

## **Is the Co-operative Group different to any other supermarket chain?**

Where is its USP? The others have their plastic cards for points. An example of how the co-operative culture is subsumed by mainstream orthodoxy is its emphasis on Charity.

From Victorian times to the present, 'Charity' can be seen as a concept which fits comfortably within the capitalist orthodoxy. Large companies have always made token gestures in the way of donations to worthy causes. Philanthropy was very popular in Victorian capitalism and whilst there is nothing wrong with this in itself, it can never change the world. We can view 'Charity' as part of mainstream orthodoxy.

Co-operation is the opposite. It is collective self help, and this does have the power to transform Society. It builds up community resilience and gives ownership and control to communities. It is people coming together to cut out the middlemen and profiteers.

But this can only happen if it is organised collectively. The strength of the Co-operative Movement is that it is a family of organisations which support each other for common benefit.

Capitalist businesses of all kinds give to 'Charity' in all sorts of ways. In particular, the Co-operative's rivals on the high street all have their 'Charity of the Year'. For instance the 'Alzheimers Society' has been Tesco's Charity of the Year. There can be no objection to The Co-operative making donations to Charity, but this is not part of what a co-operative is. 'Charity' is an easy option because it is a concept well understood by everyone and staff can easily buy into it.

Why is the co-operative Group so determined to be just like all the others?

Is the Co-operative Group too big to be an authentic co-operative fostering the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity and being known for its ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

Steve Thompson  
October 2019