

Notes of an
ICA President: 1976-1995



Lars Marcus



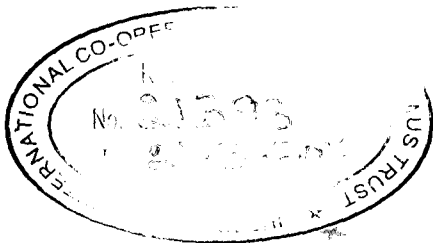
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NATIONAL CO-OPERATIVE ALLIANCE

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INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATIVE ALLIANCE



Notes of an ICA President : 1976-1995

by

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Introduction

In the autumn of 1975, I became Executive Vice-President of KF, the Union and Wholesale Society of Swedish Consumer Co-operative Societies. I was responsible for the union part of KF, which included membership, publishing, non-commercial activities and, among other things, international fraternal relations. As Executive Vice-President, I was also one of seven members of the KF Executive management team. We met weekly to discuss the biggest retail organisation in Sweden as well as a large conglomerate of industries, some of them multinational.

I had just turned 50 and had come from the local consumer co-op in Stockholm, where I had held various positions during the previous 25 years, the last ten as a member of the Executive.

Both at KF and at the consumer co-op in Stockholm, my main task had been to serve the economic interests of members and to develop and strengthen the co-operative. From this perspective, the ICA might appear to be a side track, but it was compatible in that co-operatives are built on a vision and the ICA was a part of our vision and heritage: the dream of a world in peace and without poverty.

A year later, in 1976, I became a member of the ICA Central Committee. In 1980 I was elected a member of the ICA Executive Committee. Four years later I was elected President, a position I held from 1984 until the Centennial Congress in 1995.

The ICA has its origins in the needs and visions of a group of co-operators formed one hundred years ago. From its modest beginnings, dominated by consumer co-operatives, ICA is today an umbrella organisation of all types of co-operatives – producers as well as consumers. Its membership is made up of many national apex organisations, generally formed by local or regional societies, which in turn have their own individual members.

In 1976, ICA's records showed the number of individual members as 346,591,824. Twenty years later that number had doubled. Major changes had taken place. Old and once strong co-operatives had disappeared altogether. New types of co-operatives had emerged. Eastern and Central Europe was no longer under

communist rule. Chinese as well as Latin American co-operatives had joined the ICA. Economic structures had become more global. And co-operatives, by nature local, were undergoing transformation.

The history of the ICA has been written by more than one. Others are likely to follow. It may be that they will satisfy their curiosity and find some answers in what follows. This is not a history of the ICA. It is my recollections, made even hazier by a weakening memory, but backed up nonetheless by a number of documents saved, it would seem, almost at random. Many of them are of course part of ICA's archives.

One more thing. As an aspect of consumer interest, I would like to start with an answer to the question: With whom are you, the reader, actually dealing? So let me tell you something about myself. I am a parvenu, the only child of a "Pinneberg" family. I am a social democrat and in the 1950s I was active in international youth politics. Many of my friends made politics their profession. I could have, but didn't want to. I chose to be a co-operator. To me that means to work for a society that respects the individual and human rights that create a democratic system; which brings equal rights regardless of race, creed or gender; and strives for a general well-being.

Having said this, I may offer the general picture of a Scandinavian social democrat. Maybe I was like that from the beginning, but life means learning and to me not all intelligence is concentrated in one political model.

I believe in competition and that everyone has a responsibility of his or her own. Each one has to contribute and make efforts based on their own capacity. I also believe in the market, but not as an ideology – that it is not. The market brings an efficiency that has to be controlled but not stopped.

I do not believe in governmental financial support for co-operatives or other preferential treatment. Gifts mean dependence and are expected to be repaid. If there is something like a liberal social democrat with an interest in an old conservative value attitude, it sounds like me, because I am far away from the new liberals who seem to believe that a better world could be built from pure greed.

1975-1980 – A Slow Start

When I moved to KF in 1975, I knew that the organisation was in trouble. Why and how is a long story, not to be told in connection with what follows. We all knew that European consumer co-operatives in general were declining and that we in Sweden had to find a better structure and make difficult changes. This was what I had to concentrate on.

When my predecessor in the KF Executive, Nils Thedin, offered to carry on with the international work I was happy. It meant that he remained in the ICA leadership for five years, until the Moscow Congress in 1980. It meant that he should keep his seat on the board at SIDA, the Swedish International Development Agency, until it expired after two years. He should also remain chairman of the Swedish Co-operative Centre (SCC) until the next annual meeting.

As a consequence, I was limited to being one of the Swedish members of the ICA Central Committee, but a natural candidate for the two other positions when Nils left. It was all set for a slow start.

The international heritage of KF was steeped in tradition and legends. There are names from the past like Albin Johansson, Anders Örne and Torsten Odhe. Outstanding in the ICA sphere, however, was Mauritz Bonow, its President from 1960 to 1975. He was among the founders of the governmental agency SIDA. His Government contacts led to financial support. ICA was given the then beautiful Regional Office building in New Delhi. Co-operative colleges were built in Tanzania and Kenya. Without his personal efforts, ICA would perhaps have remained a consumer dominated, OECD body in a world that had changed.

Nils Thedin was his deputy and then his successor on the KF Executive. He had also been active in international affairs for decades, not only in the ICA. Particularly important were his contributions to Unicef as a representative of the Swedish Government.

Nils was a much loved man, elegant, fast moving and intellectual, with a capacity for words that was unequalled in Swedish co-operatives. I believe he found me a bit boring but I hope not incompetent. I had actually little to do with him. The organisation he left me in KF was, however, difficult to understand. Staff issues and financial matters were maybe not his main priorities.

It was these traditions and heritage that I was to take over, and my start was on the SCC Board. On one of my first sessions we dealt with a request from the ICA Director, Suren Saxena. He referred to a discussion in the ICA Executive about sending a delegation to West Africa. The purpose was to explore what interests there were in the region for another ICA Regional Office. Suren wanted the SCC Director, Alf Carlson, to lead the delegation.

I had just learnt that the ICA budget was financed up to 50% by Sweden and now Nils explained that the ICA President, Roger Kerinec, was very interested in offering support to francophone Africa. Also, the Swiss and the francophone Canadians had supported the idea as well as Peter Soiland, the ICA Vice-President from Norway. I asked if something had been said about the future financial consequences and if those who had proposed the idea could raise money. It was explained to me that first the delegation would have to explore if a real interest existed.

Following discussions, the SCC Board decided to make its Director, Alf Carlson, available but also to tell Suren that the financing of a West African office would have to come from other sources, not least from francophone members. A practical reason was that SCC wanted to concentrate on the anglophone world.

Nobody was surprised when the delegation returned with a request to ICA for another regional office, but there was disappointment among the French members who couldn't deliver. When the office opened some years later, it was thanks to Norway and Peter Soiland, President of NKL, Vice-President of ICA, and a remarkable person about whom more will follow.

ICA, SCC and SIDA

In Sweden Mauritz Bonow had started fund-raising for co-operative development by asking members of Swedish consumer co-ops to spend a little part of their annual dividend on development in South East Asia. He had a vision of help to the rural poor, which he shared with a friend from the Swedish co-operative farmers in the federal organisation LRF. The other co-operatives in Sweden then joined through fund-raising among members as well as employees. Folksam Insurance, HSB as well as Riksbyggen Housing and the Farmers Savings Bank joined KF and LRF in what was called the Swedish Co-operative Centre.

From the start, SCC was formed to work in collaboration with ICA, and its programme was very close to the development programme of our Government. Both were, as donor agencies, aware of the advantages of self-aid, but while the Government had to work in collaboration with UN agencies and other governments, SCC could turn directly to co-operatives. Many governments had a programme just for co-operative development and now asked their Swedish colleagues for such support. An informal partnership was thus formed between SCC and SIDA. Nehru and Nyerere were key figures here.

Then the Scandinavian Governments found that they could work together and formed a Nordic Project for co-operative development in East Africa. The implementation was given to SCC and our colleagues in Norway, Denmark and Finland.

In this way the co-operatives in Northern Europe were brought together. In Norway, Peter Soiland turned an old joint body of the national co-operatives into a modern development agency – the Royal Norwegian Society for Rural Development.

Later the Nordic Project was dismantled. We all found that the administration was too heavy. It involved a group of parliamentarians, four national agencies and groups of co-operators from four countries. Norway remained the supporter of the ICA West African office for years to come but concentrated on the English-speaking country of Gambia. In all four countries the movements raised money and continued their collaboration with the national agencies, which

brought additional resources to those that the co-operatives had raised from their members.

In Sweden, the popular movements – NGOs – that had initiated SIDA (churches, trade unions and co-operatives) were given a preferential role. If one of their projects was accepted by SIDA – and if the Government agency was generous – their collected money could be multiplied five-fold. It meant that Swedish co-ops had to fund 20% of all projects.

In 1976 we found, however, that this created a restriction because SIDA and the governments in Africa and Asia put heavy emphasis on rural development and a co-operative component was being asked for everywhere. The SCC staff thought we should increase the member contributions. That was easier said than done. Most contributions came from the consumer co-operatives and voluntary deductions from member dividends. In these years the dividends were reduced and in some cases even disappeared due to weakened turnover in the local co-ops. Also we did not want to compete with charity actions by the churches, the Red Cross or Unicef.

Our argument was that, with some 50% of the population having co-operative membership and being taxpayers as well, parts of our development work should be 100% financed by SIDA. This agency was a strong supporter of international bodies like the International Planned Parenthood Association. Why then couldn't the ICA receive a similar support for its offices in New Delhi and Moshi? It did – as a result of the efforts of Nils Thedin just before he left his seat on the SIDA Board to me.

Coop AG

In the beginning of 1976, due to changes in the KF Executive, I was also given a seat on the Controlling Council of Coop AG in Western Germany. It was now obvious that some of the old consumer co-operatives in the ICA were suffering: the Dutch had already disappeared in the 1960s, and Coop AG had been formed as a rescue effort by German trade unions. The consumer co-ops in Denmark and Sweden took a stake in the share capital of 5 million DM each. I suppose the seat was given to me because I spoke German and because it was international and fraternal. My competence could really be questioned but the Danish council member, Ebbe Groes, was the CEO of FDB – the Danish consumer co-operative organisation. He had the necessary authority and experience. I sat at his feet!

The background was as follows. German consumer co-ops were dissolved and crushed by the Nazis. In 1945, they were rebuilt in the DDR as part of the communist economy, while their return in Western Germany reflected the thinking of the three occupying powers. The British in the north were highly supportive and a good co-operative structure developed around Hamburg and Dortmund. The French did not show much interest. The US looked upon consumer co-ops as some kind of communist invention, my German friends told me.

The German trade unions had formulated a strategy of “common weal” and operated a holding for a bank (Bank für Gemeinwirtschaft), an insurance company (Volksfürsorge) and a housing company (Neue Heimat). The bank had helped to finance many of the consumer co-ops and now it found that this money was to be lost. Discussions started on a complete structural change that would lead towards one juridical entity – Coop West Germany. It did not succeed. It ended as Coop AG – a joint stock company. The strong societies stayed outside while more money was thrown into the weak ones in the former French and US zones.

I felt myself forced to take the seat on the Council. My German was not good enough to understand the legal aspects of decisions. My major reason to accept was to secure a consumer co-operative partner south of Sweden and increase the strength of the Scandinavian-based venture we had for co-operative joint purchasing on the world market. The Swedish seat would have been better

occupied by one of my business-oriented colleagues. I also felt that some of those in the leadership of Coop AG were perhaps not as good as they should have been. Their culture was, anyhow, different than ours – and not only because of their big black chauffeur driven Mercedes cars.

Coop AG soon needed more money. Our friends in Hamburg and Dortmund asked us for further support and now it was given in the form of a company – SKAN – that was owned totally by KF and FDB with the purpose of being one of the owners of Coop AG. A Dane became CEO of SKAN and I made up his Board. Two years later I asked my Danish friend who had succeeded Groes why I never saw any annual reports on SKAN. Was this according to the laws of the EU? I asked.

Within a few days Danish lawyers and auditors had looked into the affair. They found that the bank people in Germany had made our little company, SKAN, a major owner of the huge Coop AG without telling us. Our efforts to assist them came to an end. We got help to sell our shares to other German interests, received interest on them, and made a profit thanks to the exchange rate.

The leaders of Coop AG turned out to be criminals who fled Germany but were later sent back to serve time in prison. Full exposure soon followed. The trade unions found that their own trusted spokesmen and financial advisers had been engaging in shady business. Neue Heimat disappeared. Volksfürsorge suffered. Coop AG was sold to a group of European banks organised by UBS, the major bank group in Switzerland.

Fabuscom

In 1977 I had been elected Chairman of SCC. Were we in SCC actually doing a professional job? I could not tell. Some of the Board members hesitated and told me they expected a change in SCC leadership. I asked them for time to find out and think it over.

Nils came one day and asked me on behalf of the ICA Executive to participate in the new committee, Fabuscom, dealing with finance and budget. The committee was formed by members of the Executive and they wanted someone from Sweden. Nils felt that he himself should not engage in matters of a long-term character and had put forward my name.

I accepted. It did not take long to learn of the problems, especially severe for me since ICA depended on Sweden and SCC to an extreme extent. Its dues were based on the economy of each member. Weak members paid a minimum and there was also a national maximum. When they paid they had to give evidence of proper calculations. The amount paid gave the right to representation at the annual Central Committee meetings and also at the Congress every fourth year.

At the Central Committee, where elections took place, each country could have only ten votes. These could be held by one organisation paying high dues or by ten members each paying the minimum.

The system had advantages. It was not like the UN, so dependent on the USA. The system was based on trust and respect for the rules. Many probably cheated.

In 1976, out of a total turnover of US\$ 1,700,000, dues paid brought in \$700,000 and reserves were \$480,000. At the same time the SCC support was \$560,000. For a number of years to follow, subscriptions never covered the HQ costs, and for four consecutive years after 1976 the ICA operated with a loss. SCC's share of ICA total income increased in 1981 to 53% or US\$ 1,700,000.

What I learnt from the work on the finance and budget committee was that the situation left the ICA with an obvious vulnerability and its Swedish members with a responsibility never observed at home among those who one day might have to face it. At the end it would not be the SCC Board but the movements we represented. I also learnt that while more Swedish support was expected, some

members were uneasy about our already dominant role in their view.

I further learnt that the ICA HQ lacked control of the regional budgets. At the end of the year they caused a shock that was no real surprise, because it all happened again and again.

Fabuscom saw the need for reinforcement of the HQ staff with someone in possession of a better experience in accounting and control. We got such a person, but it brought little help. The ICA Director did not take advantage of our findings. The skill of the office was mainly in the area of diplomatic niceties.

Participating in the committee's work were the ICA Director, Suren Saxena, his deputy, Robert Davies, the new finance expert from the staff, and several members from the Executive – Vice-President Peter Soiland, Hedley Whitehead from UK, Alexander Krashennikov from the USSR and Heinz Fahrenkrog from DDR. Peter had the chair and had been the initiator and now the pusher for transparency and results. He was also the one who presented the reports to the Executive and Central Committees. He was unhappy about the situation, but he was a good fighter and at that time a friend, who taught me most about the ICA.

East is East and West is West ?

ICA was of course influenced by the fact that the world was politically divided after 1945, and remained so until the end of the 1980s. You could see this in the UN but also everywhere in the international world where OECD countries met those from COMECON. The international trade union movement split into two separate organisations. The UN survived and so did the ICA, but not without severe internal tensions and sometimes fierce struggles to dominate and take control, even though no member had an official right of veto.

The ICA was still dominated by old West European consumer co-operatives. Most of them were close to the labour movement and adhered to the democratic, reformist parts of it. Many of us had fought communist ideology and knew how to handle it when it appeared in the form of co-operators from the so-called people's democracies in Central and Eastern Europe. We were friendly and collegial on a personal basis, but firm on all matters where the communists tried to introduce non-co-operative issues on the ICA agenda.

Sometimes hard words were used. 'Warmongers' and 'social fascists' could be heard. Not least the US delegations were accused, but also others from the West who spoke against proposed resolutions on disarmament or peace. Peter Soiland was heavily attacked, not only at formal sessions but also for the Minutes. The worst attackers were the Poles and the Czechs, but seldom the Russians. They just ordered it all. This situation hurt the reputation of the ICA, especially among the members with a tradition other than the European consumer co-ops. The farmers of the co-operative Raiffeisen tradition in Germany and Austria were among them. The Germans left in 1980, to return at a later date. The Austrians never joined.

There was another area for fighting – the Third World, where the people had found their way to independence and where emigrants had returned to assist with co-operative ideas for their common future. It is easy to understand that many of them now saw co-operatives as a way to create jobs and prosperity. Some of them had been trained in communist schools and universities. The Soviet Union and its allies offered a formula, while the US and France believed less in revolution and agrarian reform.

In a way Fabuscom represented this rift in the ICA. Members were from both West and East, reflecting the ICA Executive as a whole. While both sides had their own ways to support co-operative development, their aims were not the same. Mauritz Bonow and Nils Thedin had one vision, which I shared. Governments are necessary but co-operatives have to be member-owned and democratically run in order to succeed. They should be members of and helped by the ICA. Help from governments should come in the forms of legislation and education. Co-operatives should be financially independent because gifts bring not only dependence but also neglect of the value of money. As long as SCC brought its support with the help of SIDA, ICA was running an obvious risk. As a new member of the SIDA Board I felt this strongly. One day also the Swedish Government could change its priorities.

A Message from the Far East

One day in 1977 Mauritz Bonow turned up with a letter addressed to him as the ICA President. He had answered by telling the writer that he no longer held this office but was forwarding it to me. This letter was from one Mr. Lu in Beijing and it expressed the desire for a contact with the Swedish co-operatives. Mr. Lu explained that he had studied at a co-operative college in Scotland and now, when the "gang of four" had been ousted from power, it was possible for him to make contact. His wish was for information on the role of our co-operatives.

I collected information from both farmers and housing, insurance and banking. We added everything we had in KF including some copies of films and sent it. He wrote back and so did I. After a couple of letters I ended one by asking if he and some of his colleagues were interested in a study tour.

He came twice with the most curious delegations I ever met. Then the KF Executive visited the People's Republic of China and invited two young hand picked Chinese to study our co-ops for six months.

Mr. Lu was an old man, but he achieved what he had sought to achieve. The people he brought with him were serious co-operators. Some advanced in political life. One was made Secretary of the People's Congress, others stayed in the co-operative leadership, and now in 1999 one is Chairman of the ICA Region for Asia and the Pacific and a Vice-President of the ICA as well.

Suren Saxena and the ICA Headquarters

Suren Saxena, ICA Director in the early 1980s, was a part of the Bonow vision. He had been scouted in India, where he had been of value during the initiation of the Delhi Regional Office. He was, as so many Indians, a well educated and charming person. His English certainly had no Indian accent and his way of speaking, moving and thinking were often more British than the British themselves. He also had a Scandinavian touch. He was married to a Swede and had wonderful children.

The ICA Headquarters was in Upper Grosvenor Street in Westminster, London. It had once been donated to the ICA and was a mansion built in the 19th century as a home for a rich family with many servants, whose quarters were in the basement. It was a narrow building with many floors and a lift, which rattled and shook. If you walked upstairs the oak tiles squeaked and made other noises.

The staff was some 15-20 people according to the British tradition: the Director and his Deputy, Development Officer, Press Officer, Education Officer, Research Officer and a number of secretaries and their secretaries, and then a librarian and someone who served the tea. They were scattered throughout the building in small rooms with heavy desks and high shelves stacked with piles of paper, dust and memorabilia. They were all nice people, representing the British and West European tradition. Saxena seemed a bit isolated.

I went there in the spring of 1976 and from then on three or four times a year until ICA moved from London. At the end, and after a meeting with Fabuscom, I sat down with Suren and asked him a few questions on matters I could not understand.

Why, I asked, is the President not more visible? How often do you meet with him? Why are the finances in such poor shape and control so weak?

Then Suren told the story about Mauritz Bonow, who had had all the time he needed for ICA and who had promised him he would take care of the financial matters and then, together with Suren, work on expansion through development in South East Asia and Africa. When Bonow left, this support and partnership disappeared.

Roger Kerinec, who succeeded Bonow in 1975, was an amiable man but lacking a position in France similar to the one Bonow had in Sweden and that Nils and I had after him - SCC, SIDA and a strong KF added to that. Kerinec was President of FNCC, the "political" body of the French consumer co-operatives. This movement had no business activities and was weakened by its ailing member societies. Roger was pleasant and warm but lacked influence and strength. He never brought any economic support to the ICA in the way that Bonow had.

In addition to this, according to Suren, the support from the British co-operatives was weak. Hedley Whitehead, their member on the Executive, was Chairman of the Co-operative Union and a former Chairman of CIS – the Co-operative Insurance Society. Suren felt he was both without power and almost hostile. To be an Indian in the UK was not easy and the staff had its traditions from the old days. Some found it difficult to accept his leadership and he missed Bonow, who had given him outstanding support.

I carried this information with me when I was elected to the Executive Committee four years later.

Problems in SCC

In this period of my life I learnt about quite a few of the problems and challenges in the area of development. I believe this was to prove of great help during my ICA years.

Everyone sees the need to do something for those who live in poverty. It is a shame that so many suffer. Many individuals are prepared to “spare a dime”. But then comes the dilemma of what best to do. Should you just send the money and expect it to be used in a proper way? Who could be more informed or responsible than a recipient government? Or a co-operative?

But then arises the problem of whether the recipient knows how to make proper use of what is given. Perhaps it is better also to send some expertise. These questions remain unanswered after decades of development in the latter half of the 20th century. I met them in SIDA, at SCC and at ICA as well.

To give is good for your own conscience and it is also noble. But to receive creates a risk of becoming dependent and not realising the value of one’s own efforts.

The cultures of Sweden and Tanzania or Vietnam or Costa Rica are different indeed. Family or tribal ties certainly add to a difference that is still difficult for me to understand fully after many years. Having lived in a country that has enjoyed peace for almost two centuries makes all the difference.

Latici

This is a story of a co-operative ambassador from Sweden to Central America and his attempt to build consumer co-operatives in new forms. Names are not necessary but it all started in the days of Mauritz Bonow when he sent one of his trusted collaborators on missions to Egypt and Portugal. These must have been successful because he could now be found as our man in Puerto Rico, in charge of a project called Latici.

The philosophy of the project was to establish a base in a country where revolutions or political unrest did not seem likely. Puerto Rico had been his choice. From there "our man" organised studies for those interested in co-operatives. He was in contact with oil companies in the Dutch Antilles, with the Catholic Church in El Salvador, and others. Shops were built and supplied by a wholesale operation in Florida.

When I entered SCC we knew little about this except that he was given a yearly contribution for educational activities from our budget. I asked Nils, who said that "our man" had contacts with Dr. Bonow. I asked Alf Carlson, who said the same but hinted that "our man" was a bit difficult when it came to questions and relations.

Since the agricultural and consumer co-operatives met in SCC but had no other common forum in Sweden, I thought that a joint visit to Latin America of their respective Chairmen and CEOs could be of value to the organisations and also to SCC. It took place and turned out to be a success on a personal level. We were also impressed by what had been achieved by Latici.

However, "our man" was getting close to retirement and I raised the question of a successor with the SCC Director upon my return, and again a year later. Correspondence with "our man" did not bring any information about the future of Latici. He wanted more time to scout for a suitable successor and was given another year to make a suggestion. I had also started to think about who was really the owner of Latici and to doubt what "our man" called his personal "method" for co-ops.

In the end we sent people out to audit the Latici finances. We also learnt to our surprise that our visit a couple of years previously had been prepared in a way

quite similar to guided visits in communist countries. I got a letter in despair from a nun in El Salvador saying that "our man" had written to the Pope making accusations against her. She had not accepted our man acting as an emperor. We also found that the financial situation was unclear, or at least that our man had mixed his money with that of Laticí.

The project was discontinued. "Our man" got his pension but he was not the only one who lost contact with his task, and felt that it belonged to him. Later we had a similar case in Egypt.

The Moshi Office

In order to be on the safe side, SCC at that time always posted one of its staff at the ICA Regional Offices. Each office was led by the Regional Director, who was on the ICA payroll and recruited from the co-operatives in the region. The other staff members were funded by donors and were mostly local or regional.

The Regional Director had at his side a council of co-operative leaders from national movements. His position was envied not only because of his pay but also since he was “*primus inter pares*” in the region. Since co-operatives in many countries were included in national development strategies, their governments often included a minister for co-operative affairs. This in turn meant an office with staff. They got a car and a driver. They often ran for a seat in parliament and could speak there. To them the co-operative leadership was something to control and the co-operatives themselves something to use for re-elections. Our Regional Director, however, was at least their equal. He not only had an office, car and driver but also a seat at international bodies and contact with donors who had money for co-operative development. The ministers actually depended on him.

We tried to have the best. A co-operator with political experience, perhaps some years in government service, held in high regard among the regional ICA members – this was the kind of person we looked for.

One day I received a letter from the Swede in the Moshi office. He explained that the Director was involved in the black economy. In our agreement with the Tanzanian Government on operating the office, we had been given some benefits of tax exemption. For the needs of the staff we were allowed to import cars. The Director had taken personal advantage of that provision and had resold cars on the black market. He had also built a luxury house, probably from the proceeds of such affairs.

I asked our SCC Director about the report. He said that it could very well be true. He quoted a saying by Mauritz Bonow: that we should rather have a clever, small-time crook employed than an incompetent but honest Director. I remember asking if that was what I was supposed to say to SIDA if they made an inquiry.

Alf Carlson, our Director of SCC, was one of the finest and most gentle Swedish co-operators I ever met. No shadow should be thrown on him, but he was by then ready to look for other employment. We discussed these matters and he moved of his own accord to other tasks than those of the SCC Director. Later he was to obtain a doctorate in co-operative development and then, suddenly, we lost him. He had been one of those on the Estonia ferry on its way from Tallinn to Stockholm when it sank during a storm, causing the death of more than 800 people. On the same ship were Knud Ollgaard of the ICA Executive Committee and Olle Lindstrom, chairman of the ICA Housing Committee, both close friends and fine co-operators. I had been invited to attend the same seminar but was away in Asia at that time. The margin was in my favour.

But let me return to the Tanzanian office. I now told Suren Saxena what I had learnt about its use of the tax exemption and asked for an investigation by our auditors. I added that this was a precondition for SCC's continuing support. A change of Director took place in the regional office.

As a Member of the ICA Executive: 1980 – 1984

The Home Front

Even though my memories from years in the Swedish movement represent another story, I think it is fair to recall a few of them which explain why I was able to see my engagement in the ICA grow with the years.

When I entered KF in 1975 I knew that it was facing problems similar to nearly all of our colleagues in Western Europe. Many of our societies showed favourable results thanks to extra bonuses paid from KF. Still they maintained a healthy facade by paying dividends to their members. However, the societies that made money by themselves noted that KF was getting weaker and weaker and not doing as well as a wholesaler as it used to.

We had had a situation after 1968 when more democracy was called for. The rules were changed both for KF and the societies. The tradition had been one of professional board members. The President was employed by the laymen council, to which he proposed other board members. This board was generally three to five people, all employed, and also with a background in co-operative business.

Now it all changed. The board was to be formed by laymen and included the CEO who was employed. The directors he chose had a duty to attend the meetings of the board, which took all legal responsibilities.

It might have worked well, and it did in some societies. Attempts were made to give the chairman of the Board at KF a full time position. He was a social democratic Member of Parliament and chairman of a regional society. The argument was also that the chairman of his party as well as the trade union movement were elected separately by the Congress, while other members of the board were to be nominated by the regions to represent them.

I am not the one to speak in favour of one system against the other but I have a preference for one leader and not two, which a system with full time elected chairmen can easily lead to. I believe that a co-operative manager should be chosen on commercial grounds.

I had been recruited to KF by Johan Sallborg in early 1975 to take over from Nils Thedin on January 1st 1976. In the summer of that year Sallberg was killed in a car accident. The Board decided to replace him by Karl Erik Persson, CEO of Konsum Stockholm, which I was just about to leave. He was an old friend and a colleague.

As CEO of KF, he faced the problem of the said chairman and so did I, because the latter felt that my responsibilities – membership, publicity for KF, and non-commercial relations – should be his, while Karl Erik asked me not to open the door to such influence. It should be added that the chairman could be described as a man with a hot temper.

I had in younger years experienced a few struggles for power between factions in both politics and co-operatives. These memories are unpleasant, although what happened was perhaps necessary. Here my choice was easy. The chairman was not suitable for the power he strived for, but he had to be accepted as the representative of the Board. He could not come to me and give orders. He had to work through Karl Erik.

In 1984 Karl Erik reached retirement age and Leif Levin was appointed his successor as CEO of KF. At this time the Board made a study tour to France and Leif participated. Leif and I had a walk together on a boulevard and I told him that I had been asked to run for ICA Presidency.

I then explained my relationship with the chairman of the KF Board and said to Leif that I was glad to work with him in KF, although maybe he would like to talk to the chairman privately about the offer. He answered very diplomatically and said that the offer made to me was a high honour that I had to accept. He would give me total support. I said that I understood him and would run, but on the condition that I had access to the Monday meetings of the Board, because I needed to have a base. ICA was a sidetrack still.

Later I got a successor, Lars Hillbom, both in KF and from 1995 in the ICA. I kept my seat in KF as Executive Vice-President until my retirement in 1990. When I remained ICA President until 1995 it was on other conditions but still with the support of KF.

Directors and HQ

Life forces you to make choices. I must admit that organising these notes was not easy. To recount memories in a chronological way would seem more logical and probably easier, but a bit confusing if you look for what had happened with co-operatives in a country, in a region or on a continent, and not least inside the ICA. We moved from London. We changed Directors and ended up with a Director General. We changed the rules. We engaged ourselves worldwide in the problem of ethics and basic values.

To make the years 1980-1995 easier to understand, I find it is better to deal with a great many sub-topics, all covering the full period but with a content which brings details over the years into a fuller picture. Maybe it is only fair to repeat what I wrote earlier – the pictures are mine.

Let me return to my talks with Suren Saxena. As I have already mentioned, he felt that the support he got was weak. He had problems with his half-Indian family in the UK. When Roger Kerinec was re-elected President in Moscow until 1984 the problem was easy to identify, not least for me with the responsibility for the strong Swedish financial involvement.

I talked with Alf Carlson, who was an old friend of Suren, about using him for SCC, not least for South East Asia. Alf was ready to give him a job, and Suren would not have to live in Stockholm, only to be available. Then I talked to Suren and asked him if there was an interest. When Kerinec was informed he welcomed this development.

The answer from Suren was positive. His family wanted to leave the UK and there were two options – either southern Sweden, where his wife was born, or Canada, where many Indians had settled and prospects for his daughters' education were better.

The Executive had a Canadian member – Yvon Daneau from Quebec – and its very strong francophone Desjardins movement. I talked to him as well as Peter Soiland, and Yvon made contacts with the Trudeau Government. In their ministry for foreign affairs there was an interest in someone who could reinforce their South East Asian diplomacy.

Suren was informed of the two options and decided to move to Canada. I told

him that a job with SCC from so far away and on a full-time basis was not possible, but that we would give him financial support for two years so that he could settle anywhere he wanted.

So he left the ICA for Canada where he preferred not to seek full-time employment but to work as a consultant on co-operative development. Somewhat to the surprise of Roger, Suren demanded a big payoff from the ICA. For many years he had not taken advantage of annual home travels from London to India with his family, which was provided for in his contract. Now he wanted it in cash and Kerinec came to me with his letter. He was worried about the Board. I said "pay", but I found it a bit surprising that this debt was unknown in our accounts.

We now went to look for a new ICA Director. The Executive asked its President, its Vice-President and its member from the UK, Hedley Whitehead, to scout for candidates. Advertisements were placed in a number of the world's leading newspapers – the New York Times and the Economist were among them. Applications were received in great numbers, a majority of them from India.

The three decided to recommend a British parliamentarian, John Roper, but when the Executive met in March 1981 he had withdrawn his application. In this situation, Peter and Hedley explained that their second choice was a young British co-operator, Dr. Briscoe. I asked Roger if he also was in favour and he answered that he was prepared to work with the candidate. With my memories of the relations between Kerinec and Saxena, I might have made a mistake, but I said that our choice of a new Director had to have the strong support of the President. The Executive shared my opinion.

The Executive consequently asked Roger to bring forward a candidate of his own. He returned with André Saenger, a Swiss with a co-operative background and with a professional career in the UN system. He turned out to be an elderly man with experience in decision-making but nevertheless the choice was a mistake, as we found out later.

This was a difficult period. Soon we learnt that André did not like the staff or London. It was necessary to introduce some leadership after Saxena and the office building did not suit efficiency. But he went further and hurt people. Their message reached the members and started to cause unrest. We agreed to rent another office in London and sell the one we had. He started to talk against the British, the strikes, the laziness and the unreliable underground. Our British member found little satisfaction in trying to find us a new home. André talked about Vienna as an alternative or Geneva, where he had friends to help. Peter found that the British could give support for a move to Manchester, where the movement had its headquarters. The Co-operative Union itself was ready to offer office space.

It was a confusing time. I remember I said to Roger that London and Paris had an international attraction that Manchester lacked. Geneva and Vienna at the same time were unattractive for travelling, and without interest for co-operative leaders from a business point of view. Quite a few of our members – banks, insurance – were already represented in London.

When the decision came the Executive was split. Peter and Hedley said Manchester. I, the Japanese and India said London, while Roger and the Russians said Geneva. Then Peter gave in and there was a majority for Geneva, where André promised low rent, high efficiency and low staff costs. I was asked if I wanted to make a reservation in the Minutes, but I said that the majority had to decide. The Russians were happy to move out of the NATO sphere and the British movement was very sad.

We moved to temporary accommodation belonging to Coop Switzerland while waiting for the final move into the present office at the Route des Morillons. André was happy – he was back home in the city where he had a flat waiting for him and his wife. We also moved away from tradition, most of the staff and parts of our library. From what we heard, those were taken care of by British interests.

André had now to recruit an almost completely new staff and get acquainted with our membership. Recruitment was generally successful but member relations as well as staff relations got worse. I think he felt lost and we had reports from regional council meetings that participants had left in an upset mood. His style was one of giving orders and casting blame.

The Executive met in Seoul early in 1984. The most important part of the session was in a hotel room, where the President was instructed that he had to tell Saenger to go. We were unanimous. Roger did what he was asked, but it cannot have been easy.

This time we did not advertise. We asked our members if they could find someone from inside our movements or close to them who would be suitable for the job. It was to be a fast process and the task was given to a small working party of which I was a member.

Until a new Director was appointed there was, however, to be a temporary solution after the Prague Central Committee meeting later in the autumn. Roger had always been accompanied to ICA meetings by Françoise Baulier, and with the Hamburg Congress half a year away he made her available to the Executive as an interim Director. I felt she did a fantastic job with a staff divided between loyalty to André, who had employed them, and – in some cases – objections to a female boss.

Now, the major choice was between two candidates from the Americas. The Chairman of the Co-operative League of the USA was put forward by its CEO, Morgan Williams. He was really a pusher and a politician used to lobbying. His candidate, Robert Beasley, was in his fifties, had worked with agricultural co-operatives and was a respected man among his peers in Kansas City. The other was the Executive Director of the Co-operative Union of Canada. Still in his thirties, Bruce Thordarson also had an experience with co-operative development projects, and was closer to the world of politics than one who had so far lived only in the Mid-West. Both were worthy candidates.

Morgan had done his homework. With the help of a French communist agro-cooperator, Robert, or rather Bob, was given the Russian support. Bruce on the other hand had no support from Yvon or from anglophone Canada.

Having learnt from earlier procedures, I arrived at the session in London accompanied by the headhunter of KF, Hans Ardelius. During the lunch break he helped me to judge the candidates with the following result.

Bruce was younger, multilingual, unmarried at the time and more international. Bob was older, only speaking English, and more local than international. His family as well as himself might have more problems with the move to a new country. With the kind of problems facing the ICA Bruce would be better, I told my colleagues.

The majority followed Morgan and preferred Bob. This happened in the early summer of 1984 and in the autumn Bob and I started to work together, since I had been elected President.

He was a pleasant person, had a talent for making friends and was a good listener, but was not always prepared to deal with the conflicts necessary for ICA's survival. At this time US citizens faced a risk of being hijacked when travelling. Bob was easily worried. He recruited new staff, however, and was a renewer of the office operations. It was an important contribution.

Bob understood for example that his former competitor, Bruce Thordarson, had a capacity for the ICA. He had had the courage and skill to employ him in late 1985 as his deputy with responsibility for development. It was Bruce who now took over the Directorship. Bob was unhappy indeed with his situation, but happy about the choice.

Bob was employed on a four-year contract and he was naturally sorry when I told him it would not be renewed. I felt bad about it but I saw no other solution. We needed someone more active and I had the full support of the Executive to tell him. We arranged for him to continue to work on ICA projects for an additional year.

Telling my story about ICA Directors, I want to add some opinions about what it takes. The ICA members are different not only in size but also in economy, activities and culture. They elect an Executive whose members, it is hoped, reflect their needs and wishes. The Executive meets twice, perhaps three times, a year. The President, who gives the Director their messages, lives away from HQ and has his own job at home. To be ICA Director is a lonely job. It is a travelling job. It is a job for someone who is flexible and strong, but also diplomatic. And with responsibility for an HQ that is nobody else's business.

When I asked Bruce to accept the Directorship I repeated to him what I had told Bob four years earlier. I was not to challenge his leadership in the HQ. It was his domain. And to Bruce I added: If I am not satisfied with your work you can keep it nevertheless, but the Executive will have my resignation because it is my fault if you don't live up to our expectations.

The Members of the Executive (after 1992, the ICA Board) and Other Profiles

Since I have now presented the Directors it feels like a duty to present some of the other actors who took part in the work. Some names will turn up later and in connection with special episodes or chains of events, and I will restrict myself here to the years 1985-95.

The Executive was by tradition and strength dominated by Europeans, and our Nordic representation of three was weighted in relation to our populations. Out of 16, all were male except for Raija Itkonen from Finland. She was the international secretary of the E-movement, had a strong co-operative family background and a wide experience not least from contacts with Central and Eastern Europe. She was an active member and raised many questions on ICA actions, staff work and the future.

Together with the Dane, Jørgen Thygesen, the three of us had close contacts, often before meetings and during them at meals, in the evenings and during our travels.

Jørgen was an old friend from the 1950s. He had been CEO of the Copenhagen Consumer Co-operative, had worked with private retailers in Switzerland and Denmark, had made structural changes in Danish co-operative milk production and was in 1984 the Chairman of FDB. There he had introduced major changes in the organisation and wanted to step down. Why don't you run for the ICA? Someone like you is needed, I said.

He was independent, experienced and enjoyed telling the truth. The three of us were often joined at our meetings by Oswald Paulig from the German consumer co-operatives and Lloyd Wilkinson from the Co-operative Union of the UK.

For Oswald these were difficult years due to the development of Coop AG and the slow decline and dissolving of his own beloved Coop Hamburg. He was a man with a hot temper and a good heart. In 1988 the German members replaced him on the ICA Executive with Berndt Otto, President and CEO of Coop AG, who never once sat at the Executive table. First he had problems with the German authorities, then he escaped to South Africa, and later he returned to

jail. After that things went back to normal. Otto was replaced by Raimer Volkens from Coop Dortmund, who brought us his wide experience of consumer co-ops and co-operative global joint purchasing.

Lloyd Wilkinson had a few features unique to the Executive. He had his mother tongue, the ICA tradition and the British expertise on rules and statutes. He was a very friendly and joyful person.

He too had problems at home and gave perhaps too much time to his international contacts – not only in the ICA. As a result and through a virtual coup, the British tried to replace him with Norah Willis, one of his board members. The 1988 Congress rejected her candidacy and, for the first time in ICA history, no British representative was elected to its leadership.

Having written this, I think it is fair to say a few words about what we told the British on the issue. They had felt badly about the move of the headquarters from London and now they were also out of the Executive. We told them that things could not be taken for granted. Norah was a nice person and an experienced committee member in the UK, or so we had understood. What we had expected, however, was someone of a capacity similar to that of Lloyd. What happened was not her fault and had not been done by the Central Committee as an act of male chauvinism. The British had to think it over. They returned to the ICA Board four years later when Graham Melmoth was elected. He then became ICA President in 1995 when I stepped down.

I suppose the reader has noticed that so far only representatives of the consumer movement have been mentioned. In 1984 we even had three more of them from Western Europe – Italy, Austria and France. Let me only add that German and Austrian farmers were members of the International Raiffeisen Union and not in the ICA. Let me also say that candidates for the Executive were put forward after national consultations. I felt in my years that I had the support not only of KF but also of the Swedish farmers, housing, insurance and banking co-operatives. And in 1988 Jørgen Thygesen was replaced by Knud Ollgaard, a Danish farmer with a strong position in Danish agro co-operatives. He was given a personal recommendation to me from Jørgen and he was an excellent replacement! After he sadly followed the ship Estonia to the depths of the Baltic Sea, the Secretary of the Danish agricultural co-operatives, Hasle Nielsen, was elected to the vacant seat. Ollgaard and Nielsen added much to the quality of the Board, not least by representing West European farmers.

In Italy we had two major members, Lega and CONFICOOP. Lega represented them in the ICA, according to a deal made by the two. Lega was after all among the ICA founders. CONFICOOP had a strong catholic connection and later got a seat on the new council for the European Union.

Lega in 1985 was experiencing ideological change. Originally they had had a strong communist influence, seconded by republicans and socialists. Now they looked for more contacts with colleagues in Western Europe. Lega included not only retailing, through Coop Italia, but also worker and farmer co-operatives as well as banking and insurance. The Lega President was its candidate until

1997. They were strong persons but sometimes more interested in politics than member business. Among them were Onelio Prandini and Ivano Barberini. Ivano, who was President of the Italian consumer co-operatives before becoming President of Lega, was in my opinion the best of all the top consumer co-operative leaders in Europe.

At the time of Roger Kerinec's departure the organisations in France created an all co-operative umbrella. It made Jacques Moreau their candidate, and he held the seat for eight years, after which he was succeeded by Etienne Pflimlin, President of Credit Mutuel. Both defended the role French co-operatives had always played in the ICA. Their closest ally in the Executive was Canadian, since this country was represented until 1988 by Yvon Daneau from the francophone and strong Desjardins movement based in Quebec.

Yvon joined the Executive in 1980 and played a major role in the following years, not least as the man behind a report to the 1984 Congress on the future of the ICA. He was Kerinec's candidate for the presidency and I will return to his name later. After his resignation, due to illness, following the 1988 Stockholm Congress, anglophone Canadians were elected to the ICA until 1995 through a national agreement.

The US co-operatives had a long-standing participation in ICA affairs. Our member was the Co-operative League, which had a Democratic political reputation because of its links with the Roosevelt New Deal. In 1980 their candidate was Morgan Williams, a strong Republican with a personality that gave him both sympathy and political influence, at home and in the ICA as well. He was a doer and a charmer.

Soon he changed the name of the Co-operative League of the USA into the National Co-operative Business Association. He persuaded the Russians to accept Bob Beasley as ICA Director. He arranged our Central Committee meeting in Washington DC in 1985 in a way that made it memorable for several reasons. Let me explain.

Not only had they booked me into a huge suite in a luxury hotel with a panoramic view of the Capitol. Even worse, it was equipped with all the requirements for a buffet for at least 50 persons. It was taken away untouched for the hotel staff.

Then there was the dinner for a limited number of honoured guests. Morgan asked me to walk across the street to rent a tuxedo at his expense since I had to sit on the platform as newly elected President. There are certain limits to what you can do. The ICA was an organisation far away from such traditions. I refused. A dark suit had to do. The dinner in question served a single purpose. The foreign participants with whom NCBA had had relations were to be honoured by plaques expressing gratitude. The Norwegian Vice-President, Peter Soiland, showed me his – it was given to "P. Soiland, Sweden." He enjoyed that as a future talking point, not least because he was a friend of my country.

The Russian, Alexander (Sasha) Krashennikov, got a plate and an accompanying speech praising him as a close friend. Now this was in 1985 and Sasha

had to answer. It was at the end of a long dinner that had started with cocktails. Sasha was in a good, warm mood, in the best Russian tradition. He made a speech of strong sentiments. The other Sasha, his interpreter Alexander Leukhin, made a brilliant but much shorter translation: "I love you as much as you love me." And he helped his boss back to his table.

Morgan Williams was expansive and perhaps also tempted by a political career. He had worked for Robert Dole and was close to him and his wife. She was his choice for someone from his Government to address the Central Committee, and he himself later got heavily involved in the Dole presidential election campaign.

Rumours reached us that the economy of NCBA was not only in disorder but had gone over the brink. Williams had to go as CEO and as a consequence leave the ICA.

For quite a few years afterwards, NCBA had to ask for ICA leniency. They had been a maximum payer like Centrosoyuz. Now they had severe problems with their own membership. *Sic transit gloria mundi!*

The Japanese representation came originally from JCCU, the consumer co-operative union, and through Mr. Nakabayashi, its President. This country had a long co-operative tradition and the consumer part of its co-operatives was growing very swiftly due to weak competition and strong member involvement. He was an old, almost spiritual man but at the same time an outspoken socialist with personal memories of the Hiroshima bombings. He sided with the Soviet Union on peace resolutions directed against the US. When he retired, his successors came from Zenchu, the central organisation of farmer co-operatives.

While the consumer co-operatives felt that no favour could be expected or given by their Government, the farmers expected not only protection but also trust. Step by step you could see how the interest for economic development in Asia accepted co-operatives as one of the recipes for progress. Both as a Swede and as ICA President I noted our Japanese friends as strong allies, not only through their IDACA institute for the development of Asian agricultural co-operatives but also in the ICA. The name of Mitsugu Horiouchi is one of those for whom I have the highest respect, and his name crops up again later in these recollections.

So far I have given only names of people from the OECD area but for one, Anton Rauter from Konsum Austria. His role in the ICA was influenced by the slow decline of his movement. Like other consumer co-operatives, competition grew harder and his position weaker. He was close to politics and politics was one of the reasons why Austrian consumer co-operatives could not reform themselves. European labour movements tend nowadays to be protectors of their past rather than developers of the future. But this is the case also for most old non-co-operative enterprises, not only family owned ones but also those on the stock market.

Now I turn to the members from the Comecon group. I have often thought that I was lucky if I could understand my own movement, KF. As this was sometimes difficult, was it then really possible to grasp what happened in other

parts of the world and in co-operative branches other than retailing?

In the ICA Executive, the USSR, Poland and Czechoslovakia were represented by organisations dating back to decades before the revolution in 1917. They had been successful and then accepted by the communists but given a role inside the planned economy. Their leaders had a solid party background; in Centrosoyuz of the USSR they always came from among the regional party secretaries, as was the case with Smirnoff, Trunov and, at the end, Fedirko.

In Czechoslovakia, Zahradnik had been a minister but was by profession a schoolteacher who was able to learn English in a few years. He was succeeded for a short period by Michael Marik, a co-operator and not a politician who was a nice person in difficult times. In 1989 one of those who had supported Charta 77 took over. His name was Ota Karen and he had his background in housing co-operatives. I was at the Czechoslovak Congress when he was elected and heard him defend Marik against the attacks from opportunistic delegates. It is correct that Marik had to go, Ota said, but he never hurt the co-operative interests and has an almost clear alibi from the past. Marik had tears in his eyes and Karen was afterwards talked of as a man of integrity and courage.

And then I turn to Jan Kaminski in Poland, who was Chairman of the Supreme Council (of co-operatives) and for a time also Chairman of the financial committee of the Sejm.

Kaminski was a very competent and reliable person and a committed communist. Modest in the way he lived; correct in relations; interested and informed. I could trust him. Most of the others from Comecon also had good personal qualities, but for some the ICA was more of an assignment that emphasised their international importance to a national membership. They used to give lengthy reports about the co-operative success back home to ICA meetings. The Rumanians were often the worst, with endless figures on how the number of cattle had grown and what increase in quantities of grain had been brought into barns. But they were laughed at, even by the Soviet co-operators, and were never made candidates for any position within the ICA. Romania was politically isolated.

Let me add here to my list a co-operator from the Comecon group who was not on the Executive but on the Central Committee, Heinz Fahrenkrog, the President of the Union of German Co-operatives, VdK, as well as Chairman of the ICA's Audit & Control Committee. I had come to know him earlier and appreciated him as a person with the same qualities as Kaminski. Both represented the destiny of their countries.

Jan Kaminski had moved to the north when the Germans broke into Poland in 1939. He had joined the Russian air force and came to look upon Russians as brothers. I remember when one night he and Oswald Paulig from West Germany found out that they had both fought each other in the same air battle above Warsaw in 1944. They went for a glass of beer together and never talked about it again.

Heinz Fahrenkrog was in the late 1920s a young co-operative shop assistant.

His career made a party membership necessary and he was in the 1980s also a member of the Parliament. You could not question his or Jan's communist convictions but could you really blame them? I have, by the way, never asked about my STASI file.

No one controls his or her life entirely. I have also learnt that communism did not offer a road to a better society, but all of us who had a chance to learn about and respect human rights should not brag about being better than people like Jan and Heinz. What would J. Morgan Williams or Knud Ollgaard have chosen if we had been inside Central Europe between 1930 and 1945? The three of us were never tested.

Now I turn to China and Yang Deshou, who joined the Executive in 1988. He was a low key member. His organisation, the All China Federation of Market and Supply Co-operatives, was in terms of members and employees the largest movement in the ICA. He knew that and played his cards with skill. He looked for respect but also for business. He got the first but little of the second, only some wool from Australian farmers to be treated somewhere in Southern China. The strength of this movement was easy to grasp. It was well organised at the local level, not least thanks to democracy, according to a report given by two members of our Executive, Daneau and Kiminski, who recommended ACFMSC to membership. The obvious problem was that ACFMSC was not independent at the top level. The President was not elected but appointed and worked under the ministry for domestic commerce. Yang and I were to speak often in connection with the changes in Central and Eastern Europe and what happened to their co-operatives.

The third Asian member of the ICA Executive came from India. He was a banker and a candidate put forward by the National Co-operative Union. This movement remained in many ways a mystery to me. Their number of individual co-operators was almost equal to the Chinese, about 150 million members, and their representatives acted as if India's were the best of all co-operatives. The Gandhi-Nehru-Gandhi tradition was as strong as links between co-ops and Government, or rather the Congress party.

I remember a short talk with Rajiv Gandhi at a break in the Opening of the 1989 Central Committee meeting in India. We were alone for a few minutes and I offered an expert group of co-operators to look into the role of agriculture of his country. I explained that we on the donor side were worried about its democracy, self-reliance and efficiency. He looked at me and answered without hesitation that this was a major worry for him but unfortunately not easy to deal with, since he could not trust his staff. He gave me the name of a man he trusted as an adviser – Dr. Kurien – and asked me to take the matter up with him.

Shortly afterwards Gandhi was assassinated. Where were the security men? I asked myself. When I had met him they were everywhere with their black briefcases to hide the guns and he was also surrounded by twenty, thirty, forty supplicants all dressed up in the white cotton fashion of the Congress party.

B.S. Vishwanathan had little influence in the ICA. He came to the meetings but



This picture shows the first ICA meeting in China, the ICA Regional Council for Asia. In the far left on first row is Mr. Yang Deshou, ACFSMC, next to him is Pan Yao. Next to Mr. Marcus is Mr. Li Peng, the Chinese Premier next is Mr. Mitsugo Horiouchi from Japan. Others are members of the Regional Council from India, Philippines, Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Fiji, Thailand and their interpreters.

sometimes only to the opening and the closing sessions. Between 1988 and 1992 India lost its seat, but he returned with support from the other Asian countries.

We had for a while a fourth Executive member from Asia. He was an Indian Tamil, whose whole family had immigrated to Malaysia, by the name of Mathimugan. He was in co-operative banking, like many Chinese and Indians, and had severe difficulties at home where the native Malays had started to attack the financial dominance of the Chinese and Indians in Malaysia. The Malays were also displeased by the fact that Mathimugan held the position of Chairman of the ICA Regional Council for South East Asia. He became a victim and had to escape from accusations of illegal activities of which I thought he was innocent. He was not only a nice and friendly person, but also had a capacity to do things and to analyse development trends in Asia. All of us were happy that the Australians helped him to get a job and bring his family to safety. Later he was to become Executive Director of a hotel in Mauritius.

African members of the Executive in my time were John Musundi from Kenya, Bernard Wolinba from Uganda and Mamodou Dibba from the Gambia. They were elected in their capacity as ICA Regional Council Chairmen and good to have among us when the two African offices were discussed. Since ICA member participation had to be paid for by their organisations, donors often had to help them. It also happened that ICA made exceptions to its policy that the expenses of Executive members should not be covered by the ICA budget.

Dibba was the strongest personality among them although the Gambia, on both sides of a river mouth and characterised by the West African lack of investment capital and water for agriculture, literally lived on peanuts. He was not only an elegant person, in dress and in speech, but he was also humorous and witty. He had as a good Muslim made his pilgrimage to Mecca together with the ruling family. When a revolution took place he went out of power, accused of financial wrongdoings as CEO of the Gambia Co-operative Union and actor on the international peanut market.

I felt this was a tragedy and we tried to find out what had actually happened but with little success. I like to think of him as not guilty of betrayal to members. At the same time I suspect he was, because of the way he lived with his big family, his responsibility for relatives and their families and also the children of dead friends. It is almost impossible to see how he managed. I keep him nevertheless in my memory as a good Muslim. Life is more difficult for some than for others.

In the 1980s, ICA made efforts to involve more Latin American co-operatives in its membership. From the start we had only had the Argentineans, but now the interest increased. We got a Regional Office in Costa Rica and soon the region had its own man on the ICA Executive, Luis Carello from El Hogar Obrero in Argentina .

Roberto Rodrigues is a Brazilian sugar farmer and also a co-operator with long experience both in education and political life. His world has certainly been quite different from my own. But his election to the ICA Presidency in 1997 marks in many ways the changes that have taken place in the period from which I am trying to recall some memories.

Stopping name-dropping here, I will explain that the list is not complete, not dated, purely personal, but also gives in my opinion a clear picture of the ICA international leadership. A number of people, some travelling around the world for meetings of two or three days, two or three times a year. For me they were my colleagues and friends who helped me to achieve goals after being elected their Chairman and President of the ICA from 1984 to 1995.

Interpreters

I believe most of us active in international organisations have come to understand the role of interpreters. Not only do they give influence to those who speak their mother tongue, they also often represent continuity. Those who are elected may change but the interpreter is often a survivor for decades. In such cases they are sometimes more experienced than those who have their help.

According to the ICA rules we had for a long time four official languages – English, German, French and Russian. Later Spanish was added. For the Central Committee and Congress we brought in the necessary assistance from Geneva and these conference interpreters were so good that we did our best to afford them. Delegates who could not understand any of the official languages had to bring their own interpreters to help them follow or participate in the discussions.

In the 1970s the technical equipment for simultaneous interpretation was not like today. Some equipment was, however, on its way and then with the start of the Moscow Congress in 1980 we found that Russian linguists did nearly as good a job at a distinctly lower price. There were some political feelings about using “communists” for this purpose but since no secrets were involved, nobody had a valid case against them. After all, we had Central and Eastern Europeans already present in high numbers as delegates and on the Executive itself. After getting used to the ICA and its co-operative vocabulary, these Russians became every bit as good as the elegant Swiss ladies and they thus remained in the service of ICA meetings during my term.

In the Executive we decided to restrict ourselves to English. This meant that we had at the same time consecutive interpretation for French, Russian, Japanese, Polish, Czech and later also Chinese at the green table. With some 20 people whispering around the table it was often a bit difficult to hear what was going on. My grandfather as well as my father had used hearing aids and before being elected President I went to an ear specialist in 1984 to check that I had what it took. She said yes and I almost made it, but as soon as I left the ICA I got a little loudspeaker in my left ear. It certainly made a difference. If any reader

thinks I should have had it earlier, you are probably right. Perhaps it was vanity!

Among those interpreters I think of are Anna Tuz from Poland, Ivan Fidler from Czechoslovakia, Rong from China and two ladies from Japan with difficult names. All of them discreet, competent, often funny and well informed. Then there was also Alexander Krashenennikov (Sasha I) and Alexander Leukhin (Sasha II).

The former was head of the International Department of Centrosoyuz. He always accompanied its President who held the seat as Vice-President. Quite often Sasha I was his substitute, but not for meetings where the President led his national delegation and met with the other leaders from Comecon. The President himself was the Party man while Sasha I was more of a diplomat and saw to it that the present foreign policy of his country was followed. From him came their proposals for resolutions on peace, disarmament, NATO and Western warmongers.

Sasha I was loved by everyone because of his friendly way and he served all the Centrosoyuz Presidents – Klimov, Smirnoff, Trunov and Fedirko – with both loyalty and distance. His life was very Russian. Drinking habits are hard and many years of them can be devastating.

Sasha II was an interpreter with a fast brain useful for many purposes. When we asked Trunov for assistance for our Geneva staff he offered Sasha II who, as a secondee, became more involved in the ICA.

After a few months in Geneva, Sasha explained that he had to return to the USSR and discontinue his task as interpreter. His hope had been to bring his wife to Geneva because he could not live away as a single person for more than two years. Now she was not permitted to go abroad because a member of her family was under investigation.

Mikhail Trunov was by far the best of the Centrosoyuz Presidents I met, because he was more than a retired regional party secretary: he was a doer. When I met him next time I asked him if he could act on my request although this was an internal affair for Centrosoyuz. To stop someone because a relative might have done something illegal was for us in other countries difficult to understand and could be harmful for the ICA. Maybe I said too that the Central Committee of his party would understand my request. I said so because I have heard that my name had been investigated before I was elected President of the ICA. But that is another story.

Sasha II was later permitted to continue with the ICA staff and gave us and Centrosoyuz invaluable services at the time of changes in 1989-92. Between his two periods at the ICA, Sasha was replaced by another Russian, Slava Ouglev. Slava was much appreciated for his competence and thoroughness.

The ICA Staff

The Executive employs and dismisses the Director. The Director employs the staff and is head of it. These relations limited of course my contacts with his team. When someone came to me from the staff with ideas or proposals, I asked them to see their boss. Sometimes when they raised matters where they wanted me to interfere, my answer was the same. But there were also times of criticism, which could add to other reasons for change.

The worst period was with André Saenger. It is easy to understand that the majority of staff members in London were not happy about the move to Geneva, but once the decision was made it had to be followed. Worse was that almost everyone felt humiliated by the Director. Robert Davies was his deputy. He had served well. He was the strongest link with the past and represented knowledge. He was sad, like everyone else, but did not complain all the time like the others.

The move was complicated and I understand that parts of our library could have turned up in other parts of the movement because loyalty had been damaged. And once in Geneva, Saenger's tough personality scared the staff. Their information reached co-operative friends worldwide. Saenger had to go.

At the same time a new secretariat took shape, perhaps not so much with a co-operative identity but with a high work capacity and with more interest in modern office equipment. Bob Beasley was good at that and also at spotting talent when recruitments were made.

At the time of the move from London our finances were strengthened by the sale of the lease. But moving was expensive and wages in Geneva had to follow the standard of its international community, since we had to look for English-speaking staff. It was of great help to be provided with Russian and Swedish secondments. A lot of good results were achieved by the Geneva staff during the years, running meetings and carrying out the everyday administration and financial work, not always visible to the outside world but nonetheless the backbone of an organisation like the ICA.

As Chairman of SCC, it was frightening to see how little control ICA had of our contribution. At the end of the year we still did not know what had happened

in the regions. The SCC Board decided that we would have to pay in order to feel secure, and Claes Thorselius was offered to Bob free of charge. The proposal was accepted but it increased the impression among some Executive members that Swedes were running the ICA. This remained a problem for the President.

As a President of the ICA – 1984-1995

So far I have recalled how I became involved in the ICA, my years as a member of the Central Committee and its Executive. I have followed this up by telling of my activities in KF during the period I am describing and named some of the main actors during the years up to 1995 when I resigned. Now I will come to more events during the years 1984-1995, when I held the gavel.

Finding a Successor to Roger Kerinec

I never sought the ICA Presidency and neither did I expect that Kerinec would step down four years after the Moscow Congress in 1980. It was however clear that he had problems in the FNCC, the elegant but poor non-commercial umbrella of many ailing consumer societies. His choice of André Saenger was also unfortunate.

I had an early experience of chairing the ICA Central Committee in Prague in 1984 during a part of the sessions. According to the rules, meetings of the Executive and Central Committee as well as the Congress could only be chaired by the President. If the President left the chair, the Vice-President would be asked to take over. It was also stipulated that the Director had to be present.

In Prague, Kerinec left for one day to receive an honour from the French President. Vice-President Soiland had stayed in Oslo to participate at his own Congress and the Russian Vice-President had been dismissed from Centrosoyuz. On top of that, Kerinec, acting on behalf of the Executive, had just told Saenger that he was fired. Saenger sat in a hotel room close to our meeting, and his staff were in disorder and not functioning properly as I sat there alone on the large podium. I chaired the meeting at Roger's request and promised to shoulder a role not foreseen in the rules.

I could feel the frustration of the delegates. I saw the shaken staff. I did not like the gavel in my hand because I was no expert in its use. The ICA procedures were complicated and quite different from my somewhat limited national experience. Meetings I knew, but chairing one requires considerable subtlety if you are to lead the participants.

Prague did not end in catastrophe, however, except for an open conflict on the Peace Resolution. At the Executive meeting the Soviet and Japanese members had asked for a condemnation of US missile deployments and the representative of our Women's Committee presented a proposal from their meeting that went even further. I could not make the usual compromise because the Russians were represented by Sasha II, the interpreter of the substitute of the dismissed Vice-President. Sasha II had no mandate to change their proposal. The text, which we finally proposed to the Central Committee, was rejected. I didn't feel too sad about that!

Back to the discussion on Kerinec's successor. I felt that the next President of the ICA should come from Canada. Yvon Daneau was a pleasant friend and a sharp analyst in the francophone tradition. He and Kerinec were close, and at our request Daneau had written a report based on visits to major member organisations. It dealt with the question of what kind of ICA the members wanted.

After the meeting in Prague he approached me and asked if I would support him as a successor to Roger. I had no reason to object but I was nonetheless surprised when he offered me his support if I should want to become a Vice-President since Peter Soiland was due to resign.

Then Peter came to me and told me that his time had come and he had convinced Kerinec that both of them should resign. He had discussed possible successors with Kerinec and others and asked me to be a candidate for the Presidency. I informed him of my discussion with Yvon and Peter informed me that several Executive Committee members thought that a European would be closer to the office than someone in Canada, that there had been a period of francophone domination – Kerinec, Saenger and the present location of the office in French-speaking Geneva. He told me that a majority of Executive Committee members would welcome me as a candidate. I said I needed to think it over.

I spoke with Yvon and told him what had happened. I asked him to run for the Vice-Presidency if I was elected. He agreed. Then I talked with my wife and, as I mentioned earlier, with the KF CEO from whom I got the necessary support. I called Peter and told him I was ready.

The Hamburg Congress was held at a time when the ICA was in a deep crisis. People came to see me and asked me if I really believed in the future of the ICA. I asked them to give us some time and said that the future would bring us a new type of organisation. I was convinced about a new ICA but not completely sure of my own capacity to succeed. I was elected.

Oswald Paulig had organised a very nice dinner at the end of the Congress and I had been allowed to present the Swedish Albin Johanson medal to the outgoing Deputy Director, Robert Davies, which he greatly appreciated. He was not to be blamed for the mess. We thanked Françoise Baulier, who had worked so hard on the preparations of the Congress and with what looked like reluctant support from the staff. We were all relaxed and most of us had our wives present. It felt almost like a family reunion.

Before I returned to Sweden I told Bob Beasley that I was looking forward to working together with him and that I would come to see him in Geneva the following week. I suggested that we both prepare a strategy and work plan for the next four years and compare the results when we met. I told him that in the initial stages I was willing to travel to Geneva once a month or as often as he required, but that staff issues were entirely his domain and I would not interfere. I would concentrate on member relations.

My Strategy

I informed my Stockholm office that I would be away for a week and to contact me only in case of emergency at my island summerhouse in the inspiring archipelago outside Stockholm. I was alone. I walked. I cooked. I thought about the ICA. When I felt ready I booked my flight to Geneva, called Bob about my arrival time and told him that I would also like to meet the staff. When I travelled to meet the staff I thought that Bob's and my common strategy should be presented to them so that they would know what was expected of them and how we planned to put the ICA back on the right track.

First of all I wanted to inform them that as long as I was President the Head office would remain in Geneva. They knew that I had been against the move from London, but once done I was not interested in moving again because of the costs involved and also for reasons of continuity, member trust and good staff. They should feel safe.

Next I wanted to explain the division of jobs between Bob and myself. I lived in Stockholm and was not going to move to Geneva. My full time job in Sweden was my major occupation, with a few days a month for the ICA. As ICA was going through a crisis I planned to use my available time to visit Geneva until we established that some control had been achieved.

The Director was – and should be – in charge of the Head office and I was not going to interfere in a way that gave them the impression they had two leaders. I was not going to work directly with them as a matter of principle. My major duties were to work with the Executive and on contacts with members.

The next matter was the most crucial – the financial situation. I felt that we could not turn to members and ask for an increase in their dues. The reasons for this were several. On the one hand, many old members were critical about our performance and some had problems of their own. On the other hand, new members were poor and felt ICA was too European.

Through the years ICA Head Office had been unable to make the necessary budget follow-up, and development costs were leading towards a future disaster. The Regional Boards were tempted to take decisions and create debts that in the end had to be paid by Head office.

I felt we had to make a clear distinction between Head Office and Development costs. Other donors had to be found. Financial control at Head Office had to be put in place and run by someone who understood Development and donors as well as politics. That was the time when I offered Claes Thorselius as a secondment on behalf of SCC, since we had to live on the income provided by the existing dues formula.

All Regional Office staff had to be paid by their own activities and connected to specific donor sponsored projects. The Regional Director should be the only ICA employee. All employment contracts had to be in accordance with this principle because donors were capable of withdrawing support. The dependence on the Swedish SIDA was dangerous and efforts had to be made to enter longer-term agreements with other donors.

Minimum paying members had to accept an increase in their dues so that these would cover at least the cost of correspondence, etc.

The use of five official languages should be limited to simultaneous interpretation at Central Committee meetings and the Congress. The little we had of press, reports and other documents had to be limited to English. Other languages were to be used for documents only if additional sponsorship covered the cost.

Then we had the problem of confidence from our old and richer members. What we offered them was mostly quarrels at meetings on peace resolutions or financial and development problems in which only few of them were directly involved. The fact that many of them travelled to our meetings to meet old friends, and for the fun of travelling, was good but by no means attractive enough.

We had to try to create agendas of interest for each delegate – which was difficult because together they formed a mixture of bankers, fishermen, farmers, consumers, insurers and construction workers, Muslims, Jews and Christians, rich and poor, all from very different cultures. Their common denominator was that they were working according to principles drawn up by a group of people in the mid 19th century. We had to see if this still worked. And the names of attractive speakers on our Agenda could help.

We also had to support the auxiliary organisations inside the ICA, today called Specialised Bodies today. The Director and I should personally attend their meetings, listen to them and see if new members wanted to join these groups within the ICA.

Furthermore, we had to turn towards Latin America, where co-operative growth was taking place without being reflected in our membership.

As for myself, I wanted to meet the members of the Executive where they lived. I felt that I should look into the problems of our Comecon members as a special area of interest since their economies were insecure and their organisations old-fashioned. Together with the Director I thought that Latin America should be visited and a Regional Office opened if there was a membership interest within the continent.

I also had noticed that participation from Arab countries was limited to Egypt

and a few small organisations, and decided that we ought to find out if anything could be done. That issue would have to wait.

Initially, a division of contact spheres between Bob and myself should be agreed upon when it came to our specialised committees – or auxiliary committees as they were called in those days. Since we had different types of co-operative members, the big ones had discovered a need to meet around their specific interests and needs. At the beginning of the ICA these groupings had not been called for because consumer co-operatives dominated, but now we had such groups also for agriculture, fisheries, housing, insurance, banking and workers.

With a clear picture of the regression of consumer co-operatives, I thought I should approach them with an offer of services from the ICA. Similarly I thought Bob, with his background in Farmland, should keep a contact with the agro group. How the other committees should be shared was open to discussion with him. These were the main points of my strategy.

A week later I went to Geneva. I was met with a positive reaction from Bob and I thought we both had a similar analysis of the situation, although he was a newcomer and I had by then been connected with the ICA for eight years. I met the staff and gave them my message. In addition, I agreed to take on contacts with the ICA's Insurance and Housing organisations. Bob said that he would take on the Bankers and Workers, in addition to Agriculture.

At the next Executive Committee meeting we informed them of our plans and what had already been initiated. Bob also had a major task in putting the Head Office in order and I had my ordinary job at KF. The days were busy ones. As a general rule between 1984-1988, I devoted at least a day and a half of every month on trips to Geneva and to European members, besides the preparatory work I did from my base at KF.

To Stop the Economic Bleeding

During André Saenger's period we sold our London office. The proceeds of the sale provided a good boost to our reserves but the move and redundancies took their share. In 1983 the reserves peaked at 2 million Swiss francs. Then they started to shrink – 1984: 1.7 million; 1985: 1.1 million; 1986: 0.5 million. From 1987 they improved to 0.7 million; in 1988: 0.8 million; in 1989: 1.1 million; and in 1990 1.3 million where they stabilized.

The Executive Committee was responsible for the ICA's finances but was a weak institution in this regard. Most members had some kind of national or regional interest at stake and in order to keep the atmosphere pleasant, detailed budget discussions were avoided. Fabuscom represented a failed attempt to get control over the situation. The role of our auditors was a formal one.

Early on I saw the risks of being too dependent on SCC and even more the Swedish SIDA. From these sources around 50% of the approximately 1.5 million Swiss francs annual turnover was generated. Because of this I asked the Executive Committee to set up a Control Committee, which would report to the Central Committee and Congress on the state of the finances and on the performance of the Head Office, Regional Offices and Executive Committee.

The first Audit & Control Committee was elected at the 1984 Congress in Hamburg. We were happy that Robert Kohler was the chairman. He was CEO of Coop Schweiz and had been a member of the ICA Executive Committee when Bonow was President. He knew ICA well and had the necessary independence. The Swiss are strong in matters of money. On the Audit & Control Committee with him were Heinz Fahrenkrog, CEO of VdK East Germany and for this purpose the best available from the Comecon area. They played an important role over the next four years in presenting reports to the Central Committee.

Robert also provided the link we needed and desired with his movement as well as valuable advice on our Swiss environment. He enjoyed working with Bob Beasley and the staff. He told me what he had managed to achieve for the Swiss co-operators. He was at that time one of the most successful of the European colleagues in forming a strong, very competitive consumer co-operative organisation from a group of ailing local societies. I felt a personal sorrow when

he criticized us for the change of Director in 1988. At that time however he had retired from co-operatives and his successor, Hans Thuli, would serve as Audit & Control Committee Chairman for the next four years. In 1988 another Swiss was elected as Chairman of the Audit & Control Committee but by then Coop Schweiz had changed and the other Europeans felt that they were moving away from the co-operative family. As I write this they are no longer members of the ICA.

The Audit & Control Committee expressed year after year how much they appreciated the improvements in the Head Office, thanks to the Director and of course to Claes Thorselius, who was later to become Deputy Director, on the ICA payroll and no longer a secondee from Sweden.

Development of the ICA Regions

To change the work of our regional structures turned out to be much more difficult. Not so much in West Africa, where Mamadou Dibba, Regional Chairman and member of the Executive Committee, was very helpful. He understood the problems and did what he could to control the costs of the Abidjan office.

The office for East, Central and Southern Africa in Moshi, Tanzania, was more complicated. Relations between Geneva and the Regional Council were not good. The Executive Committee's opinion was that the Regional Director was an ICA staff member and should be hired by the ICA Director in conjunction with discussion with members of the Regional Council. The Regional Council members' opinion was that the choice should be theirs. In the revision of the ICA Rules, we settled this issue so that today the Regional Directors are hired by the Director General after consultation with the Regional Councils.

SCC promoted an assembly of co-operators and national government representatives in what was called a Ministerial Conference. The idea was developed as a result of the difficulties in our regions of co-operative leaders in getting support and help from a Minister and from the civil service, usually headed by a Commissioner or Registrar. These were generally socially and politically superior to representatives of the movement. It happened frequently that a Minister used co-operatives as a means for his own political ambitions and snatched graduates of the co-operative colleges for the civil service, where they were offered better pay.

A Ministerial Conference had as its aim to offer the co-operative leaders a forum to meet the government in open discussion and as equals through the presence of the ICA.

The conference had originated from a talk I had with the then Regional Director Anangysie in Moshi and the idea was later to be taken up also by the offices in New Delhi, Abidjan and San José. Anangysie had the political know-how and the capacity to meet on an equal basis with co-operative Ministers. When he died so tragically his successor turned out to be too weak for such a purpose. The documents which drew up a plan for co-operative development

were written by Ministers in the absence of the co-operators themselves. Our Regional Director behaved like a servant to them.

SCC support was gradually reduced from 600 000 Swiss francs in 1984 to 325 000 Swiss francs in 1988. It was a way to show that the Regional Council did not live up to expectations. At the same time, Sweden was getting heavily involved in Uganda. The Uganda Co-operative Union was a member of the Regional Council and had very competent leaders, but for several years it had not been allowed any influence by the Regional Council.

There were intrigues and tension around tribal issues as elsewhere in Africa during these years and this represented an extra burden for the ICA. Although I was Chairman of both SCC and ICA, I supported the SCC viewpoint on this matter. What was intended to promote development in reality brought stagnation to East and Central Africa. The idea of having a Regional Office to serve a structure of national apex organisations did not work because the apex organisations lacked societies at the local level and the co-operative structure was in the hands of politicians who were rarely democratic, often tribal and mainly corrupt. The Director in Moshi later had a more competent successor, Mr. Kabuga.

The New Delhi Office

India, New Delhi and the Asia Pacific region represented other, more complicated, problems. It was in New Delhi at the time of Mauritz Bonow that ICA opened its first Regional Office as a gift to co-operatives in South East Asia and in close collaboration with Indira Gandhi. The Swedish Government paid for the construction of the office building. The premises were impressive, complete with offices, a library, a meeting room and living quarters for the "peons" and guests.

When I first visited the Delhi office it had become a bit shabby and the air-conditioning was showing signs of fatigue, but the British colonial tradition was very much in evidence. The word "peon" was used to designate low paid staff. We were driven around in Indian-made cars, which were used to drive senior staff to work and back every day. If not "colonial" it was in any case very Indian. The Director was from Sri Lanka and almost all the other staff were Indian, with the exception of a Swede who was posted there by SCC.

In addition to the financial situation we had two other problems. The office was too Indian to represent members in the Asian region. There was general dissatisfaction about its location in New Delhi. Legislation made it difficult to have foreign staff. The currency was and is not even today freely convertible. A reasonable degree of efficiency would require a move to, for example, Singapore with its dynamic economy and modern environment.

With messages to that tune from our members in Korea and Japan, I talked to the Regional Chairman and it was decided that we should sell the office and move to a more modern economy. I was not sure that this move was correct from a development point of view but something had to be done. In addition, the staff-Director relations were not good.

The period that followed was amazing. Everyone but the Indians agreed with the ICA but no one was willing to take the axe and use it. I told Bob he had to go there and when he hesitated I said, "Then I will go alone".

We managed to bring in a new Director, G.K. Sharma; we sold Bonow House; and we either retired the staff or put them on project-related contracts. Then the Indians talked the other Asian members into the need for "Asian unity". In the end we bought back Bonow House but the office structure was new. There

were now Chinese and Japanese members of staff. The Delhi office became a common responsibility of the Asian Region and a property of their own. In 1984 it had been almost completely financed by SCC. In 1990, only half its income was from SCC. In 1994, SCC provided 25% of the office's 2 million Swiss francs project and administration budget.

I do not believe any of this could have been achieved without a tough attitude. I still remember a final meeting in New Delhi when I met with the Board of the National Co-operative Union of India. They were very aggressive in expressing the opinion that Indian co-operatives were the strongest, most successful, most beautiful and efficient in Asia. I told them that they were cheating their colleagues worldwide by using a loophole in the subscription formula to avoid paying the right level of ICA dues.

In early 2000 I was informed that Bonow House has been sold and that ICA has opened an office in Singapore. The New Delhi office had served well in many respects but ICA should have learnt the lesson not to get involved in the business of real estate.

The pressure on our development structure not only placed the ICA in a stronger position. It also attracted new sources of funding outside Scandinavia. By the time Bob Beasley stepped down he had made valuable contacts with the World Bank and we received project support from members in Japan and Canada and later from outsiders such as Rabobank in Holland.

The Latin American Office

In my report to the Central Committee in 1985, I offered some thoughts on the future structure of the ICA. After raising the problem of making our Agenda interesting to all members, I stressed the difficulties we faced dealing with the professional and geographical differences in our membership. I referred to the Scandinavian tradition of close cross-boarder contacts between Presidents, CEOs, buyers, exporters, legal advisers and many others. This approach was in the spirit of the ICA but completely outside the competence of the Head and Regional offices. But, I said, to help to achieve this, a more developed regional structure could be helpful. The need would however have to be identified by the co-operatives concerned and self-financed or donor assisted. In the latter case the ICA could negotiate on their behalf.

I showed them a map. I can only remember that it was based either on cultural, linguistic, ethical or religious groupings or on political links, like the Asean and Andean pacts. The number of such structures could increase by ten the existing regional offices. So far, one has been set up in Latin America: San José in Costa Rica. The history is as follows:

We had an Argentinean member on the Executive – El Hogar Obrero – that was represented by Luis Carello, a lawyer. He explained to me that his organisation was prepared to bear the costs of setting up an ICA office in Buenos Aires. I told the Director that we should write to all members south of Mexico to find out if they were interested in the offer.

The reactions were few but indicated nonetheless that Argentina was not a favourite location – too far away, not Latin American enough and without consensus on the consumer co-operative initiative of its other co-operatives. I told Carello about the reaction and also that the Executive should send a delegation to that part of the world.

In the meantime, Bruce Thordarson was employed by Bob Beasley to take care of Development. It was decided that a delegation comprising Bruce, Arsenio Invernizzi – a Spanish speaking Italian – and myself should travel to the region to learn more about our Latin American members and what they wanted from the ICA. We were also to make contact with OCA, the Organisation of the Co-

operatives of the Americas, an ICA member about which we did not know much. Our itinerary took us to Argentina, Uruguay, Colombia, Panama and Costa Rica. As SCC had a project for co-operative farmers in Nicaragua I was to end my trip there. We had eight days at our disposal.

In Buenos Aires we met with national co-operators as well as with their colleagues from Uruguay, Paraguay and Chile. It was easy to understand that they had a strong interest in having an ICA presence. It was good too to learn that our decision to decline the offer from El Hogar Obrero had been correct.

The history of the nations of South America is fraught with revolutions and fast changes. Argentina was a part of that trend but was more European than the others. Its co-operators had been born as children of every junta, every revolution. The Jews, the Italians, Germans and all the other immigrants had formed a nation of convulsions. If you spoke to one of them, another would come to you afterwards and say that the first one was not to be trusted; he or she could have been a socialist, a fascist, a racist or anything else. The co-operative insurance sector was strong on paper but divided into a vast quantity of small entities that did not communicate.

With the years I have learnt that the same conditions can be found in many countries, but while these are more like a spice to life, here it was life itself. But all Argentineans were genuinely nice to us.

In the Uruguay of the mid 1980s, political changes had made a co-operative comeback possible. We flew in and met with a newly elected council. As in Buenos Aires we told them that co-operatives of all kinds, of all historic traditions should co-operate in areas of common interest such as legislation and government relations. It could be difficult at first but in a ten-year perspective very helpful.

In Paraguay we met a medical doctor who was involved in the first stages of a new type of co-operative. Ideologically clear, prepared to use personal means and a "good" person in the proper sense of the word, he was an idealist and a bit of a dreamer too.

We then went to Colombia via Chile and met with the President of OCA. By then we knew that OCA had been formed with the strong support of US colleagues and USAID, that the financial support had been terminated and that it was now weak and unable to live up to its name.

The President used our visit to argue that the ICA was not needed for any other purpose than to support OCA. On our side we explained to him that we had no intention of limiting or competing with the activities of OCA. If we opened an office in Latin America, we would act in the interest and at the request of our members.

As always, it was difficult to understand OCA as well as Mr. Tovar, its president. Many of those we met said that OCA did not represent anything of interest to them. We didn't open or close any doors. The future would tell.

Then we spent a night in Panama, where we met with a spokesman for the

credit union confederation, COLAC. They were members of WOCCU, the World Council of Credit Unions, and thus indirectly a member of the ICA. The visit was short and did little to add to what we already knew.

After Costa Rica, Bruce returned to Geneva and I ended up in Nicaragua before returning to Stockholm. It gave me yet another picture of Latin American co-operatives. Here, co-operatives helped poor farmers to survive at a time when the US looked upon their country as an evil outpost of communism.

It took some years before the ICA opened an office in Costa Rica – first a project office in 1988 and then a full Regional Office in 1990. The movements in the Americas gave their consent and support. New members had joined the ICA in the meantime, Brazil amongst them, and it should be noted that at the time of writing the current President of the ICA is Brazilian and the first non-European to hold the position.

Communism in Eastern and Central Europe 1984-1989

USSR

A few years after my election to the presidency I was informed that I had the acceptance of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR. It could be true, and it shows both how politicised the co-op movement was and how seriously they took the ICA. In the beginning of the 1950s I had led a delegation from the Swedish national apex youth organisation to Russia and the Baltic republics. I was then responsible for the international relations of the social democratic youth and I was accompanied by representatives of the conservative, liberal and farmers parties. We also had a teetotaler, a Lutheran priest and a young Baptist in the group but there were no communists.

My only co-operative contacts with the communist system had been through helping the DDR – then still outside the ICA – to study Swedish retail techniques, and a visit to the Congress of Bulgarians at the end of the 1960s. In those days the Swedes were still a bit unaware of the outside world.

Looking at the Swedish communists, most people thought that they were paid and controlled by the USSR. After Churchill identified the Iron Curtain, many were sure that the enemy was in the East.

I pictured the situation a bit differently. I was aware of the risks from 1948 onwards but from a personal interest I had studied the Soviet system and its weaknesses. I thought that they had more reason to be afraid of Western democracies than we of them, at least in a longer perspective. I had a small library with biographies and memoirs from the USSR and DDR and also a number of books on politics and criminality. I had been to West Germany early and could compare that with what developed behind the Wall.

The communist system was not going to survive unless force was used. In the DDR and Hungary they tried during the later years to develop and create more efficient systems but the Russians didn't care and used Comecon to support their own economy.

With these thoughts in my head, I decided to make co-operatives in Eastern and Central Europe an area of vital importance. I do not say that I foresaw what would happen in 1989. My plans were only to help the consumer co-operatives in Comecon to be better than the state-owned alternatives.

Soon after my election I attended a *Centrosoyuz* Congress in Moscow. Everybody was there and I delivered a message that was to be repeated many, many times and to all ICA members. In short, it was as follows:

“ I extend to you the greetings of ICA members, representing 700 million co-operators and their families worldwide. ICA members are united by the effort to strengthen the economy of their members regardless of culture, religion and political system, capitalist or socialist.

“*Centrosoyuz* represents one of our oldest members and a tradition dating back to the 19th century. ICA itself was founded in 1895. What has made co-operatives survive during times of fast changes during the last century and why do we continue to increase our share of the market economy so fast in the poverty stricken parts of the world?

“The answer is simple and double. People need to work together and co-operatives have proved that they can deliver. But you can turn it the other way. If co-operatives don't offer what is expected then people don't need them.

“For most of our members, survival in the market economy is a struggle. You have to prove that you are excellent. Only those that do this survive. In planned economies you have a role that looks as though it could last forever. Don't be deceived. It is comfortable to be able to sit back and let the operation run. Whenever you talk to members they tell you they want things to be better, faster, cheaper. Only by serving your members will you serve your nation.

“The ICA is an organisation that cares for its members, mostly the economy of its members, but it is also an organisation that understands that what we strive for includes a world where nations live in peace and where our environment is not abused. Our generation has seen great changes and there are more to come for our successors.

“Let them find that we have not spoiled the heritage given to us by earlier generations.”

Being President for eleven years I found in the end such messages a bit monotonous. I suppose I gave at least two hundred variations of the Moscow speech of 1984.

Audiences varied but generally they included congress delegates, Government representatives and, as in the case of the USSR, members of the Politburo. This always gave me the opportunity to ask the members I visited if they wanted me to include something in my speech for the attention of politicians.

I returned to another *Centrosoyuz* Congress in March 1989. I made a similar speech but talked more about the co-operative legacy. I referred to meetings with Russian reformers whom I had met studying in Sweden and told the Congress that these scientists had said that *Centrosoyuz* had been good in the 1920s and 1930s but nowadays had nothing of interest to offer for the future. I urged

the delegates to listen to and discuss with their critics so that they might find a new role in the national economy, and I said – with Gorbachev and his colleagues sitting behind me – that if co-operatives were criticised, it was not only because of their shortcomings in the past.

During the lunch break I was asked to join Mr. Ligachev, the Politburo member in charge of agriculture and consequently consumer co-operatives. They had once been dissolved in the cities by Stalin and had their activities limited to non-urban areas.

In my address to the Congress I had said that I would like to have the same opportunity as the younger delegates to take part in the work of Centrosoyuz. The challenge was great but the chances of success were obvious if they could make the right analyses, unite and prove themselves ready for hard work and discipline.

Ligachev was described at the time as a conservative but respected idealist from the past and the strongest opponent of Gorbachev and his reform plans. He proved to be very curious about the role of consumer co-operatives in Western Europe and asked about market shares and our role in competition.

When I asked him about the future of Centrosoyuz he smiled and looked at its President, Pavel Fedirko, who had been listening to our conversation in silence. Ligachev said he did not know what strengths could be mobilised. Then he told of a recent meeting of the Politburo at which Gorbachev announced that sovchoses and kolchoses were to be privatised. He was not against privatisation but he feared that a fast and complete transfer to another system would be fatal. On many of their huge farms the production worked sufficiently well and workers claimed that they preferred to keep the collective system. In the majority however the results were bad and reforms should be initiated. He foresaw the disorder that was to follow but he did not defend the status quo.

At the end of the Congress the guests were taken on one of those excursions, which meant that foreigners were not meant to stay. I asked for permission to remain so that I could follow the election of Pavel Fedirko. Here, in 1989, voices from the floor said that he had to go. At a crucial moment the representative of the Central Committee of the party was invited to speak. He agreed that their President had committed mistakes but advocated nevertheless his re-election. Pavel Fedirko, the long-time big party secretary of Siberia, was deeply humiliated.

But I have no illusions about the risks of outside interference in co-operative affairs, especially when they are dependent on politicians who can see that the co-ops represent economic strength. I have listened to the Pope address Italian catholic co-operators in the Vatican about what they should do. I have heard African leaders. I have even heard Swedish trade union leaders address the KF as visiting guests, unable to keep their fingers away from co-operative democracy, believing themselves superior masters of a business they neither knew nor understood.

In 1989, the Russians still listened to a party that was to lose its power in a short time. So what happened to Centrosoyuz then?



Meeting with ICA Vice President Pavel Fedirko (centre). Next to him is Mr. Bob Beasley, ICA Director 1984-1988. Mr. Fedirko was brought into co-ops from the position of Party Secretary.

The Soviet Union was dissolved and so was Centrosoyuz. The co-operative federations started a life of their own in the republics. In some cases, national minorities inside them formed their own co-operative federations.

The original Centrosoyuz had been a wealthy organisation and among the assets were its import-export operations, Koopvneshtorg. Its CEO turned it into private property where he was in charge and the Mayor of Moscow, Lushkov, was one of the partners. When I think of it, I remember a big warehouse in Siberia full of furs. Perhaps they were exclusively from sable.

The CEO of Koopvneshtorg, Alexander Starykh, was a fascinating businessman and maintained a vision of keeping the parts of Centrosoyuz together as most consumer co-ops of the ex-Soviet countries had shares in the new Koopvneshtorg. For a couple of years he helped all our new members to pay their dues and other costs related to the ICA, to make them legitimate in the eyes of the members and government.

Centrosoyuz had also owned property in Russia. There was a conflict over other parts of its head office in Moscow, which included a hotel. At one phase it almost started a civil war. The Moscow Regional Union claimed it was theirs. They asked the staff to leave it and locked it up. The new Centrosoyuz of Russia claimed their rights and called for government support. The army faced the police. Then, Koopvneshtorg said that it was common property of all the new republics and was supported by a large majority of them. I was told that it ended up in court.

This account is about what I heard and what I remember. Maybe I missed a few

things, but what I have written is aimed to bring to light how reforms completely changed the situation for an ICA member that was regarded by most of us as strong and solid.

In the beginning of the 1990s I was asked to visit Russia, the Baltic countries, Kazakhstan and Moldova. It was difficult to understand the quality of the remains of the co-operatives. They were badly hurt by their past. Questions about democracy and members were left unanswered.

One final thing about the Soviet Union: the economic collaboration between countries in Eastern and Central Europe had also included the co-operatives. The President of Centrosoyuz had called their leaders to an annual meeting for which the duty of hosting was passed from one country to another. The events in 1989 now made the role of the Russians obsolete, but the need for exchange of experiences was still necessary. A major problem was that in several countries co-operative property was looked upon as state property and could thus be privatised.

I turned to Pavel Fedirko, who had been very passive, and said that I was prepared to call a meeting in Geneva of leaders of co-operatives in Eastern and Central Europe. He had no objections. It was welcomed by all and was said to have been of help, although it was too late to change what had already happened. I also became aware that the problems occurring in Eastern and Central Europe were being closely watched by the Chinese and Vietnamese. The Chinese were eager to learn and took steps to avoid a future shock.

It was hard for me as a Swede to recognise the role of the ICA in the USSR, but when you find your own portrait in the offices of distant, small co-operative offices, staff rooms and shops, you know that it must have meant something – and also that you yourself were just a symbol

Poland

Poland is not far from Sweden, some 200 kilometres, but modern history has made it more unknown than it had been a century ago. It was in Poland that changes in Eastern and Central Europe began, and I had Jan Kaminski on the ICA Executive.

He was President of the Supreme Co-operative Council, which united the consumer-owned SPOLEM, the agri co-operative Farmers Self-Aid, a bank, and other co-operatives including housing, handicapped, workers, students, etc. I have written about Jan in a previous chapter as a man of high moral character. Now in the late 1980s he understood more than most, but not the strength of the revolt against the communist past.

He looked for a successor who could also gain the respect of the people of Solidarity. He was advised to take Barslikovski, who had been the negotiator with the trade unions in Gdansk and was supposed to be acceptable.

It was a mistake and things happened very quickly. I was called to a special Congress during the last days before the real changes in December 1989 and met with the new Premier, Masovietski, and General Jaruselski, still President

of the nation. The Congress had been convened by recently nominated co-operative officials. In the front row I saw representatives of the new Government.

I spoke up in favour of reforms but also of the co-operatives now facing new opportunities. In Poland as elsewhere, the co-operatives dated back to the 19th century and they represented not only an ideological heritage of economic democracy in the sense we had in Sweden but also economic values created by generations. These co-ops belonged to their members and were thus already privately owned. The ongoing reforms should lead to decisions by the members, not by the State. The Government and Parliament were of course supreme to take decisions in the interest of the nation, but to dispose of the co-operative unions by selling all their assets would be to throw out the baby with the bath water. In a period of many changes, I also felt that a strong SPOLEM would probably be the best way to arrange retail distribution in competition with a private sector originating from State owned enterprises.

I ended by saying that I had spoken not in the interest of those who were present but with my knowledge of Poland. I believed they were already closer to Western European co-operatives than those in other parts of the Comecon. Yesterday's leaders should now have a chance to compete for re-election if they could get the support of their members.

I never received such applause as I did then. It lasted at least five minutes. I was given the honour of having a cup of tea with the Polish President, General Jaruzelski, and an upsetting talk with the Prime Minister, Mr. Masovietski. The new people in power hated the communists – and the Soviet Union. In their place, I would have done too.

Since then, much has been achieved in Poland, probably now ranking number one in the contest for membership of the European Union amongst all countries wanting to join. I still think they behaved wrongly towards their co-operatives and their unions. A couple of years later I was invited to Poland to receive an apology from a new Government. SPOLEM's central and regional assets had been sold to the highest bidder but consumer co-ops had started a new union.

The speech I had made put forward arguments that I was to repeat in many countries. I never spoke on behalf of those who happened to be in power but on behalf of the co-operatives and their members.

DDR

In August 1989 I was surprised to learn that the VdK President, Heinz Fahrenkrog, wanted to meet with me. He was coming to Stockholm with two colleagues and their wives. We had dinner together both at home and at a restaurant with my wife – someone who through the years has been not only a wife but a good friend and one of my best advisers.

It was a nice summer evening and we walked along the quays of the old town. Heinz slowed down and began to talk about the reforms in Poland and the changes in the USSR. I told him that Hungary had just opened its border to

Austria and that many DDR citizens seemed to be taking the opportunity to cross over. Heinz slowed almost to the point of standing still while the other members of the group walked on ahead. He said very quietly that his country had a severe problem but he did not think that the young generation would be tempted to emigrate. I remarked that what is forbidden is also very tempting and that the other man's grass is always greener.

He and his colleagues returned to Berlin and he informed me afterwards that he immediately called a meeting of the Board to find a suitable strategy for such an alarming situation.

Co-operatives in the DDR were limited to retailing and given a more or less fixed market – and thereby market share – by the State. VdK, where Heinz was President, was the umbrella organisation for local consumer co-operative societies. They had some factories but had neither their own warehouses and wholesaling nor transport facilities. The reunification of the two Germanys later made all the efforts by the VdK President, in his small environment, inadequate.

At first there was a threat from Bonn to auction the co-ops to the highest bidder. On behalf of the ICA I wrote to the Minister concerned with the same message I had given in Warsaw in December 1989. I also pointed out the history of Germany. First the co-ops had been dissolved by the Nazis, then they had been raped by the communists. My question was whether the present Government was going to commit a similar abuse.

The plan was cancelled but VdK ended up with nothing but planning functions and a few small industries. The Eastern German consumer co-ops had little power to resist Western German private retailers who were in a position to deliver the required goods and offered partnership to co-operative societies. They provided Mercedes and BMWs as fringe benefits to local managers. From VdK they got nothing, and the range of goods produced in the DDR was not attractive.

In this process Heinz Fahrenkrog withdrew and a lawyer from Hamburg was persuaded to take his place. Frank Dahrendorf not only carried one of the most respected family names in Germany but also had the support of the very strong society in Dortmund. His task was nevertheless hopeless and the efforts of Co-op Dortmund to expand through merging with co-operatives in the former DDR only caused harm and helped Dortmund on its way to final defeat. At the end of the 20th century, with the exception of Schleswig Holstein, consumer co-operatives in Germany are mere history.

All the Others

Between 1989 and 1993, most of my travels were directed to countries in transition that had changed from a communist to a market regime. For me it was a question of proving to ICA members that they most certainly belonged to an organisation that cared for its members and that they were not forgotten.

When I met their leaders in 1990 the thoughts I expressed were that they should learn from each other, and I added that if they needed an ICA presence to enhance respect for the movement we would be happy to accept their invitations.

I went to Czechoslovakia a few times and later to Slovakia. I went to Hungary and I visited the three movements in the Baltics. I met with presidents, premiers, speakers of parliament and party secretaries. And as changes were happening quickly, I had to return again and again. Most of the new political leadership had a short time in office before becoming history.

Let me end by writing about two countries because they were somehow beside the mainstream of events and have still at the end of the century not caught up with the reforms: Bulgaria, the traditional supporter of the USSR, and Romania, the communist regime of the Ceauscesco family.

Pancho Ivanov, President of the Co-operative Union in Bulgaria, was a person who did not wait for things to change. He had the necessary contacts with the next generation of politicians and their parties and asked me to come to help. When I arrived he gave me his analysis of the situation and next morning we started to visit seven or eight people. They were communists, socialists, liberals, farmers and others representing different factions of parties from before 1939. I was Pancho's door opener and gave them my little lecture and he gave them his agreement.

Back home, I read the results of the elections that followed a few weeks after my visit. The winners were the only group I had not met. Pancho had referred to them as a hopeless, untrustworthy bunch of idealists. You had better come again, he wrote. I did. The last time I was there was in 1996, as a tourist. Pancho was still in charge. The co-operatives had survived. We visited Sulindol, the

huge and very experienced wine co-operative, where I was asked to give KF an option as exclusive importer to Sweden. When I told them that wine retailing belonged to our State-owned monopoly they looked at me as though I was a survivor from a communist past. For a moment, our feelings were mutual ...

Among the ICA members I found hard to reach were the Romanians. At ICA meetings all members had a chance to report on events of general interest to others. The Romanians never hesitated. They talked at length about harvest results, the increase in the number of calves and piglets, the expanding production of eggs and butter. They read their speeches in Romanian and had an interpreter reading the same speech in French, which was then taken up and improved upon by the official simultaneous interpreters. Even though we talked to them, nothing could stop the mass of words.

At that time they were represented by Paul Nicolesco Misil, elegantly tailored and well manicured. He made the same type of speech, describing a prosperous and technically well-advanced country, while my friends from the DDR told me about its backwardness and starving children.

In 1989, at the invitation of the ICA, Paul Nicolesco came to Switzerland together with colleagues from Comecon. The meeting was organised in order to exchange information on political events in Eastern and Central Europe, and their implications for co-operatives. I need you in Romania, he said. So I landed in Bucharest in November 1989. I was not dressed for the latitude. It turned out to be cold and I was put as the only guest in a good-sized but cold hotel (+10° indoors). I was also alone in the dining room next morning, and when Misil met me he told me that the Congress of the Communist Party was to start the following day. If I accepted, I was invited to the opening session. I answered that I would appreciate taking part and he seemed relieved. Perhaps this was the sole purpose for my visit. I never found out.

It turned out to be a remarkable experience. I had once read the history of the Communist Party of the USSR in the version that was embellished with all Stalin's speeches. Here I saw and heard it repeated. First arrived the delegates – or rather audience. For quite a while we looked at the rows of empty chairs on the stage. Then arrived the international guests. I was not one of them. I sat on the floor together with the delegates. They applauded Yasir Arafat and others. Then arrived the Politburo – including Paul Nicolesco – and they got their fair share of praise. Another pause followed and we looked at the two gilded armchairs at the front. Then, after a further delay, came a thunderstorm of shouting and handclapping, accompanied by the arrival of Ceaucesco and his wife.

Given the floor, Ceaucesco spoke for four hours, including a short break for sandwiches. His message was delivered by three, four or five sentences, after which he raised his voice so that everyone knew what was expected. I am sure we were filmed so that it was possible afterwards to identify who had not applauded or shouted things like Long live Ceaucesco, Ceaucesco and the Party, Long life to our beloved leader, and I suppose other things like that, since my knowledge of Romanian was limited to what little Latin I remembered.

I returned to the programme I had been given on my arrival. We visited a consumer co-operative next day. We went by car and on a good road. I was freezing. I don't think that I was ever so cold.

The shops were well stocked, much better than those in Bucharest, but of course they knew I was coming. The village was inhabited by scientists, I learnt. I hate to visit a co-operative without making a purchase so I bought a packet of 24 mousetraps for our little house in the Swedish archipelago. So far I have caught only one.

During our lunch my interpreter had a call. I was to return immediately to Bucharest. It was good news because it was nice and warm in the car. I was to meet Ceaucesco. He had left the Congress to meet me and also the leader of the Chinese delegation. One at a time, I understood.

I met with Ceaucesco in a big room. There were two armchairs at the end of it, a table between them and a chair for the interpreter. At the other end, some 10 to 15 metres away, there was another armchair where Paul Nicolesco was seated. After some minutes Ceaucesco arrived. I have met with many people of power during my life – not least in the ICA. Some of them I am ready to respect, others had a reputation that made it difficult. But to me, they had one thing in common. Charisma. They were informed. They had lived interesting lives and had wide experience. They had the charisma of power, otherwise they would have been just anyone.



Mr. Marcus with Czech President, Vaclav Havel - It was explained to Mr. Havel that co-operatives were by no means a product of Marxist Leninist thinking, but actually operating successfully in market economies and privately owned by members and not State property.

The talk with Ceaucesco was friendly. I offered no threat to him. We spoke about Olof Palme and I referred to the Youth Movement where he had played a role in the World Federation of Democratic Youth. Since we were almost of the same generation, we talked about the differences between the turbulence in Romania and the peace in Sweden. We talked about our visions and differences in careers. He knew more than I expected of the outside world including Sweden. He expressed respect for our neutrality and non-alignment and referred to how Romania also had refused to be a part of a military alliance that limited its independence. We build our own aircraft and cars, he said. I talked about Volvo, SKF and our paper mills and turned to the problem of the OECD versus the Third World.

He cast an eye at his wristwatch and said that he found support for African development useless. I sent them 200 lorries, he said. I believe he mentioned Angola. But, he continued, within a month they were all out of order or had crashed.

I said that Swedish co-operatives and the ICA had another approach. We had no cars to give away but could offer co-operative principles and experiences. Our Government supported us in this respect, while our business was a part of our market economy.

Finally, Paul Nicolesco became a participant in the talks without saying a word. Ceaucesco said: "Do you hear what your President says. We should help the ICA." Then the time was up. I thought of an old Latin quotation: "Quid quia id est. Danoes et dona ferentur" (Beware of Danes bearing gifts).

Yes, time was up. A few weeks later Ceaucesco was shot together with his wife. Paul Nicolesco was sent to prison. A new Romanian turned up at our meetings but I got a letter from Paul Nicolesco's wife asking for support to free her husband. I made inquiries and found that he had been close to the dictator in several ways. He had been Minister of Finance and there had been some relations between his daughter and the son of the ruler, but people said also that he had been very good to protect the movement.

I wrote to the new people saying that I had learnt about the imprisonment of Paul Nicolesco, and that while I could not interfere in legal actions taken against him, I asked the movement he had served to see that no injustice was done.

I returned later to Romania at another request. I heard that Paul Nicolesco was out of prison and had retired from active duty. I brought a bottle of French cognac to be delivered to him but I did not meet him again. As a person he reminded me of Hercule Poirot, with features similar to those described in her books by Agatha Christie.

Western Europe – Is There a Need for the ICA ?

Between 1984 and 1988 my major problem had been to bring the ICA back on track. During my next four years I chose in many ways to concentrate on members who faced the market economy after the fall of the communist political system.

There were other problems, however, and increasingly it turned out that our members in Western Europe had several of them. I have already pointed out some, but there were others where ICA could be of very little help or even where ICA was never invited to play a role.

On the other continents we had, at the request of members, organised regional offices and around them a formalised regional co-operation had started to grow between groups of members: farmers, consumers, fishermen, banking, insurance and others. This was similar to the structure of the ICA, where we had such global committees.

In the European community and Union, such regional specialised activities had been active for a long time and did not call for any promoting actions from the Executive or the Geneva headquarters. We also found that many of those concerned felt that they were better off without ICA interference. Some however urged us to open an ICA office in Brussels, while most of the Western Europeans didn't care.

The creation and expansion of the European Union certainly created a new situation and gave reason for some deeper thoughts on what happened in Central and Eastern Europe. In Brussels there had existed for many years offices or lobbyists for several of our members. By far the strongest of these represented the farmers, and their staff felt that an ICA office should not create a superior organisational level that would hinder them in their work.

There were also other objections. In Brussels many politicians and civil servants (and some co-operators too) were regarding co-operative enterprises as a part of what is called the "social economy", derived from a French concept. It does not sound so bad but means that we would be mixed with various non-profit and charitable associations and thus perhaps hide the fact that we were

working according to a concept where we had to prove efficiency in the market and build our credibility on our own financial strength and as a result of that independence. The value of that concept is still an issue among the European ICA members.

For me it was easy to agree with those who did not want the ICA to represent the interests of just one or two member categories. We had very little if any capacity for that. The members know better themselves what they want and need. A presence in Brussels had to be according to the wishes of all, not only some.

My conclusion from these discussions was that, for the time being, we should have no intention of forming an office at the EU but should rather handle our responsibilities in Europe from the HQ in Geneva. In later years the fear of unskilled interference in Brussels seems to have vanished, though this was mainly after my departure in 1995.

The other objection is, in my mind, still valid. I did not and do not believe that people in general should think that we run the same kind of economic activity as sports clubs, yachting clubs, charity groups and diverse activities which are all to be honoured and supported but not looked upon as enterprises. The "social economy" concept may sound tempting to any co-operator but I do not agree with my dear friends in France, Italy, Belgium and Spain that this alliance would necessarily serve our long-term interests.

The Inner Life of the ICA

When I tried to identify what had to be done in the ICA, as described above, I noted that to care for and serve our members should be come a top priority as soon as our economy was under control. What we called auxiliary committees – the Specialised Organisations – made it possible to meet with colleagues in the same category such as retailing, banking, housing, etc. Among these committees were also four of another character – the Research Committee, the Communications Committee, Co-op Training and the Women’s Committee. For a while we also had a Librarians’ Committee. In what follows, I will not only refer to the long-term task of the ICA but also try to shed some light on the complexity of our membership.

Consumer co-operatives 1980-1995

I do not think it is necessary to apologise for starting with consumer co-operatives. They were the strength of the ICA right from the start and the major contributors to the ICA economy in 1980. The Swedish member had been a major backer of the ICA since the 1950s.

By 1980 it was easy to spot the problems ahead for consumer co-operatives in Western Europe. In Holland, they had already gone bust in the 1950s. In Belgium they had faded away and existed mainly as a chain of pharmacies. I have already recounted the sad story of what was to happen in Western Germany.

While our competitors imitated what had brought success to co-operatives and made them unique as survivors in the market for perhaps a century, they also added other features to make them more competitive. The development of new techniques made retailing interesting for investors. Small family-owned businesses formed voluntary chains for buying wholesale, warehousing, transport and marketing. They could be described as retailer co-ops, which is also the legal form they took in both Italy and France. Another type of competitor was created by strictly capitalist interests. Big companies diversified into food chains to appear on the stock market and act as multinationals.

A specific quality of the consumer co-operatives was their local character, accompanied by national wholesaling and production. Now our ICA members

found that they faced a competition they did not know how to handle: the pride of members and their solidarity towards their own enterprise made structural changes difficult and the demands for democracy made the boards of lay people stronger and the CEO's position more difficult. When they raised the question of just one society for the entire national area, they found little support.

This was most clearly seen in the UK but also in Sweden, where many board members of local societies favoured keeping their shops and societies until bankruptcy. At the same time I found that consumer co-ops seemed to have made a new start in Greece and Spain and that in Italy they had been able to create a new structure ahead of most competitors.

The truth was simple. Success in the past does not guarantee a place in the future. Any co-operative, including consumer co-ops, must prove excellence in the marketplace. The members must know that it has something to offer, not only good ideas, but also economic benefits. Nobody needs a bad co-operative! Only at the turn of a new millennium you can see efforts to form transnational co-operatives as a means for survival.

Our new CEO in Stockholm had in 1985 invited a group of consultants to study the problems of KF, and with their results available I found that they could be of interest to colleagues not only in Scandinavia and Finland but also in Austria, Italy, Switzerland, France and the UK. When I asked Leif Levin to invite them to Stockholm, he gladly accepted.

All arrived and found that they knew each other mainly by name but that they had the same situation at home. The meeting was at first sight a big success. Problems were introduced by one of the consultants. He and his group were then invited to perform similar tasks in Austria, Switzerland, Italy, the UK and Denmark. The CEOs decided to meet again in one year and to discuss further and reach conclusions. They added that they did not want this to be an affair of the ICA but that I – as initiator, friend and retailer – was welcome to their future meeting. What the consultants would find in respective countries should “of course” be known only to the organisation paying for the services provided.

The atmosphere in Stockholm was also good when I raised the problem of national restrictions and asked if someone among them could perhaps throw light on the chances of a transnational co-op retail chain emerging. The Norwegian CEO promised to respond. He was for other reasons soon to be dismissed.

A year later there was another meeting as planned, and then another and another. Gradually they turned into social occasions. The truth was unpleasant. To dine and chat was a way to hide.

I happened to be in Vienna when the Swedish consultant reported on his look into Konsum Austria, and I was given the chance to sit in with the CEO. Probably no one else in Austria ever heard what was explored and exposed. The picture given was one of a movement dying under the control of a person who was its Chairman but also Speaker of the socialist party and Chairman of the

blue-collar trade union. He was old and did not want a change that might cause unrest among any members of the three categories.

The French had by that time already suffered a run on one of their societies. The financial world then asked all the other societies to pay all outstanding debts. Hopes for rescue operations from the Government were in vain. In a short time the French consumer co-ops were reduced to Alsace and some other smaller societies. Soon the Austrians followed. I do not know if they also had any false hopes raised by their friends but I doubt it. They were already looked upon as a part of the trade unions and the party, to be used, milked, but rarely supported.

The Nordic consumer co-operatives had since 1917 worked together as buyers on the world market and to some extent in later years as manufacturers of, for example, detergents and sweets. As buyers they had for years been one of the strongest groups worldwide. Nordisk Andelsförbund (NAF) operated successful offices in California, Brazil, Spain and Hong Kong, and others were invited to join.

During the years 1970-1990, the commercial alliances of co-ops grew weaker and weaker. I cannot tell what happened. The simple explanation could be that NAF did not perform well enough. Another is that buying is more fun and easier than selling. Elements of corruption cannot be excluded. The Germans in Coop AG, for instance, took part in the Hong Kong office only to use information on offers and prices to buy on their own. The Swiss preferred to move into partnership with private capital. Their link with the ICA itself became very passive after a few years.

What I have recounted so far about the consumer co-operatives in the ICA is about decline, some falls and initiatives taken in Europe, where they had formed the strongest sector to give ICA economic support. While other sectors in corresponding ICA auxiliary committees were represented by their top leaders, the consumers used their committee for what could be called "union matters", i.e. non-commercial issues like consumer policy, the environment, membership and democracy. The representation consisted of people like me. The consumer co-op CEOs and the commercial colleagues met in NAF and Intercoop, and when they looked for inspiration they did not look to co-operatives but to the US and the European giants like Carrefour and Migros. Long gone were the days of the 1960s when Carrefour made pilgrimages to our Swedish out-of-town discount department stores OBS! or after 1945 when Migros's founder Duttweiler worked together with Konsum Stockholm on developing supermarkets.

Now, the Finns also had problems and the Danes too. The Finnish E-movement had to be brought under outside administrators. The Danes had a severe leadership crisis. The UK co-operatives have survived so far, but the ICA President from 1995 to 1997, Graham Melmoth, resigned because of the pressures of his duties as CEO of CWS at a time when the movement was under attack by corporate raiders.

I have made up my mind once and for all not to write anything about Swedish

developments. In comparison with the ICA and our colleagues in Europe, however, I should say that our problems were the same but we had more fat under the skin to live from. A couple of years ago the crisis suddenly became acute. Christmas sales in the month of December always put a heavy demand on liquidity. Some people say it could have turned one way or the other. Today KF is a very different organisation to the one that I retired from in 1990 at the age of 65. Slimmer, hungrier, more united and attractive. I wished it had changed earlier and I sometimes blame myself since I was a part of it. But I have learnt that life in the market is a continuous change that never stops. So far I have felt tempted by the view that consumer co-operatives can be successful only at times similar to those in Europe after the industrial revolution and up to the post-industrial society. I hope younger generations prove that this is false.

In Italy Coop Italia has been doing very well, perhaps because their retail competition long resembled Sweden in the 1930s. Other leading lights are the other, and largest, Finnish consumer co-op, SOK, with a record surplus for several years, and NKL in Norway, which also enjoyed a good last decade of the century. In Japan the JCCU has been able to grow at a speed almost unheard of and it included some new elements on its agenda like health and the environment. In China and South East Asia, as well as in Latin America, the ICA has some fast growing consumer co-operatives that are taking on the role of successors to the Europeans, unless the political environment stops their growth. But for a full return to what once existed in Western, Central and Eastern Europe, only dreams can give a promise. Of Africa I cannot tell but in the big cities, the millions of consumers looking for a better life still wait for the leaders who can organise and bring hope.

Agricultural Co-operatives

While a consumer generally has a choice between competing retailers, a farmer has to make a living from what the farm produces. For a co-operative farmer, the co-op represents a much more important part of the overall economy than the consumer co-op does for the consumer. Unlike retailing, the market for agricultural products is global and regulated mainly by political decisions.

Sweden protects its farmers. Europe protects its farmers including the Swedish. Many farmers lack similar political support, not least in countries where the majority lives from farming. As a consequence the interests of farmers are creating conflicts between nations and continents. The co-operation between farmers on the global scale is therefore even more complicated.

Today, farmers as individuals outnumber other categories in the ICA because of our members from India and China. Two other international organisations also offer them membership: IFAP and IRU. The former also includes non co-operative members and was formed by the agro industry in OECD countries, but has shown increasing interest in attracting members also in developing countries. Its task has been to defend the economic interests of its members and provide a forum for discussions on issues like trade agreements, customs and taxes. It is the club of the advanced farm industry.

The International Raiffeisen Union – IRU – is an international organisation of co-operatives based on the ideas of Fridrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen, who pioneered in Germany the same ideas as the Rochdale weavers, but focused on artisans and farmers through savings banks. Some of its members have also joined the ICA. Among the others in the IRU you can find the Austrian farmers and banks like the large Rabobank of the Netherlands. To this picture should also be added the fact that the European farmers have jointly built a strong organisation - COGECA - in Brussels where they act as lobbyist to defend their interests in the European Union.

When you take a look into the ICA, IFAP and IRU membership and tasks, the overlapping is obvious and improvements look possible. When Bob Beasley left ICA I felt it my duty to contact our Swedish member organisation LRF, although I know the old saying that those not invited will seldom be welcome. It turned out to be true.

In LRF, where I had friends and their support as ICA President, I had only had a slight contact with their new Chairman, Bo Dockered. He now refused to meet with me and I was told by others that he spoke of me as a communist and of consumer co-operatives as enemies of our farmers.

I had wanted to discuss with him whether ICA could be of better service to the farmers and not whether farmers could be of better service to the ICA. As I saw it three organisations overlapping were perhaps too many to operate independently. I thought it called for a meeting with the Presidents and CEOs of IFAP, IRU and ICA and I had wanted him to initiate it. On the agenda should then be costs, development, meetings and the consequences of the political changes in the former communist economies. I also had as a longer perspective my conviction that farmers worldwide had to defend their interests by uniting and not by dependence upon politicians. After his refusal I had to turn somewhere else.

At the end of the 1980s a large part of the ICA Executive was directly related to the farm industry. I turned to the Dane Knud Ollgaard, who knew of the remarkable change in LRF and who shared my views and thought it worthwhile to explore the co-operative map.

The first thing we did was to turn Bruce Thordarson's personal contacts with the CEO of IFAP into a routine of mutual invitations to meetings of Congress or Central Committee. To get to understand each other is the first step to co-operation.

Then Knud offered to contact Hans-Detlef Wülker, who was Secretary General of the IRU, and a meeting with him and his President took place in Frankfurt. As a result we started to co-ordinate meetings and part of our agendas. Their meetings and our meetings were partly parallel. The President of IRU and I also toured some of the Central European countries in the beginning of the 1990s. He was a Dutch banker and a person who shared my views on global co-operative structure. Looking back, this matter still looks unsolved to me, but my successor from 1997, Roberto Rodrigues, will perhaps be more successful being a farmer himself.

ICA and the Financial Sector: Banks, Credit Unions and Insurers

There are different reasons for the existence of financial co-operatives. One category is formed by people who are ready to save their money and want to be sure they can turn to their own bank when they need to take a loan. They may also want to know that the assets of their bank are not used against their own interests, which could be national, ethical, environmental or other concerns.

To this category belong credit unions and banks where the ownership is in the hands of individuals. A good example is the Desjardins group in Canada. This serves the francophone part of the country and its interests in relation not only to the economy of its members but also to their ethnic identity in an ocean of anglophone culture and economy. Desjardins is very strong.

Early on, farmers started similar savings activities that later took on more of the characteristics of a bank than of a credit union. The strongest in the ICA world is the French *Crédit Agricole*. Today it is among the biggest banks in the world and a part of the global economy.

The consumer-owned banks are often not formed by individuals but rather by their co-operatives. They offer the members similar conditions to commercial banks but also that the assets should be used in the interest of the savers as co-operators.

Today in the developing countries, savings and banking in co-operative forms are increasing while the co-operative nature of the old and big ICA members seems to be at risk. Quite a few have changed from membership to stock market ownership. The Swedish farmers bank did, as well as the German *Bank für Gemeinwirtschaft*, whose charismatic leader also turned *Coop AG* into a capitalist enterprise and then in partnership with the trade unions also lost the old co-operative insurer *Volksfürsorge*.

The 21st century will tell us about the future. I am sure there will always be a role for neighbourhood finances, where people who live close to each other or work together will find it useful to do business together – also in savings and credit.

Co-operative insurers have, more than the banks, their origin in consumers. Behind them can be found not only consumers but also trade unions and the political left as well as liberals and conservatives. This situation has partly developed side by side with the national welfare system – sometimes initiated by it, sometimes making it more complete.

Today the co-operative and mutual insurers in ICA form the strongest group. Here you have *Nationwide* in the US, which flies its own jet to our meetings, *Zengyoren*, the strongest insurer in Japan, together with their European colleagues. *ICMIF* – the International Co-operative and Mutual Insurance Federation – has its own office in Manchester and does successful business in reinsurance, arranging training and introducing new techniques to all members, as well as running development projects.

There are, however, a few problems for them too. Some insurers have been sold by their members because they were owned by other types of co-operatives in urgent need of money. Others have been turned into joint stock companies because their members were tempted to make a profit and the leaders wanted to make acquisitions and then had to pay with stock.

Such limitations contribute a real threat to many co-operatives as long as globalisation continues. The information society also adds to the advantages enjoyed by big and transnational operations.

Housing

Co-operative forms of housing have many advantages. Over the years they have probably become the most promising. Their members live in their co-operative and when they move, the house remains and new members will move in.

It is of course true that farmers have their land that cannot be moved away but they can still walk out of their co-operative or sell the farm to a purchaser who is not interested in co-operatives.

Especially favourable are co-ops providing apartment buildings or groups of them. Co-op owners willingly care for their staircases and facades and for the efficiency of the administration as well. They keep an eye on the walls to see that the youngsters do not use them for graffiti. They care more for the co-operative than for property owned by public or private ownership.

The advantages of co-operative housing are not so well represented in the ICA, however, because in most countries these co-ops lack a national union or have a very weak one with little interest or possibility for membership. The strong ICA members are to be found in the OECD and particularly in Northern Europe. They are active on behalf of co-operative solutions not least in the developing countries, both at the UN level and through projects with support from their governments.

The Housing Committee is maybe not as strong as the ones so far described, but the potential for co-operative solutions worldwide is remarkable when you analyse the problems and the shortages.

Fisheries

A small group of our members represent the interest of fishing, and among them the Japanese have played a leading role. The focus has been greatly on the environment and the risks of over-fishing. The individual fisherman has another approach to these problems than the big companies with their methods of vacuum cleaning the oceans. Through their committee they have voiced their concern in international forums. Most of the members are from Asia and Latin America.

Health

Co-operative solutions in health care were for many years absent from our

membership, even though many countries have organisations like friendly relief funds that date back to the early 20th century. Then in the 1980s we found two organisations in Spain and Brazil that applied for membership. They were mainly in the category of worker co-operatives, formed by socially conscious doctors of medicine, operating through a national chain of colleagues but including hospitals of their own.

These two organisations were not based on the ideas of maximum profit but wanted to offer the clients a service at reasonable cost. When they came on the scene, they met with co-operators in Japan who had organised health services for their members among farmers and consumers as well. The Japanese gave their employees and members instructions on how to increase awareness of symptoms like high blood pressure and breast cancer.

This was the start of a new committee and others took interest in their work, both in Europe and in the South. In countries with a strong welfare system the increase of operating costs has become a big problem. Every disease soon seems likely to be cured and healthcare has taken a growing part of the national budget. Hospital beds, emergency care, new, expensive drugs, everything adds to the costs and new systems are looked for. The structure of public health care without competition seems to offer the same problem as any monopoly in countries like the Scandinavian ones and in the US with its liberal capitalist system. The best health care is so expensive that it is available only for the rich.

I think I have seen the start of some kind of international co-operative health care alliance, where consumers and producers meet.

Worker Co-operatives

Worker co-operatives are often formed as small enterprises or as a result of a takeover. You find them as evidence of unemployment or dissatisfaction. In times of cheap technology and high labour costs the OECD is already short of jobs. And where unemployment and poverty predominate, worker co-operatives are born by themselves and also as aid projects. In both cases the governments take interest in supporting them.

This interest is generally theoretical, however, unless products or services are attractive to the market. Also at the same time a successful worker co-operative often ends by being owned by a few or just one of its members and then changed into a joint stock or family-owned company.

The Basque country in Spain has proved that success and expansion are possible. In the USA and UK, big companies are bought out by staff from former owners and given a co-operative structure. In Sweden, small enterprises in villages threatened by unemployment have been bought from ageing owners, much against the will of the trade unions, who worry about the future membership of the new owners.

In countries under communist rule like Yugoslavia and China, experiments in worker ownership have been made but seem today to have been largely abandoned.

In the ICA they were already part of our vision at the beginning of the 20th century but they never became an important part of our membership. One explanation is that they offered ad hoc solutions to problems like giving jobs to blacklisted workers. They also rarely form a central organisation that can support, represent and propagate them. Another problem was that they were to be found in very different branches. I have above pointed to one type of health co-operative which belongs to the group of service co-operatives including homes for the retired, kindergartens, schools, etc. The other major category is manufacturing co-operatives like metal workers, boat builders, etc, where people work together and then sell their products.

In my years in the ICA a French colleague, Yves Regis, was elected Chairman of the Committee. It had existed as a part of our tradition but others had heard little from them. He was a person full of enthusiasm and capacity who arrived at a time when this type of co-operative met increasing interest in OECD countries as well as from development agencies. High unemployment and problems in the public sector, both from costs and inefficiency, have provoked discussions about whether new directions are called for. Whether that will result in ICA membership is difficult to tell. It depends on how people in the future will want to organise their professional lives.

Energy Co-operatives

From the US and its National Co-operative Business Association we were given a new direction. Much of the electricity in that country is distributed by consumer co-operatives. This was common also in Sweden until publicly owned entities took over.

Our American friends saw to it that a committee was formed, thanks to contacts with other parts of their continent. I do not know what followed after my time in office, but in view of the global energy problem it is not difficult to see a co-operative agenda for this – distribution, of course – in Africa and Asia as well, but even co-operative production of alternative sources of energy like solar and wind will be possible.

Other committees

In the long co-operative tradition women were always involved in the co-operative movements not only as members but also as representatives. In the European tradition they had formed co-operative women's guilds, which played important roles in supporting, influencing and propagating the advantages of consumer solidarity.

Some of these organisations were accepted as members of the ICA and formed a committee by themselves. An important task of this committee was to gather all female delegates at our meetings to discussions on consumer problems but more and more on gender issues.

Their participation was at times during my years not without complications and should not be, because it reflected the urgent need for higher gender equality. When you call for a participation of co-operative leaders from all over the

world, the result is not half women, half men. You face an overwhelming majority of elderly, well-fed men who are used to holding power, and one or two women in each delegation.

Generally, these women were used to being and were expected to remain quiet in the ICA. In the 1980s we were confronted with the Women's Committee whose representatives had a not-too-easy task to create enthusiasm for a stronger and more prominent role for women in the ICA membership. That was what they now demanded in ICA forums.

Some of us men had met these demands on the national level and had tried to respond to it in different ways. In Sweden for example, legislation against discrimination of women included a demand upon all enterprises – private, public and co-operative – to draw up plans for the enhancement of gender equality in the labour market. Swedish female co-operators now asked the ICA members worldwide to do the same.

The reactions were varied and somewhat surprising among many delegations who found the ideas – let me say – exotic. Those who had faced angry women at home hesitated about whether the tactics were good. I did not think they were, although I sympathised with the criticism raised against the male dominance – not least among the consumer co-operatives, where the individual members are women but where the boards are mainly composed of men and their leaders are those who participate in the ICA meetings. I would have preferred them to argue as I have done myself. I have now and then asked my colleagues in big assemblies if they think that their daughters, whom they love, should also in the future be discriminated against in the labour market in favour of less educated, less clever, less intelligent, less in every aspect male competitors. Cultures differ, as well as religions, but daughters who are loved have the same rights to education as sons, because education means personal strength and provides the opportunity for influence and choice in your own life. Education adds quality to life and makes happiness more easily accessible.

I am not sure whether I could be accused of defending male dominance. There is also a need for plain talk and sometimes aggression to make a point. It was certainly made.

The ICA Women's Committee had a weak basis. From the beginning their members came from women's organisations in Europe. And the consumer background dominated. The year 1989 saw a growing disintegration of the co-operative guilds that had started earlier and emphasised that women more and more had to win influence in the regular commercial co-operatives. Then they will be seen more frequently in the ICA of the future. And they will be dissatisfied until their capacities are fully taken advantage of.

Groups of Specialists

In a structure where needs and interests differ and finances are limited, the ICA has nevertheless through its annual meetings been able to invite specialists from

different areas to meet and exchange ideas and produce results. Some of them can be found in connection with the ICA. Most of them exist outside but in the same spirit. Let me give some examples.

Research

Co-operatives represent a unique form of economic life and cover many competing branches. Many people have reflected on their character. In developing countries we often find a co-operative minister in the government. In several countries you find universities with one or several professors specialising in co-operatives. Co-operative education is organised by ICA members, and the big and strong ones have employees engaged in research, but mainly for commercial use – quality, methods, opinions, etc. When it comes to research on the true nature of co-operatives, the examples I can think of are sociological studies in developing countries.

ICA has had a Research Committee for many years, but in the 1980s it was fostered mainly by the consumer co-operatives and dealt almost entirely with the problem of finding efficient retailing methods. In the discussion that preceded the 1988 Congress, the Basic Values of Co-operatives were put forward as a theme. It led to a project that ended with a new ICA structure and new rules. All parts of the movement were invited to participate and a number of seminars for researchers took place in our regions up to the Centennial Congress in 1995. The Research Committee seems to have followed a broader range of activity since that time.

Development

In order to strengthen the bonds with those who offered support for regional development and our regional offices, we invited donors to meetings with each other and also to meet with regional staffs and HQ. A committee on Human Resource Development has also been established, working in collaboration with our Geneva neighbour the ILO.

Communications

What used to be the ICA Press Committee is today transformed into the ICA Communications Committee. When I started in the ICA it was where the chief editors of the co-operative press met when they were present to report on our regular meetings. Today the scope is wider and includes workshops and seminars and ICA itself is engaged in the internet.

Archives and libraries

The large co-operatives always had good control of their archives, thanks to the presence of qualified librarians who were in close contact with the ICA in the days of our London office. The move to Geneva caused some harm, but even worse was the decline of several co-operative movements and the cutback of staff and expenses.

The ICA library still exists, although smaller, more unilingual and without detailed minutes on discussions, just decisions. I am not too happy about the de-

cisions that contributed to this, but we had little choice about maintaining full contact with the past when we were desperate about the future. Other co-operative archives remain worldwide but they are often short of librarians and the old ICA role of co-ordination has been hard to continue.

Congresses, Central Committees, Agendas and Basic Values

Through my notes on the activities inside the ICA structure, it is perhaps possible to understand the difficulty of creating interesting meeting agendas for so many different types of members. I had from time to time reason to speculate on that.

First of all, I believe three things make ICA meetings interesting – to meet with international colleagues and friends, to get away from the daily problems and to visit an interesting place. To this can be added that the ICA participation gave some strength to the positions of delegates at home. For quite a few participants nevertheless the agendas played a role.

In fact the meetings of our auxiliary committees (nowadays Specialised Bodies) were rated more highly than those of the Central Committees or the Congress. Geneva, on a dead end street for airlines, is less interesting than Beijing, Quebec, Tokyo, Kuala Lumpur, Rio de Janeiro or New Delhi. And to be on a photo with a prominent person that might be published back home could give a thrill and some bonus points.

On the auxiliary committee agendas the ICA Executive had little to say. Our job was to find a suitable venue for the Central Committee – later General Assembly – and especially the Congress. Since we alternated our meeting sites on the invitation of members, we had to look for those who could offer decent hospitality. For a long time they had to be found in Europe and the national members had to be unanimous in their support of the invitation. As a result, we could as a rule have a member of the government to address us and someone from the country itself if a strong personality was available. Rarely did we get that something extra, and national figures are seldom there other than for their countrymen.

When India contributed to the first ICA Central Committee in Asia, they offered the presence and welcome speech of Rajiv Gandhi. Speaking in a low key manner about the world and co-operative ideas and strategies, without a manuscript, he kept everyone spellbound, especially as he stood on the stage surrounded by bodyguards ready to shoot straight from the hole in the bottom of their black briefcases.

After the opening session there was a tea break and the Premier and I were the first to leave the hall. It gave me a chance to chat with him for a few minutes. As I have said earlier, I told him of my worries for the economic dependence upon the political system of the Indian co-operatives. To my surprise he shared my views. Perhaps some agro co-operators from the OECD group could form a delegation to see what reforms were needed and possible, I said. Please talk to Dr. Kurien, he answered, because I cannot trust my staff in such matters. Shortly afterwards he was murdered.

We also had representatives of the ILO address our meetings but they were not exactly "personalities". Our main interest in having them there was to keep the collaboration alive.

At the Washington Central Committee meeting, we were promised a keynote address by the then Presidential candidate, Robert Dole, who was a friend of the Executive Committee member from the USA, Morgan Williams. At the last minute he was replaced by his wife, who was to be a presidential hopeful herself in 1999. At that time, she was Minister for Transport and the speech she delivered had obviously been written for another audience. To me, it felt so typically American, like a talk show.

When the 1988 Congress was planned, we got for the first time in ICA history the Secretary General of the United Nations, Perez de Cuellar. It was in the summer. I talked to the Swedish Ambassador at the UN and he promised to take it up during a visit to the Secretary General's office. Our Director talked with some of his contacts. I talked to our Minister of Foreign Affairs, who was negative. The UN only asks for money, he said. Please, I said, and added that we would welcome him anyway.



Marcus with UN Secretary General, Perez de Cuellar, at the Sotckholm Congress, 1988

There were as usual some emergency situations around the world that year. The days before our Congress, however, de Cuellar was in Geneva, and later he was supposed to turn up in Oslo. He had two days at his disposal and wanted to meet the Government. He did. He met us too. When he entered the Congress hall he said: "What a lot of people." He delivered his message and left with our Prime Minister and the Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs, who had also delivered a speech that I had written, though he needed the help of a pair of borrowed glasses. He could not find his own glasses and had been forced to borrow his secretary's, the frames of which were bright red. My friend the Minister could be very charming and both of them left us in a good mood. The Secretary General did not leave for Oslo empty handed, and the respect for ICA in the UN group grew to a previously unknown high, I was told. It was not difficult to appreciate Javier Peres de Cuellar.

Exploring ICA's Basic Values: 1986-95

In Moscow, the 1980 ICA Congress dealt with the Laidlaw report on Co-operatives in the Year 2000. In Hamburg, in 1984, a report was signed by Michael Trunov and dealt with ICA and global problems. Something similar was to be looked for in Stockholm in 1988.

The Presidium met in Montreal in 1987 and proposed to the Executive that Co-operatives and Basic Values should be the heading of our report. The idea emanated partly from the Board of the Women's Committee who had been in Japan and learnt about member participation in the consumer co-operatives. We found it interesting from a revival point of view but a bit too narrow. Then Yvon Daneau referred to his own recent experiences of member activity at Desjardins around basic values.

The Executive accepted this as its proposal to the Central Committee, which put it on the Congress agenda. Then came the problem of who should write the report. We were offered help from Austria but found that what they were to produce was more on a business than a value level. Time was running short and someone in the Executive said: "You had better do it yourself". I hesitated but went ahead because someone had to. Besides, I knew what I wanted it to look like and we were in a hurry.

I took a couple of days off on my return to Sweden. I walked, thought, wrote and cooked my own food. It ended with a sauna on the third night. Then I came back from the island and presented my thoughts to Sven Ake Böök, Head of the Swedish Co-operative Institute, who was later to play a leading role in the discussions on the paper that followed. It was his knowledge that helped me to sum up a great number of value categories to make the picture broader than the four I had originally put forward. The matter is complicated but complications can often hide a message, not only for scholars but also for the illiterate. I stuck to my four basic values – democracy, participation, caring and honesty.

The report received a better response than I anticipated at the Congress. It started a process that would continue until the Tokyo Congress four years later. There were meetings around the world in which Böök played an important role delivering the report "Basic Co-operative Values". Then the issue was passed on to a reference group led by Dr. Ian MacPherson, who was responsible for the

ICA Project on the redefinition of the co-operative principles and who presented the results to our Centennial Congress in Manchester in 1995. At that Congress the ICA principles were confirmed. Two new ones were added: Independence from State and Concern for Community. The principles were in some respects a summary of our co-operative heritage but they clarified the role that co-operatives should take in the 21st century society.

Changing ICA

At the Stockholm Congress our Finnish members put forward a motion that asked for structural changes to the ICA. It was inspired by Raija Itkonen, a member of the Executive and Vice-President of the ICA after Yvon Daneau retired for health reasons.

It was good timing because this was what ICA needed and the Executive gave the task to the three of us, Raija as Chair, Bruce and myself. While discussions around values went on and were in good hands we now, step by step, changed the way for ICA to serve its members.

The new structure was to be a global General Assembly every second year and four Regional Assemblies in the years between. It was a way to free the members for a higher degree of activity but also to meet a development of centrifugal forces from the Specialised Organisations.

A European Regional Assembly with Geneva as its office half solved the problem with Brussels. Each of the four continents had to nominate a candidate as Vice-President to the new Board. Together with the President they formed a Presidium of five.

These decisions were taken at the Tokyo Congress in 1992 followed by the election of Regional Boards and the nomination of candidates to the General Assembly. The Executive Committee became the ICA Board.

Everything went smoothly and I did not give much time to the basic values, the principles and the rules, because I supposed my time had come to leave. In any case, the events in Central and Eastern Europe were taking much of my time.

President Again ?

I told the Executive in late 1991 that it should look for my successor and added that since we had no proper procedure for nominations, it was the responsibility especially of those who might be running for re-election. Even though I did not want to take part in nominations, I thought that it might be a good future solution if the planned four Vice-Presidents would meet and discuss the elections and find my successor.

Nobody said anything to me, at least until our next meeting. Then the Vice-President, Raija Itkonen, told us that the Finnish movement had given her their nomination. There was no reaction at the meeting, but someone turned to me after the meeting and said that everyone thought that she was my choice because I had put her in the vacant Vice-President's seat. I replied that this was a misinterpretation. My thought had been that it was a good signal to our members that the only lady on the Executive was given a more prominent role and Raija had experience and was a good and respected member. By that I had not intended to influence the election of my successor.

At a following Board meeting in Uruguay the Vice-President, Mitsugo Horiouchi, wanted to talk with me. I speak for most of my colleagues on the Executive, he said, and we want you to carry on for another two-year period. Raija is a good person, he added, but she is not the best choice for such a position. To find the right person for this will take time and will be complicated as Raija has declared herself a candidate and has supporters. Please help, he concluded.

What was offered was really no temptation. I had taken difficult decisions before but this was in the unpleasant category, if I was to say yes. On the other hand, I found that this request came from a friend. I also found out that the soon-to-be Vice-Presidents from Africa, the Americas, Asia and Europe wanted me to remain. To escape the problem I gave four reasons why I could not accept:

1. I had told KF that I was leaving the ICA when my present term came to an end and that in any case I needed a home base.
2. KF had paid all the costs for me: travel and representation, as well as topping up my pension. I could not presume that they would continue to carry this burden.

3. The inter-Scandinavian relations must not be damaged.
4. I did not intend to run a campaign



Ms. Raija Itkonen (extreme right), competing Finnish candidate for the President in 1992. Seated with her are, Ms. Mathimugan (centre) and Mr. Sasha Leukhin (left).

On this basis I expected Horiouchi to find that my reasons made re-election impossible. He only said that he would take care of the problems. He sent a messenger to Scandinavia. KF's CEO, Roland Svensson, told me he would pay everything, which I refused, and then he and Horiouchi agreed to share the costs. Suddenly I was a candidate.

There were reactions among some of my friends. Knud Ollgaard, the Danish farmer, was strongly against as were Rainer Volkens, from the German consumer co-operatives, and other people whose integrity and good judgment I respected, with the exception of a few silly remarks about my being bought out to serve Japanese interests.

The election took place at the first ICA General Assembly, in Geneva in 1993. As a point of order the President of the Finnish E-movement made a forceful speech in favour of his candidate. I was then elected by a narrow margin.

From Tokyo to the Centennial

We now had four regions with their own leadership. I wanted the regional Presidents to find themselves in a strong position. The tradition had been that I should take the chair whenever present at meetings of all ICA committees, even the Women's Committee. Now I did not.

I went to Africa, the Americas and Asia just to take greetings and some information. I let the four Vice-Presidents run all the regional meetings they could attend. They spoke on behalf of the ICA on their own continents. When members asked me to come I referred them to the respective Vice-President.

I took a little extra interest in the Workers' Committee to help it grow stronger. I went on my last trips to some Ministerial conferences.

In Sweden I had several years before left my positions in SIDA and SCC. My successor in KF, Lars Hillbom, chaired the SCC and now I introduced him to the ICA. He had earlier been on the Central Committee; in 1995 he was elected President of ICA Europe and thus became a member of the ICA Board as European Vice-President.

With his agreement I arranged for a study of African co-operatives and our development efforts. On one hand it is difficult to succeed in the midst of poverty, feudal fights and tribal wars, illiteracy, illness, hunger and corruption. It takes at the very least patience and even courage. On the other hand, assistance is useless unless it brings results, and perhaps it even makes the situation one of ever increasing dependence and eroded self-reliance. The study was built on experiences from success and failure and indicated a new co-operative strategy. How to support self-aid in Africa remains to me a major task for co-operators but also governments in other parts of the world.

We also turned to the Muslim and Arab world. This had been represented by only a few members. I had made a friend at the Moscow Congress in 1980, Aboul Kheir, professor at the University of Cairo and a key person for the co-operatives south of the Mediterranean.

With his help we explored the interests of these co-operatives and gathered them for a session in Cairo where even Palestinian co-operatives could meet

with our Israeli members, who were deeply involved in the peace movement. This happened when the situation had looked promising just before Isaac Rabin was killed.



Here is a photo of Annhelen, my wife and companion of 50 years, taken during a visit to Cairo, together with Dr. Abdul Kheir from the University of Cairo.

The Manchester Congress – 100 years of the ICA

Graham Melmoth was elected ICA President at our Centennial, having served as European Vice-President for two years. And I stepped down without unnecessary noise after eleven years. My colleagues in the Board gave me an exquisite art book with all their signatures. Graham made a generous speech, describing me in almost religious terms and the Congress passed a Resolution to express gratitude.

It was high time. I was 70. Now, five years later, I have since had a lot of fun. Perhaps you can call that irresponsibility, but nevertheless I have been thinking about the past. First I thought about a book, but I found that memoirs tend to disappear or turn into falsifications. Then I decided to write just this – some notes on the years in the ICA from 1976 to 1995, with a few copies for my friends and old supporters.

My Co-operative voyage

My work in the ICA felt like that of a pilot. I carried with me a chart of experiences and as I look back on the voyage it seem sometimes that it was a bit rougher than my notes might indicate.

I was seldom alone. The staff was the crew. The Executive was the representative of the ship owners. And these were co-operators from all over the world. The chart that I used could be found in the ICA documents from XXIX Congress Agenda and Reports called *Co-operatives and Basic Values*.

The voyage I made can be read in the Review of International Co-operation, Vol. 88 No. Page 7: "The ICA – What it is and what it has done."

The ICA – What it is and What it has done

Some of us have had the opportunity to be active within the ICA for decades. I myself recall how I joined as a Swedish member of the Central Committee. It was in 1976, at the Paris Congress.

My major memory is from a dinner in Epernay, where lots of champagne was served, and where I had a talk with a Japanese delegate who was by himself. He was very old. He had attended his first ICA Congress some 50 years earlier, and that evening he shared his experiences with me.

He helped me into the ICA work, which is not easy to understand when you are new to the job and agendas mainly seem to deal with endless reports on economics and past activities.

As Chairman of the Swedish Co-operative Centre and with a national background of importance to the ICA economy, I was immediately made a member of its newly elected committee for budget and finance, FABUSCOM. The ICA had problems.

Four years later I was elected a member of the Executive, and after another four years I found myself President. This was in Hamburg in 1984.

Many of you are likely to be in the situation I experienced in 1976. I turn to you to bring some light upon what the ICA is, and what it has done during the last

few decades. I also turn to those who will take over, as some of us are now stepping down.

The ICA forms a huge and complex organisation. It encompasses agriculture, fishing, banking, insurance, savings, housing, health, tourism, energy, industry and retailing. Some of our 200 members are strong, but most are weak. We operate in English, French, German, Russian and Spanish. We have our head office in Geneva, Switzerland, and regional offices in India, Tanzania, the Ivory Coast and Costa Rica, with a branch office in Argentina.

Our huge body has a small head. We operate on a budget of roughly 2 million Swiss francs of annual subscription income. We have enough to allow us to operate with a headquarters staff of 11 and four regional directors. For us, strict priorities are necessary. The ICA cannot be run by events: it has to have a plan, which must be understood by all members.

In the years 1976 to 1980 we had some major problems, which were becoming urgent. The office had always been in London, where we owned a leasehold in Upper Grosvenor Street. It was impregnated by tradition, but not appropriate for our needs. Too often among OECD members it was said that the ICA was old fashioned, dusty and sleepy, and had turned away from them to the Third World.

And our development programme during this period, with support from mainly one country, was not under economic control. The ICA started to bleed during the 1980s.

In the years from 1980 to 1984 we finally sold the leasehold and moved to Geneva. Something had to be done, although we temporarily lost both competence and a certain amount of our members' confidence, not only in the UK. The staff was reduced by 50%, yet the financial situation remained out of control. We now survived on the proceeds of the office sale. The threat of bankruptcy was increasingly present. A worried staff kept members informed. Unrest among the main financial contributors increased.

In the autumn of 1984 the Executive sat down. We had had a brilliant document by the Canadian, Alexander Laidlaw, on Co-operatives in the year 2000 at the Moscow congress in 1980. We had also received a survey and evaluation of our problems and structure from another Canadian colleague, Yvon Daneau, which had been well received by the recent Hamburg Congress. We had to make ourselves strong again.

We identified four tasks. In order of priority these were:

1. To function as a network and offer the members a suitable contact structure;
2. To support development in the South;
3. To represent members with the UN community or in response to individual requests; and
4. To care for the co-operative identity.

The short-term priority plan was, in reality, both short and self-evident: stop the bleeding.

With a damaged reputation, we did not go to the members asking for more money. We decided that subscription income could not be used for development. We cut staff. We limited our use of languages to mainly English. We managed to get two excellent secondments for financial control and membership services.

We also put pressure on the regional offices. At one stage we even sold our office building in Delhi, the Bonow House. After staff changes, and with more responsibility taken by Asian members, the building was later retained by the ICA as common Asian co-operative property.

Little by little we noticed a turn for the better. Our development efforts attracted more donors. In Asia, Japan was prepared to play a leading role, and members and donors in Italy, Canada, the Netherlands and Scandinavia also found that collaboration with and through the ICA was beneficial.

New members were attracted. A delegation to Latin America in 1986 was of great help, and the All China Federation of Supply and Marketing Co-operatives joined the year before. The economy started to be all in black figures, and we set ourselves another target. The reserves should be restored to an amount sufficient to cover one year's operating costs.

Now the time had come to tackle tasks three and four.

Contacts with the ILO, our neighbour in Geneva, had improved. The UN Secretary General, Perez de Cuellar, increased his references to co-operatives in his yearly reports. He personally addressed our 1988 Congress in Stockholm. And we gave consideration to the defence of our identity. The board decided that a discussion on co-operative basic values should take place at the 1988 Congress.

So far, so good. The next four years, however, developed in a way that was not foreseen.

From the beginning of the century, the ICA had had members in what, in 1917, became the USSR. After 1945 most Eastern and Central European co-operatives became part of State-planned economies. Together, they then formed a strong, united group in the ICA, not always easy to handle, and particularly loud and outspoken when it introduced political themes on our agenda. Nevertheless, they were respected; and not only for their financial strength. They needed us as a remedy against isolation.

After 1987 we noticed how they became more open and started to speak in the spirit of perestroika. Also, they had problems.

Then it all happened at once. In Poland, the new Government proclaimed that co-operative property was State property. In Russia, the economic reformers said that co-operatives were part of the past.

The new political leadership in Central and Eastern Europe was not familiar with the role of co-operatives in the OECD economies they wanted to imitate.

So far Centrosoyuz of the USSR had been acting as the leader of co-operatives

in COMECON. Now the Poles, East Germans, Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians made clear they wanted to go West.

We at the ICA asked them all, regardless of future orientation, to sit down together and inform each other and us about what was happening and what could be done. Three such meetings were held during 1990 and 1991. This at least meant that the Eastern bloc co-operatives were not deserted at the most crucial time for them.

At their request we talked to Governments and new political parties in nearly all the countries of the region. Together with the ILO, we organised several seminars on co-operative legislation. We also joined forces with the International Raiffeisen Union for discussions on rural reforms and co-operatives. Information was given to other members in order to encourage bilateral action. We contacted the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the World Bank and the European Union, and we also took part in the Co-op Network, formed to tap these and other sources to finance projects in Central and Eastern Europe.

For a couple of years we concentrated much of our work on Central and Eastern Europe. I do not think this led to any misinterpretations. Work also took place elsewhere.

Through the Moshi office in Africa we had already, in the early 1980s, started to organize conferences with the participation of co-operative regional leaders and the responsible Ministers and Commissioners. Their purpose was, on the one hand, to strengthen the co-operative image and, on the other, to formulate developmental strategies which could have a follow-up at the next conference. It worked favourably. Similar Ministerial Conferences followed in Asia. Good results have been achieved, not least in legislation.

We were also able to give thought to the future structure of the ICA, as decided by the 1988 Congress. The result was presented in 1992, when the Congress was held in Tokyo. There, we also finalised the discussions on basic values.

From Tokyo came the new rules, and the decision to make co-operative identity and principles our major centennial theme.

I know that some of you had concerns about the new rules. You felt that we in Europe, still the financially strongest part of the ICA, would move away from the other regions. I did not share this opinion, and I feel that position has proved to be correct.

The regions of Asia-pacific and the Americas have some very strong members and also many weak, but fast-progressing ones. Europe will need them, and they will need collaboration with European co-operatives.

Africa is a problem, it is true, but for different reasons. Africa must not be neglected. The problems of Africa are not due to its co-operatives, but rather to an environment of political weakness, corruption stemming from poverty, lack of human rights, and high rates of illiteracy.

All continents have countries suffering from the same, or similar factors as

Rwanda and Burundi: the crazy warlords in former Yugoslavia; the extreme poverty and corruption in Bangladesh; the extinction of large indigenous groups in Central America.

But Africa is an entire continent. Through the ICA we have, for almost 50 years, tried to assist our colleagues in Africa. Last year an evaluation was made, and guidelines for a new approach, built on hard experiences, were established. We have to have patience. A perspective of 50 years is not too long. It will probably take another 30-50 years for the sustainable development of Africa, based not on aid but on its own strength.

My own country also had a long period of poverty and famine. In the middle of the 19th Century, 20% of the Swedish population had to emigrate because of land hunger, and people starved to death. Confronted with the problem of Africa we should all be humble and try to help.

Farewell Remarks

Three years have passed since our Congress in Tokyo. The changes decided upon have had their follow up. Regional Assemblies and elections have taken place. During the preparations for this Congress we, on the Board, have once again turned our attention to our financial situation. We are still in the black (with the exception of 1993), but we have not reached the levels of reserves which we had hoped. Some major contributors of subscriptions have asked for leniency. Many members do not pay according to what is stipulated in the rules. The Swiss Franc is very strong, and subscriptions paid in local currency lose value when they are transferred to Geneva.

The new structure, anticipating a development that had come anyhow, is likely to require increased contributions both for sectorial and for continental collaboration.

The board has therefore taken certain measures to increase income, but I believe that before the year 2000 the matter will be brought to the General Assembly again.

I tried to tell you during the Congress Opening Ceremony how we worked to make ICA more effective in a changing environment. It is fascinating, but also a little frightening. Here we are at the beginning of our next century, five years ahead of the world.

When I say "we" I mean the Secretariat, and its very competent staff headed by Bruce Thordarson; a friend with enormous work capacity and brilliant intellectual skills. I also mean my colleagues on the Board, all my good friends. A good atmosphere and mutual confidence certainly help when decisions are difficult.

Before the elections I also have the privilege to express my gratitude to all of you, whom I met or worked with during so many happy years of my life. Because our cause is noble.

I also want to say something to my wife, who is present and who now and then accompanies me on my travels. I thank you, Annhelen, for accepting me again and again on my return from my numerous journeys, with our without jetlag,

loaded with documents and picture books of cities I visited but never saw. I wanted to say this now and in not too many words.

Elections will now take place and my successor, once elected, shall immediately have the chair. Please, then, be as generous, friendly and supportive to him as you have been to me. Once again, thank you all.

