

Principle FIVE

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Yorkshire Co-operative Resource Centre

August 2025

The Principle 5 Co-op Resource Centre

The Principle 5 Co-operative Library was established eleven years ago in 2014. It was the culmination of my efforts to promote the idea of accountable community common ownership. A community can be identified by location or by a common interest. This, it seems to me, is the only way that people can take back control from the profiteers of the Capitalist system. Leaving this task to elected politicians has not had much success. Exceptionally, great steps forward were made by the Labour Government of 1945 under the leadership of Clement Attlee. But the gains made have now all been lost. Attlee was remarkable. No other elected leader of the Labour Party has had much success.

This is why I believe that community action through the well tried and tested Co-operative principles is the best way.

There are various difficulties which arise in people's minds at the mention of 'co-operative' and these can create an initial hindrance to this discussion. Firstly, the retail co-op societies convey to no one the spirit of of community common ownership. Of course, their origins in the 19th and 20th centuries demonstrated examples of community co-operation in action. And some of the retail co-op societies still play an excellent part. But now, they can seem like large and faceless businesses, like the mainstream food chains. Some of the Older people have vague memories of their parent's 'divi' numbers – a time when belonging to a society meant

something. They remember the affection which families had for the co-op. This sense of belonging could be restored.

But to make co-operation relevant, communities could start all over again, this time hopefully, not losing control.

The other obstacle in people's minds concerns the political wing. Of course co-operation is political. If Capitalism is systematically replaced by common ownership and control, this is certainly political. And there are powerful political interests which will try to defeat Co-operation. The snag, though, is that The Co-operative Party is seen as yet another electoral machine, allied with The Labour Party. This could be a distraction in an age where electoral politics are distrusted. But the Co-op Party still plays a useful role in support of co-operation.

The books in the Principle 5 Library fall into the following categories:

- **Co-operative:** history, culture, politics, co-operative stories and case studies, co-operative societies, worker co-ops, international co-operation and overseas co-ops, housing co-ops, co-operative writing, economics, co-operative working structures, links to the wider co-operative movement, contemporary projects.
- **Society:** socialism, communes, alternative life-styles, groups and movements, sustainability, ecology, peace studies, local history (especially Sheffield and the region).
- **Biography:** political, co-operative, socialist, ecological, innovative lifestyles, peace activists.
- **Fiction:** works of Upton Sinclair, Fenner Brockway, Pat Arrowsmith, and many other writers of powerful fiction.

The reference resources cover the co-operative publications of the past right up to the present. And the story of co-operation through documents which are available for co-operative researchers.

All of these materials are included in the Library because they help to bring about a better understanding of how communities can overcome disadvantages and help to make the world a better place for all. This is co-operative self-help education in action.

The Principle 5 catalogue is made up of spreadsheets which can be downloaded at: <https://www.principle5.coop/archives>

The Principle 5 Report can be downloaded at:
<https://www.principle5.coop/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/The-Principle-5-Report.pdf>

And more information at: <https://www.principle5.coop/about-us>

Definition of a Co-operative

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

Co-operative values

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

Principles

Principle 1: Voluntary and Open Membership

Co-operatives are voluntary organisations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.

Principle 2: Democratic Member Control

Co-operatives are democratic organisations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary co-operatives members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote) and co-operatives at other levels are also organised in a democratic manner.

Principle 3: Member Economic Participation

Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their co-operative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the co-operative. Members usually receive limited compensation,

if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing their co-operative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the co-operative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.

Principle 4: Autonomy and Independence

Co-operatives are autonomous, self-help organisations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organisations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their co-operative autonomy.

Principle 5: Education, Training and Information

Co-operatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their co-operatives. They inform the general public - particularly young people and opinion leaders - about the nature and benefits of co-operation.

Principle 6: Co-operation among Co-operatives

Co-operatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the co-operative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.

Principle 7: Concern for Community

Co-operatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.

Members are always welcome to visit the
resource centre. We look forward to seeing you.

Contact

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