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APRIL 2022

SHEFFIELD'S CO-OPERATIVE NEWSPAPER

START A FOOD CO-OPERATIVE TODAY

LOWER YOUR FOOD BILLS REBUILD YOUR COMMUNITY

SHEFFIELD CO-OPERATOR CELEBRATES CENTENARY

FOOD CO-OPERATIVE STARTER PACK INCLUDED IN THIS EDITION

AT LAST! There is a new consumers co-operative movement. Or perhaps it is safer to say, that there is a little cloud, no bigger than a child's hand, which might yet grow into a new consumers co-operative movement!

Across the country, neighbours and friends are starting new food co-operatives on their streets and their estates, supported by an organisation called Co-operation Town.

Why are people starting food co-operatives now? Because they have collectively decided that the best way that they can support themselves is to pool their resources, so they can buy the food that they need in bulk at a cheaper price.

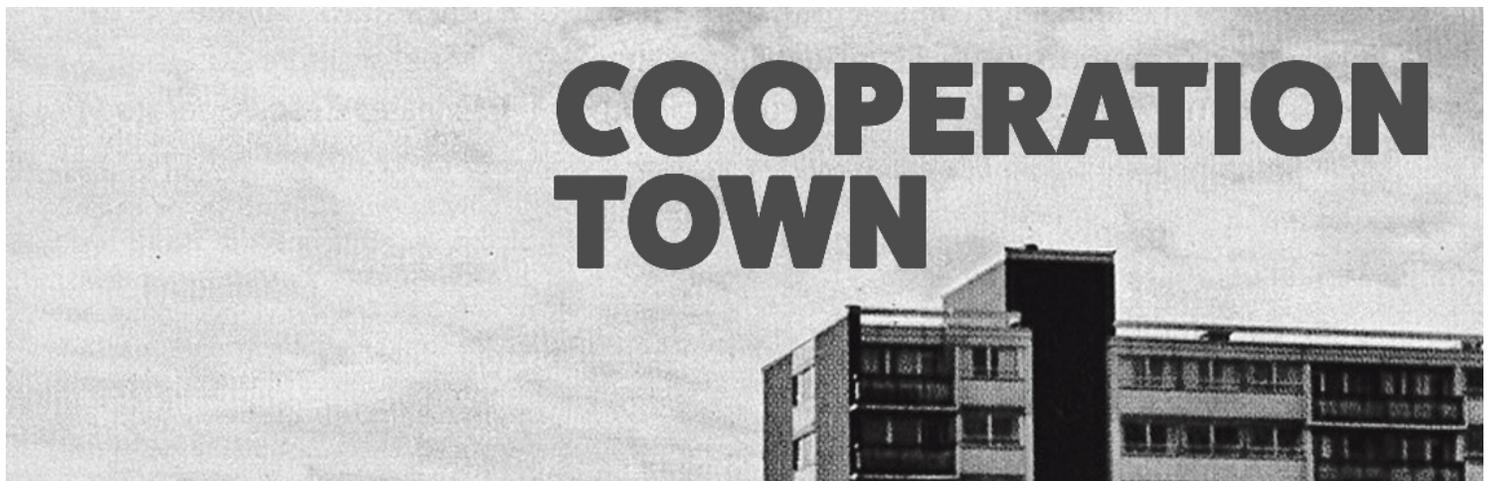
In doing so, they are building up a fresh community spirit in areas of the country often considered to be 'left behind', and making the luxuries of life that little bit more affordable.

CO-OPERATION IN ACTION

Most importantly, these people are discovering co-operation. A hundred and eighty years ago, in Rochdale, a group of ordinary workers reached the same conclusions as Co-operation Town and its activists. That individuals cannot always rely on the Government of the day to help them make their lives secure.

Rather than wait for a favourable outcome in a future election, these activists have realised that a better way for working people to improve their lives is through self-help and community. After more than a decade of austerity, and forty years of technological upheaval, they have decided that enough is enough.

The co-operative movement has al-



ACROSS THE COUNTRY PEOPLE ARE COMING TOGETHER WITH NEIGHBOURS AND FRIENDS TO START CO-OPERATIVES TO REBUILD THEIR COMMUNITIES AND FINANCIAL RESILIENCE

ways been built on the backs of ordinary people sharing in a singular vision. That through voluntary association, communities can make themselves self-sufficient from the 'middlemen' who charge high prices for low-quality goods and services. At the 'co-op', members can buy high-quality unadulterated food and home items at affordable prices, with profits distributed among members, just like a corporation. It is in this tradition that the *Sheffield Co-operator* offers its support to Co-operation Town, and reprints their Starter Pack, first published in 2020.

THE CENTENARY OF THE SHEFFIELD CO-OPERATOR

This edition of the *Sheffield Co-operator* marks the centenary of the paper. Among its aims is the desire to inspire the crea-

tion of a number of Co-operation Town co-operatives in Sheffield.

Across a series of articles, it will show that there is as much a place for consumer co-operation in the 21st century than in the 19th, and that all that is needed is a small number of people willing to give up a small amount of their time to make it work.

The *Sheffield Co-operator* insists that co-operation should be extended to all people regardless of their income or background. If properly supported by the wider movement, local councils, and politicians, Co-operation Town co-operatives can provide an alternative means of supporting people who are short of money without them having to resort to the indignity of foodbanks.

An estimated 40% of all claimants of Universal Credit are in work. The cost of living crisis is real, and it cannot be solved by simply accusing those with-

out money of being lazy. Across the country, people are trying their best to make ends meet, and it is simply not possible for them all to relocate to London, where up to a third of the new jobs over the past decade have been created. To suggest that they simply 'get on their bike to find work' is in itself lazy, for it wishes away the problem of under-employment without facing up to the realities of economic change driven by technology which has created a new generation of low-paid jobs with no security.

SCARED OF CO-OPERATION

In the past, the Conservative Party and its friends in industry were scared of co-operation, because it promised a very different economy in which shareholding - through co-operative society

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CITY REGION PARTNERS WITH OWNERSHIP HUB

DAN JARVIS

The Sheffield City Region Mayor Dan Jarvis, described the launch as a “hugely exciting opportunity. Not just because “it gives us the chance to boost our support for co-ops and employee ownership” but because it would “help to weave the thread of co-operation through our plan for economic recovery and renewal in South Yorkshire.”

“It complements other threads of that vision – linking support for wider ownership to reformed procurement, incentives around investments in companies, the creation of a business charter, community wealth building, stronger devolution and democracy, and a just carbon transition.”

GRIPPLE SUCCESS

A testament to the success of employee ownership is Gripple, a market-leading manufacturer of wire joining, and tensioning devices headquartered in Sheffield.

Set up in the 1990s, ownership was transferred to the employees in 2011 and today the business is a global success employing more than 670 employee owners, manufacturing 6,000 products and exporting 85% of its trade to 80 countries.

Rose Marley, CEO of Co-operatives UK said “We’re delighted to welcome Sheffield City region as the first of many regional partners...The pandemic has shone a light on inequalities across the UK, and workers owning an equal share of businesses is an effective and practical way to redress this balance of power.”

- CHRISTOPHER OLEWICZ



Sheffield City Region is the first region to partner with the Ownership Hub in an effort to grow resilient and inclusive businesses through employee and worker ownership.

As Covid-19 restrictions ease across England, focus is moving to the economic recovery of businesses hit hard by the pandemic. The Ownership Hub is designed to support businesses, advisors,

and regions, gain a better understanding of what it means to start a worker co-operative or convert a business into a worker co-operative.

THE OWNERSHIP HUB

The Ownership Hub is a partnership between the Employee Ownership Association (EOA) and Co-operatives UK, as

part of their campaign to create more than 1 million good jobs by 2030 through businesses giving employees a stake and say.

Deb Oxley OBE, Chief Executive of the EOA, claimed that while “the growth of employee and worker ownership” was accelerating, the Ownership Hub was what was needed for a chance for it “to grow at scale and deliver impact in economies and communities”

CO-OPERATION TOWN

- CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

membership - was widespread, supported by patronage dividends. Co-operators imagined that a Co-operative Commonwealth could challenge the position of monopoly capitalism which restricted the benefits of enterprise to a small pool of wealthy investors. Co-operative Societies rewarded members in proportion to the amount they spent. Those with more capital gained more, but their investment helped to grow the society to the benefit of all Members.

The Conservative Party tried all that it could to suppress the growth of the co-operative movement to the benefit of private traders. Opposition began by suggesting that those who were poor did not have the skills to operate a shop - that they “did not know the trade.” When they were proved wrong, shop owners conspired to make sure that wholesalers would not sell to co-operative societies.

Later, when the Movement expanded into other items such as clothing and electrical items, large manufacturers refused to sell their products in co-operative stores. Those with political influence attempted to have the laws changed in order to undermine co-operative retailing, accusing the movement of being a socialistic menace. In reality, co-operatives were democratising capitalism.

As much as it requires brave local residents to take the plunge, creating co-operatives requires the support of local authorities, though not so much support that they are ‘institutionalised’ or ‘co-opted’. It is important for those with

power to be supportive, but control must ultimately rest with the local residents who set up the co-operatives street by street, estate by estate.

GOVERNMENT LIES

For decades, the Conservative Party pretended to be the friend of the British farmer and fisherman. This has proven to be a sham. Both have become victims of the Government’s desperation to sign free trade agreements with other nations as quickly as possible in order to have something to show for itself at the next General Election.

The Co-operative Movement long ago realised that while it is great to have cheap food, if you make it too cheap, then you do it at the cost of jobs and quality. The trade agreement with Australia will leave our farmers and fishermen exposed to being undercut by foreign competition at huge expense to the environment, jobs, and animal welfare.

One could argue that this places the responsibility on British farmers to become ‘more competitive’ but this can only be achieved by concentrating more of our production into fewer farms, and cutting animal welfare standards in order to make farming cheaper. It is highly likely that these standards will be relaxed in order to save a portion of the sector, to ensure that Britain retains a semblance of national food security. For those on lower incomes, sacrifices will have to be made. High-quality, high welfare, Brit-

ish food will soon become a luxury for the better off, who will not particularly mind paying 30% extra for their food. It is patronising to assume that people on lower incomes do not care about their diets, and ‘enjoy’ eating low quality food.

In the 19th century, flour was adulterated with chalk. Cocoa often had soil mixed in. Today, adulteration is baked in with growth hormones and other chemicals, such as ractopamine in pork, banned in the EU but not in the United States or Australia.

NFU SPEECH

A recent speech made by Minette Batters, the President of the National Farmers Union (NFU), perfectly illustrates the problems we are facing. She stated:

“We need a plan that pre-empts crises... rather than repeatedly running into them. The current situation in the pig sector should have – and could have – been avoided. There are currently 200 thousand pigs on contract backed up on farms. Forty thousand healthy pigs have been culled and simply thrown away. This, truly, is an utter disgrace and a disaster for the pig industry.”

“This is down to government’s poorly designed change to immigration policy and what I can only say appears to be their total lack of understanding of how food production works and what it needs.”

“Right now, the eyes of the world are currently focusing on the growing tension and potential war between Russia and Ukraine, which we all desperately hope will be avoided. I would hope there are some in government who are taking note that these two countries produce

30% of global wheat exports. Russia recently imposed a two-month block on exports of ammonium nitrate. What will this mean for global food production, what will this mean for Britain?”

“And whilst we all hope that the end is in sight for the pandemic, we are potentially at the start of another crisis around the cost of living and inflation. It’s a stark fact in the 12 months to November 2021, the price index for agricultural inputs increased by over 18%. Many of us are experiencing inflation in fertiliser of around 200%.”

“We must share this pain throughout the food chain. It cannot be left for farmers and growers to take the hit. Yet while there is a cost-of-living crisis looming and an increasingly unstable world... the UK government’s energy and ambition for our countryside seems to be almost entirely focused on anything other than domestic food production.”

“What’s the plan for the food we eat? Where will we get it and at what price? This country needs a strategy and a clear vision for what we expect from British farming.”

“Do we want and expect different things from our land than the rest of the world? A pretty park at home while we tuck into imported food produced in extremely intensive ways with huge environmental impact somewhere else?”

“Are we turning a blind eye to the impact of global food production while we pursue a domestic vision of a chocolate box countryside?”

“We have completely contradictory government policies. Raising the bar for environmental standards at home but pursuing trade deals which sup-

port lower standards overseas. Claiming to value domestic food production but making it difficult to find workers to harvest or process it. Stating there are many export opportunities for British food but failing to prioritise the resources to open up those new markets.”

“What does government want? We know what the British people want. A million people signed our petition supporting British farming and over half a million people are NFU Back British Farming Supporters.”

“Food is valued by the British people. Those people vote for our MPs – and our government – to represent their views. Delivering for society requires the best innovation, new technology and world leading R&D.”

“I know all of those businesses will back me in saying the time to create a plan is now...not when supermarket shelves are empty...You all know what I make of the recent Australian trade deal – suffice to say I’d be much happier as an Australian farmer than a British one.”

JACK MONROE

The facts of the price inflation of everyday food items was brilliantly exposed recently by activist Jack Monroe. Across

a series of posts on Twitter, Monroe highlighted how supermarkets have gradually inflated the price of their budget line products, or removing them from sale altogether.

JUST A START

The only way that ordinary people can defend jobs and the quality of their food, is to pool their consumer purchasing power. Through co-operative membership, members can access the food that their families need, help make the luxuries of life more affordable, and support the creation of more jobs by increasing demand for certain foods to a level that can support employment.

Co-operation Town is but the start. A New Rochdale is within our grasp if we want it to be. Why can’t the consumer co-operatives of yesterday be reborn, with membership and dividend, helping people to save and increase their financial independence?

There is nothing to stop us except our own lack of effort. There is no point in waiting for Government. Set up a Co-operation Town Food Co-operative with your friends and neighbours today, and you too can give new life to a movement with a radical purpose.

- CHRISTOPHER OLEWICZ



The Sheffield Co-operator is edited and published by Principle 5 Yorkshire Co-operative Resource Centre.

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JACK MONROE EXPOSES COST OF FOOD CRISIS



Woke up this morning to the radio talking about the cost of living rising a further 5%. It infuriates me the index that they use for this calculation, which grossly underestimates the real cost of inflation as it happens to people with the least. Allow me to briefly explain.



This time last year, the cheapest pasta in my local supermarket (one of the Big Four), was 29p for 500g. Today its 70p. That’s a 141% price increase as it hits the poorest and most vulnerable households.



This time last year, the cheapest rice at the same supermarket was 45p for a kilogram bag. Today it’s £1 for 500g. That’s a 344% price increase as it hits the poorest and most vulnerable households.



Peanut butter. Was 62p. Now £1.50. A price increase of 142%.



These are just the ones that I know off the top of my head - there will be many many more examples! When I started writing my recipe blog ten years ago, I could feed myself and my son on £10 a week. (I’ll find the original shopping list later and price it up for today’s prices).



The system by which we measure the impact of inflation is fundamentally flawed. It completely ignores the reality and the REAL price rises for people on minimum wages, zero hour contracts, food bank clients and millions more.



But I guess when the vast majority of our media were privately educated and came from the same handful of elite universities, nobody thinks to actually check in with anyone out here in the real world to see how we’re doing



Every time there’s a news bulletin on the rising cost of living, I hope that today might be the day that some real journalism happens, and Someone stops to consider those of us outside the bubble. Maybe today might finally be the day



And just to add:
- an upmarket ready meal range was £7.50 ten years ago, and is still £7.50 today.
- A high-end stores ‘Dine in for Two for £10’ has been £10 for as long as I can remember!
- My local supermarket had 400+ items in their value range. Its now 91 and counting down.



The margins are always, always calculated to squeeze the belts of those who can least afford it, and massage the profits of those who have money to spare. And nothing demonstrates that inequality quite so starkly as tracking the prices of ‘luxury food’ vs ‘actual essentials’.



To return to the luxury ready meal example, if the price of that had risen at the same rate as the cheapest rice in the supermarket, that £7.50 lasagna would not cost £25.80. Dine in for £10 would be £34.40. We’re either all in this together or we aren’t. (Spoiler: we aren’t).

This series of Tweets demonstrates how price inflation is impacting on the lives of those who are least equipped to get by on their current household budgets.

The posts received a lot of attention from the media. Jack Monroe warned that people would begin to starve to death, quoting a man who said that he had gone to bed having eaten nothing but a mouthful of toothpaste just to make it feel like he had eaten something. Foodbank use has exploded, the media warns. Six million people now face fuel poverty due to the crisis in gas prices. The Ukrainian conflict threatens

wheat, grains, and food oil harvests.

POSITIVE OUTCOMES

Some positives have come out of re Monroe’s intervention. The ONS has promised to review its inflation calculations. Iceland and ASDA have promised to do more to keep low cost items in stock.

The Sheffield Co-operator suggests that food co-operatives offer an alternative solution to poverty that is led by the people themselves, rather than relying on charity. Let’s start co-operating!

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WE INVITE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR TO BE SENT TO STEVE@SHEFFIELD.COOP

PAXTON COURT: FROM CO-OPERATIVE TO COMMUNITY

As a long-time resident of Paxton Court, but not one of the original self-build co-operative members, I found Christopher Olewicz's article in the August 2020 edition of *The Sheffield Co-operator* a fascinating read.

I hadn't known, before, the full history of how the Sheffield Solar Housing Co-operative had come into being, with so much support from Sheffield City Council, nor seen the drawings of the original intended design and lay-out plans.

But I also realised that there might still be another interesting story to tell: the human story of what living in a co-operatively built mini-estate has been like. My own experience, beginning only five years after Paxton Court had been completed, has been of a strong sense of community – right up to today, when only one of the houses is still occupied by a founder-member family.

That community had emerged from a particular kind of co-operative: a self-build, experimental solar-energy housing co-operative, pioneering design features which had been developed by an architect at the University of Sheffield during the late 1970s and early 1980s.

So I wonder how much of that community spirit can be credited to its founding co-operative principles, or is it mostly just down to Sheffield's own strong spirit of neighbourliness?

MY OWN EXPERIENCE

The following account is based partly on my own experience of living here for 33 years, during which time all but one of the individual houses have changed hands, some even several times by now. But it is also guided by the crystal-clear memories and impressions – and a few photos – shared with me by the last remaining founder couple, in a typically welcoming conversation with them a few weeks ago.

I moved into Paxton Court in early November 1988 as a complete stranger. A month later, welcoming Christmas cards started plopping on to the doormat. How could I not play my part and do the same straight away! Within a few months, I felt a full member of a very special community. I was in any case required to

pay into the common fund and expected to attend the regular co-op meetings.

In my earlier years here there were memorable day trips, such as the excursion in a hired coach to Market Rasen races. After a few years, it was usually one or two meals a year together at a favourite local restaurant.

But still today, exactly a third of a century since I moved in, and now surrounded by neighbours who in some cases are even "fourth-generation" residents, we all continue the tradition of putting Christmas cards through each other's letterboxes, and help each other out in so many small ways from day to day.

My impression is that what has in general attracted those who have arrived since I did – apart from the advantage of lower energy bills – has been not the central idea of the passive solar heating at all, but the huge conservatories, the beautiful timber framing and panelling, the stunning views, and the bargain price from being on the edge of a big Council estate on the wrong side of town.

A CHAT WITH FOUNDERS

In fact, when I consulted the last-remaining founder-member couple, they said that, even for the original co-op members, what had really interested almost all of them was the chance of an affordable house, at something like half the price compared to buying an existing one, through doing most of the building and finishing work themselves. Only the architect had really been in it for the environmental ideals!

They added that, although this steep hillside running with springs had kept the site free of building developments till then, the same problem had also made the site preparation dishearteningly hard, muddy work, and had added a third year to what everyone had at first thought was going to be only two. But working so hard for so long together as a single team, one house at a time, until the shells were ready for the indoor finishing, did help to create a powerful sense of community.

What they found most impressive was that, despite occasional serious disputes, there was never any bad feeling: disagreements were taken to the regular committee meetings, and fair compromises were proposed and accepted, usu-



PAXTON COURT TODAY

ally without even needing to take a vote. In one or two cases where disagreements went unresolved, the issue was quietly dropped by both sides as not worth fighting over.

That spirit of co-operation also continued after all the homes had been completed, because there was a central fund for maintaining and repairing the infrastructure that was common to all the houses together, such as the court paving and the drainage. So there had to be a treasurer, and regular formal co-op meetings to receive the financial reports and to decide how to prioritise the spending of the funds. It was very difficult to retreat into your own home and have nothing to do with your neighbours.

Much of this foundation of goodwill did come from the fact that the majority of the original co-op members were already on friendly terms. Seven of them were the group of friends who had got together to plan the project, and at least three of the other six families were already friends of these. But there was no guarantee that this goodwill would continue once these founder members sold up to newcomers.

Both felt strongly that today's level of neighbourliness is a lot more than just what is normal in Sheffield. "We still feel comfortable with everyone here, and that we can go to any one and ask for anything. Where we used to live, on an ordinary street, we would know our immediate neighbours well, and exchange Christmas cards with them, but not much more than that".

LEAVING A LEGACY?

So I'm left with the following central question. What does it take for a founding co-operative group of people to leave a legacy of community spirit that still thrives even over 30 years later, despite virtually all those involved having left by then?

Perhaps it could be expected that the normal day-to-day experience of working together in any workplace – shop, office, school or building firm – might create and maintain a sense of community just from spending your working hours on the common purpose, with co-operatives having the additional advantage of an ethos of sharing and equality, and without the competitiveness and authoritarianism potentially inherent in hierarchical workplaces.

But that cannot apply to a self-build housing co-operative, where the bonding

process of working together and supporting each other through thick and thin ends when every one's house has been completed, leaving those friendships to continue only while most of the fellow-builders still live there.

It's true that, when newcomers start to buy houses there, having a committee of all the residents can keep every one talking to each other, and be a forum that easily turns to organising joint social events. But in the case of Paxton Court, that committee and fund went into abeyance a long time ago, so what other factors could provide an explanation?

Is it that all the houses are more or less in a circle around a common entrance? Does there come a point when, even if arranged in a cul-de-sac, there are too many houses to allow for that sense of togetherness? And do other fourteen-house cul-de-sacs form natural communities? If, so, do they pass the Christmas-card test even after 33 years?

Or does the Paxton Court effect depend on everything coming together, so that each newcomer is inevitably drawn into the community and into sharing tools, walking neighbours' dogs, and generally looking out for each? In other words, is Paxton Court's 33-year-and-counting community spirit unique? Or are there other stories of long-running, post-founder communities?

- OLIVER BLENSDORF

BEANIES WEATHERS COVID

Beanies has been a flourishing cooperative for over 30 years. We've moved a few times, from humble beginnings in Hillsborough via a converted terrace in Walkley and on to our new premises at 1 Barber Road. We're a collective that's fundamentally about fairness. Fairness to animals, the environment, future generations and to the people here now: customers, workers and producers all over the world. Unlike other local veg box schemes, we don't use volunteer labour and we don't have shareholders – we simply offer a fair day's pay for a fair day's work, and a fair price for everyone.

The produce we sell reflects this ethos. We carefully vet the ethical credentials of everything we stock, and we work hard to support local suppliers, resulting in lower miles and a healthier regional economy. We have a substantial organic section, including the biggest organic grocery in the region, and we also run an



THE FOUNDER-BUILDERS WITH THE ORIGINAL DESIGN



organic veg box scheme.

The last few years have been challenging as we've had to adapt frequently to changing circumstances under Covid. We opened our new shop in November 2019, hoping that our new premises would strengthen our business, bring in more customers and enable us to create more and better jobs.

The onset of Covid turned our plans upside-down, and suddenly we were running a very different business. Our produce was still in demand, but social distancing (and safe working) meant that everything took longer; we closed the shop for a period to focus on collections and deliveries, which increased staff costs; and the roulette of covering absences due to isolation periods has made day-to-day working unpredictable. It took us a while to get to grips with how to operate under these new conditions, but by August 2020 we were open as usual and rebuilding our business plans. We're now at a point where we can think about the future again. Nothing is ever

certain, but we're confident enough to be taking on new members, redeveloping our café space, and investing in sustainability and infrastructure.

We're working towards being carbon neutral with a new set of solar panels on the roof, and we're rethinking our former café space. All this is founded on a shared commitment to co-operative working. We rely on each other, and we're stronger for it.

- ELLA (BEANIES)

STILL AT THE CROSSROADS

The headline of the August 2020 *Sheffield Co-operator* was "City at the Crossroads". Over a year on, we remain at those crossroads and things have gotten a good deal worse. We face great challenges, but the members of the City Council are absorbed dealing with the day-to-day doings of the city, and seem to spend most of their free time organising litter picks.

FACE THE FUTURE

That was the title of the 1950 Labour Manifesto. In town halls across the nation, a great debate was under way. It was basically about the future. What kind of public housing should replace the slums where thousands of families had lived cheek by jowl for decades with the smoke and grime of heavy industry?

During the years following the election of Labour in 1945 housing was built in the form of redbrick housing estates. Houses with gardens back & front with wide roads and green spaces.

This concept eventually lost out to the modernisers who advocated high rise flats which enabled the housing of more people in a far smaller area. Then as now Labour was divided, with the right wing of the party supporting the highrises.

It may be of interest to note that Tony Benn was an active supporter of the highrises. He was living at the time in Holland Park, London, in an extremely palatial house.

NEW IDEAS

New ideas will be vital if Labour is to be elected at a future General Election. But the political atmosphere in Sheffield is almost unreal. Apart from the very small group of Labour Party members who advocate green policies, the local party has no provision for confronting the big issues. To the best of my knowledge, it has no groups where new ideas can be discussed. Even the Fabian Society is dormant.

We have serious problems here at home

which require the attention of party members. Across the city we have huge numbers of young people who have fallen out of the education system, and currently have no qualifications.

The decline of the high street, accelerated by Covid-19 and homeworking, is slowly sapping away the supply of low-skilled work available to those with few qualifications. These people will have a very difficult time in the future.

While I can understand why the new Chief Executive of Sheffield Council wants everyone to talk up Sheffield in order to create a feel-good factor, we must not disregard the very serious situation we are in, which is complicated by our departure from the European Union and the failure of the Government to put into motion new rail links.

It is time for us all to put our shoulders to the wheel. Firstly, we need the Sheffield Labour Party to come together and become a think tank with the responsibility of feeding into a city-wide debate with ideas to both create jobs and new projects that can harness new technology to improve the financial viability of our city economy and ensure the benefit is for all.

Of chief importance is the response to climate change. Research has revealed that claims by major oil companies that they are working on the transition towards clean energy are false.

Sheffield must proceed with its own plans to reduce the city's dependence on oil!

- KENNETH CURRAN

JOHN L HALSTEAD (1936-2021)



I was introduced to John Halstead by a former student of his called Don Wanless. Both of us had benefitted from adult education through the trade union movement - Don a Day Release Student to the Sheffield University's Extra Mural Department in the late 1960s, and myself a student at Newbattle Abbey Adult Residential College. We had very similar interests and became good friends.

One day with a bit of time to fill, Don suggested we should look into the Extra Mural Department as he wanted to introduce me to John Halstead. At that time John was teaching a class of miners from the Derbyshire coalfield. When he heard that I originally worked in the mining industry at the Rising Sun Colliery, Wallsend, the largest Colliery on the North banks of the Tyne Valley he became interested in my background. That was the beginning of a friendship of over 40 years.

As a boy John followed the local rugby league team, and played the trombone in the local brassband. He failed his 11-plus

exam which triggered off a campaign led by his Mother which resulted in John being offered a place outside of the local catchment area at Penistone Grammar School, where he did well.

Following his National Service John applied to go to University and was offered a place at Oxford where he studied Politics, Economics & History. His tutor was Ralph Miliband, the highly respected Marxist intellectual. Ralph had serious doubts about the Soviet Union and Stalin in particular. John agreed with his conclusions that Labour in its then form would not lead to the electorate being offered a serious alternative to the market dominated system that people were locked into. The strands of thought which prevailed in Labour were opposed to democratic socialism and tended towards the centralisation of power and authority to a central elite with few roots in local communities.

John joined a splinter group which formed the remnants of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) which had helped form the Labour Representation Committee, the forerunner of the Labour Party, in 1900. John contributed to all of the meetings of the ILP, and wrote articles and comments on the Labour Party in both Government & Opposition.

During his years of friendship with Ralph, John was brought into contact with a number of leading intellectuals, including Eric Hobsbawm and E.P. Thompson, author of *The Making of the English Working Class* first published in 1963.

After John received his degree, he applied for a post in the Civil Service. He served in a number of Departments in Whitehall. He did tell me his job included advising Government Ministers. He would attend

meetings with senior Politicians on Fridays and first thing on Saturday morning would be off to join nuclear disarmament demonstrations. He loved to go to Ronnie Scotts to wallow in the traditional Jazz which he loved.

After some years John applied for a post at Sheffield University as a Lecturer and Tutor in the Extra Mural Department, set up to attract adult students whose potential had not been recognised at school. John appeared very much at home in this role, and was highly regarded by his colleagues at the University. He had an ability to make the complex simple and formed close relationships with his students. Former lecturer Andrew Gamble recently told me it was John who had greatly helped him overcome his difficulties in dealing with adult students.

John was not in favour of big government. He saw co-operatives delivering social care with the administration and decision making as close a possible to the recipients as the way forward. He favoured small towns as opposed to larger cities. He campaigned for and wrote pamphlets advocating constitutional reform, considering a federal system of Government across the UK to be the best outcome.

John recognised that the pandemic and climate change were the primary issues facing humanity. If they were to be dealt with properly we and other nations would have to co-operate and forget the nonsense about sovereignty.

A few years ago John and I set up the Sheffield School of Democratic Socialism, our response to the closing down of the District Labour Party. Our project kept going for a couple of years. Eventually we decided to hold a couple of lec-

tures each year, unfortunately the Pandemic put this in abeyance.

As a consequence of his connections with the Derbyshire miners John was asked if he would serve upon a charity set up by the miners union to administer the management of the aged miners homes in the county. When the mines closed a new body had to be found in order to improve their sustainability in the future. They joined up with a Leicestershire Housing Society which had very similar objectives. John joined the new body, which extended its role to deliver care to the elderly miners and their partners. Very soon he became the Chair, a position he held for three years.

John also gave assistance towards the setting up the Manor Training & Resource Centre (MATREC) which was the first project created to support the the regeneration of the Manor Estate in Sheffield. He was also a founder of the Peoples History Museum in Salford, along with E.P. Thompson, and was an early teacher at the Northern College.

John was a much travelled man. It was only after he died that I learned he spoke Italian, quite a bit of French, and also Spanish. He was a frequent visitor to Italy which he liked.

He seemed to have friends all over. There was a group of men from Ireland I never met that he would meet at least once a year. Together they researched the Spanish Civil War. John had a very high regard for their intelligence and comradeship.

I have lost a very good and honest friend, as has the Co-operative and Labour Movements.

- KENNETH CURRAN



NOTES FROM THE COUNCIL

CO-OPERATIVE BY NAME. CO-OPERATIVE BY DEED?: Sheffield now has a “Co-operative” council executive run by the Labour and Green Parties. This follows the May 2021 Council Elections following which Labour lost overall control.

Also in May 2021, residents voted to transfer the running of the Council from the existing Cabinet model to a new committee system, which is due to be introduced this year. It was promised that local residents would have the opportunity to give their input over the design of the new system, which would also allow the Council to test new ideas and ways of working.

The “Co-operative Cabinet” set the following goals for its period in office:

- Implementing the new Local Area Committees, also introduced by referendum in May 2021, giving power back to Sheffield’s communities, devolving services to local areas, and giving local people a real say over decisions that affect their communities. It is hoped that these Committees will ‘revolutionise’ how residents can influence the decisions that matter to them.
- Introducing a new approach to community safety, with additional safer neighbourhood wardens
- Providing additional investment in young people
- Supporting the renewal of Sheffield’s district centres, right across the city
- Implementing the recommendations set out in the Arup report to create a pathway to deliver the shared ambition for net zero
- Appointing an independent person to conduct a local inquiry into the management

of the street trees dispute. The aim of the inquiry would be to reflect on and understand what unfolded, to learn lessons, and to support Sheffield to move forward confidently, with the knowledge that in the future, greater communication is needed between the Council and the public.

THE CO-OPERATOR RESPONDS: There is little sign that the Council Executive intends to pursue a strategy of creating new co-operatives along the same lines as Preston Council. Sheffield City Region has become the first region to sign up to the Ownership Hub, which is a positive step, but with the unique resources that Sheffield has available at its disposal in terms of co-operative development, one might hope that the Council would be more ambitious in the policies it chooses to pursue to lessen the impact of government austerity and the cost of living crisis. Co-operation is about more than simply ‘getting along’ well together and achieving cross-party consensus, it is about building co-operatives!

RESIGNATION OF COUNCILLOR WILSON: Councillor Sophie Wilson, representing Park and Arbourthorne Ward, has resigned from the Labour Party. In her resignation letter she states the following. “The Labour Party desperately needs a coherent strategy for local government, empowering local Councillors to protect their communities from the damage of brutal austerity. We need local councils which have a sound social strategy of ethical, local procurement which aims to build wealth within our communities. Strategies of bringing services back-in-house and running them in the best interests of those who use them. Strategies which take responsibility for our environment and are proactive and ambitious in our climate protection work. We have failed to do this up and down the country, and we have left Councillors to middle-manage a regime of Tory austerity which has wreaked unold havoc on our most vulnerable communities. This havoc is about to get worse. This is reflected nationally, too, where we have an unprecedented cost of living crisis to which our ‘solutions’ are, at best, to read from a different page of the same neoliberal economics textbook the Tories are using...I have recently re-evaluated how I can make myself the most useful to our movement. I have been inspired by Sharon Graham at Unite, who recognises that the real fight is with the people in their workplaces, in their unions, and in their communities, building pathways to secure structural change and building power from the grassroots upwards rather than wasting valuable time and energy on a party which does not want trade unionists and socialists in it.”

THE CO-OPERATOR RESPONDS: Co-operation Kentish Town, the first Co-operation Town co-operative was set up by left-wing activists in late 2019. Some of those involved were Unite Community members. Councillor Wilson is exactly right to warn of the cost of living crisis and the continuance of austerity at the hands of this Conservative Government. She is also correct that Sheffield Council could be doing more to investigate alternative methods of wealth creation similar to those advocated by Preston Council. Labour councillors should constantly be looking for ways to avoid being the ‘middle managers’ of Conservative austerity.

Finally, Councillor Wilson is correct that we should focus on our communities rather than rely on local and national government to solve our problems. The *Sheffield Co-operator* suggests that in the coming months, Councillor Wilson might like to explore the possibility of setting up a Co-operation Town food co-operative in her Ward. We are sure she would be an asset to the co-operative movement.

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EXTENDING CO-OPERATION TO ALL

More than a century ago, the Co-operative Women's Guild attempted to extend co-operation to all people regardless of their income. In Sunderland they supported a radical experiment that was abandoned despite its success in bringing co-operation to the desperately poor. Despite a couple of short-lived efforts elsewhere, including in Sheffield, the campaign faltered.

One hundred and twenty years ago this year, the Co-operative Women's Guild launched an investigation which aimed to find ways to extend co-operation into the so-called 'poor areas'. Poor, because people living in them suffered from a lack of employment and a lack of money.

The enquiry was the culmination of a decade of work which began at the 1890 Co-operative Congress where it was suggested that 'adapted branch stores' of co-operative societies could be set up in 'poor' neighbourhoods.

POOR NEIGHBOURHOODS

Over the next few years, Margaret Llewelyn-Davies, President of the Co-operative Women's Guild, developed an anti-poverty campaign which resulted in the publication of *Co-operation in Poor Neighbourhoods* in 1899, a critique of co-operative societies which appeared to have forgotten their radical social aims and instead had turned into "respectable savings banks" for the better off. "High dividends" had corrupted the morals of the movement and lured it away from the path of true reform. "Good steady trade, good quality, an educated taste, a well-to-do membership, are all excellent things...But is this all that co-operation can do?" Llewelyn-Davies asked. "Are we not becoming dangerously respectable, in more ways than one?"

CONSERVATISM

When she lectured on the idea, Llewelyn-Davies found that it was unpopular among a certain kind of man. She once wrote of a meeting at Huddersfield, where one man had repeatedly insisted that 'poorer people could become co-operators if only they, like him "had grown up in the movement and stuck to its principles, and had thus become well-to-do... the great cause of [slum dwellers] misery was due to drink...the working classes of the country must look to themselves for their own welfare.'" This sort of 'solid unbending conservatism of the older men' was common at the time, she explained.

Eventually the United Co-operative Board were persuaded to give the Women's Guild a £50 grant to pursue an investigation into the idea. In early 1902, Llewellyn-Davies toured the country, visiting Sheffield, York, Bury, Newcastle, Bristol, and Sunderland. She visited people in their homes, interviewed town councillors, school attendance officers, and local co-operative officials. Information was gathered about the admission rules of local co-operative societies and of the local foreign meat trade.

SHEFFIELD

In Sheffield, the Guild visited more than thirty homes with the Head Sanitary Inspector. Shops were visited and shopping habits recorded. Interviews were con-



MARGARET LLEWELYN DAVIES

ducted with Councillors, and the Medical Officer of Health. A conference was called by the Brightside and Carbrook Society, which included the directors, educational, and guild committees of both Brightside and Carbrook and Sheffield and Ecclesall Societies. The general feeling was that a 'poor store' "needs to be done and...can be done."

The Guild women had this to say of the conditions in the areas they visited: "Owing to limited space it is only possible to give the barest idea of the people of these districts. They comprise every sort and kind. There are cases of intense and hopeless poverty, and there are spendthrifts, who gamble away good family earnings; but, mixed with much that is bad and despairing, there is many homes kept decent despite gloomy insanitary surroundings and lack of all accommodation inside. The women were outwardly respectable and friendly - some obviously hardworking as housewives or home workers at file and fork-polishing. With a suitable store close at hand and a co-operative missionary to personally explain co-operation in their homes, it is certain that large numbers of them might become co-operators."

CORONATION STREET

The Co-operative Society which had accomplished the most in its attempt to reach the poor was Sunderland, which carried 'a marked desire to reach the poorest and "get them on top of themselves.'" It had already opened three 'poor stores' in Lawrence Hill ("poor"), East-End, "poorer") and Coronation Street ("poorest"). 'It is impossible' the Guild Report stated, "to describe the...degradation of the lanes off Coronation Street, which is the main shopping thoroughfare of the neighbourhood.'

Coronation Street branch was a rat-infested place, first opened as a co-operative store in 1897. The same year as the Womens' Guild investigation, it was decided that the building would be renovated to incorporate a grocery shop, a butchers, a meeting hall, and rooms for resident workers above the shop. It was

opened in October 1902 with a celebratory public tea and concert.

On sale at the new store were milk, penny loaves of bread, and potatoes. Cooked dishes included hot bowls of soup, pork chops, pease pudding, and 'first class sausages'. The food proved highly popular in areas where cooking facilities were limited or prohibitively expensive.

Highly impressed with the developments, Llewelyn-Davies suggested that the Guild could operate a settlement at the Coronation Street store, with a co-operative twist. With the agreement of the society, she and a worker moved to Sunderland for three months, living close to the store. Llewelyn-Davies personally covered the costs of the worker. With pubs the only safe place in the neighbourhood, she encouraged the development of a library, a sewing class, lantern lectures, and a club for young women. Coronation Street branch quickly became a community centre.

Attracting custom was key to the survival of the new store. Guild workers set out into the neighbourhood to encourage people to buy 'their bread, their tea, their sausages at the store.' They showed them

how to save, to put in deposits for boots and clothes, and how the dividend could grow 'a little nest egg against the worst emergencies.' 'There is...no patronage, no church, no charity; but there is, on the other hand, a centre of real neighbourliness and absolute social equality,' the literature explained.

WHAT CAN CO-OPERATION DO FOR POOR AREAS?

Following their tour, the Guild published *What Co-operation Could do in Poor Areas*, which made many practical proposals as to how co-operative society membership could be made more affordable for those people who lacked money.

Experiments could be undertaken to rent a shop, or construct temporary premises, and to organise voluntary propaganda work. Entrance fees to societies and payment for rules could be abolished in favour of a 1-shilling deposit towards share capital to admit membership. Application forms could be simplified and fines removed. Societies could establish penny banks at all branches for both adults and children, in addition to a variety of saving clubs.

Co-operatives set up in poor areas could sell food cheaply and in small amounts, including cooked food that could be eaten in-store or taken home. Dividends could be set at a low rate. Each store could include a club room, with resident workers providing help to residents. Becoming the centre of the neighbourhood, these stores could help rebuild local communities which were in danger of despairing.

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THE CO-OPERATIVE STORE AT CORONATION STREET

SIMPLE AIMS

All that was really necessary however, was a establishment of a 'special branch store' and simple advertising which clearly explained the functioning of the store and its link to the broader co-operative movement. The aims then, were:

- to establish a reputation for trading and working for the poorest.
- to localise everything (except withdrawal of share capital).
- to induce a sense of ownership and pride in the society.
- to put forward every temptation to save, attracting every spare penny into clubs etc.
- to supply the most nourishing food at the cheapest price.
- to give opportunities for satisfying everyday needs.
- to supply education in co-operation and domestic economy, to give concerts etc.

"With a co-operative centre at work in a poor area," the report concluded, "might we not hope that a real effect might be made on the lives of the people?... "To base the foundations of this work on the primary acts of life, gives it a reality that education work alone can never have. But though we may begin from the sale of a halfpenny black pudding, our idea is that the whole of a poor area should be liberated from all that trades on its...poverty, and misfortune, and dominated by a

co-operative life carried on in the interest of the people themselves."

SUCCESS THEN DISASTER

In January 1904, one year and three months after it had opened, the Coronation Street store paid out its first dividend. A considerable achievement, and proof that co-operation could work in 'poor areas'. It was at this time that the Sunderland Society pledged to fund the resident workers on a permanent basis.

However, before the end of the year, it was with regret that the Llewelyn-Davies had to announce that the Sunderland Society had voted to cut off all funding for the settlement. and that Coronation Street would be converted back into a regular store. To this day, it is unknown why this decision was reached. "There were always wheels within wheels", it was written. "There was always a small opposition and then there came a change in the local committee."

The Coronation Street experiment was not perfect. Outside workers, for practical reasons, were usually middle-class women from outside the area. Yet following its conversion into an ordinary branch the local people expressed grief, continuously asking when the hall was to be reopened, and when the guildswomen might return. 'The whole thing was over in two years', the historian G. D. H. Cole once wrote, "and deep was the discouragement of the Women's Guild leaders

who had laboured hard for its success'.

Ever hopeful that Sunderland might change its mind, the Women's Guild continued to promote their campaign. They sent money and advice to York Co-operative Society who opened a branch, but without a settlement. A project in Bristol in 1905 was short-lived. The Sheffield Brightside and Carbrook Society ultimately failed to gather enough support to launch their own experiment.. The Guild's anti-poverty campaign fizzled out after 1906, and was never again referred to at the meetings of its senior council. The Guild moved on to other projects.

PARALLELS

In her article on the Poor Store movement, Kath Connolly notes the contemporary parallels of ideas behind the causes and political solutions associated with poverty today; in the demonisation of benefit claimants we can see similar attitudes to the poor and issues around morality. There is now, as then, a failure to challenge the root causes of poverty. As to whether a Coronation Street experiment could succeed today? Why don't we try and find out?

- CHRISTOPHER OLEWICZ

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COOPERATION TOWN STARTER PACK

INTRODUCTION

Who is this pack for?

We've made this guide for people wanting to start a Co-operation Town food co-operative in their neighbourhood or on their estate. It explains how to start a local co-op in a simple and accessible way, contains templates your group can use and provides information on what support is available.

Why should I organise in my neighbourhood, on my street, or my estate?

Our communities have been hit hard by years of austerity and, most recently, Covid-19. This ongoing crisis left many of us poorer, with no access to public services and isolated in our struggles.

Decisions about our housing, education, jobs, and health, are made by strangers, who don't know us, ignore our needs, and disregard our experience. Often, businesses have more say about how our communities are organised, than the people we live with. They make decisions about us – without us.

But there is another way!

When we work together with neighbourhoods and colleagues we can take control over our lives. From food to housing, jobs to public spaces – we share the problems and the solutions! The co-op structure is just one way in which we can organise around our needs.

What is a food co-op?

Co-ops are based on the simple idea that organising together makes us stronger and more resilient – and saves us money!

There are different types of food co-ops, some of them are shops, some are growers co-ops and some are consumer clubs. In this pack, we refer to food co-ops as small buying groups, which provide their members with affordable food (and other products) bought in bulk and re-distributed at a very low price. They are the most affordable – and sociable – way to get food!

Unlike a food bank, where recipients are means tested and have no say in how the service is run, Co-operation Town co-ops are owned by their members, who decide together what to buy and how to run the co-op. They are not-for-profit groups, set up to meet members' need and are controlled by the people who join them. They are based on solidarity, not charity.

What is Co-operation Town?

Co-operation Town is a network of independent food co-ops. It was set up in 2019 to develop a new co-op mode and support a new generation of food co-ops across the UK. While Co-operation Town co-ops are independently organised by their members, the network is designed to share resources and support across the movement.

Our vision is for a community-led food co-op on every street in every town!

The Co-operation Town network is coordinated by a not-for-profit workers co-op (with the same name), which is responsible for helping groups to start and run new co-ops. Find out about what help is available on page 21.

How are Co-operation Town co-ops different from other co-ops?

The Co-operation Town model is based on a combination of free supplies and food bought cheaply in bulk. Members pay a small amount every week and contribute up to one hour a week to run the co-op. Co-operation Town co-ops only serve their members, they are not shops open to the public. In order to benefit from co-op food, people have to join as members.

HOW DOES IT ACTUALLY WORK?

Your co-op will be distributing food to members on a regular basis. The model we developed at Co-operation Town means that most of the food you get will be free, with any extra food and supplies purchased collectively by the co-op in bulk. That way, everyone gets much more for their money!

Below are some suggestions for how to organise your co-op. You can use as much or as little as you want and adapt them to fit your own group.

Where does the free stuff come from?

Co-operation Town has a relationship with a few major free food distributors, such as the Felix Project (in London) and FareShare (across the UK). These organisations get huge quantities of surplus food from supermarkets, recipe box companies, and producers, and distribute them to charities, foodbanks and Co-operation Town co-ops. We also have an agreement with Co-op supermarkets (the high street stores) about providing free food to Co-operation Town co-ops.

Each co-op will have its own ‘account’ with those suppliers and arrange deliveries individually, based on how often members meet and how much food they need. In areas with high concentration of co-ops, we aim to organise local ‘hubs’ it make ordering and distribution for efficient.

You can’t send a specific shopping list to the free food providers; they send you whatever they sourced in that week. However, deliveries usually include fresh fruit and veg, bread, snacks, meat (if you want it) and some dairy products. You are also likely to get some pre-packed food bag, which you can unpack and redistribute, as well as some ready-cooked meals. There are usually a few nice surprises in each delivery, such as posh tea or expensive desserts!

Please note: some of the food provided by these organisations is near its sell-by date, but many products have a much longer shelf life.

What kind of stuff does the co-op buy?

The items you buy are food staples, such as pasta, rice, tinned tomatoes, and cooking oil (you can also add nappies and cleaning products or whatever else your co-op needs). You might decide to add special items, such as seasonal treats or food for special events.

You can use the co-op shopping list to decide on the items the majority of members want. Members select from a regular list, which can be updated regularly. You might not always get every item each member wants, but you will get most of what everyone needs.

Where to buy extra food?

A local cash and carry would be a good place for large bags of rice and pasta; the high street Co-op supermarket have small budgets to support neighbourhood co-ops (find your local Co-Op Pioneer to learn more); wholesalers such as Costco

or Bookers are good for bulk purchases (you will need to set up an account); a local greengrocer might offer you a good deal on big quantities, and, sometimes, online retailers are the cheapest option.

Buying, receiving, packing, and distributing the food.

Members of the co-op will be responsible for researching suppliers and ordering food, booking deliveries, collecting, receiving, and unpacking products, repacking, bagging, and distributing the food to members.

Some of those jobs can be done by individuals (for example, researching suppliers), some in pairs (collecting from suppliers) and some in small groups (packing boxes). The co-op will decide in its monthly meeting who’s doing what each time.

How do we share the food?

The Co-operation Town model is based on “need, not transaction” which means that, while all members pay the same, everyone gets what they need.

How do we do that? Everyone receives the same shopping bag, containing a share of the free supplies, all the staples and any additional items the co-op purchased. When collecting your shopping, members who received more than they need, can return their surplus by putting it back into a common basket, where members with a greater need can help themselves to the extra items.

We suggest this is something you discuss as a group and agree early on, so that no one feels lacking or cheated. You can also agree on a different system of distribution.

How do we decide how to use the money?

Your co-op will have to accumulate some money before you can start buying supplies. This will be members’ investment in the co-op. Once you have enough to make your first purchase, you will decide on the shopping list (see above) and the quantities to buy. If you have regular storage space, it might be cost effective to buy more than you need right now and distribute it at a later date.

How do we manage our accounts?

The co-ops will be collecting money (membership fees or subs) from members, in order to pay for the food it purchases. You will need to keep an account, which is managed by the elected treasurer (or co-treasurers).

We recommend using Open Collective as an alternative to a bank account. Open Collective is an online financial service used by co-ops and social groups, which makes all transactions transparent and allows groups to collect donations, in addition to members’ subs. Co-operation Town will help your co-op to set up an Open Collective account and can advise you on how to manage it.

How big is a Co-operation Town co-op?

Keep it small and keep it local!

We suggest each co-op has no more than 20 members, who all live within 15 minutes walk (or a short bus ride) from your meeting place.

A small group means that everyone has a role, that meetings are kept short and that all members are neighbours.

When your co-op gets to 20 members – split up! Start a new co-op down the road and continue to co-operate as part of the Co-operation Town network.

Working with the wider community

Co-operative principles 6 and 5 are “Co-operation among Co-operatives” and “Concern for Community”. That means that, while your co-op is autonomous (i.e. making decisions independently), it is part of a wider ecology of co-operatives, community groups, voluntary organisations, faith groups, and other associations working together to make the community stronger and more active.

Local groups will have resources you might need (like a space, access to storage, etc) and existing members who would be interested in your co-op. Reach out to them!

Social events, such as a Free Food Larder, or a shared meal, which are open to both members and non-members, are a great way to spread the word and meeting new members. Being in a co-op ought to be fun!

GETTING STARTED

How do I start organising in my area?

A lot of us already organise in our communities, without thinking of what we do as ‘organising’ – we help at the local school, share childcare with our neighbours, or we are part of a tenants association. We all have valuable skills and experiences.

Starting a food co-op can bring up lots of questions. You don;t have to answer them all at once! Below are some of the things that you might want to consider before you get going.

Who is my community?

- Are we a single social group or a mix of different ones?
- What is our common interest?

What are the needs of my community?

- How many people struggle financially?
- What help is available to them?
- Are the households in my community mostly single people, small or large families?
- Will my neighbours be interested in joining a food co-op? Do they know about the benefits?

What resources do you have?

- Who are the ‘community anchors’ – the neighbours who know the community well and are trusted and valued by local people? How do I connect with them?
- What other groups are active in the community and could support the co-op with their resources?
- Do I have access to a free and accessible organising space? Who can help me find one?

Reaching out to people

You will have to tell people about our idea to start a food co-op and let them know how they could find out more and get involved.

The best way to get people’s attention is to speak to them directly. From experience, people who don’t already know about co-ops are unlikely to come to a public meeting, so we suggest going to them. The best way to get people’s attention is to speak to them directly. From experience, people who don’t already know about co-ops are unlikely to come to a

public meeting, so we suggest going to them.

Organise a small crew of 2-3 people, print out a leaflet and go door knocking on your estate or your street. Time it to make sure people are around (evenings are best) and practice what you want to say so you feel confident when speaking to neighbours. A conversation on the doorstep is the most effective way to generate interest in the co-op. It might be time consuming but remember, there are no shortcuts in community organising!

In addition to door knocking, you can distribute flyers and put up posters (for example, on community noticeboards, in local shops, at the post office or the GP practice), write for the school newsletters or the local paper, post on the neighbourhood social media or whatsapp groups, contact your local Mutual Aid group...

Public events are also a great way for people to find out about the co-op. A Free Food Larder ahead of the school holidays can make a real difference to parents and is fun to organise (ask us how!).

Finding a space

Your co-op will need a space to meet, organise, and distribute food. This should ideally, be a free and accessible local space, such as a community centre, a tenants hall, or a place of worship. If you haven’t got access to a free space, you could consider holding your founding meeting in a local library or a private home (or at the pub!) and make looking for a space your first task. It’s useful to have some storage space for your co-op, but you can also decide to distribute your deliveries on the same day.

YOUR CO-OP FOUNDING MEETING

Once you have gained some contacts and interest, start organising the group. Don't worry if you start small...as long as you have 10 people, you are good to go.

The co-op founding meeting is where the initial group of members agrees on the co-op principles, structure, and roles. It will set the tone for the rest of the project, so it's crucial that you get it right (no pressure here!).

Making your meetings engaging

Boring meetings are the worst! To make sure everyone feels welcome and engaged you might want to:

→ Elect a facilitator who will introduce the agenda and make sure you stick to the time. The facilitator will also ensure everyone gets a chance to speak (but not for too long!)

→ Agree in advance on the duration of the meeting – most people lose concentration after about 90 minutes.

→ Nominate a note taker, who will share the minutes after the meeting.

→ Provide food – you can ask people to bring a dish or, if you have the space, cook together ahead of the meeting. That means people don't have to rush home for dinner.

→ Organise childcare. Parents can't join meetings if no one takes care of their children! Ask someone without caring responsibilities (clue: not a mum) to help keep children safe and engaged. They are, of course, welcome to join your dinner!

Making decisions about decision making

The founding meeting will agree on the way you will be making decisions as a group, so it is important that everyone understands and approves of the method you choose.

We recommend 'consent' decision making' as the most inclusive and fair method (with a fallback majority option, if you are truly stuck). Consent is achieved when, those not in agreement with the proposal, agree not to maintain an objection.

MAINTAINING THE ENERGY

Maintaining the Energy

Keeping a community group active and engaged over time takes some effort and thinking. It is crucial that your co-op makes time to reflect on how things are going and addressing issues as they arise.

→ Introduce a 'check-in' (asking members to quickly say how they feel) at the beginning and the end of each meeting.

→ Make sure the co-op meets its members' needs by updating your shopping list regularly and ensuring that everyone gets a chance to add what they need.

Co-op rules

The co-op is managed by its members and the founding meeting is when you discuss and elect the different roles.

We recommend that people take on roles for a limited time (initially, three months) and collaborate where possible. It is useful to clarify the time commitment – no more than one hour a week. Some jobs (for example, packing food) can be done in small groups.

The co-op founders will have to elect, at a minimum, a membership co-ordinator and a treasurer, so you can list your members and start collecting membership fees (subs).

Frequency of meetings and time commitment

Your co-op will have to meet regularly to make collective decisions. We suggest a short monthly meeting to go through the accounts, share updates, and complete the shopping list.

Holding a meeting on your food distribution day saves organising another session that month. You can cook and eat together some of the food you received that day!

How much do we wanna pay?

The co-op will get much of its supplies for free and purchase the rest in bulk. That means that a small weekly membership fee (subs) goes a long way!

We recommend starting from £3 a week, which is affordable to most people. You can decide to increase or decrease this amount at any point.

Next step

Before ending the meeting, make sure to set up a date for the next organising and food distribution session (These can be on the same date to avoid meeting fatigue)

→ Long, messy meetings are boring! Keep your meetings short and practical. Make sure you have an agenda and stick to it. Rotate the facilitator and note taker regularly and take breaks if people start to flag.

→ Make your meetings social and fun – share food and go for drinks after!

→ Are members leaving? Ask them why and what can be done to make the co-op more relevant to them and their needs. But don't panic – people leave and new people join.

→ Organise public events to make sure everyone in your com-

munity knows about the co-op (and attract more members!).

→ Dealing with tensions – the co-op is a collective project, but it doesn't mean that members have to agree on everything. Remember – not everyone is used to working in a collaborative way. It is, therefore, hugely important to establish a respectful environment, where no one feels excluded or silenced and where dominant voices or harmful comments are challenged.

→ Link up with other co-ops, community projects, tenant groups, trade unions, local campaigns, and the wider Co-operation Town network – there is so much we can do together beyond food distribution!

WHAT SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE?

Co-operation Town is the network organisation for our community of co-ops. Its workers are there to help start new co-ops, support individual groups, organise training, coordinate resources and create opportunities for mutual aid and collaboration between co-ops locally and nationally.

Other ways Co-operation Town supports new co-ops.

→ Link individual co-ops with free food suppliers.

→ Provide a small budget for initial shopping, room hire, and printing costs.

→ Share templates for membership database, shopping lists, promo flyers, etc.

→ Help set up an Open Collective account.

→ Provide website space and online forum at: cooperation.town.

RESOURCES: FOUNDER MEETING

Co-operation Town – New Co-op Founding Meeting

Facilitator Introduction

Today's agenda.

What is a Co-operation Town food co-op?

Members Introductions

Making decisions about decision making

How do we make big and small decisions?
(majority vote/consensus/consent)

What can working groups decide on?

Co-op Roles

Quickly present each one so members can start thinking what they would like to do. People have hidden skills and surprising life experiences!

Membership Co-ordinator: Keep members list up to date.

Treasurers: Collect and keep record of all member subs.

Researchers / Bargain Hunters: Look for good deals on products on the co-op's shopping list.

Logistics Co-ordinators: Organise the co-op's food deliveries and collections.

Packers and unpackers: Arrange and bag the food.

Distributors: Deliver food to members.

Meetings administrators: Schedule meetings, chairing and taking notes (on rotation), sharing minutes.

Childcarers and cooks: Make sure meetings are accessible and fun (everyone on rotation).

Promoters: Telling people about the co-op.

Events coordinators: Organise Free Food Larders and other events for members and the community.

Network coordinators: Maintain contact with the wider Co-operation Town networking.

Sharing responsibilities

How do we allocate roles and responsibilities?

How often do we swap jobs?

Can some jobs be shared e.g. pairs or working groups?

Electing an interim membership officer and treasurer

Deciding on other roles, if possible at this meeting.

Money questions

How much money should members pay every week?

When do we want to re-evaluate this amount?

How much money should the co-op accumulate before we make our first purchase?

How are we going to pay for a launch event?

Frequency

How often do we want to distribute food?

How often should working groups meet?

How often do we want to have bigger planning meetings?

Recruitment

How do we recruit new members?

Where can we promote the co-op locally?

What kind of public events will appeal to our neighbours (for example a Free Food Larder or a school holiday event)

Admin going forward

Sharing template documents in a public folder.

Date to start collecting subs (via an Open Collective account)

Date, time and facilitator for next meeting.

THE ELEVATOR PITCH

An elevator pitch is a very quick introduction to a project. Use it when you only have a few seconds to grab someone's attention, for example, when you first tell people about the co-op. Once you got them listening, you can go into more detail.

What

We're starting a food co-op here on our estate / on our street and want to invite everyone to get involved.

Why

We all need to eat and feed our children, but we're sick of relying on expensive supermarkets or, when times are hard,

on food banks. We want to have control over how much we pay for basic products and get to know our neighbours in the process.

How

Join us at this even we organised (there will be lots of delicious food!) / read this leaflet / visit cooperation.town / sign up here... Remember to ask people for their contact details, so you could get in touch with them later on.

CONSENT DECISION MAKING

Consent means there are no objections to a particular proposal or suggestion. Similar to consensus, consent decision making encourages all the participants to take an active part in the process.

Unlike consensus, the aim is not to achieve a compromise based on everyone's ideas, but to reach a collective agreement that is "good enough for now" and "safe enough to try" – a decision that no one has a strong objection to and that the group is happy and confident to implement.

The basic process is:

- A member makes a clear and specific proposal (for example, that the co-op holds a public event ahead of Christmas).
- Everyone gets a chance to ask for clarification on this idea.
- Each member gives feedback on the initial proposal.
- The person who brought the idea listens to the feedback and decides if they want to make changes. If so, they present an amended proposal.
- Members can then respond with either agreement, objection or a pass (not having a strong opinion either way). Everyone gets a chance to respond.
- Objections should only be made if members feel strongly that the proposal will disrupt or damage the co-op. These are called "paramount objections". Otherwise, people should follow the "good enough for now" and "safe enough to try" rule.
- Objectors explain their strong reservations (in this case, for

example, because they feel that organising the event will be a very big job).

→ The meeting discusses possible solutions and can propose an amendment (for example, calling on more people or planning fewer activities on the day).

→ The person who brought the idea presents it again with any amendments and everyone gets to respond again (agree, object, or pass).

→ A decision is reached when there are no more objections. Consent decision making means that everyone gets to have a say and, unlike voting, no one feels like their ideas didn't matter in the end.

It is a tried and tested decision making process used by organisations as diverse as activist groups and tech companies. Once everyone gets the hang of it, it will help make meetings more productive, efficient and, mostly, more inclusive.

Check out cooperation.town/resources for more information, tips and videos about consent decision making.

"Through joining the food co-op I connected with neighbours I never knew. Organising together has been a godsend – we get lots of food for free, buy the rest in bulk, split the cost, and collectively get more for our money. There is a place for everyone, no matter what your skills are and you learn some new ones along the way. Everyone takes on a small role, so no one person is left holding the beans!"

This pack was developed by Co-operation Town. A digital version of the pack and all the resources are available on www.cooperation.town.

For further information or to order copies of this pack email info@cooperation.town

Original design by Karishma Puri. Adapted version by Principle5 Yorkshire Co-operative Resource Centre

The text of this pack is an adapted version of the First Edition. August 2020.



co-operative
college

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A VISIT TO PRINCIPLE 5

LIBRARIAN STEVE THOMPSON TAKES US ON A BRIEF TOUR OF PRINCIPLE 5 YORKSHIRE CO-OPERATIVE RESOURCE CENTRE



The political and social environment in which we currently live can be incredibly hostile for those lacking the material resources to “get ahead” in life.

It was evident also in the early days of the industrial revolution. The Co-operative Movement became a success because it gradually liberated people from the stranglehold of private profiteers. Education was enshrined in the co-operative model from the early 19th century.

People in their thousands were struggling to survive in a world where the profits of their labour were taken away by the class of people who own business and industry. The situation today is largely the same across many industries and utilities.

The Co-operative approach differed from representational politics because it relied upon direct community action, expressed through collective self-help and solidarity.

Co-operation gave ownership to the customers and workers. All of this relied upon co-operative education, now known as Principle 5 of the International Statement of Co-operative Identity. And is the name by which our co-operative resource centre is known.

The story of the struggle for and achievement of collective ownership has been recorded in books and papers since the start of the co-operative movement. Ownership gives control, and co-operative ownership has provided a voluntary and democratic model for organising production, retail, distribution - and educational and cultural services.

A VISIT TO THE CENTRE

Principle 5 Yorkshire Co-operative Resource Centre provides a library and archive which retells this story, and of course, the story continues to this day. There is a lively contemporary co-operative movement which is still putting the pieces together to create a more human and humane society.

The Co-operative Movement owes Dr. William King a great debt. He published a journal called *The Co-operator* which came out every month from May 1828 to August 1830. The first co-operators were avid readers of this journal. Indeed, The Rochdale Pioneers collected them and bound them together as a guide to their activism. King was an educator in the practical application of co-operation and wherever *The Co-operator* sold, new co-operative societies began to spring up.

It was agreed at the 54th Annual Co-operative Congress in Brighton in June 1922, that the complete set of editions of *The Co-operator* should be published in a volume prefaced by a chapter on the life and teaching of Dr King, together with a selection of his letters on co-operation. Principle 5 has a copy of this book.

Visitors to the resource centre can browse, read, borrow and discuss matters of interest. The Centre continues the sound tradition of sharing the experience of co-operators with people who aspire to build new ventures. The Principle 5 catalogue can be downloaded from the website.

Perhaps the greatest ambassador for co-operation in the 19th century was George Jacob Holyoake. He was a writer, speaker, propagandist, historian and storyteller. Famously, he wrote the history of the Rochdale Pioneers in two volumes.

The library holds works by George Jacob Holyoake, and authors through the decades to the present day. Some books take an historical view, others look to the future and many are practical guides.

THE CO-OPERATIVE PARTY

Common ownership is political, and this is reflected in the collection of books in the library. The Co-operative Movement created its own political party and fielded candidates at the 1918 general election. At the 59th Annual Co-operative Congress in Cheltenham in 1929

an agreement was reached between the Labour Party and the Co-operative Party to allow the two parties to work together at elections. The resource centre holds Congress Reports. The Co-operative Party was a department of the Co-operative Union, the umbrella body for the Movement, until the Co-operative Congress in 2005 gave approval for the Party to become a co-operative society with its own constitution.

CO-OPERATIVE NEWS

One of the most precious possessions of the Co-operative Movement is Co-operative Press, publishers of *Co-operative News*. This last year marked 150 years of Co-op News, since 1871 it has reported on everything that is important to co-operators. Every edition to the present day is preserved in Holyoake House in the National Co-operative Archive. Principle 5 also holds most of them in the Collection. They provide an invaluable resource for students of co-operation, aspiring co-operators and researchers.

Principle 5 has begun the task of creating a digital index for *Co-operative News*. Co-operative Press is committed

Co-operative Party from those inside and outside of the Movement who believed that it should remain politically neutral. Finally, to propagate the values that it believed would lead to the creation of a co-operative commonwealth as an alternative economic system to capitalism. ‘Co-operation is life,’ the Co-operator’s masthead proclaimed, and ‘Competition is death.’

The Sheffield Co-operative Party published *The Sheffield Co-operator* monthly, with a guaranteed circulation of 30,000 copies freely distributed every month from May 1922 to July 1939. Co-operative societies, particularly Brightside & Carbroom and Sheffield & Ecclesall, placed adverts in the publication and this helped to fund production. There was regular reporting about Sheffield City Council and municipal, co-operative and international issues.

In 2017, to celebrate the Centenary of the Co-operative Party, Principle 5 revived *The Sheffield Co-operator* with a special edition. Like the original publication, co-operatives placed adverts in its pages and this covered costs. This was well received and two further editions were published in 2018 and 2020. This year, 2022, marks the centenary of the *Sheffield Co-operator*.

In addition to The Sheffield Co-operator, principle 5 has re-published *Sheffield and Socialism* by Edward Carpenter, the first of a series of pamphlets. This is a chapter from Carpenter’s autobiography *My Days and Dreams* and tells all about his



to independent journalism and its mission is to connect, champion and challenge the global co-operative movement, through fair and objective journalism and open and honest comment and debate. Principle 5 is happy to support these objectives.

Visitors to the Resource Centre can peruse the pages of *Co-operative News* spanning three centuries. The catalogue can be downloaded from the Principle 5 website.

SHEFFIELD CO-OPERATOR

The Co-operative Party in Sheffield published a newspaper, *The Sheffield Co-operator*. It had four purposes. “Firstly, its effort to promote the candidacy of A. V. Alexander, who was first elected Co-operative and Labour MP for Hillsborough in 1922 and served until 1950 with a break between 1931 and 1935. Secondly, to defend the Co-operative Movement both locally and nationally from those who viewed its success as a threat to the capitalist system. Thirdly, to defend the

time in ‘The Sheffield Socialist Society’.

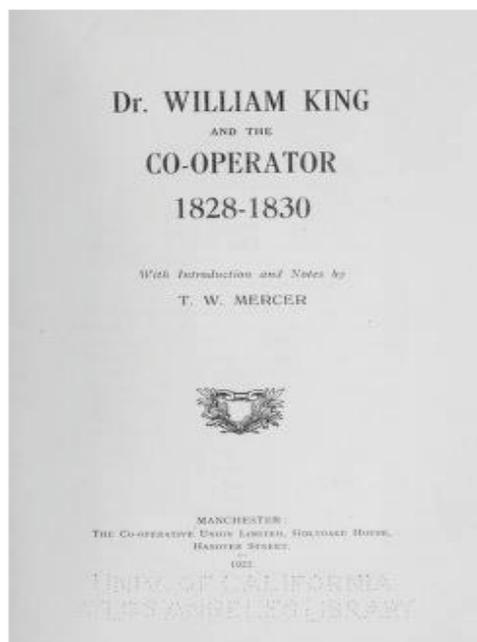
The second pamphlet *Co-operative Production*, is also by Edward Carpenter. This was originally delivered as a lecture by Carpenter at the Sheffield Hall of Science on Sunday 8 March 1883. The venue in Rockingham Street was where George Jacob Holyoake and other radicals of the time promoted co-operative education. Like *Sheffield and Socialism*, it is on sale at the modest price of £2.

VISIT PRINCIPLE 5

Readers are encouraged to look at the Principle 5 website: principle5.coop and support co-operative education through membership. The survival of our co-operative depends upon the subscriptions from members. To join contact: steve@sheffield.coop or telephone 0114 2823132.

The Principle 5 library and archive is in Aizlewood’s Mill Nursery Street, Sheffield S3 8GG.

- STEVE THOMPSON



EACH FOR ALL AND ALL FOR EACH

A hundred years ago, the *Sheffield Co-operator* was founded to support A.V. Alexander, who was elected the Co-operative and Labour Member of Parliament for Sheffield Hillsborough in November 1922. The same month, the *Co-operator* published this speech, in which Alexander made clear his thoughts that only consumer co-operation could radically change society. To celebrate the centenary of the *Co-operator*, we are reprinting the speech largely in full aside from a brief edit to the introduction.

It is an old axiom of British commerce that "Competition is the life of trade." I want seriously to suggest that on the other hand, that the results of competition show it clearly to be a curse of humanity. It is based upon the doctrine of the survival of the fittest and the weakest to the wall; of every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost. Its results are seen first of all in national life with the overcrowding of industrial areas; in the sweating of labour — male, female, and child labour. It has been responsible in pre-war days for periods of boom and for periods of slump, in the periods of boom the reward of labour being only such as could be wrung from their employers by the workers; and in periods of slump, the turning into the street of workers no longer required when they can produce no profit. Nor does the evil effect finish there. For those leaders of industry who survive competition, as soon as they are able to do so, exploit

not only the worker in his capacity of producer, but also as the consumer.

In regard to international matters, I submit that competition is responsible for even more widespread results. If there were time it could be amply demonstrated that commercial and industrial competition amongst nations has played a very large part in the engendering of modern wars. The existence of a competitive system in this and other countries leads to economic and commercial rivalry for the markets and raw materials of the world, which first produces the seeds of hate, and then open rupture and war. Surely Ruskin is right when he says that 'competition is death.'

The statesmen of this country and of some other countries have been appealing with the regularity of a gramophone in the last three-and-a-half years for international co-operation. I suggest that whilst the national industrial systems are on a competitive basis, any efforts for in-



A.V. ALEXANDER (1885-1965). MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR HILLSBOROUGH (CO-OPERATIVE AND LABOUR) 1921-31, 1935-50.

ternational co-operation must in the long run prove abortive.

They may be many who do not agree with me, but my opinion is that those who support the continuance of such a system may preach and pray in vain for 'Peace on Earth and Goodwill towards Men.'

We have heard much during the last five or six years of reconstruction. It is regrettable that this reconstruction has largely ended in talk. Yet it needs to be emphasised that all great causes have been born and have received their greatest impetus in the time of greatest difficulty and in the greatest depression. The birth of the co-operative movement in this country at Rochdale in the period known as the 'Hungry Forties' has proved this. I suggest that the present period of depression is showing us clearly that there is need for all men and women of goodwill to spare no effort to substitute for the competitive system, which has had such desire results, the system of co-operation, based upon our movement's motto: 'Each for all and all for each.' There have been many schemes for the promotion of co-operation in industry, but I have only time to refer to the three principal ones, and can only deal effectively in the time at my disposal with one of them. They are: - Profit-sharing, co-partnership, and consumers' co-operation. Profit sharing and co-partnership I regard as palliatives to our present system, and not substitutes. The measure of their efficacy in relation to the consumers' theory can best be gauged by a comparison of the success which has attended them.

Quite a large number of schemes of profit-sharing and co-partnership have broken down altogether, and taking a broad survey of the whole of our industrial system today, the extent of the operation of profit-sharing, and co-partnership is infinitesimal. On the other hand, the consumers' co-operative movement, which started at Rochdale in the 'forties, on the weekly savings of twenty-eight out-of-work weavers has grown until it has a membership of four-and-a-half million adults, with a cumulative capital of nearly £100,000,000 and an annual distribution of surpluses to the consumer of rather more than £20,000,000.

Consumers' co-operation is based upon the theory that associations of consumers should combine to provide them-

selves with all the necessary commodities and services which they require for human existence and development. They commence with an organisation for the collective buying and distribution of necessities and commodities. They sell these things to each other at market prices, and after allowing for administrative, productive, and establishment expenses, including the provision of at least trade union hours, conditions, and remuneration to labour, return the surpluses to the consumer in relation to the purchases made.

Except therefore, that provision is made for a limited fixed return upon capital employed, the commodities and services are supplied to the consumer without profit, and the amount of profit represented by fixed interest on capital is restricted by the fact that no shareholder can hold more than £200 capital.

The local associations of consumers give facilities to purchases to acquire capital by allowing them to leave their surpluses upon purchases in the societies, and such of this capital as is not required for local development, is invested in a central wholesale organisation, which undertakes not only collective buying, but production of the commodities required. The whole movement therefore is providing or aims at providing on the basis of the ascertained and organised demand of the consumers; and, further, it is organising industry on the basis of supplying human need for what it requires, and for use and not for profit.

The control of the movement, although it may possibly be said has not yet reached the ideal, is as democratic as it can yet be made.

Each local society is governed through monthly or quarterly meetings of its shareholding consumers, whose voting power is organised on the principle of one man or one woman vote, and not on the basis of the amount of the shareholding. The management of the Wholesale organisation is also democratic, the number of representatives at the quarterly meetings being governed by the membership of the constituent societies.

So rapid has been the development of this system of co-operation promoting both mutual help and self-help, that many years ago Lord Roseberry described it as 'a state within a state.' Further, at a time when there is a wide



THE FIRST EDITION OF THE SHEFFIELD CO-OPERATOR, DATED MAY 1922. GUARANTEED CIRCULATION OF 30,000.

plea for the workers' control in industry, there is a possibility of the co-operative worker having a real share in the control of his industrial life, since he is entitled to membership of his consumers' society on the same basis as all other members. In some cases, employees are eligible for election to management committees and it is hoped that this privilege may be still more widely developed.

Moreover, at a time when the workers of the country are frequently told that they are unfit to govern, they have in their co-operative movement a real opportunity of obtaining the necessary knowledge to fit them for government.

Nor is the activity of the movement confined to the mere industrial and commercial aspects of production and distribution. It has a central educational organisation, with 30,000 students; an annual expenditure on education of £200,000 (money provided by the consumers themselves from their surpluses); and in every department of effort for social reform and for the general wellbeing of the people at large, co-operators play an active part.

Moreover, their activities are now being extended internationally. Co-operators recognise that until their principles are inculcated into the national life of all peoples, and until international trade is based upon the same principles of mutual help as their own national movement, no finally lasting peace can be established in the world. Already, thirty national co-operative organisations are included in the International Co-operative Alliance, comprising some fifty millions of co-operators, who have taken as their pattern the co-operative system which saw its birth in this country.

I submit that such a movement with

such ideals has an ethical basis and a moral goal which can command support from all true Christians. It is based upon voluntary association by the free volition of the individual; and we think with the late Sir Thomas Hughes that if this co-operative spirit, with the facilities of action now open to it, cannot succeed in forming a reformed social state, the existing state will be absolutely powerless to create a co-operative spirit.

As well might we suppose that if St. Paul had succeeded in converting the Emperor Nero to the Christian faith that religion might have been established as a true spiritual influence by the javelins and swords of the Roman legion.

To me it is a bright spot in the history of the Church that a great impetus was given to the co-operative movement by the members of the Church who called themselves in the Victorian era 'Christian Socialists.' The names of Sir Thomas (Judge) Hughes, of the Rev. Maurice Ludlow, Charles Kingsley, and Edward Vansittart Neale are indelibly written upon co-operative history. They saw in the movement something which was akin to the spirit of mutual service which Jesus of Nazareth came to teach.

Like all other movements, many faults can be discovered in modern co-operation, but we feel that it does contain the germ of that which is highest in man; and we appeal with confidence for the support of those who are seeking to bring about a better state of things. 'Whoso hath felt the spirit of the Highest cannot confound nor doubt Him or deny. Yea, with the one voice, oh world, thou deniest, stand thou on that side, for on this am I.'

- A. V. ALEXANDER

Principle FIVE P5



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An accessible co-operative learning and information resource for all:

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Principle 5 Yorkshire Co-operative Resource Centre
Aizlewood's Mill, Nursery Street, Sheffield S3 8GG
Tel: 0114 282 3132 Web: <https://www.principles.coop>

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COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING IN SHEFFIELD

IN FEBRUARY 2021 SHEFFIELD LABOUR PARTY HELD AN ONLINE DISCUSSION ABOUT COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING WITH LOCAL MEMBERS. THE FIRST OF MANY PROMISED EVENTS, THE *SHEFFIELD CO-OPERATOR* EAGERLY ANTICIPATES FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

*The text has been edited for clarity whilst retaining the integrity of the original. Please contact us for copies of the original transcript.



COUNCILLOR BOB JOHNSON

The austerity cuts have profoundly affected Council services. But we still need to make a difference locally. What we prioritise and how we work will become even more important. We want to bring a real locality feel into the way we work.

The great stuff that has come out of the pandemic, that sense of community is what we want to bring forward. It's this sort of thing that puts clear blue water between us and other parties. This session will hopefully be the first of many.



COUNCILLOR TERRY FOX

My working life was spent in the mining industry and community wealth building is a big issue for me. Our story so far is one of ethical procurement.

In 2018 Labour councillors launched an ethical procurement policy, led by Olivia Blake. The policy sets out some clear expectations across the Council's supply chain. Most importantly, tax compliance is a must for us, as is a living wage and a commitment to social value. Social value essentially means reducing inequalities by creating opportunities for all.

Local people developing new skills and finding quality local jobs. Helping local businesses develop their skills and supporting them so that they are competitive and can tap into supply chains and form relationships with big businesses

We need to develop new and innovative ideas for some of the old problems, to build stronger relationships with the voluntary and third sector. To ensure

the places where we work live and play are greener and cleaner. Our ethical procurement policy is clear. To uphold these ambitions, and to use the money we spend to increase opportunities for local business and local people.

We hope that businesses who have council contracts will share our values to create a city economy that works for everyone.

Covid-19 has reset the dial back to zero on many things. If we can use this opportunity to stimulate and regenerate Sheffield, then something positive will have come out of the ordeal.

In practice the economic benefits are quite clear. We estimated that in 2018/19 £80 million pounds more money was kept in the local economy. Half the contracts, nearly half a billion pounds, went into local businesses, local contracts. The money in these contracts has found its way into the local economy.

When I entered into local government, there was a big conversation at that time about Objective 1, SRB, and other types of funding, and what that meant in sustainability terms. That local money should touch at least three local businesses or partners, or workforces, three times. So that half a billion could stimulate into one and a half billion across the city.

THE QUESTIONS TO ASK

What sort of measures would regenerate your local area? And how could the same could be applied nationally? What are the core themes that should underpin our social value in contracts? How do we ensure that the procurement contracts make us carbon neutral?

The sort of investments we're already making over the next five years are widespread, including redeveloping and regenerating West Bar to Castlegate.

We are launching an electric van scheme, installing rapid chargers, purchasing e-bikes and cycle routes, retrofitting the busses, introducing a clean air zone, also upgrading the electrical works on 22,000 properties as people move away from gas to other forms of heating.

We've obviously put investment into the carbon reduction target. To help us to get over the next hurdle, we've put in place a private renters inspector, to ensure that private properties are fit for purpose.

We are also investing in our own housing fleet. We've got a massive task just keeping our existing tenants living in a dry safe properties. There are 6,500 roof replacements opportunities for insulation and solar power generation.

£6 million is being spent taking out the 3000 obsolete heating boilers, external wall insulation. Also 3000 new council homes, that obviously will be constructed with local apprentices.

COMMUNITY WEALTH

Community wealth is about using wealth that is already here. We've attempted to use our procurement to stimulate the lo-

cal economy. We've committed to bringing in better terms and conditions for the workforce and for our partners and businesses in the supply chain. We've set up within Labour group a task and finish group which is looking at our assets, not only for assets for rationalisation, but to take advantage of opportunities to improve our neighbourhoods.

We are just about to announce on how we engage, enable, and empower our residents and our communities by devolving budgets and decision-making power. We want to empower residents to influence and steer their communities.

We aren't comfortable sitting on our laurels. We want to make Sheffield a Living Wage City. We need support from Government, and the City Region, to see how we can combat poverty and create jobs for our city young and pay fair wage for a fair day's work.



MAYOR DAN JARVIS MP

The work that I'm doing as Mayor is underpinned by a very basic principle. That I want to make our economy and our society stronger, greener, and fairer. Stronger, in terms of an economic transformation to create not just a bigger economy, but a better one. Higher tech, higher skill, and higher value. Greener, in terms of a green transformation in order to decarbonise our economy, improve our environment, and revolutionise our public transport system. And fairer, a transformation of wellbeing and inclusion, raising our quality of life, reducing inequality, and widening opportunity.

I support community wealth building because we want to build not just a bigger economy, but a better one, and community wealth building is part of our core strategy. Over the past number of months, we've put a huge amount of work into developing a strategic economic plan, and that's recently been agreed by all the leaders across South Yorkshire. The SEC is our blueprint for the kind of economy we want to see over the years to come and it sets out the principle that very clearly states that the mayoral com-

bined authority will seek to implement principles of community wealth building and the wellbeing economy. We will use any assets and fund that we have some control over to create social value and advance our key policy priorities. We will encourage local anchor institutions to do the same.

Now, we've already started to put that into practice. We are in the process of undertaking a major process of procurement reform because we want to make sure that our procurement as far as possible contributes to the wider social good of South Yorkshire, whether by supporting local employment and local businesses, whether that's by incentivising companies to offer apprenticeships, through procurement weighting, or say, encouraging higher labour standards or decarbonisations.

We want to call on a large number of anchor institutions, including the ones that Sheffield Council are already engaging with as a part of that effort. We've already put a basic programme into place, but we're intending to do much more. And my intention is that we'll use contributions from CLES, from Sheffield Hallam University and a range of others to push the envelope of what we can do in South Yorkshire.

I'm very pleased that we'll soon have a new procurement manager in place to lead this effort, and we have a programme of investment planned to which we also intend to attach conditionality and incentives around social value. Back to the SEP again.

Our investment decisions must better harness the benefits for local economies following the principles of community wealth building. We are looking hard at how we can support different, more social models of enterprise more widely. That's widely through direct and indirect support of co-operatives and worker ownership. It's a model that has been shown to work, being more resilient in turbulent economic times, because it is less likely to lay off workers, and more likely to keep money in the local area. It offers I think a fairer distribution of power and profit, and it makes sense as a matter of principle, as well as practical sense. What's not to like?

I think these are ideas that I think Labour can and should be making part of our core message. I'm happy that we seem to be heading in that direction. It's a robust, confident argument that we can do better. It's a fearlessness about the fact that the system as it stands is broken, and unfair, and it's an acknowledgement that the state has an active and innovative role to play in terms of fixing it. It's not just about filling the gaps in the market. It's about pro-actively trying to change our economy towards a greater social good. With rigour. With care. But a clear sense of mission.

We are always stronger when we seek to change the system rather than just picking up the pieces from it. That is what we are about as a movement, and what this initiative is about. I don't pretend that its close to the change that ultimately we want to see, but it is I think, a very good step in the right direction, and I offer my assurances that I'll want to work very closely with city councillors in Sheffield and see how we can roll this work out more widely for the benefit of South Yorkshire, so we can put in place something we can collectively be proud of.



OLIVIA BLAKE MP

The past year has shown us that the Conservative government is dead against this way of organising local economies. Our high streets are likely to be changed forever, and there simply isn't enough support available now to ensure that they bounce back.

In the Labour Party we've launched a Co-operative Recovery Task Force, jointly with the Co-operative Party. This recognises the important role that Councils and Mayors have in delivering this change. It highlights where Labour is currently in power and doing head, and there is steam building behind this idea. It was launched at the Co-operative Party Local Government Conference in November 2020, and it involved a series of roundtables with Annaliese Dodds, meeting different co-ops and social enterprises across the country. The first one was a couple of weeks ago and focused on the role of community ownership and revitalising high streets, including some of the great work that is going on the ground where we have Labour Councils. This will be instrumental with us helping our policy development, hearing directly from those who are delivering, and share in that best practice.

STUART MACDONALD (CLES)

Even before Covid, the economy was not working for everybody. 14 million people were living in poverty, we had a million people on zero-hour contracts, not knowing what work they were going to do next week. The Marmet Review was refreshed and told us that life expectancy was falling for the first time in a century. The system really isn't working. Under austerity we've had a doubling of billionaires, and five men in the UK have more wealth than 13 million people.

OUT OF NOWHERE?

But this is not something that has come out of nowhere. This is a long-term structural issue that we have in our economy. In 1850 about half of income in the country went to labour. As we progressed through the industrial revolution, we developed workers' rights, terms and conditions, good employment, that share shifted, and it increased up to 70 per cent. Its been on the slide since the late 1970s. This is a structural part of our economy, and labours share of income is back to what it was in 1850. We've basically undone a century and a half of work.

GDP has been growing at the same time that median income has been falling. This divergence between GDP and median income is driving an increase in inequality. We've got the Bank of Eng-

land now telling us that there's all this pent-up capital through lockdown and that all these people have saved loads of money and they are going to spend it and the economy will be great. But we've also got the NIESR telling us that destitution has doubled. Inequality is growing. Covid has accelerated it, and fossil fuel capitalism is destroying our planet. We need to do something different. And we need to do it quickly.

INCLUSIVE GROWTH?

Now the last few years have been typified by conversations around inclusive growth, but we would argue that this concept itself is flawed. Inclusive growth does nothing to challenge the existing economic model which has produced the growing divergences. Growing inequality. It thinks that we can tinker around the edges and solve things. We argue that the problem is much more structural. An inclusive economy is one that is intrinsically married to social goals, to social justice and environmental sustainability and to prosperity for all. We can't have inclusion after the fact of growth. We need an inclusive economy to develop inclusion with or without growth and seek to address some of the fundamental flaws of market liberalism more generally.

A new model is emerging from the local upward, there is lots of progressive practice out there. How do we bring that together and scale it, and make it part of our national conversation around renewal after Covid? There's a whole range of progressive practices, and community wealth building serves as a framing for bringing those together. There is an awakening from those who have an ability to influence economic outcomes, and progressive partnerships are coming together all over the UK.

A DEFINITION

Now community wealth building we define here as being the people centred approach to local economic demand. A fundamental driver of a more inclusive economy. We're looking to re-organise and control the local economy to ensure that wealth is not extracted but is broadly held and generative. We want wealth that has local roots, wealth that creates circulation of income, where communities are put first, and people are provided with opportunity, dignity, and wellbeing. Now an inclusive growth narrative fails to challenge this issue of distribution, so tradition economic development looks at how do we redistribute wealth after its creative, and this is where community wealth building differs. We start to ask questions about the pre-distribution of wealth. Where wealth is being created, who is creating that wealth, and how that wealth is being shared. If we are going to get anywhere near a fair and just transition, we're going to have to start asking these questions about wealth.

Now the approach that we take is embedded in anchor institutions, or more specifically in institutional economics. These major institutions – universities, government, hospitals, housing institutions – they are what we call anchor institutions, anchor because they are rooted to their place, they aren't going anywhere. But they control collectively immense amounts, financial, economic, intellectual, social, and human capital. How do we pull these levers of influence

together to shape a more progressive local and environmental outcomes for everyone? Community wealth building as we approach it has five pillars, and what we try to do is advance these five pillars simultaneously and collectively across the anchor institutions of a place. This is where you start to see a real shift in the dial, and real outcomes or a place.

The work that Sheffield has been doing around procurement has been fantastic, but how are we engaging with the hospital. What is the hospital doing on procurement? What is the university doing on procurement? The police? All the major public institutions. But not just public. Why just limit it to the public institutions. What about the major private institutions? The big firms. The ones that are rooted in the local economy. The ones that are not who can just get up and move to Asia. These are our major institutions. What do their supply chains look like.

LAND AND PROPERTY

Land and property: Again, how can we look at the collective public estate through the lens of community wealth building. How do we use some of those under-utilised properties to support the growth of the local economy? The knowledge and intelligence that we gain from the work we do on procurement, can help build and make markets. Those local supply chains are going to need to grow, develop, have access to land and property. As collective institutions, the anchor institutions of a place probably

represent 10, maybe 30 per cent of local employment. Tens of thousands of people potentially employed by these collective anchor institutions. How do we develop more progressive terms and conditions, more progressive employment practices across those anchor institutions, so that we can then collectively go to the private sector and say, look, the big good employers in Sheffield, this is what you need to be doing, work with us, share our understanding of supply chains, share our understanding of procurement, what sort of opportunities we've got coming up in the next five years. Work with us to produce good jobs for local people.

All this needs financing. Capital has moved away from the local. Capital is a global market, but how do we look at using some local financial levers. Where do we invest our pension funds, our institutional funds which are collected locally? Are they being used locally? How do we look at developing schemes or bonds or financial mechanisms, using the financial powers of our collective anchors which can support the growth of local infrastructure? Local projects. Local housing. Local green energy. The money is there. There is latent capital. Some people do have savings in the bank which are only earning them 1% to 2% interest. We could be offering them much better returns by pooling our capital and looking to develop a financial power that works for our local place. We need collaboration...and scale.



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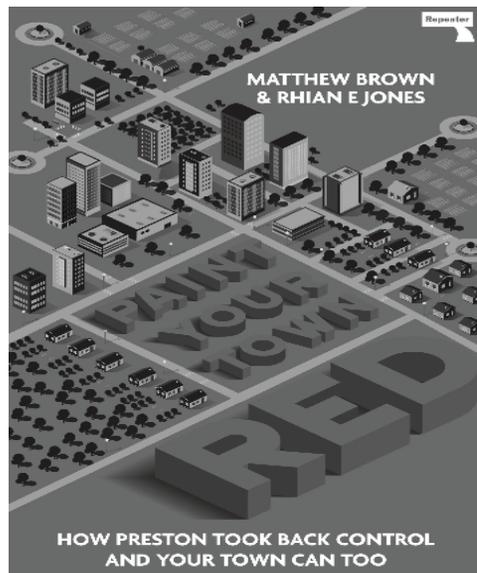
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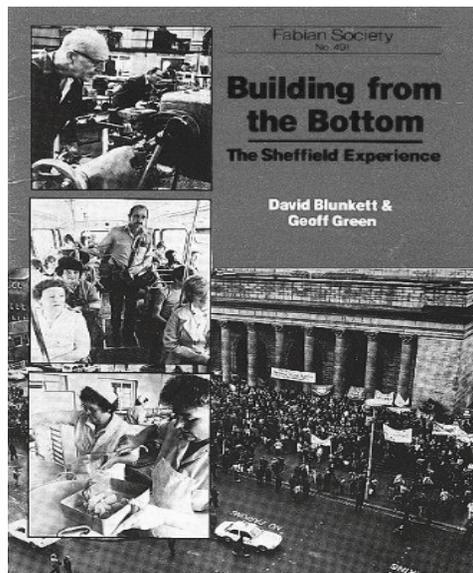
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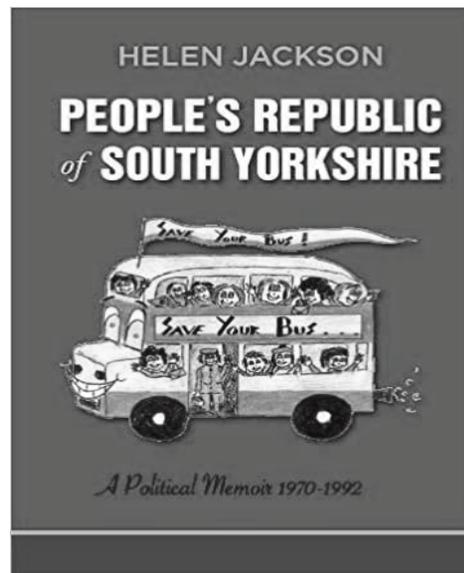
BOOK REVIEW ESSAY



Paint Your Town Red
by Matthew Brown and Rhian E. Jones.
Repeater Press, 2021



Building From the Bottom
by David Blunkett and Geoff Green
Fabian Society, 1983



People's Republic of South Yorkshire
by Helen Jackson,
Spokesman Books, 2021

Among activists of the British Left, the foremost economic ideas of the present day are Universal Basic Income and Community Wealth Building. It is regularly repeated that these are ideas whose time has come.

Perhaps it is safer to say that their time has come again. UBI has been discussed in Sheffield for a hundred years, Sheffield radical Edward Carpenter speculating on the impact of a guaranteed income in 1897. In the late 1960s, the Nixon Administration in the United States almost passed a Basic Income Bill. And while *Paint Your Town Red* is a valuable book which neatly summarises the progress made by Preston Council in recent years in reinvigorating the local economy, the ideas behind community wealth building are not entirely new, as evidenced by the experience of Sheffield in the 1980s.

PAINT YOUR TOWN RED

If *Paint your Town Red* has a weakness, it is its title. The authors state that community wealth building can 'cut across political partisanship.' This is true. It's not hard to imagine that some Conservative and Liberal Democrats are receptive to the idea of supporting local businesses over multinationals and keeping the generated wealth in the local area. But they may reject the idea because *Paint your Town Red* is a red book.

The Community Wealth Building agenda is a set of loosely related development strategies which can be used to stimulate 'collaborative, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth with a focus on preventing a leakage of wealth to organisations that otherwise has no connection to the local area.' It was inspired by Ted Howard's Cleveland Model of 'community, inclusion, place (keeping wealth local) good work (labour before capital) and democratised ownership, ethical finance, and sustainability.'

In Cleveland and Preston, these strategies have been built initially around the notion that permanent local economic assets – 'anchor institutions' – should procure as many of their services from local companies as possible i.e. the Council, the universities, and the local hospitals. Using these sites of permanent economic demand, community wealth builders

seek to increase democratic control of the local economy by creating worker co-operatives, and community development institutions to service these institutions, who are encouraged to procure their services more locally. Why should school meals, for example, be procured from a multinational corporation and not a local co-operative?

A FLEXIBLE IDEA

The authors of *Paint Your Town Red* are quick to point out that community wealth building is a flexible idea. The only requirement is the concerted political will to try new things. Some local authorities might bypass procurement issues and concentrate on community ownership and the management of local resources. The ultimate aim remains the same: to reduce economic and social inequality, to create good jobs with stable conditions and a decent wage. In areas where co-operatives are used, ownership of the local economy can be broadened, insulating it from the whims of the Government of the day, which can cut public budgets at any moment whilst increasing the number of statutory obligations – doing more with less. This, Matthew Brown, Leader of Preston Council, is the real meaning of 'taking back control.'

The challenge for those who want to introduce community wealth building into their local authority is 'buy in' beyond councils and think tanks. A lack of free time for political commitment, a reticence for some Councils to cede power to the community, and the failure of previous attempts to undertake initiatives that challenge central government orthodoxy. These are all reasons why local authorities might be reticent to experiment. It is also a strategy that takes time to implement, requiring stable leadership across a number of years.

THE SUCCESS OF PRESTON

The success of Preston however, shows it can be done. Local authorities can support grassroots projects and local businesses by redirecting funding, offering training opportunities, and experimenting with social enterprise and co-operative development. Importantly, its suc-

cess shows that Councils can proactively consult with local residents on their priorities.

There is plenty of scope to be ambitious. A commitment to community wealth building could lead to creative and unorthodox solution being found to solve the crises in local housing supply. Progressive procurement, community banking, co-operatives, and other initiatives could lead to the creation of innovative new businesses that are locally based and employ local people. If no local businesses exist to bid for a public contract, why not support the creation of a co-operative to fill the gap? Why not stimulate the growth of co-operatives by providing education and business planning sessions?

Preston has done just this. Link is the UK's first educational psychologists co-operative; The Larder is a healthy cafe and cooking academy offering catering services; the Preston Digital Foundation is a media co-operative specialising in digital transformation; and North West Black Cabs, is a cooperative of local taxi drivers. Care, construction, and education co-operatives are at the developmental stage.

The key to the Preston Model is co-operation. Its success stems from its status as a shared endeavour between several organisations, stakeholders, and individuals, all of whom are contributing ideas, energy, and expertise to the task of creating a strong local economy that works for the majority of those it represents.

BUILDING FROM THE BOTTOM

Much of what is described in *Paint Your Town Red* will sound familiar to people in Sheffield. It is almost forty years since *Building from the Bottom: The Sheffield Experience*, a summary of Sheffield's alternative economic strategy to Thatcherism in the early 1980s, was published as a Fabian Pamphlet. In revisiting this work, it is important to ask the following. Firstly, why did the strategy fail? Secondly, does its failure haunt the council? Thirdly, does its failure prove that Community Wealth Building cannot work in Sheffield?

Written by David Blunkett and Geoff Green, *Building from the Bottom* pitched

the Council's agenda as a challenge to the Thatcher government's rejection of working class traditions of community and co-operation in favour of individual competition for work and resources.

Labour Councils, Blunkett declared, had to fight against this ideology by proving to the public that council run services could be better – less paternalistic, less authoritarian, and more efficient – than those operated by private sector.

This meant placing as much wealth and resources under the control of local communities as possible, including those who delivered the services.

A new culture, which extended workplace democracy, was the key to generating ideas and the power to implement changes in the Council and the local economy that could create a more cohesive community. 'We must spell out why the economics of the marketplace and private enterprise itself create an unacceptable society, and how the concept of community can form an alternative to that of greed and self-interest as the only motivator of innovation and initiative.'

Using the Council as a tool to stimulate economic innovation, it was decided to focus on 'setting up... small scale demonstration projects to test new goods and services to tackle unmet needs.'

This was a form of Community Wealth Building. Regeneration had to come from the bottom not the top, from the 'collective imaginations' of local people working with the support of council staff.

The Thatcherite alternative to Sheffield's Strategy, Enterprise Zones and Urban Development Corporations, amounted to a lottery for funding or bribing 'large-scale enterprises to move to Sheffield rather than somewhere else.' The 'billions poured into the private enterprise begging bowl', Blunkett wrote, 'enabled companies to make massive profits without any net gain in employment.'

Pots of European Union money in the 1990s had similar effects, as might the Towns Fund and Levelling Up funding. Such money has always been welcomed, but in reality, they have never solved the problem of under-employment among families who previously relied on the heavy industries for employment.

BUILDING CO-OPERATIVES

Building from the bottom also meant creating worker co-operatives. In 1981, the Council sent a delegation to the Mondragon Co-operative in the Basque Country, in order to learn how the council might stimulate the creation of a co-operative economy. Mondragon at the time had created 17,000 jobs over 25 years in the modern manufacturing sector. In 1982, Traffic Systems won its first major contract with South Yorkshire County Council to maintain traffic light control units. In doing so, it broke the 'stranglehold of big firms' who had previously charged twice or even three times as much for the same service.'

There were sadly, few other successes. The MONS Co-operative, of which two former employees appointed to the Employment Department as Product Development Officers, created a domestic dehumidifier for council houses that suffered from damp, yet this never took off. Since the 1980s, Sheffield has been home to Sheffield Co-operative Development Group, which funds co-operative development through the rents collected at Aizlewood's Mill Business Centre on

Nursery Street. Despite the existence of this valuable resource, Sheffield Council has been reticent to develop a coherent community wealth building agenda, though it has put in place an ethical procurement plan.

Neither is Sheffield Council a member of the Co-operative Council's Innovation Network (CCIN), although it was involved briefly in the Co-operative Councils Network. Co-operative Party activists in Sheffield have previously challenged councillors to explain why it pulled out, without a response.

MUNICIPAL ENTERPRISE

A recent memoir written by former Sheffield Councillor and Member of Parliament for Hillsborough Helen Jackson has done much to enrich the story of the times during which *Building from the Bottom* was written. 'Municipal Enterprise', Jackson explains in *People's Republic of South Yorkshire: A Political Memoir 1970-1992*, was initially built out of the success of David Blunkett's "Elderly Person Support Units" (EPSUs) initiative. EPSUs were purpose-built hubs focused upon home help services and a day centre which attempted to improve the jobs of those providing care services for the elderly.

After he was elected Leader of the Council, Blunkett held a weekend strategy conference at Thornbridge Hall. Out of this conference, three strategy papers, *Towards a Social Policy*, *Alternative Economic Policies*, and *Implementing a Local Economic Strategy for Sheffield*, formed the basis of the Municipal Enterprise strategy.

In order to turn the ideas in the papers into reality, two groups were formed on the Council. The first, the Economic and Employment Group, chaired by Bill Michie, would 'seek to create employment by identifying the needs of Sheffield people and examining new ways in which they may be met by local skills and productive capacity including municipal enterprise, co-operatives, and planning agreements.'

The second, Social Strategy, chaired by Alan Billings, would 'guide the local authority's work in the general direction of positive discrimination and by linking traditional departmental provision will co-ordinate the direction of resources to meet political objectives.'

To support these groups, two development officer positions and an officer directly responsible to Blunkett were recruited. Paul Skelton, Frances Homewood, and Geoff Green, reached those experienced in community development, brought in a host of new ideas which 'challenged existing policy and proposals for the future', and exposed the 'conventional' top-down culture of local government.

The worsening economic situation soon prompted the creation of a separate Employment Committee, and John Bennington, an academic based at Warwick University, took up the job of being its co-ordinator.

The Employment Committee set out to alleviate the worst effects of unemployment. 21 jobs were created to staff the department, that would develop 'radical strategic action against unemployment'. It worked to encourage effective training for new skills and jobs, stimulate new investment, and diversify job opportunities in the city. It also worked to explore new forms of industrial democracy and

co-operative control over work.

Jackson outlines the various initiatives undertaken or supported by the Council in these areas. A Centre Against Unemployment was opened on West Street. With the encouragement of the Council, the Autoways Building on Shoreham Street was converted into a cinema, Red Tape Studios, and the Sheffield Archives.

THE RATES ACT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Much of the impetus for Sheffield's independent strategy was undermined by the 1984 Rates Act, which Jackson claims 'effectively abolished the idea of independent local authorities, democratically elected on a regular basis...a high-handed, undemocratic proposal of historic significance from which local government has never since recovered.'

Jackson describes the impact of the Act on the morale of the Councillors and their willingness to continue to resist the Thatcher Government. 'Even...a few months before, vitriolic attacks in the council chamber on projects such as the Women's Technology Training Workshop, or [Red Tape Studios] had strengthened Labour solidarity...Had the national media and official Labour Party opposition to non-compliance with government legislation and thereby breaking the law, scared them and their families? Perhaps the main reason was general exhaustion and demoralisation. Council members believed that a further fight would inevitably end in defeat.'

What emerged was not so much a strategy, but a state of mind, which in some quarters persists to this day. Although the Council did undertake projects after the passage of the Rates Act, such as the Heat and Power project and the World Student Games, these lacked the outcomes which 'translated equality policy into action.' 'The phrase "cranes in the sky" emerged as a key aspiration to show pride in the city and keep some dignity', Jackson explains. 'It was a way of rebuilding confidence, but the bold emphasis on people-led progress towards a fairer society, driven by the belief that what was good for social progress and equal opportunity would help the local economy thrive and vice versa, became more hesitant and muted.'

Certainly today, there is a feeling that the Council should stay out of the business of attempting to directly stimulate employment for people. Like many other cities, it has been reliant on the lottery of attracting businesses to invest locally. Pursuing this strategy is great as long as you are the city a company chooses to invest in. The jobs created by these companies tend to be highly skilled, and largely filled by university graduates from Sheffield and beyond. In all areas, high-tech jobs are seen as the future of employment.

THE LESSONS

What lessons does Jackson draw from her experiences in the 1980s and early 1990s?

1) That pots of money from the European Union such as European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) were highly useful. However, they had their drawbacks when applied to British circumstances. Management and prioritisation of regeneration funding was more centralised in the UK than in countries like Germany, which retained stronger regional gov-

ernments, and became 'more focused on remedial work to physical infrastructure than supporting people in social need.'

2) That direct labour was enormously beneficial. The building of the City Hall in the 1930s, Jackson explains, had created 120,000 man days of work for the unemployed.

In the 1980s, the Council was the largest employer in the city, with more than 30,000 people on its books. Employing direct labour made it possible for the Council to offer education leave and in-house training to boost skills, which give people better opportunities in the future regardless of whether they were working for the Council or not.

3) That local authorities are much more capable of keeping in tune with their communities than central government. They can speak with greater clarity the goals which they want to achieve, are more invested in community development, and can be more open. David Blunkett, Jackson writes, 'brought clarity into the message that a fair and equal society was the goal' with every council employee encouraged to be ambassadors for the Council and its reforms.

4) That education is a lifelong process and that there is an urgent need to reinstate lifelong education and training. 'Post pandemic' she writes, 'we need to encourage the development of a new economy based around care, and local councils are best place to provide quality services and a good return on investment.' This is correct. In the fast moving world of new technology, a quarter of advertised job vacancies in Sheffield

last year were digital roles. How many of those jobs went to people from Sheffield?

FINAL WORDS

The Conservatives created a one-dimensional society in which the centre holds all power. This is not a small state. This is an all-encompassing state that relies on the fiction that the centre, dictating one uniform policy for all, can cure all problems. There is a central role to be played by local authorities in solving the problems of the future. Whether the Labour Party can grasp this reality is far from certain.

In November 2021, Labour leader Keir Starmer, delivered a speech at the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) annual conference. He announced the creation of a new skills advisory panel, that would include David Blunkett.

Blunkett has warned the Party that people living in former industrial areas want to know what Labour is going to do for them in the future, and 'don't want to be patronised by people saying what they are going to do for them from above. They want to actually see something happening on the ground. The Tories have recognised this very cleverly and have been smart in being able to translate 11 years of levelling-down into the promise of levelling-up.'

The challenge, as we have seen, is how these promises can be delivered upon for all, and not just those who will be able to take on jobs in 'high-tech' industries.

- CHRISTOPHER OLEWICZ

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