remained the general expectation that hostilities would be brief and any disruption made manageable. The idea that it would be 'business as usual' was accepted. Co-operation, and the economy and society in Britain more broadly, responded with this assumption in mind. There was panic buying in the first instance, but this eased, and the Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS) and local societies played a role in steadying supply of essential commodities and prices. Indeed, its hand in the control of distribution and price levels, and the maintenance of quality, meant that it would attract larger membership numbers, a trend that would continue through the war years. Co-operation would express its support for the war effort, reflected in the reinstatement of the allowances and re-employment guarantees that it had put in place for the Boer War, and the receipt of early government orders to supply the armed forces.

However, the CWS felt that it could step back from an opportunity to take up national representation, as offered through an invitation to join a new Prices Advisory Committee set up by the Asquith government. Such external activity was seen as not permissible within the narrow constraints of the role of its Board members. This would prove a major strategic error on the part of the movement, and with considerable ramifications nationally and locally during the war years. Before 1914 was out, co-operators found themselves failing to receive

9. Robertson, 'Co-operation', pp. 223-4; Wilson, Webster, and Vorburg-Rugh, *Building Co-operation*, pp. 152-6.

invitations to join a Royal Commission on Sugar Supplies and a Grain Supplies Committee. More promising, though, was the growing of bonds with the wider labour movement through the War Emergency Workers' National Committee (WNC). This body was established by the Labour Party and trade unions, and its membership would admit representatives of the Co-operative Union (CU) and the Women's Co-operative Guild (WCG). The Committee would give advice to government through the war on matters of prices and supply.

In the first instance, it was a despairing report that confronted the *Quarterly Record's* readers in the early Autumn of 1914. Much of the front page is given over the outbreak of the war. Shock and regret predominate:

It has been stated that this is not a war of peoples; that the German people did not want war, and probably this was so. We have sufficient faith in the good sense of the majority of middle and working class people in both this country and Germany, to believe that if the bonds of sympathy and understanding which the co-operative and democratic movement of both countries are endeavouring to weave had only had the opportunity to grow stronger, this war would have been impossible.¹⁰

The article turns to reflect back, with wistfulness and anguish, on the meeting of the International Congress in Glasgow in August 1913, when the 'highest point of enthusiasm' had met the submission of a resolution on 'Co-operation and international peace'. A German delegate had stressed the ideals of friendship, solidarity, and unity among co-operators, and the realisation and accomplishment of 'that great work for the peace of the whole world, and the resolution was carried with 'Germans, French, Russians, Serbians, Britons, and Austrians, vying with each other in their intense earnestness'. The fear, though, was 'the baneful system of conscription', and how this might compel 'the same delegates' to 'meet each other in deathly conflict... they are by a military system made into deadly enemies... International Co-operation and Trade Unionism will get a serious set-back as the result of this war'. The article concludes:

We dare not think what International Co-operation will be like at the end of this strife, we can only hope. Probably all progressive movements will be thrown back for a generation, and when peace reigns again throughout the land of Europe, may it be a

10. *LCQR*, 'War, and co-operation', 5.

peace made permanent by the bonds of International Fellowship of Co-operation, so strong that the militarism of any country is not powerful enough to break it.

By early January 1915, the tone of the *Quarterly Record* had shifted from the position of horror and alarm that it had expressed three months earlier. Discussion of the war would remain on the front page, but had been pushed towards the bottom of the second column. The co-operative movement accommodated itself with the national crisis, and had been actively supporting and encouraging enlistment. In an article entitled 'For King and Country', the *Quarterly Record* draws on prevailing attitudes towards the promotion of recruitment, including a collectively shared patriotism, a sense of duty, and the need to defend the homeland:

England's call has met with a magnificent response from all classes and conditions of the people: 'cook's sons,' and 'dukes's sons,' are comrades in arms fighting one common foe... Our gallant fellows, impelled by the one sacred call of duty, have laid down the pen, have left the counter, the stables, the mill, the buildings, and the farm for the motherland. They have enlisted under the flag that stands for freedom and liberty... Already the price is a terrible one, but the liberties we enjoy to-day have been won by blood, we must hold fast that which has been so nobly won.¹¹

It is clear from the outset the level of support of the Lincoln Society for those taking up arms locally. Reporting on those that had left for service, and the first reports of injuries, if not yet fatalities, the account declared: 'As a Society we are immensely proud of them, we know they will do their duty, and play their part well, and thus do something to bring this terrible war to an end'. The piece continues: 'and the good wishes of all our readers will follow them with a prayer for their speedy return'. The article, though, is caught rather ambivalently, not yet wishing to lose sight of its international hopes and visions:

If, when peace comes, militarism in Europe is hopelessly broken, and all nations work for the common weal, then a new day will dawn in which our children and future generations will enjoy a liberty even this land has yet known.

11. *LCQR*, 'For king and country', 5-6.

Critical to opinion forming was the fate of Belgium. The October report makes reference to a contribution to a relief fund for Belgium. However, by January the Management Committee reported on the establishment of a fund, and, citing one case, that: 'we took immediate action and prepared an unoccupied house on Newark Road, for their reception. Mr. and Mrs. Moorgat, of Antwerp, with a family of four children, arrived on December 23rd, and are highly gratified at your kind consideration'.¹² The *Quarterly Record's* third article devotes some length to the matter of Belgium, and includes a number of individual and personal accounts of families being housed by co-operative employees:

The debt that all civilised countries owe to Belgium, cannot be adequately put on paper, hence the hearts of the peoples of these countries have been sorely stricken at the terrible calamities through which the Belgian people have, and are now passing. Fire and sword (and worse things still) have done their work, and in scores of thousands these people are looking to other lands for succour.¹³

The positioning of the co-operative movement internationally, in the immediate and longer term, is reflected upon further in January 1915 in an article reproduced from the national publication, the *Co-operative News*, for the Lincoln Society's members. It recognises the spiralling of 'the price of food and other necessities of life', observing that the 'most serious, of course, is the advance in the price of bread, because this hits hardest the very poor'. The account explains the background in terms of the destruction of shipping and the disruption of supply, and the impact on shipping and commodity prices. It expresses a mindfulness of the need for future reconciliation and restoration. However, the article is concerned at the prospect of the capitalist gains that might be achieved in securing and then perpetuating greater national dominance of trade: 'the idea of permanently destroying German trade, not merely during the war, but after the war, so much talked about by our yellow press, would, if it were possible, only rebound to the capitalist interest'.¹⁴

For the October 1914 edition, consideration of the international scene dominated the *Quarterly Record's* front page. The place of co-operation at home is relegated. In the lead article of the October's news-sheet, the impact of the war at home is confined to a single and

12. Half-yearly Report and Balance Sheet (HYBS), 'Committee's Report', January 1915, 2.

13. *LCQR*, 'Our Belgian friends', January 1915, 11.

14. *LCQR*, 'Prices and freights – how the people are being robbed – co-operation and party politics', January 1915, 12.

relatively perfunctory paragraph. This said, it is quite assertive, and reflects the wider picture: 'The suddenness of the conflagration created something like a panic throughout the country', and fears were abounding in relation to sustaining levels of supply and demand, and the likelihood of shortages and spiralling prices. However, 'the Co-operative movement throughout the country saved the situation', with the report referring to societies that had ceased or reduced the facility for advance ordering, or had managed demand through other means, such as limiting the number of orders placed per week, and declining to supply to, or to admit, new members.¹⁵ Nationally, the business of the CWS had increased. Although profits in some areas were being limited by wage rises, 'all the departments are in a healthy condition'.¹⁶

Locally, the Lincoln Society reported that 'the great European War has been uppermost in all our minds during the greater part of the quarter, and has affected very considerably the usual smooth working of the Society. It had to contend with price rises and rash buying, but could reassure members that: 'as far as supplies were concerned we were, as a Society, exceptionally well placed. We have advanced prices only where it was absolutely necessary'.¹⁷ Moreover, the loss of draft horses for deliveries was being met with the addition of further motor vehicles. The role of the Lincoln Society in the local economy receives further elaboration in a discussion of bread pricing: 'We are the largest dealers in bread in the city, and have always controlled the prices, and it has been no uncommon thing for the bakers to approach the Committee, urging the necessity of raising bread'. Co-operative outlets had continued with established practices of selling in standard weights, but varying prices in line with the cost of flour. Other traders, by contrast, had switched to fixing prices, but were masking fluctuating production costs by reducing the loaf weights, and not that transparently. City co-operators could only but take up their customary cause of protecting the honest customer: 'Knowledge is power, and we believe the public have only to learn the facts, to condemn the new system'.¹⁸ The article continues by notifying readers of a Select Committee Report, with recommendations relating to the standardisation of bread weights, and the weighing and clear pricing of products at the time of sale.

By the New Year, 1915, co-operators could be even more emphatic about the movement's domestic contribution. A report places the satisfactory trading position of the

15. *LCQR*, 'War, and co-operation', 5.

16. *LCQR*, 'C.W.S.', October 1914, 5.

17. Quarterly Report and Cash Account (QRCA), 'Committee's Report', October 1914, 2.

18. *LCQR*, 'Size bread v. bread by weight', October 1914, 6.

Lincoln Society in the context of its national economic significance: 'Never before has the movement had such an opportunity, but it has proved itself worthy, and the Government in many ways have found the "Great" Wholesale of immense benefit in this critical period of our history'. Government contracts had been negotiated through the CWS for clothing, boots, and other items, and the movement could 'rejoice in a prestige we never had before'.¹⁹ The Half-yearly Report of 6 January 1915 brought to a close the business of the year 1914.²⁰ For the Lincoln Society, and its operations on the home front, there had been a broad sense of business being as usual. The *Quarterly Record's* leader opens with the title 'Allies still advancing', but in fact follows with a report of the Secretary on 'Another year of splendid progress' recognition. The war was 'responsible for many things, positive and negative', but, on balance, could be set in the context of a celebration of what had been the most successful trading year in the Society's fifty-three years, and a strong decade of advancement since 1904. Many areas of growth could be evidenced, including: 'our Society has the distinguished honour of being foremost in taking co-operation into the county districts', together with greater investment through the Educational Department: 'music, books, gymnastic exercises, nursing, &c., catered for all, and relieved considerably the monotony and drabness of many a life'. Domestic supply concerns had translated into an expansion of membership and custom, and, with this, the wider place of the movement, locally and nationally: 'From the highest paid official to the youngest employee... all are allies in a great cause, in a peaceful revolution which is doing much to regenerate the workers of our land'.²¹

Elsewhere there is little other reference to the war in the early January 1915 *Quarterly Record*, except a further contribution a relief fund for Belgium, the restoring of bread deliveries, and the departure of some staff to take up service in the army. Coverage is generally to be expected, with short pieces commending co-operative trade practices and services, listing meetings of the Women's Guilds, summarising the provision of the Education Department, and including news of other societies in the country. Moreover, there is little sign in the Society's advertisements of the impact of the war on the supply of consumer commodities through its Central Store. The Outfitting & Ready-Made Department drew attention to new designs and being 'well up' in certain sporting ranges, and with a 'large stock' in 'fancy goods', The Tailoring Department was also encouraging advance

19. *LCQR*, 'Our "Great" Wholesale', 111, 11.

20. *HYBS*, January 1915.

21. *LCQR*, 'Allies still advancing: another year of splendid progress', January 1915, 10.

orders, including in the 'latest colours'. Furthermore, The Drapery and Millinery Department could announce:

our half yearly clearance sale, which we trust, as usual, will be effective in clearing all Surplus last Season's Stocks so as to give us good Space for our new deliveries of Spring Goods: these were bought early and consist of the Newest and Latest of the early Spring Novelties. We would earnestly ask you to call and inspect our New Stocks; they will be both well-varied and abundant, and for value unexcelled.

1915: 'Not business as usual'²²

The difficulties of providing adequate labour according to the demands of our growing business is ever increasing, and we expect it will get worse sooner than better, we therefore respectfully ask your assistance whenever possible by trading at your nearest branch, carrying home your own goods, as far as able, and in various other ways that will occur to you. It would help us considerably, if, where it could be done, our members would make their purchases at other than the ordinary times when our shops are crowded.²³

By the end of the second full year of the conflict, the readers of the *Quarterly Record* were becoming more familiar with announcements on mounting challenges to supply and demand, and regular appeals to participate in voluntary measures to alleviate shortages and pressures. More generally, through 1915, co-operation adapted further to the political, economic and social adjustments required of a country at war.²⁴ Its organisation was integrated well into the economy, nationally, and locally, through processes of production, procurement, distribution, and retail. This meant that the movement was very well placed to respond, but it was becoming clearer that the scale of the conflict would no longer be met with a mindset of 'business-as-usual'.

22. *LCQR*, "'Business Not as Usual'", January 1916, 10-11.

23. *HYBS*, January 1916, 2.

24. C. McCabe, 'Irish railwaymen', pp. 110-18; Robertson, 'Co-operation', pp. 223-5; Wilson, Webster, and Vorburg-Rugh, *Building Co-operation*, pp. 154-8.

Various accommodations and compromises were arrived at between government and labour interests. Parties would endeavour to settle disputes through arbitration rather than by striking, while trade unions would permit the dilution of skilled labour forces along with the admittance of female workers. Undertakings were agreed to ensure that pre-war practices would be reinstated at the end of the conflict. Negotiations with the Amalgamated Union of Co-operative Employees (AUCE) had arrived at equal pay for women employed through the CWS and other societies. This said, they would be required to join a union while employed, and with the expectation that substituted workers would not be retained after the war. At the same time, the CU set mechanisms for the negotiation of hours and wages levels from the local to the national levels. However, such measures would not be adequate to ease all tensions that would mount through the war years, including recourse to strike action.

Co-operative operations would also be increasingly hampered by procurement and supply issues, from the centre to the stores, as international shipping suffered greater losses at sea. Co-operation could contend with this to some degree, in terms of managing distribution and prices. given the role of the CWS in the supply chain between overseas producers and local retailers. Nonetheless, co-operation, as a movement and as a trader itself, was sensitive to the struggles of its working-class consumer base, and stepped up its campaigning for greater government-managed rationing at a time of rising food prices and their impact on household budgets. Particularly significant was the tracking of staple-commodity prices, working with the WNC, and informing both the government departments and the general public.

An important reverse, though, was suffered with the imposition of Excess Profits Duty (EPD). The measure was greeted by the movement initially, given the Duty's introduction as a response to widely held indignation sparked by evidence of private-trader profiteering. However, co-operation failed to bring the retraction of the EPD's inclusion of dividend payments to its members. The taxation of the dividend, of what was a mechanism intended to assist and encourage saving in working-class households, was seen as a major blow to one of co-operation's core principles and practices. Co-operators felt that their societies were already making a significant contribution through the Duty, and it was fair and appropriate to reduce the specific tax liability on the dividend. Societies, typically, achieved this through reducing the level of dividend payments by lowering of prices closer to the cost price.

For the *Quarterly Record* of April 1915, the war re-occupies its position as the subject of the lead article. The leaning of the content here is far more resolved and focused, with less ambivalence and *caveat*. It is set at some distance from the tone of the October 1914 leader.

Our brave lads from all parts of the town and country, from cottage and mansion, democrat and aristocrat, are nobly responding to their country's call, and standing shoulder to shoulder in one common cause against one common foe... we consider the response magnificent, and of which any Society would be justly proud. The history of one of our Society contains many glowing records, and among the best will be the readiness with which they obeyed the call of duty at the time of greatest crisis in our history as a nation.²⁵

The service of the Society, eight months into the conflict, justified the call for the creation of a roll of honour. The account lists the names of 69 former employees who had enrolled, but with, at the time of writing, no fatalities, if with one prisoner of war in Germany. The report of the Education Secretary at this time noted that 'some have left our classes and gone to fight for our King and Country in the lands across the seas, including a former Junior Choir member and recent recipient of the Victoria Cross: we trust that other of our boys may become heroes, not only on the battlefield but in the battle of life'. The report was of the view that the Education Department's classes had a role to play in securing the advancement of its young members, and, as needed in the current time: "England expects that every man this day will do his duty," and at this time we shall include the women who are nobly bearing their part'.²⁶

The *Quarterly Record* for October 1915, in a graver tone, had to return discussion of the course of the war to the position of lead article. The Society was confronted with its first fatality. It is one of what would follow as a series of notices of the deaths of former employees in active service at the Front. The publication, however, was not without its eye on the wider and longer-term vision and hopes for the future. A contrasting perspective from overseas is provided in a long article of more than one page dedicated to co-operation in Russia. It is an international insight that reminds readers of the advance of the movement globally, in spite of the current military crisis. It celebrates the growth in the number of local societies, reaching 37,000, and passing the total present in Germany. Moreover, the author estimated that members and their families probably accounted for one third of the population.

25. *LCQR*, 'Our roll of honour', April 1915, 7.

26. *LCQR*, 'Educational Department', July 1915, 10.

There is no explicit message in the form of a call to British co-operation to adopt features of the Russian model in Britain in wartime.

The same article, though, proceeds to stress the significance of the levels of government intervention and partnership that had developed, including the direction of state finance through the local co-operative credit societies, and the approval of the formation of co-operative unions. Furthermore, relationship with the state had extended itself to local government, with the forming of partnerships and the offering credit through co-operative credit societies: 'The high prices of necessities, speculation on the part of small tradesmen and the war have all contributed to the appreciation of the part played by the co-operation movement'. Involvement and engagement in munitions production had also developed: 'Its straight-dealing has won the confidence of organisations for supplying the army, and numerous orders are now placed with the societies'. The author goes on to discuss the productive capacity of co-operative societies, their credit-raising value, and their charitable and relief functions. More generally, the piece concludes: 'We express our earnest hope that the light of Co-operation may illuminate those remote corners of Russia which until now have remained in utter darkness'.²⁷

Through 1915, the *Quarterly Record* considers the management of national affairs, and the role of co-operation. The July *Quarterly Record*, for example, gives a clear expression of the more prominent place of women in the movement and the building influence of the women's guilds. A report of a Lincoln delegate attending the Women's Guild Congress in Liverpool in that year observed 'Naturally the war largely occupied the thoughts of the congress, and ways and means of obtaining a permanent peace'. The President's speech had acknowledged the gains in the employment conditions of women, and the role of the Guilds in the advancement of the education of women through the Guild. Indeed, the reported added pointedly: 'Perhaps too much importance was attached to the idea that, if the women of Europe had a greater share in local and Imperial government, the danger of war would disappear', and, referring to Ruskin's writings, that: 'the women of Europe could prevent war to-morrow if they wished, by exercising quite other methods than having a share in the government'. The account also turned to current and practical action in relation to a debate on co-operation and prices:

27. *LCQR*, 'The development of co-operation in Russia by Professor V. Totomianz (Moscow)', January 1916, 11-2.

Organisation, by means of co-operation, to get more complete control of food products, would enable the co-operative societies to control prices and bring them within more reasonable limits than is possible at present. Speakers, one after another, pointed out how the co-operative societies in their own districts had done a great deal indeed to keep the greed of the private trader within limits.

The article's author, 'ER', could add that the 'Lincoln delegates were very pleased to think that their own Society had done much to keep down prices in their own town'.²⁸ The same edition of the *Quarterly Record* also reports on the national Annual Congress of co-operatives, noting with regret the absence of foreign delegates. There is little by way of discussion of the content of the proceedings of the meeting. However, the report did reflect the position of the movement at this point in the war on the issue of more formal political engagement. A general aversion to this continued to prevail, with the gathering declining, 'by a very large majority', any direction towards greater political-party affiliation. Nonetheless, the Congress did debate its engagement in the management of the economy, with 'How far can the Co-operative movement control prices' as topic. Moreover, it returned to its wider and future significance, with: 'The future policy of the movement after the war from an International standpoint'.²⁹ Moreover, an article in the subsequent edition of the *Quarterly Record*, on the opening of a new branch store, was capitalised upon as an opportunity to remind co-operators of the greater war that they were fighting:

The allies of thrift and industry are moving on, occupying new ground, and ever waging war against monopoly, trusts and unfair competition. Truly a bloodless revolution is taking place in our midst, and instead of desolation, peace, happiness and contentment follow in its train. May we have more of it.³⁰

The new headway being achieved by the movement was being enjoyed across the country. As 1915 came to a close, the *Quarterly Record* made reference once again to quarterly reports of the CWS. Sales had increased by 26 and 36 percent, although it was recognised that these were actual rather than in real terms, given the increase in prices, nonetheless, 'when all allowances are made, the CWS is evidently steadily progressing, in the

28. *LCQR*, 'Impressions of the Women's Guild Congress held in Liverpool, 1915', July 1915, 10.

29. *LCQR*, 'Impressions of congress, July 1915, 10-11.

30. *LCQR*, 'Allies advancing: opening of the new branch on Coulson Road', October 1915, 5.

likes of banking, flour, cocoa and chocolate, and boots and shoes.³¹ Furthermore, co-operation's ongoing contribution to the economy through a second year of war had earned due political recognition:

It has been tested in many ways and has stood the ordeal well... The clasped hand has been real, a brotherhood has been fostered, that will endure when peace comes. The Government has at last realised what a power the movement is, and when the history of these times are written, the story will be told how prominently a part Co-operation played in the greatest crisis the old country has ever had to meet.³²

Moreover, the course of 1915 had finally dispelled the idea of a wartime regime that could enjoy 'business as usual'. An extended analysis of the general economic conditions concluded: 'Never in the memory of business men has there been such difficulties of keeping up supplies as during the year 1915'. Various causes are ascribed, including the loss of vessels to enemy action at sea, the cancellation of contracts by suppliers experiencing the impact of higher freight charges, labour shortages, the scarcity of raw materials, the redirection of import shipping to safer, but more distant ports, and greater insurance charges. The article also incorporates a series of extracts from trading journals, 'full of their lamentations and complaint as to ever growing troubles in carrying on business'; three tables of statistics, listing the increase of freight charges from New York, and from the River Plate; and figures illustrating the increases in food prices over the last year. The article concludes: 'in addition to the ghastly work of the war that is claiming those nearest and dearest to us, in every household we are paying the toll in another way, and shall continue to pay for this barbarous crime to humanity to the end of our days'.³³

Through 1915, the quarterly and half-yearly reports, together with the *Quarterly Record*, conveyed to local co-operators how the war was affecting the Society's trading and other activities. At the end of the first quarter of 1915, the Management Committee could note in positive terms the continuing prosperity for its trade, and Lincoln's engagement in producing for the war effort:

31. *LCQR*, 'Remarkable figures', January 1916, 11.

32. *LCQR*, '1915', January 1915, 10. See: Robertson, 'Co-operation', pp. 223-4; Wilson, Webster, and Vorburg-Rugh, *Building Co-operation*, pp. 154-8.

33. *LCQR*, "'Business Not as Usual'"..

The War, while causing much sorrow and anxiety, has brought to the Society a large increase of trade of a special kind, notably in the Tailoring Department in the shape of Government Orders. Already we have made and delivered 450 overcoats, 1215 Hospital Gowns, 465 Service Suits and 300 pairs of Breeches. It is gratifying to learn that complete satisfaction has been given with the work done.³⁴

At the end of the next quarter of the year, the Management Committee reported similarly, emphasising further growth in trade and membership. Its progress was also represented in the declaration of a £5000 contribution to a War Loan through the CWS, in response to a national appeal from Government. It was a 'transaction which, apart from patriotic motives, will be a profitable investment for a portion of the Reserve funds of the Society'.³⁵ The *Quarterly Record* could bring a close to the year in good spirit, making reference to its support for the war, and the ongoing co-operative effort: 'Sacrifices have been made of which we are all proud... the one thought has been to fight for the flag that demotes freedom wherever it goes'. In business terms, benefits had clearly arisen locally: 'we have had a very successful year. A large increase of members, and a vastly growing trade', if with the *caveat* that 'expenses have gone up very considerably, the heaviest being for labour, the enhanced prices of living necessitating higher pay'.³⁶ Co-operators were also having to accept a widening in the incidence of shortages.

By early 1915, members were forewarned that they must accustom themselves to selecting from existing stock within a narrower range. Advertisements echo this. The Drapery and Millinery Department, in smaller font towards the end of a feature, added: 'Owing to the War deliveries of certain goods are very difficult and, in some cases, impossible. Under these circumstances we must ask our members kind forbearance'.³⁷ There are also remarks on shortages or delays in the advertisements of the Outfitting & Ready-Made, Tailoring, and Furnishing & Hardware Departments. An advertisement of the Boot & Shoe Department was most explicit, and impressed upon customers the need for early orders:

34. QRCA, April 1915, 2.

35. HYBS, July 1915, 2.

36. *LCQR*, '1915', 1916, 10.

37. QRCA, April 1915, 6.

Labour conditions are causing great concern in Boot Manufacturing Centres. This serious fact, occurring at a time when certain leathers are both Scarce and Dear, has brought about conditions of shortage in Footwear which is without parallel in the Boot Trade.³⁸

Such advertisements continue in this manner through 1915, giving notice of the impact of wartime conditions. Others, meanwhile, speak of measures taken to alleviate shortages or where possible, offer reassurances. The Outfitting & Ready-Made Department, for example, stressed that 'we have made extensive purchases EARLY ON, in view of the great rise in the prices of all kinds of goods'; while the Tailoring Department was could still 'supply you at the old prices'.³⁹

Disruption was also being experienced in relation to the Society's social and cultural activities. An early 1915 report of the Education Department noted the loss of an instructor to military service and the requisitioning of the gym facilities for military training needs.⁴⁰ Other support for the war effort, though, could be reported in more positive terms. The proceeds of a Junior Choir Concert, for example, were being donated for the 'comforts of the soldiers' in the Northern Hospital, Boultham Hospital and 4th Battalion, the Lincolnshire Regiment, at the Front: 'Nothing could be more cheering than to see the children doing their bit to cheer the soldiers who have so bravely fought for us'.⁴¹

Conclusion: 'we have come out quite well'⁴²

Throughout the war, articles in the Lincoln Society's *Quarterly Record* appeared reflecting on how much its status and role had been advanced. This is a discussion of the first couple of years of the First World War only. The circumstances of this time acted as a catalyst in the transformation of the Lincoln Society and co-operation more broadly. The 1914-18 war was a great test for the movement. It brought considerable advances, but also drew attention to areas of challenge that would have to be confronted in subsequent decades. If the years up to 1914 can be regarded as something of a golden age of expansion, the years of the First World War allowed a deeper embedding of co-operation socially, politically and economically, and

38. QRCA, April 1915.

39. HYBS, July 1915.

40. *LCQR*, 'Educational Department', April 1915, 8.

41. *LCQR*, 'Educational Department', October 1915, 6.

42. *LCQR*, 'Our Society after three years', October 2017, 6-7.

locally and nationally.⁴³ It had demonstrated convincingly that it could operate both as a successful trader under demanding and competitive market conditions, and remain a conscientious and persuasive protector of its consumers, as well as its employees and members.

For the Lincoln Society more specifically, it had entered the second decade of the twentieth century in a more mature state, both consolidating and expanding its activities. This trajectory was maintained, and indeed accelerated during the early war years. Its place as a political representative, employer, and provider of services would grow and diversify significantly. It is difficult to discern how much publications like the *Quarterly Record* were read, and how far members and customers felt themselves to be part of a national or even international movement. For the Society's leadership and management at least, as they expressed themselves through the *Quarterly Record* and other reports, the war demanded a vision of local co-operation that was positioned operationally and culturally on a wider stage. The significance and role that the publication had established for itself before 1914 was posed a more urgent and graver task. The publication was a multi-layered media form, informing its membership on the national and international scene, as well as that on its doorstep. It was also a sophisticated mode of propaganda, articulating the thought and practice of the wider co-operative movement, the continuing and the shifting. The world of the Lincoln co-operators had never been more assailed by, but also advanced by, general political and economic forces.

43. Robertson, 'Co-operation', pp. 222-35; Wilson, Webster, and Vorburg-Rugh, *Building Co-operation*, pp. 165-202.