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Reviews

Hard Sell: Advertising, Affluence and Transatlantic Relations, c. 1951-1969

Stefan Schwarzkopf

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The study benefits from unprecedented access to the extensive archives of the CWS and related societies. This includes material until recently thought lost, but now available to researchers as part of the collection of the National Co-operative Archive in Manchester. The same sources have yielded a substantial number of illustrations of co-operative products, plant and personalities, which are well-reproduced throughout the book, including 20 pages of colour illustrations. The authors have also been fortunate to secure interviews with key figures from the CWS and Co-operative Group, whose insights particularly illuminate the book's latter chapters. In some places, however, the detail available from these sources can feel a little overwhelming. This is perhaps also a function of the book's narrative structure. This has the virtue of revealing just how often the CWS and subsequently the Co-operative Group have wrestled with the difficulties posed by a dysfunctional system of governance in recent decades. But a more analytical approach might have aided the reader's understanding of the underlying issues.

Overall, this is a fair and balanced account of the strengths and weaknesses of co-operative trading as a distinctive and important way of doing business. As the authors reflect in their conclusion, the 'co-operative' difference' is positive in its involvement of members in profit sharing and decision-making, and in its espousal of ethical good practice, but also poses substantial managerial challenges.

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Hard Sell: Advertising, Affluence and Transatlantic Relations, c. 1951–1969

Sean Nixon

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