

Article Two for Sheffield Co-operator 2018 edition

For a long time now, I have been conscious that the mainstream media, institutions, business, politics and all that makes up our social fabric, has narrowed into a pro corporate capitalist consensus. A culture which perpetuates the status quo. This is reflected in the microcosm, from individuals, to small groups and onwards through the whole of Society. It tempts one to believe that Mrs Thatcher was correct when saying that there “is no alternative”. To take an example, are there really enough people who make a considered choice when buying a product or service? How many people first ask;

- Is this from a co-operative?
- What is the environmental impact of this product?
- What is the social cost of this product?
- What are the conditions of the people involved in making this product?
- Above all for a socialist, am I buying into the co-operative commonwealth or am I buying into the capitalist orthodoxy?

This article makes the assumption that the reader is a democratic socialist, co-operator or at least left of centre. It starts with the observation that the dominant culture of de-regulation and privatisation is the cause of a spiralling downhill of the well-being of people and the degradation of the environment.

It is difficult to understand why so many people choose the services and products which are thrust upon them simply 'because that's the choice that everyone makes'. But we really do have alternatives.

Why shouldn't money be in the service of local communities, of benefit to us all, rather than used to further the interests of private corporate interests. We really do have a say in how our money is employed. The Sheffield Co-operator carries adverts from co-operatives who offer alternatives, eg. community ownership and democratic accountability, high quality services and products as well as the values which we might expect from any bone fide co-operative. Whilst co-operatives need to make a surplus, unlike the private corporations, profit is not their only consideration.

Co-operatives at their best are not stand alone businesses but are part of a Movement. This fraternity of business gives mutual strength to all. This is why the old symbol of co-operation was the wheat sheaf – one stalk alone cannot stand but a bunch stands by mutual support. Co-operatives make mutual links with each other in local, national and international ways and it is the

International Co-operative Alliance which has agreed the standards for co-operatives everywhere. The wording was last revised in 1995.

The Definition, Values and Principles of the Co-operative Movement

A co-operative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise.

Co-operatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

1st Principle: Voluntary and Open Membership

2nd Principle: Democratic Member Control

3rd Principle: Member Economic Participation

4th Principle: Autonomy and Independence

5th Principle: Education, Training and Information

6th Principle: Co-operation among Co-operatives

7th Principle: Concern for Community

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