

Principle 5

Yorkshire Co-operative Resource Centre

Directors Report

By 1852 the Co-operative Movement's vision to build the co-operative commonwealth as an alternative to capitalism had begun to be consolidated. In this year the Co-operative League, a forerunner to the Co-operative Union established three objectives. The second one was; "To collect books, papers, documents and facts and to communicate all sorts of general information which may either be interesting or useful to the advocates of Co-operative association". The importance of informing the customers, members and general public about Co-operation cannot be overestimated. The success which had already been achieved was due in large part to the importance which the Movement had put on co-operative education since the pioneering days of the Rochdale Co-operative.

The Founding Congress of the Co-operative Union established the importance of co-operative educational establishments, self supporting by Industrial Co-operative enterprise.

From 1860 the Movement had been served by a newspaper called 'The Co-operator' published by the Manchester and Salford Society. This proved to be unsatisfactory. As a result of decisions at Congress the Co-operative News was established, published by the Co-operative Newspaper Society, later to be the National Co-operative Publishing Society and now, the Co-operative Press Ltd. G.J. Holyoake was involved in the early days of the Co-operative News which has been published continually since 1871.

The Second Congress urged societies to apportion a percentage of their profits for education and the law had been amended so they would be in a position to do so. By 1882;

- 120 societies had newsrooms
- 100 had libraries
- 34 had courses of lectures
- 9 or 10 had endowed scholarships or paid school fees
- 8 or 9 had science classes
- 9 or 10 had discussion rooms
- Some gave Co-operative News away or sold it at half price

Then, as now, awareness and knowledge was the key to building the co-operative commonwealth. A collective co-operative culture blossomed. By the mid 20th century the CWS was providing a film service for the Movement.

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It seems that much of that culture has been lost. Large co-operative societies have been driven into mainstream corporate ways of doing business, awareness raising amongst customers and members has been deemed to be unnecessary. If there are any of us left who still have a vision of a co-operative commonwealth, now is the time to begin again to cultivate co-operative education and culture.

The last few decades, it seems, have eradicated any sense that alternatives are possible. The big Co-operative Societies have marginalised co-operative education and in some cases abandoned the co-operative movement. Thatcher's declaration that "there is no

alternative” seems to have taken hold and was even affirmed by New Labour. Interest in the co-operative vision has largely been assigned to the rubbish bin. This is what Principle 5 Yorkshire Co-operative Resource Centre seeks to change.

We have to start all over again, this may not be easy, but hopefully you will agree that it is worth the effort. The good thing is that in the co-operative movement we are never alone. There are many co-operators who are organised in their own societies and organisations, who share a commitment to a co-operative future. Principle 5 is always seeking to fulfil principle 6 “Co-operation among Co-operatives”. We need to work in partnership with all those who share our vision.

The Yorkshire Co-operative Resource Centre has been open for two years now, we opened in August 2013 and by August 2014 were incorporated as a private company limited by guarantee under Co-operatives UK model rules for a multi-stakeholder co-operative.

- During that time the Centre has received many visitors.
- All of the resources have been freely given.
- All of the time spent in developing the Centre has been freely given.
- A study group has been established.
- Support has been given to a community project.
- Two articles about the Centre have been published in Co-operative News
- Principle 5 has received support from Sheffield Co-operative Development Group, Co-operatives Yorkshire & Humber and books from East of England Co-operative Society.
- The founding Board consists of four members; Dennis Chambers (secretary), Mary Wilkinson (treasurer), Steve Thompson and Jonathan Cook. We have received advice from Alan Dootson (SCDG) and Emma Green (Portland Works).
- Co-operative Film screenings are planned.

Now is the time to elect the new Board to move Principle 5 to realise its objectives.

**To provide an accessible co-operative
learning and information resource for all.**

- Lending Library.
- To have the current edition and back issues of Co-operative News always available for readers. To be a member of Co-operative Press.
- Maintain a co-operative archive .
- Maintain a co-operative information resource.
- Organise talks, classes, study groups, visits and film screenings.
- Co-operate with other co-operatives (principle 6)

Encourage and support principle five throughout the Region.

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The Co-operative is also looking for members who have skills to help in the Resource Centre, e.g. library, archive, office skills.

There are 38 individual members and two organisation members. P5 membership must be built up in order to fund the future programme.

