SHEFFIELD'S CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT IN THE 1970s AND 80s

This brief paper, largely on Co-operative activities in Sheffield during the 70s and 80s, is an extract from a wider range of material covering the experiences of my wife and me over a much longer period.

The issues raised regarding the two Sheffield Co-operative Societies, the formation of the Sheffield Co-operative Development Group, the Co-operative Party and its relations with Trades Unions and the Labour Movement are matters of continuing moment. As such, we are happy to lodge the material in the City's archives in the hope that it will prove to be useful.

W T Jordan
(Labour Councillor 1984-1999; Lord Mayor 1992-1993)

January 2001

SHEFFIELD CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETIES - MERGER PROBLEMS

After finding my political feet again in Sheffield on my return in 1972, it became an aim of mine and other political activists that we should try to obtain places on the Boards of the two Sheffield Co-operative Societies. Although in the golden past of A V Alexander, Alderman Ballard, John Tomlinson and others there had been a close association between the Societies and the Co-operative Party, by the middle 1970s this was well and truly on the wane. The peak of the Co-operative Party's influence, too, in Sheffield politics had passed by several decades. For all that, it was felt important to keep Co operative values alive and to ensure that the Societies' constitutions were not irreparably impaired or damaged.

So at the end of the 70s it was agreed that I should 'have a go' at obtaining a place on the Board of the Sheffield and Ecclesall Co-operative Society. We knew it would not be easy because well-respected people such as Reg Munn, a loyal Co-operator and a prominent member of the Sheffield City Council, had not succeeded in his attempts to get elected. By this time the votes of the Co-operative Societies' employees were the main determinants as to who gained a place on the Boards.

In my first attempt to be elected in September 1979, I was bottom of the poll. The result was:

CANDIDATES FOR COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT

5 Members to be elected for 2 years and 1 Member to be elected for 1 year

EVANS, Mr S	265
HARDY, Mr L	255
JORDAN, Mr W T	193
LAMB, Miss R M	228
LEE, Mr W	327
LINDLEY, Mr G	221
MARSHALL, Councillor J G	224

The following October I just managed to get elected on a 1 year basis.

The result was:

CANDIDATES FOR COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT (8 nominated)

5 Members to be elected for 2 years and 1 Member to be elected for 1 year

BAMFORD, Mrs N C	192
BLAGDEN, Mr W	216
GALPIN, Mrs M	256
JORDAN Mr W T	197
KNOX, Mrs N C	175
LINDLEY, Mr G	215
POOLE, Mr T	241
RUTHERFORD, Mr N W	216

From that point onwards getting elected did not seem to be too much of a problem. In 1979 and 1980 it was a problem as can be seen from the

correspondence between the Secretary and Chief Executive Officer and me. Although a warning shot was fired across my bows in an effort to diminish my chances of success, my exchange of fire dissuaded the Board from pursuing the spurious argument that I was in breach of the Society's Rule 84 (see attached correspondence).

Over a period of years the Board began to tolerate me and maybe came to think that I was well-meaning if misguided.

From the time I joined the Board, it was clear that the Society was doing less well year by year. The solution for declining trade and profits advocated by Messrs Cotterill and Evans - the two chief officers during the 1980/85 period - was nearly always to close the loss-making shops. The problem with this simplistic approach - 'the ten green bottles hanging on a wall approach' - was that very rapidly the rot sets in with no shops and no possibility of recovery. In this climate of decline, the possibility of transferring the assets of the Society to another Co-operative Society began to become the order of the day. The obvious other Co-operative Society to merge with was the Brightside and Carbrook Co-operative Society. At this stage the Co-operative Union was encouraging retail societies to amalgamate in order to stay in business and compete with the rapidly-growing ASDAs and TESCOs of this world.

Since the abolition of the Retail Price Maintenance legislation by the Heath Government, the Co-operative Societies had been losing their market share. Obviously there were other factors contributing to the long downward movement in the fortunes of the retailing mutuals. The national situation both currently and historically regarding the Co-operative retail sector is well known - in Co-operative circles at any rate. My account will be confined to Sheffield.

In October 1981 I made a report to the Sheffield Council of Labour under the heading, "The Way Forward for the Sheffield Co-operative Movement" which was intended to give the Labour and Trades Union Movements the "state of play" as I saw it. Additionally, in the context of there being a Brightside and Carbrook/Sheffield and Ecclesall liaison committee discussing the possibility of a merger between the two Societies, I produced my version of the priorities that perhaps should be under consideration. APPENDIX 1

SHEFFIELD AND ECCLESALL CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY

COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT ELECTIONS

FRIDAY 3rd OCTOBER, 1980 - 9-00a.m. - 6-00 p.m.

VOTE JORDAN ! VOTE JORDAN! VOTE JORDAN!

RECORD OF SERVICE

* Past Co-op Members' Representative to the CWS
* Secretary Sheffield Co-operative Development Group.
* Co-operative Party Parliamentary Panelist.
* Secretary Sheffield Co-operative Party.
* Past E.C. Member Regional TUC.
* Member City of Sheffield Education Committee.
* Member Sheffield Family Practitioner Committee.
* Member Sheffield and Rotherham Manpower Services Committee.
* Occupation: Vice Principal Shirecliffe College.

On the above record and his pledge to maintain an all out effort to improve the trading and the standing in the Community of the Co-operative Societies in our City,

VOTE FOR BILL JORDAN on FRIDAY 3rd. OCTOBER, 1980 (9-00 a.m. - 6-00 p.m.)

VOTING IS AT ALL SHEFFIELD AND ECCLESALL CO-OP SOCIETY SHOPS. YOU MUST TAKE YOUR SHARE BOOK TO VOTE.

Ecclesall Co-operative Society Ltd.

...ade,
...all Road,
...ffield S11 8HU.

Telephone: 20955 Ext.

C D

Our Ref. KMC/JT

Your Ref.

8th October 1980

Mr. W.T. Jordan,
14 Derriman Drive,
SHEFFIELD 11

Dear Mr. Jordan,

On behalf of the Society may I congratulate you on your election to the Committee of Management and confirm that you have been elected to serve from the 7th October 1980 for a period of one year.

For your information the Board meets at the Arcade, normally on Tuesday evenings, commencing at 6 p.m. Facilities are available from 5 p.m. for High Tea in the Arcade Restaurant at a cost of 75p and during the actual Board Meeting there is a break at approximately 7.45 p.m. for tea and light refreshments. Would you please note that the next meeting of the Committee will be on Tuesday 14th October and I look forward to seeing you at that time.

Committeemen are entitled to a fee of £200 per annum, which is paid quarterly and this, along with any expenses entitlement, is subject to a tax return which is notified by me yearly to the Inland Revenue.

I trust the above information will enable you to undertake your new duties as a Committeeman and look forward to seeing you at the next meeting. If, in the meantime, you have any questions or observations, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Secretary and Chief Executive Officer

14 Derriman Drive
SHEFFIELD
S11 9LD

27th September 1980

Mr. K. M. Cotterill
Secretary and Chief Executive Officer
Sheffield and Ecclesall Co-operative Society Limited
The Arcade
Ecclesall Road
SHEFFIELD
S11 8HU

Dear Mr. Cotterill,

ELECTION OF OFFICERS - 3rd October 1980

Thank you for your letter dated 24th September 1980 regarding the Election of Officers. In consideration of its contents, I shall be grateful if you will read out my reply to the Committee of Management.

On 19th September 1980, a letter was sent to me drawing attention to the Society's Rule No. 84. The second sentence read, "Would you please note the use of the Society's title and registered office as an official heading in connection with any letters, handbills, circulars, pamphlets or press advertising which may be used in support of your candidature, is contrary to this Rule and will not be permitted by the Committee of Management." My leaflet is headed, "SHEFFIELD AND ECCLESALL CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT ELECTIONS": this does not include the word "Limited" or the address of the Registered Office. An election leaflet would be pointless without naming the Society.

With regard to the last sentence of your letter dated 24th September where you state that there are a number of points on the leaflet which are, in your opinion, misleading to the public, I understand from our telephone conversation that the main one is "Past Co-op. Members' Representative to the C.W.S." I was a member of Crawley Co-operative Society at that time. I want no part in breaking rules or misleading anyone and it is the view of a prominent Sheffield lawyer that I have done neither. I do not wish to have a public debate on this matter as it would be damaging both to the Society and to the Co-operative Movement, and I hope that good sense will prevail.

I believe that I have exercised my democratic rights in a fair manner and within the spirit and intention of the rules.

Yours sincerely,

Later, knowing that little progress had been made in the liaison committee towards creating one Co-operative Society in Sheffield, I told the Board that it was my intention to stand for the Presidency. There were several reasons for this - one of the prime ones being that the President had indicated his opposition to merging with the other Sheffield Society. To be taking this line when clearly the situation called for combining the resources of the two organisations motivated me to declare my intention. It was important, I felt, for a much wider circle of people to know what was going on.

In November 1982, as part of the discussion as to the future of the Society, Mr A R Shawyer - who was a Board Member - wrote a useful paper entitled, "Questions on the Future of the Sheffield and Ecclesall Co-operative Society". (APPENDIX 2)

As a follow-up to the paper I had written to the Sheffield Council of Labour the previous year, and partly to complement the Shawyer paper, I submitted some proposals under the heading of "One Sheffield Co-operative Society". (APPENDIX 3)

On the question of the Presidency, the Sheffield and Ecclesall Board had no hesitation in condemning my proposal to stand against the existing President. Perhaps at the time my zeal got the better of me but, thinking retrospectively, my "ticket" of: "Promoting Co-operative Union and Co-operative Party Policies", "Fostering full co-operation of all three parts of the Labour Movement" and "Giving whole-hearted support for the creation of one Co-operative Society in Sheffield" was wholly justifiable. The Board's view was that a challenge to the President would be a vote of no confidence, discourteous, and an unwelcome precedent. The cost of the ballot was another argument deployed. To cap it all they told me that, in the event of my being elected, they would not support me.

Subsequently, on 18 September 1982 I wrote a letter to the Chief Officer indicating my preparedness to withdraw as a Presidential candidate provided that I would be party to immediate discussions concerning a merger with the Brightside and Carbrook Co-operative Society. (APPENDIX 4) In the lead-up to September 1982, there had been a letter from the Co-operative Union reminding Societies of the 1982 Congress Resolution No 4 - Regionalisation. (APPENDIX 5)

On 28 July and 22 September Messrs Bushell and May - senior officials of the Co-operative Union - attended meetings of the Sheffield and Ecclesall Board to relate their deliberations with the Brightside and Carbrook Co-operative Society Board and to suggest ways forward regarding a merger. (APPENDIX 6)

On 31 December 1982 the Chief Executive wrote a letter to all employees, the text of which shows a very non-committed stance on the part of the Sheffield and Ecclesall Board. (APPENDIX 7)

At the beginning of 1983, the Sheffield and Ecclesall Co-operative Board received an efficiency audit of the Society from the Economic and Research Department of the Co-operative Union, the tenor of which was very concerning. One of the salient paragraphs from the audit stated: "It is noteworthy that only four years ago the Society's market share in food and overall did in fact exceed the national co-operative average. Since January 1979 during a period when retailers in aggregate secured volume gains of over 8%, it is estimated that the Society lost almost 30% of its turnover in real terms, or - expressed another way - had the market share at January 1979 been maintained the Society would now be enjoying an annual turnover of approaching £25 millions." (APPENDIX 8)

During February and March 1983 there were three meetings of the Chief Officers, Presidents and Board Members of the respective Societies. On these three occasions Mr P Bushell presided and he was accompanied by Mr W May and Mr J H Butler, all senior officials of the Co-operative Union. (APPENDIX 9) The last of these meetings covered: superannuation, communication with staff, press coverage, means of effecting a merger, proposed rule changes, and determination of a schedule of meetings. Regarding this last issue, it was agreed that meetings of members of each Society would be held at 7.30 pm on Wednesday 20 April and that a meeting of the transferring Society would be held on Thursday 5 May, in order to confirm the earlier decision.

One of the issues that emerged from the discussion between the two Societies was whether or not the transfer of engagements would be more advantageous taxation-wise if the Brightside and Carbrook Co-operative Society transferred its assets to the Sheffield and Ecclesall Co-operative Society. A letter and report from the Co-operative Union on 31 March 1983 indicated that the best deal could be struck by the Sheffield and Ecclesall Co-operative Society

transferring engagements to the Brightside and Carbrook Co-operative Society. (APPENDIX 10)

On 12 March, before the special meetings, the Secretary and the President of the Sheffield Co-operative Party issued a Press statement in support of the Brightside and Carbrook/Sheffield and Ecclesall merger. (APPENDIX 11)

For whatever the reason, in the event the special Members' meetings to discuss the possible merger took place on 19 and 20 April for the Brightside and Carbrook and Sheffield and Ecclesall Co-operative Societies respectively. The Brightside and Carbrook meeting was overwhelmingly supportive of a merger but at the Sheffield and Ecclesall meeting the climate was quite different. Both meetings were well attended by Co-operative Society standards. I am not sure what the attendance at the Brightside and Carbrook meeting was but 270 people were present at the Sheffield and Ecclesall gathering. All 270 members voted - 125 for and 145 against the proposal to merge on the terms put to the meeting. The rule for decisions of this type require two thirds of the votes cast being 'for' a proposition if it is to pass from a motion to a resolution. So the 180 votes were not attained.

The Press reported the Sheffield and Ecclesall meeting as acrimonious. Apart from the tensions inherent in such meetings, the contribution of Mike Bower - a senior Sheffield City Councillor and the Organiser of the Sheffield Co-operative Development Group - tended to stoke up the heat in an already heated situation. Mike is a very good advocate and speaker, and the motion that he put - or attempted to speak to - was sensible enough: namely that the merger was to be welcomed; a business plan should be drawn up; such a plan should be made available to members in good time, and that there should be a further members' meeting in six months' time to consider the plan. In the meantime, there should be no employment changes or trading arrangements. (APPENDIX 12) What really upset some of the audience was the now-known fact that Mike had joined the Co-operative Society only a little while before the merger meetings. In other words, to put the matter as delicately as possible, it was felt that his involvement was inappropriate.

Immediately after the merger meetings there were many versions as to why the long-standing issue of two societies in Sheffield when there should be one had not been resolved on 19 and 20 April 1983.

The Governing Council of the Sheffield Co-operative Party received a report

from me in which I tried to analyse the position in as objective a way as possible. (APPENDIX 13) Arising out of our discussion, the Governing Council resolved (APPENDIX 14) "The Sheffield Co-operative Party regrets the decision of the special members' meeting of the Sheffield and Ecclesall Co-operative Society not to amalgamate with the Brightside and Carbrook Co-operative Society. Consistent with our long-standing policy of support for one Sheffield Society, we call upon the two Societies to set in train the appropriate action for an early reconsideration by staff and non-staff members of the issue."

Behind the scenes the question of what the Sheffield and Ecclesall Co-operative Society should do to stave off disaster was discussed for a further fifteen months.

On 25 July 1984 Mr W May - Sectional Secretary of the Northern Section - and Mr J H Butler - Senior Liaison Officer - both of the Co-operative Union, spoke to the Sheffield and Ecclesall Co-operative Society Board. Their message was a familiar one, namely the decline and worsening position of the Society in nearly all respects. They reminded us of our responsibilities to (a) the staff, (b) the members, and (c) members' capital. Mr May concluded his remarks by saying that it was still the view of the Co-operative Union that the Society should transfer its engagements to the Brightside and Carbrook Co-operative Society.

Mr Butler reminded the Board of the Union's Regional Plan of 25 Co-operative Retail Societies and, in the context of Sheffield, to achieve one Yorkshire Regional Society.

The two Co-operative Union officials outlined very fully the terms upon which the Brightside and Carbrook Co-operative Society would be willing to accept the transfer of engagements. (APPENDIX 15) The terms boiled down essentially to five points which were:

(i) The Brightside and Carbrook Society would be willing to change its name.

(ii) They would be willing to convene a special meeting to amend the rules so that
   a. Three Sheffield and Ecclesall Board members would join the Brightside and Carbrook Board.
   b. Full compensation would be paid to the other Sheffield and Ecclesall Board members.

(iii) A full Management Audit would be conducted.

(iv) The staff of the Sheffield and Ecclesall Co-operative Society would be treated exactly the same as the Brightside and Carbrook employees, in particular regarding bonus, staff discounts, death in service benefits. and redundancy (the NACO scheme would apply)

(v) A firm commitment by the Brightside and Carbrook Society to develop trade in all the Sheffield areas.

It was emphasised that the foregoing could form the basis for talks between the two Boards.

Mr Shawyer then proposed, "That the Board of the Sheffield and Ecclesall Society enter into negotiations with the Board of the Brightside and Carbrook Society to investigate the possibility of a merger and the development of Co-operative trade in Sheffield." This proposal was accepted unanimously.

A letter, subsequently, dated 23 August 1984, to the Chief Executive of the Sheffield and Ecclesall Co-operative Society (APPENDIX 16) from the Co-operative Union confirmed that the Board of the Brightside and Carbrook Co-operative Society had unanimously agreed for further transfer of engagement talks to ensue via the Co-operative Union.

All seemed set fair for a meaningful negotiation between the two Societies. At the Sheffield and Ecclesall Board meetings on 11 September, 18 September and 2 October (APPENDIX 17) there was some discussion around the merger. About this time, a letter from the Chief Executive of the Brightside and Carbrook Society to his Board gave details of the management audit which he, with Mr Beaumont and Mr Schofield, had undertaken on Thursday 4 October. Mr Evans and Assistant Secretary Mr Wademan were the Sheffield and Ecclesall Society's representatives at this audit meeting. (APPENDIX 18)

At the 16 October Sheffield and Ecclesall Board meeting, preliminary discussions took place around the notes of a meeting held on 11 October (APPENDIX 19) between the Societies involving Mr Twigg (President of the Brightside and Carbrook Society), Mr Whitham (Chief Officer of the Brightside and Carbrook Society), Mr Beaumont (Deputy Chief Executive of the Brightside and Carbrook Society), Mr Wainwright (President of the Sheffield and Ecclesall Society) and Mr Evans (Chief Executive of the Sheffield and Ecclesall Society). The meeting concerned itself with (i) Change of name, (ii) The co-option of three members of the Sheffield and Ecclesall Board to the new Society Board, (iii) The Management Audit, (iv) Staffing, and

(v) Commitment to develop trade. The expectation of this group was that the three co-opted members would be the President and two senior Board members. The decision of the Sheffield and Ecclesall Board on 16 October was to consider the above at the next meeting.

It was clear on 23 October that we were moving towards stalemate (APPENDIX 20) because it was resolved that the Brightside and Carbrook Society be informed that we were still considering aspects of the proposals and that contact would be made at a later date. Cryptically, I thought, the Chief Executive at the end referred to a most recent development in connection with the West Yorkshire Society.

In spite of the difficulties that I always seemed to court with respect to the merger, I did manage to keep alive some Board interest in the newly-formed Sheffield Co-operative Development Group and the possibility of staff and member education via the City Council's Sheaf Valley Adult Education Service. Certainly on Tuesday 30 October Mr F Brown, Principal of the service, addressed the Board on that topic. (APPENDIX 21) But of course the topic of the merger would not go away. At this meeting, as I had thought at the previous meeting with the Chief Executive's reference to the West Yorkshire Society (later to become Yorkshire Co-operatives), stalemate was approaching vis-a-vis the Brightside and Carbrook Society on account of feelers being put out elsewhere. The short merger discussion on 30 October led on to its being resolved, "That the President and the Chief Executive Officer seek an early meeting to convey our responses to the Brightside and Carbrook representatives. If after this visit the Board felt that no further progress could be made, that we inform the Brightside and Carbrook Society and the Co-operative Union, at the same time, that we were making an official approach to Yorkshire Co-operatives with a view to merger with them."

The 13 November 1984 Sheffield and Ecclesall Board meeting received a report (APPENDIX 22) from the Chief Executive Officer and the President of their discussions with their Brightside and Carbrook counterparts. Their report was backed up by a letter from the Brightside and Carbrook Chief Executive Officer. Unanimously it was decided to discontinue the negotiations with the Brightside and Carbrook Society and, at an early time, to commence discussions with Yorkshire Co-operatives.

I would like to think that I had not done a volte-face on the merger issue. At this stage I found my loyalties being stretched in all directions. It seemed to me that the Sheffield and Ecclesall Board could have shown genuine enthusiasm for the merger with the Brightside and Carbrook Society in the first place and, in the lead-up to the special meetings, have formulated proposals for Board membership that reflected the relative trading strengths of the Societies. Apart from that, the special Sheffield and Ecclesall members' meeting need not have resulted in a vote not to merge. It would have been easy for the Chief Executive Officer or the President to have proposed the deferment of the decision for another six months or a year. In the event, the Sheffield and Ecclesall Chief Executive Officer took no part in the debate.

I was sore because the agreement to stand down as a candidate for the Presidency in exchange for my being more involved with the merger talks was not honoured. In some ways, too, I was guilt ridden because I was aware that a fair number of my comrades and colleagues in the room at the special meeting were under the impression that, because of the critical comments that I made in my contribution regarding the preparation for the merger, I was against it. I do regret not being crystal clear. My intention certainly was to support a merger in principle but to ensure that in finalising the proposal the matter should be properly worked up and the membership fully involved. To this day I feel quite sick that such a mess was made of an opportunity for the two Sheffield Co-operative Societies to pool their resources as a logical first step on the road to a federal Yorkshire Society. The whole exercise was a classical example of co-operators failing to co-operate because of myopic thinking and individuals' vanities and egos blocking out rational action. I do not exclude myself from that charge.

On 22 November 1984 (APPENDIX 23) the Chief Executive Officer - Mr Evans - wrote to all the members of the Sheffield and Ecclesall Co-operative Society staff informing them that merger talks with the Brightside and Carbrook Co-operative Society had ceased but that other possibilities were being explored in compliance with the policies of the Co-operative Union.

At the Sheffield and Ecclesall Board meeting of Tuesday 27 November, the Chief Executive Officer read letters to and from the Brightside and Carbrook Society, Yorkshire Co-operatives and the Co-operative Union. The letter from Mr Bushell (Co-operative Union) suggested a meeting with the three societies.

This advice was not heeded and it was decided to examine the possibility of a merger with Yorkshire Co-operatives. (APPENDIX 24) The minutes for 11 December 1984 recorded (APPENDIX 25) that the Arcade building was due for listing as a building of historic or architectural interest and that I, as a City Councillor, had been active in the matter. But the main point of interest of that meeting was the presence of Mr T Wood (President), Mr K Thomas (Vice President), Mr G W Money (Chief Executive Officer) and Mr A S Henry (Deputy Chief Executive Officer) from Yorkshire Co-operatives. The Chief Executive Officer and the President of Yorkshire Co-operatives set out their proposals for merging. The matters covered were: the Dairy, Funerals, Administration, the Maintenance Department, Superannuation, Redundancy, and the Arcade building. Mr Wood said that the wish of Yorkshire Co-operatives was that the-then Board of Directors should be maintained. The question of two members from the Sheffield area being on the main Board was also raised in the context of the doubtful value of a Sheffield Divisional Board.

On 20 December 1984 the Sheffield and Ecclesall Co-operative Society Chief Executive Officer wrote to all employees informing them that the Board (APPENDIX 26) would be recommending to a special meeting of members the merging with Yorkshire Co-operatives. And so we moved into another year.

At the Tuesday 8 January 1985 Board meeting, the Sheffield and Ecclesall Chief Executive Officer gave the dates of forthcoming meetings with Yorkshire Co-operatives (APPENDIX 27) and the Sheffield and Ecclesall staff. The dates of special merger meetings were also reported, namely 23 January and 7 February 1985, both in the City Hall Memorial Hall. It was also reported that all the Trades Union officers had accepted the arrangement and would support the transfer.

The Monday 21 January Sheffield and Ecclesall Board meeting (APPENDIX 28) was almost monopolised by a discussion around a full-page advertisement that had been taken out in the Sheffield Star by the Brightside and Carbrook Co-operative Society. The advertisement recommended that Sheffield and Ecclesall members should vote against the proposal to merge with Yorkshire Co-operatives. The Board expressed disappointment that another Society had adopted this attitude but decided that no good would result from responding to this Press coverage.

A letter from Yorkshire Co-operative's Chief Executive Officer on 1 February (APPENDIX 29) confirmed that the Sheffield Board would be retained and that the Sheffield and Ecclesall Co-operative Society's Board statement to the members' meeting was noted.

At the 5 February Sheffield and Ecclesall Board meeting, the 23 January special meeting (APPENDIX 30) obviously was the main topic. Regarding the future of the Sheffield Board, it was agreed that a request be sent to Mr Money - Chief Executive Officer, Yorkshire Co-operatives - confirming that the main Board would liaise with the Sheffield Board and that the present arrangements should be revised in six months' time

It was recorded that I had expressed my concern about the lack of documentation that had surrounded so much of the negotiations. Arising out of this concern, I drafted a letter (APPENDIX 31) for the consideration of the Sheffield and Ecclesall Board, then to be sent to the main Board. To the best of my recollection, this was accepted and duly despatched to Bradford.

A letter dated 11 February 1985 (APPENDIX 32) from the Chief Executive Officer of Yorkshire Co-operatives confirmed that his main Board would liaise directly with the Sheffield Divisional Board.

The Friday 15 February Sheffield and Ecclesall Board meeting dealt briefly with the second special meeting. (APPENDIX 33) Also it was reported that Yorkshire Co-operatives' Chief Officers had met CWS Property Services and made an offer for the Neill's site off Napier Street. We thought this was a good indication of Yorkshire Co-operatives' commitment to Sheffield. So, with the first meeting of the Yorkshire Co-operatives' Divisional Board projected for Tuesday 5 March 1985, I thought perhaps after all the ambition of an all-Yorkshire Society embracing the total Sheffield Co-operative movement could be achieved but differently sequenced in relation to the original plan.

At the various early meetings in 1985 of the newly-formed Yorkshire Co-operatives' Divisional Board, all seemed sweetness and light, but I detected a little touchiness creeping in as the year wore on. For example, because of an important Council meeting in May, I wrote (APPENDIX 34) an apology for absence from a Divisional Board meeting and also made a number of observations for consideration. A matter that was under scrutiny was

the Management structure. My observation regarding this was that it would be helpful, when considering future strategies and options, to have details of salaries as well as the Management structure. It is not unreasonable for Directors of a Co-operative Society to have this financial information in a similar manner to Councillors having complete information of this kind in relation to Council affairs. In making judgments of how much should be spent on education, member relations, conferences, staff training, Co-operative auxiliaries, staff bonuses/discounts, trading stamps, special offers and discounts generally it is necessary for Directors to have the facts. Lord Graham had recently expressed this view - and I agreed with him!

But whatever my reservations may have been - and those of other Divisional Board Directors - in September 1985 the Press was reporting on a multi-million pound development plan (APPENDIX 35) for "Sheffield's best-known department store", namely the Arcade building. Subsequently there were public meetings outlining ambitious plans for the development of the Arcade and its environs.

February 1987 saw the Star feature again the projected Arcade development. (APPENDIX 36) The essence of the article was that the Arcade would cease trading but within 18 months a bigger, better, brighter Co-op would rise from the rubble, bringing with it 350 jobs.

On 14 July 1987 a letter from Yorkshire Co-operatives' Chief Executive Officer (APPENDIX 37) to all Directors stated that the planning authority (Sheffield City Council) had "granted in principle" the application for the redevelopment of the Arcade site and that negotiations with South Yorkshire Housing were still being pursued.

Alas the plans did not come to fruition. Amongst Co-operators in Sheffield this was a disappointment and seemed to confirm the views expressed by the Brightside and Carbrook Board that merging with Yorkshire Co-operatives was not in the best interests of Co-operative enterprise in the city. The disappointment was emphasised because there had been well-attended public meetings at which ambitious plans had been mooted for a first-class store. In the event, the site was sold to Safeway: as was predictable, a very successful business has flourished there from its inception. The main reasons given for not going ahead with the plan were the Council's insistence on "planning gains" which were too lavish and expensive, and

that the main business of Yorkshire Co-operatives was in smaller community shops so that launching a supermarket in Sheffield was too big a risk. It was, of course, not unreasonable that the Chief Officers of Yorkshire Co-operatives should look at the total Sheffield operation and come up with a redevelopment plan. This they did alongside their deliberations regarding the Arcade. Initially they announced a significant investment in three shops with a similar treatment being projected for three more. But ominously they intimated the need to close three other smaller outlets.

Eventually a decision was made to take over the city centre store of Redgates and to redevelop this 40,000 ft^2 five-storey shop as Yorkshire Co-operatives' flagship in Sheffield. Prior to this, they had a small temporary store employing twelve people in Earl Street: the new store was projected to employ one hundred.

Thus ended the Arcade episode. Yorkshire Co-operative's entry into the Sheffield retailing sector was now exhibiting itself.

FORMATION OF THE SHEFFIELD CO-OPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT GROUP

In the earlier days of my return to Sheffield, I sought with other people to promote co-operative enterprise in a wider sense than just retailing. Eventually the Sheffield Co-operative Development Group was formed having as its aim in the first instance an educational role, then as rapidly as possible moving into an enabling and operational mode. Prime amongst its functions would be practical assistance in solving start-up problems.

Nationally there had been the view for some time in Co-operative and Labour Party circles (APPENDIX 38) that there should be a national agency with the remit of promoting co-operative enterprise. In 1969 the term "Co-operative Development Agency" first appeared in a Labour Party document entitled "Labour's Economic Strategy". Co-operative enterprise was seen as a complementary system to nationalisation. It was proposed that the Government should establish a Co-operative Development Agency with research facilities and resources to promote the development of co-operatives.

Years passed, the Labour Government was defeated in 1970, but in 1974 the Labour Party manifesto committed a future Labour Government to "work with the Co-operative Movement to develop its role through the creation of the

Co-operative Development Agency (CDA) and in other ways" as a means towards establishing a wider, more just and effective democracy.

On 15 March 1977, under the auspices of the DTI, a Working Group was set up to formulate proposals for a CDA. The Group comprised representatives from the Co-operative Union, the Co-operative Party, the Co-operative Wholesale Society, the Fisheries Organisation Society, the Federation of Agricultural Co-operatives (UK), the Central Council for Agricultural and Horticultural Co-operation, the National Federation of Credit Unions, the Credit Union League of Great Britain, the Co-operative Housing Agency, the Fairhazel Housing Co-operative, the Co-operative Productive Federation, the Industrial Common-Ownership Movement and the Trades Union Congress.

The Minister of State - Alan Williams - made it clear that the Agency would be advisory and promotional, and would not have at its disposal public money for investment in co-operatives.

The report of the Working Group was published on 21 October 1977. It was not a unanimous report. Nine voted for the majority group and five for the minority. The majority report was based on the Minister's definition of a CDA. The minority group wrote a separate report because they felt that the CDA must assist the development of co-operative enterprise in those sectors where co-operatives were currently struggling to develop; the majority were proposing a CDA without adequate tools and one which would not command respect, and that the signatories to the minority report considered that their views were not to be found in the majority report and that they came from the very fields which were underdeveloped. The day after its publication, the Prime Minister - James Callaghan - announced the Government's support for the majority report but the 3 November Queen's Speech did not refer to a CDA. Later that day James Callaghan did make a reference to a CDA and listed it amongst the measures which the Government would introduce if time was available.

By March 1978 the debate around a proposed CDA was well and truly under way with many tracts coming off the presses setting out the theoretical, pragmatic, ideological and political reasons for co operative enterprise in its many guises. Later in the year Parliament agreed to the setting up of a CDA which gave encouragement to those who had been campaigning for such an organisation and to the many groups of people who were trying to get their

workers' co-ops off the ground.

In June 1979 the Sheffield Co-operative Party Governing Council invited Mr D C G Lawrence, Director of the CDA, to Sheffield to meet representatives of the City Council, the Trades Council, Co-operative organisations, and other appropriate individuals. Two meetings were envisaged, namely 13 and 29 June. The 29 June occasion was also projected to be a public meeting with a national speaker giving details of the Parliamentary Act and of the progress that had been made nationally regarding co-operative enterprises. Both meetings were intended to convey to the CDA representatives the "state of play" locally in relation to developments co-operatively speaking.

At its meeting on 3 December 1979, the Sheffield Education Committee passed a resolution calling on Colleges "to consider and report on the possibility of providing courses in co-operative development".

During 1980 all the spadework that had been put in began to bring results. On 9 October 1980 the Sheffield Co-operative Development Group was formally inaugurated at a ceremony performed by Lord Oram, Chairman of the Co-operative Development Agency. The founder members were: Brightside and Carbrook Co-operative Society, Co-operative Bank Limited, Sheffield City Council, Sheffield Co-operative Party, Sheffield and District Trades Council, and the Sheffield and Ecclesall Co-operative Society. (APPENDIX 39)

From December 1980 and on a monthly basis, seminars related to Co-operatives were held in the Town Hall. At that stage Mr Peter Shireby, an Industrial Development Officer employed by the City Council, agreed to deal with enquiries from those who required help or information about co-operatives and by June 1981 had responded to twenty-one potential start-up proposals.

20 November 1980 the Sheffield Co-operatives Information Group (SCIG) requested membership of the Sheffield Co-operative Development Group. They requested co-equality with other Board members of the SCDG and not just affiliate status. The SCIG considered that the work that they had been doing for some time was as valid as the work of the SCDG and there were dangers of duplicating effort and of unnecessary competition for resources. February 1981 SCIG had representation on the SCDG Board. January 1981 the City Council agree to fund the SCDG at the rate of £10K/annum for 3 years. It was hoped that other founder-members of SCDG might also

commit themselves in cash and kind but this unfortunately did not materialise in specific terms. However, it must be said that the two Co-operative Retail Societies had been very helpful and subsequently did assist the SCDG in various ways. It is probably the case that the Brightside and Carbrook and the Sheffield and Ecclesall - in common with other Co-operative Societies across the country - felt that it was all "take" and no "give" as far as the nascent Worker Co-ops were concerned.

The Trades Council, whilst being associated with the SCDG, was I felt nearly always sceptical, the reason being that the newly-formed co-ops were seen as being prone to paying minimum wages, working all hours, and undercutting the firms that trade unionists worked for. Democracy in the workplace is all very fine, they said, but there were wider considerations.

Throughout this early part of the life of the SCDG, the Co-operative Bank played a positive and a helpful role. Subsequently this has also been the case.

At the end of 1980, the SCDG - in association with the Holberry Society, the Brightside and Carbrook Co-operative Society Education Council, ICOM, Northern College, Sheffield Education Service, and the Co-operative College - planned a series of seminars dealing with many aspects of co-operative enterprise.

For a subscription of £5, Co-operatives and other organisations such as trade union branches were invited to join the SCDG, and individuals desirous (as the advertising said) of furthering the principles of co-operation could join for £2 and take full advantage of the seminars.

On 8 January 1981 the Sheffield City Council Employment Forum viewed a video of a BBC Horizon programme featuring the Mondragon Co-operative Movement in northern Spain. This was an indication of the growing interest in co-operative enterprise as one aspect of regenerating the city socially as well as economically. At the invitation of the CDA, on Saturday 24 January 1981 a "Neighbourhood Co-operatives Workshop" was held in Sheffield in association with the SCDG, SCIG and the Sheffield Council for Voluntary Service. This again was part of the drive to familiarise people with the co-operative message. (APPENDIX 40)

On 28 January 1981 there was a meeting of City Councillors and the Chief Executives of the two Co-operative Societies to discuss the SCDG's progress and future developments. Chief amongst a number of agenda items were first the projected employment of a full-time worker and second the possibility of the Co-operative Bank and the two Societies augmenting the £10K/annum that the Council had agreed to donate. As indicated earlier, the Societies were disinclined to commit themselves directly to financially supporting the SCDG. They believed this was a Council responsibility. (APPENDIX 41)

By this time the CDA was regularly publishing and distributing its news bulletin, the CDA News, and regional Co-operative Development Councils had been set up to assist in the regions. (APPENDIX 42)

ICOM - the Industrial Common Ownership Movement - was a prominent player in the field of mutuality and also had a Newsletter which was put around the country. (APPENDIX 43)

In Sheffield at this time there was a great deal of information being circulated vis-a-vis co-operative matters. At the 1981 AGM of the Trades Council there was a full report on the SCDG. For its part, the SCDG was receiving progress reports from the SCIG and the City Council's Peter Shireby. (APPENDIX 44)

In a letter dated 30 January 1981, the Director of the Sheffield Urban Theology Unit - Dr John Vincent - indicated his organisation's enthusiasm for becoming a member of the SCDG: thus it seemed that the Almighty was perhaps beginning to smile on us!

Finding the "wherewithal" to finance the employment of a full-time worker was at that time exercising our minds. The £10K/annum from the Council would scarcely cover all aspects of the SCDG operation. An application for support to the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) under their STEP - Special Temporary Employment Programme - was made in February 1981 but the application did not meet the criteria laid down in the scheme. (APPENDIX 45)

The February 1981 Board meeting of the SCDG heard that group membership had risen to eighteen, including one trade union branch and the District Committee of the AUEW.

Regarding the appointment of a full-time SCDG worker, it was agreed that a

sub-committee would be charged with the responsibility of drawing up a job specification and making arrangements for interviews. (APPENDIX 46)

In the middle of February 1981, it was a disappointment to receive a letter from the Gulbenkian Foundation to the effect that, after careful consideration, the SCDG's application for funds had been unsuccessful. (APPENDIX 47)

Another organisation active in the field was the Plunkett Foundation for Co-operative Studies. In 1981 it had already had ten years' experience of providing training courses for co-operatives all over the world. Its home base was Oxford: Ruskin College the venue for many of its courses. (APPENDIX 48) From time to time we received information from the Foundation for consideration by the SCDG Board but our preoccupation in March 1981 was engaging a full-time worker. In the event, in excess of seventy application forms were returned in response to our national and local advertisements. Seven applicants were short-listed and six finally considered. The interviews took place on 22 April, the interviewing panel being Alan West - Co-operative Bank Manager, Peter Wood - Sheffield City Councillor, Peter Sacker - Sheffield Co-operative Information Group, and Bill Jordan as Co-ordinator/Secretary of the Sheffield Co-operative Development Group. Mike Bower - a Sheffield City Councillor, a Parliamentary candidate, and with other political involvements, together with experience as a journalist, put him ahead of the other interviewees in terms of advocacy skills. These skills and knowledge of co-operative enterprise were considered against his financial inexperience and his lack of paper academic qualifications compared with the other candidates. The verdict of the panel was unanimous that he should be appointed.

On 29 April I sent him a letter expressing the pleasure of the Board that he was being offered the post, in the first instance as a three-year contract with a salary at the top of the AP5 range. It was pointed out that, although AP5 was a Local Government scale, the SCDG was not the Council and that, by implication, there could be further negotiations around conditions of service etc.

On 7 May Mike Bower responded to my letter stating that, strictly speaking, a condition of his employment with the NUJ was to give three months' notice in the event of his leaving their employ, therefore he was unable to give a firm date for starting with the SCDG. To use legal jargon, the SCDG Board was minded to accept the position. (APPENDIX 49)

Yet another organisation involved in co-operative education was Beechwood College, Leeds, and in 1981 they advertised a three-day event covering Women in Co-ops, a Public Fair Day, and a conference focusing on Co-ops as a "Revolutionary Alternative". (APPENDIX 50)

By now, too, the Council Leader David Blunkett had reported on the City Council's visit to Mondragon in April 1981. His report gave an enthusiastic account of what had been achieved in the Basque part of Spain regarding co-operative enterprise. Later I learned that resistance to Franco in that part of Spain was able to be kept alive because of the Mondragon Co-operative Experiment. The support of the Catholic Church I imagine helped to put Franco "on the wrong foot". (APPENDIX 51)

At the 25 June 1981 SCDG Board meeting it was reported that there had been a successful public meeting earlier in June, attended by 100+ people, addressed by Leslie Huckfield MP, Dr Alan Taylor and City Councillors. At this meeting, too, it was confirmed that Mike Bower would commence his duties on 6 July and would attend the Beechwood Fair on behalf of the SCDG. (APPENDIX 52)

One of the main points of discussion at the July Board meeting of the SCDG was the future location of its offices - the ex-Communist Party's offices in the Wicker, the Brightside and Carbrook Co-operative Society Rothay Road premises and Exchange Street offices were considered options. Councillor Harold Lambert favoured the use of the Palatine Chambers premises especially as this could mean the SCDG staff being alongside the Council's Industrial Development Unit. It was left in the setting that Mike Bower and Bill Jordan would look at the matter further. (APPENDIX 53)

The SCIG continued to meet and the minutes of its meetings were taken as an agenda item at SCDG Board meetings.

In October 1981 the CDA requested industrial and service co-operatives to give details of themselves so that a national directory could be published. (APPENDIX 54)

The first AGM of the SCDG was on 29 October 1981. At this meeting a draft constitution prepared by the Organiser (Mike Bower) was submitted and accepted with a few amendments. (APPENDIX 55)

December's meeting of the SCDG Board highlighted the efforts that the Organiser and the Chairman/Co-ordinator were making to acquire funds from MSC and South Yorkshire County Council. The Organiser reported various meetings that he had had with groups of workers contemplating the setting up of co-operatives. He expressed concern that some of these "co-operatives" were in danger of paying low wages and establishing markets, thus undermining the position of people in traditional employment. (APPENDIX 56)

In the January 1982 issue of the CDA News the new Board of the CDA was announced, comprising William H Farrow, Ralph Woolf, Tom Garnier, Dennis Lawrence, Lewis Lee and George Wright.

The January and February meetings of the SCDG Board received reports from the Organiser on the new co-operatives that had been set up and the assistance they had been given by the Sheffield City Council. The Organiser at this time drew attention to a letter from the Brightside and Carbrook Co-operative Society's Education Council, inviting him to attend their meetings. The Board agreed that he should attend to explain the SCDG activities and to discuss a possible liaison between the two bodies. It was recognised that the Organiser might have difficulty in being at every monthly meeting. (APPENDIX 57)

In March 1982 the Organiser sent a letter as a follow-up to a telephone conversation he had had with Roy Thwaites - Leader of the South Yorkshire County Council - outlining the work of the SCDG and requesting financial assistance. (APPENDIX 58)

The April 1982 Board meeting focused on finance, the projected employment of an administrative worker and a second organiser/development worker. In the case of the second organiser/development worker, this would most likely depend on the South Yorkshire County Council giving financial support comparable to that of the Sheffield City Council. (APPENDIX 59)

The May Newsletter of ICOM carried the headline "Half a Million People are now Employed in Worker Co-operatives in the EEC Countries". In that month, too, Keith Jackson (a Senior Tutor at Northern College) sent me a letter outlining a short course for active co-operators and inviting me to talk about Co-operative Development Groups, Co-ops, the Labour Movement and the State - quite a remit! (APPENDIX 60)

In June the Organiser sent a letter to all members of workers' co-operatives in Sheffield inviting them to see a video of the BBC Horizon broadcast on the Mondragon co-operatives in Spain. Other matters mentioned in the letter were the SCDG constitution and an enquiry as to the guidance members expected of the Organiser.

Unfortunately the June Board meeting was irquorate. However, it was held informally and its decisions were endorsed at the July Board meeting. The minutes of these meetings show that the Treasurer had reported a bank balance of £40K and that the Organiser was congratulated on the way a public meeting on 25 June had been organised and the exhibition which accompanied it. At this time the Organiser's terms of reference were discussed, together with the possible employment of other SCDG workers. (APPENDIX 61)

In a letter dated 14 July 1982 from Mike Bower to Peter Sacker - Principal Community Worker with Sheffield City Council Family and Community Services - there was formal recognition that the SICG had ceased operations and that in future the SCDG would be the sole agency in Sheffield endeavouring to promote co-operatives. The letter acknowledged the valuable work undertaken by Peter and the SICG and welcomed his continuing involvement with the SCDG. (APPENDIX 62)

August's Board meeting focused on contracts of employment for the full-time workers, Sheffield Co-operative Societies' sponsorship of a display at the Sheffield Show, subscriptions to the CDA News and the Co-operative Times, an advertisement for a further member of staff, membership fees, registration with the SCDG of three new worker co-ops, and the AGM.

The AGM held on 29 October 1982 largely subsumed the business of the earlier October ordinary meeting and a routine meeting of members. Amongst other things, the constitution was modified and the composition of the SCDG's Board was agreed as:

2 nominees from the Sheffield Metropolitan District Council
1 nominee from the District Trades Council
1 nominee from the Brightside and Carbrook Co-operative Society
1 nominee from the Sheffield and Ecclesall Co-operative Society
1 nominee from the Co-operative Bank
1 nominee from the Sheffield Co-operative Party Governing Council
8 nominees from the Industrial Co-operatives
Up to 3 co-opted members selected by the Board but without voting rights

The question of the limited liability of the Group was discussed and the Organiser was empowered to investigate the issue more fully and to report to the Board subsequently. (APPENDIX 62)

At the November Board meeting, items on the agenda included the appointment of a second development worker and possible EEC funding. In this context, I reported on the visit to Sheffield of the EEC Social Commissioner, Ivor Richards, and the discussion that had taken place around co-operative development especially in relation to EEC funding. It was noted that an application would be drawn up making the case for EEC funding to support additional staff for the SCDG.

The first Board meeting of 1983 (6 January) began to set a reporting pattern, that is, there was an attempt to ensure that all the constituent-bodies reported on their activities to the Group. So on this occasion there were reports from the City Council, the Co-operative Bank, the Trades Council, the Retail Societies and the Co-operative Party. At this meeting, too, it was reported that workers at the well-known cutlery firm of Viners were considering the formation of a co-operative as a means of rescuing or reviving the business. A reply from the City Council regarding the SCDG tendering for work and the creation of another Enterprise Workshop were discussed but it became clear that the Group at this stage could not meet a number of conditions which had been laid down. Also at the 6 January meeting it was agreed that a further five applicants for the post of development worker should be interviewed given the decision of a previously-successful candidate (Derek Jones) not to accept the post.

In an effort to build up a social side to the Group's activities, a social evening was organised at the Manor Barn, Rotherham. In the event, it was a qualified success, in spite of a bus strike, and augured well for future such events. (APPENDIX 63)

Early 1983 saw information concerning all aspects of co-operative enterprise coming off the Press thick and fast. The SCDG was playing its part in this respect and the Sheffield Colleges advertised courses with a co-operative bias. (APPENDIX 64)

The 3 February Board meeting received a report from Gerry Bacon, a worker co-op representative, to the effect that he had been to a well-attended members' meeting which had discussed publicity and recruiting co-operatives to the SCDG. Mike Bower's report included an up-date on the Viners' proposed co-operative venture and the City Council's £250,000 loan to Sheffield Solar Building Co-operative Limited to build specially-designed

houses at Nether Spring. The Organiser also reported on various other potential co-operatives and the visit of a French journalist to the office.

What was to become an annual decision, the Group agreed to advertise itself at the Sheffield Show but, as usual, with the caveat of receiving finance from the Co-operative Bank and the Retail Societies. By this time a serious attempt was being made to recruit worker-co-operators to the Co-operative Party. At the February meeting, it was announced that tentative arrangements had been made for Richard Balfe MEP to speak at a Co-operative Party/SCDG meeting in June.

The Organiser reported on the possible setting up of a Co-operative Development Group in Doncaster with requested finance from the South Yorkshire County Council. He expressed concern that the projected group had no base within the Labour Movement. Further discussions with a Doncaster Council official were agreed. First-aid training for members of worker co-ops was also discussed, the outcome of which was to explore the possibility of joint courses with the City Council. (APPENDIX 65)

For the first time the newly-appointed Development Worker - Alan McGauley - attended the March Board meeting. At this meeting the Organiser reported that the intended deal to convert Viners of Sheffield Limited had unfortunately fallen through because the firm that had bought Viners' name, dies and tools had granted exclusive manufacturing rights to other cutlery and silverware companies despite assurances that these rights would go to the potential co-operative.

The Organiser also drew attention to the need for the SCDG to have its co-operative aims clearly set out so that groups who were having difficulty in obtaining business advice, but were not seriously wishing to work within a co-operative framework, could be vetted and directed elsewhere. In this way the time of SCDG staff could be more effectively used for constituent co-operatives. At the March meeting the Board agreed that a BBC Acorn micro-computer, together with appropriate accessories and software, should be purchased from underspent monies. In fact it was reported that there would be a £12,000 underspend at the end of the municipal financial year. Other financial matters reported at this meeting were that the City Council's Employment Proposals Panel had decided to extend the uses of the £10,000 Education and Registration Funds to allow grants up to £200, at the discretion

of the Group, to co-operatives, and that the Post Office was to allow free mailing services to co-operatives. (APPENDIX 66)

At the April 1983 Board meeting the main items under discussion were the projected merger of the two Sheffield Co-operative Societies, arrangements for a public meeting in June, and business-orientated courses for co-operatives at Shirecliffe College. Reports from constituent bodies included agreement on the part of SCDG worker co-ops to demonstrate outside the Cutlers' Hall against Mrs Thatcher's policies - 5,000 leaflets in this context to be printed and distributed to Labour Movement organisations. The Engineering Group (EG) reported on proposed discussions with the AUEW district secretary and the City Council regarding a computer-controlled machine tool for use by co-operatives. Government-sponsored training schemes were also discussed by the EG with a view to securing funding for apprenticeships.

The Organiser's wide-ranging report drew attention to one of the SCDG co-ops securing a further contract in Derbyshire in the field of traffic-control systems, their maintenance and installation; the building co-op known as Solar was commencing work on its contracts; the Manganese Steel workers were striking for greater control over their working lives, and a conference organised by the Sheffield and Leeds Co-operative Societies which he had addressed.

At this point the Development Worker had "come on stream" and he reported on the possible formation of printing and performer group co-operatives. The correspondence from ICOM queried whether each co-op within the Group should pay fees individually and presumably whether the collective affiliation fee was enough. (APPENDIX 67)

Alas, at the May 1983 meeting of the Board, it was reported that the proposed merger of the two Sheffield Co-operative Societies had fallen through. The minutes of that meeting show that Mike Bower and Bill Jordan had been prominent at the members' meetings called to discuss the merger and that, although we had been critical of the terms of the merger, we were supportive of there being one Co-operative Society in Sheffield. Subsequently, the SCDG received a letter from the Brightside and Carbrook Chief Executive Officer - Mr Whitham - complaining about Mike Bower's contribution at the Sheffield and Ecclesall meeting and withdrawing the Brightside and Carbrook Society

from the Group.

Arising from the debate that followed and from the information related to the merger meetings, it was decided that a letter should be sent to the Brightside and Carbrook Co-operative Society on behalf of the Board explaining the position in which the Organiser - as an individual member of the Sheffield and Ecclesall Co-operative Society - had expressed his own views and that his actions should not be used as a reason for withdrawing from the SCDG.

The Organiser's report on this occasion was a "mixed bag". He informed the Board that Sheffield Solar Builders had hit a snag because South Yorkshire County Council required a performance bond which the Co-operative Bank declined to provide; delays were expected in the start-up of the planned Woodbank Engineering Co-operative and Albyn Co-operative because of administrative procedures in the Sheffield City Council's Employment Department.

The Development Worker (Alan McGauley) reported on the possibility of four engineering co-ops taking on apprentices sponsored by the Council's Employment Department in co-operation with the Engineering Industry Training Board (EITB).

An up-date was given on the arrangements for the joint SCDG and Co-operative Party public meeting involving Richard Balfe MEP, and the "Co-operative Week" that would follow.

Preliminary discussions were begun at this time around the ways and means of financing the Group when the Council's commitment to it ended. This inevitably became a recurring item on the Group's agendas. Other business included agreement to invite the Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions to make a nomination to the Board given the resignation of Vernon Thornes (Secretary of the Trades Council); the possibility of getting worker co-ops on to the Council's tendering list; an offer by two members of the Polytechnic staff to assist SCDG members in management procedures; and notice of a Labour Party meeting on the Common Market. (APPENDIX 63)

The June SCDG Board meeting covered the breakdown of the merger plans between the two Retail Societies; the bond requirement of the South Yorkshire County Council regarding Solar Builders; the Sheffield City Council's agreement to pay the costs for apprentices in a scheme negotiated with the EITB; the possibility of standardising book-keeping systems between co-ops; the

attendance of eleven co-op members at Shirecliffe College for a computer appreciation course; up-dates on start-ups; a visit of people from Donetsk (Sheffield's twin city in the Ukraine) to Parkway Instruments (a founder member of the SCDG); possible visits of schoolchildren to co-operatives, or teachers to a public meeting; and the use of a Co-operative College/ Co-operative Union exhibition tracing the history of workers' co-operatives in Britain for the Sheffield Show. The idea of Shirecliffe College students making a promotional video was also discussed. (APPENDIX 69)

At the monthly Board meeting held on 7 July 1983 it was reported that a public meeting had been a success but the attendance had been disappointing. In retrospect it should be said that, in spite of the Brightside and Carbrook Co-operative Society Board's withdrawal from the SCDG, to their credit they had still allowed the public meeting to go ahead on their premises. It was encouraging also to learn at this meeting of the take-up of computing and first-aid courses by co-op members. Encouraging, too, was the prospect of a Co-operative Business Centre being set up at Matthew Street, Shalesmoor.

The Members' Meeting report focused on a successful seminar that had been arranged with Dr Peter Cromar and Mandi Spalding from the Council's Employment Department, the topic being "Keeping Proper Accounts".

Correspondence from the Brightside and Carbrook Co-operative Society cast a shadow over the proceedings: their Board was "still adamant that they no longer wished to be involved with the Sheffield Co-operative Development Group". (APPENDIX 70)

In most organisations August is a "fallow" month: this proved to be the case for the SCDG in 1983. The Board meeting was inquorate so business was conducted informally with a view to confirming any recommendations at the next meeting. Briefly there were up-dates on the Co-operative Business Centre, potential co-operatives namely Woodbank Engineering, Procon, Translators, Ibbersons, and Manganese Steel; and N Harper of the Co-operative Bank explained the Bank's position regarding new business ventures. It was felt that a national decision was required so that local branches of the Co-operative Bank could expedite loan negotiations. Apprenticeships were again discussed, with funding being the contentious issue. The use of the Sheffield 5-College training scheme was suggested as a way forward if the EITB were amenable to providing funding.

Following upon the Brightside and Carbrook Co-operative Society's decision to withdraw from the SCDG Board, I reported that the Sheffield and Ecclesall Co-operative Society Board were reviewing their position. For the moment, they were reserving their position. In the interim, I was to be their representative, with observer-only status on the SCDG Board. A further decision was to be taken in three months' time. I feared the worst. (APPENDIX 71)

For the first time since the SCDG was formed a monthly meeting was missed.

At the 6 October meeting it was revealed that the proposed Co-operative Business Centre was on hold because asbestos had been found in the Matthew Street premises.

The Organiser's report triggered a discussion on the Sheffield Show, the tenor of which was favourable, and the contributing co-ops and the City Council were thanked for their involvement. Disappointment was expressed at the failure of the George Ibberson workers to purchase the company from the Receivers. Apparently they had been "pipped at the post" by four hours by another firm. Mike Bower's report on developments at Manganese Steel - Somerhatch Limited - seemed to foreshadow another non-start-up.

The Development Worker's report was a little more encouraging in that he could announce the City Council's financial support for four apprenticeships and that Procon Limited, a pre-cast concrete products co-op, would commence production in February 1984. The negative aspect of his report was that the projected Woodbank Engineering co-op had not materialised and was unlikely to do so.

Later in the meeting the Organiser raised the issue of future funding from the Council, the need for accountancy and marketing expertise within the Group, and the question of salaries in the context of annual increases and grading. The Board agreed at this meeting that the scales should be Mike Bower SO1, Alan McGauley AP5 and Hazel Bacon AP4, and that the issue of equal pay would be considered in the future.

To meet the needs of the Traffic Systems Co-operative Limited, several of whose members had enrolled on further education courses of three years' duration, it was agreed that future meetings would be on Monday evenings. (APPENDIX 71)

The next ordinary meeting of the Board was held on Monday 24 October, given the rearranged night for such meetings. In the same week, on 28 October, the third AGM was held.

The Board meeting was well attended and the agenda was wide ranging. Briefly matters dealt with were the Sheffield Show and the SCDG financial commitment to it, and Manganese Steel - Somerhatch - and the associated communications problems between the SCDG and the Council. The Organiser's report gave an indication of what would be reported at the AGM. The co-ops trading at the time were (i) ARM Engineering Co-operative Limited (ii) Aringrange Limited (iii) Attik Designs Limited (iv) Catherine Builders Co-operative Limited (v) Ecclesfield Enterprises Limited (vi) Independent Bookshop Limited (vii) Mons Precision Services Limited (viii) Parkway Instruments Co-operative Limited (ix) Sheffield Film Co-operative Limited (x) Sheffield Solar Building Co-operative Limited (xi) Sheffield Women's Printing Co-operative Limited (xii) Silver Needles Co-operative Limited (xiii) Viewfinders Limited

From the Co-operative Party, I announced that a joint public meeting with the Labour Party would be held on 31 October in the Brightside and Carbrook Co-operative Society's Restaurant and that the proceedings would be videoed for circulation to interested parties. (APPENDIX 72)

The reports to the last Board meeting in 1983 and the discussions that followed reflected the ups and downs of establishing new worker co-ops.

It was gratifying to be re-elected chairperson of the Group again but I was uneasy at the rate of progress and I was becoming conscious that the Organiser and I were not always on the same wavelength. My sensitivity was perhaps unwarranted but on small matters such as starting meetings on time I found my nerve-strings tightening.

Regarding other officers, subsequently Gerald Bacon was elected vice chair at the January 1984 meeting. But at the November 1983 meeting the Organiser was confirmed as Secretary in compliance with the constitution and it was agreed that Michael Sharpe of Accountability Northern Limited should be approached to be the Treasurer.

Regarding the employment of apprentices, it was reported that out of the fifty-seven applicants only two were females. A further advertisement was deemed necessary given the paucity of female applicants. Brian Salisbury from the Employment Department of the Council indicated that there could be a delay in interviewing because of a regrading dispute within the Department.

Mike Bower's report engendered considerable discussion: prime amongst the views expressed was the failure of the SCDG's individual companies to work collectively in determining what could be produced, marketed and sold. As usual the meeting highlighted some "little local difficulties" such as Aringrange still being a registered company but having never converted to a co-operative. The issue, it was felt, was doubly an embarrassment as Mike Bower was its Secretary.

Silver Needles, we were informed, had begun to get more work on a small scale but were unable to pay wages.

The messages coming from British Steel Corporation workers were that the firm was to be privatised and that the electricians and bricklayers concerned were requesting advice and assistance. Roger Barton - the Trades Council representative - felt that it was important for there to be full consultation with the trades unions at levels other than shop stewards and local-level officials.

The news from Procon was more to our liking, namely that they were formally registering as a co-operative under ICOM rules. Alan McGauley also told the Board that a group of workers from Sheffield Bath Services were under the impression that the company would close and consequently they were looking at the possibility of forming a co-operative.

Constituent body reports were confined to a members' meeting regarding the Matthew Street project, reporting that a working party had been set up, and an invitation from the Co-operative Party to members concerning their next meeting which would be addressed by Councillor Dave Morgan on the subject of training. (APPENDIX 73)

The Board meeting scheduled for 19 December 1983 did not materialise.

The "bumpy ride" in relation to the formation of worker co-operatives and for the SCDG to act in a cohesive fashion continued into 1984. January's Board meeting was well attended with Councillors George Matthews and Harold Lambert there as bona fide Board members.

This meeting formalised the election of Michael Sharpe as the Group's Treasurer. The Organiser's report showed that the group of sacked workers from the Monks Group had now definitely formed Procon Co-operative Limited, had received a £25,000 loan from the Council's Employment Proposals Panel (EPP) and was receiving financial assistance from the Enterprise Allowance Scheme.

ARM Engineering Co-operative Limited, it was reported, were developing their own product, namely fume extraction fans, and to support this venture the EPP had re-scheduled existing loans and granted a further £50,000 to purchase machinery which at that time was being leased from Aerex Limited. "The EPP had also agreed a loan of £2,000 and a grant of £1,000 to Blue Nymph Co-operative Limited" the Organiser said. This co-operative was actioned by three working-class women who had a number of knitting machines and they were operating from the Council's Oakes Green Enterprise Workshops.

The up-date on the Sheffield Solar Building Co-operative Limited was that they had erected two houses but were experiencing some difficulty in gaining support for a communal building they wished to erect. The stumbling block appeared to be the view that the Council should be more fully involved.

A group of workers threatened by redundancy at Bath Resurfacing had planned to start a co-operative and plans were well advanced for a registration application to be made, it was reported.

The need for a Group accountant was again discussed and also the oft-mulled-over topic of future funding for the SCDG. Agreeing the funding of fees for employees of co-operatives was discussed and the terms of reference formalised, that is general courses would be dealt with by the SCDG staff but specific requests would be dealt with by the Board on an individual-merit basis.

Under the time-honoured heading AOB, the co-operative known as Viewfinders told the Board that they had held an exhibition at the Crucible Theatre promoting their own work. Jim Edge of Viewfinders said that he would be

happy to assist either individual co-operatives or the Group as a whole to mount a similar promotional exhibition in the Crucible foyer.

The merits and demerits of the Matthew Street project were again discussed. Arising out of an exchange of views between the SCDG and the Council, Councillor Helen Jackson had requested visits to be arranged for the EPP and some officers to the worker co-ops of the Group. (APPENDIX 74)

The February 1984 Board meeting started with an explanation from the Organiser of the reciprocal arrangement that had been entered into regarding two officers from the City Council's Employment Department attending SCDG Board meetings and for two representatives from worker co-ops to be present when the EPP were considering co-operative applications. The meeting at this stage also discussed the visit of members of the EPP to the Sheffield Women's Printing Co-operative and ARM Engineering.

By February 1984 the Board had conditioned itself to the view that in order for the Group to operate a really effective service more resources were necessary, especially the expertise of an accountant.

The Organiser reported that he had worked out a plan which took into account the current over-spend but which would provide an income of £54,000. I think the basis of this plan was that the City Council and the South Yorkshire County Council would make the provision! It should be remembered that times were becoming harder and harder financially for Councils, given the National Government's attitude towards Local Authorities - especially those which were Labour-controlled.

At this meeting we were also reminded by the Organiser that his three-year contract would expire in July 1984.

The Matthew Street project was yet again discussed but it was evident that, because of a number of new factors, these premises were beginning to look less promising.

Other matters touched upon were possible Council financial support for co-operators in the SCDG to attend Co-operative Fairs such as the one attended in London by SCDG staff, a photographic exhibition of SCDG Co-operatives' operations and products at the Crucible Theatre, and agreement

to book a site and marquee for the 1984 Sheffield Show.

Reports from constituent bodies boiled down to inputs from the members' engineering sub-group and the Co-operative Party. In the case of the former, apprenticeships were discussed in the context of the Sheffield City Council's Employment Department Training Section being involved in interviewing for them and the role that SCEPTRE (the Sheffield Centre for Product Development and Technological Resources Technology Group), based on the-then Sheffield City Polytechnic, might play in relation to co-operatives.

On behalf of the Co-operative Party, I gave notice of Sheffield Branch's AGM, the imminent elections for Brightside and Carbrook Co-operative Society Board membership, affiliation to the Co-operative Union, attendance of a Group staff member at the Brightside and Carbrook Education Council, a joint Group/Co-operative Party public meeting, the possible use by worker co-ops of the Sheffield and Ecclesall Co-operative Society Arcade premises, and the suggestion that someone from a worker co-op should speak to the Sheffield and Ecclesall Board regarding industrial co-operatives. (APPENDIX 75)

My records for the months of March and April 1984 are incomplete. However it is worth recording that in April the Employment Co-ordinator for the Council issued a detailed report to the Employment Programme Committee related to the Sheffield Co-operative Development Group This report succinctly outlined the history of the Group from October 1980 to April 1984 and is included as an appendix (APPENDIX 76)

The proceedings of the April Board meeting can be summarised as follows: the willingness of the private owner of Ecclesfield Steel to set his workers up in a co-operative business shearing sheet metal so that he could concentrate on merchandising, agreement for the Development Worker to attend a national meeting for co-operative development workers, a progress report on a group of Manor women desirous of registering as a co-operative (Spick and Span) in the office cleaning business, supporting a delegation to go to Nicaragua, and lastly the on-going and seemingly worsening relationship between SCDG staff and those of the Council. (APPENDIX 77)

About this time (May 1984) Hazel Bacon had a prolonged illness and this put a brake on routine meetings. However the May Board meeting dealt informally with arrangements for a SCDG deputation to meet the Council's Employment Committee, arrangements for the appointment of a Group accountant, and consideration of the Miners' Dispute.

June's Board meeting revolved around representation from the City Council and the South Yorkshire County Council on the SCDG Board, the Sheffield Show (as the Organiser's note reminded us - "yes, it's come round again"), and the interviewing arrangements for the accountancy post. (APPENDIX 78)

A special Board meeting on 6 July ratified and finalised the decisions of the June meeting.

The 23 July ordinary Board meeting dealt with a very "meaty" agenda. Reporting on the meeting between the Employment Department of the City Council and the SCDG, the Organiser highlighted what he saw as changes in the Council's policies and procedures for processing applications for loans and grants. He reckoned a "sea change" had taken place without consultation.

I reported that Councillor Helen Jackson would most likely replace Councillor George Mathews on the Board of the SCDG and in my view the Council was still very committed to supporting co-operatives and promoting co-operative enterprise. Peter Cromar expressed a similar view to mine: he also thought Mike Bower's version of the Employment Department's attitudes was exaggerated in the wrong direction.

It had always been my view that the Council would play the role as an enabler regarding the establishment of worker co-ops and that hopefully the established retail societies would play a similar part. For the worker co-ops to be in permanent "hock" to the Council or Government was not the right philosophy. As someone who had played a major role in the establishment of the Group, and who had a considerable background in the Co-operative Movement generally, I believed that what I advocated was consistent with co-operative principles. By this time, too, I had become a City Councillor and was beginning to understand the financial difficulties of the Council and its problems concerning priorities in relation to mass unemployment. The drift of what I was saying was that the Council's financial contribution to co-operative development should taper off as the co-operatives became

increasingly viable.

The Board, anxious to achieve a better understanding between the SCDG and the Council, suggested a liaison committee comprising two appropriate officers of the Council and two staff from the SCDG.

On the appointment of an accountant, the Organiser reported at the July meeting that to date only five completed application forms had been returned so that another two weeks should elapse before arranging interviews.

Alan McGauley reported on the City Council's endeavour to establish Credit Unions in Sheffield. It was agreed that a SCDG staff member should attend a meeting on Credit Unions organised by the Council for the following week.

At the July meeting it was agreed that what had become a regular feature in our calendar - a joint Co-operative Party/SCDG public meeting - should go ahead in October, preferably in the Brightside and Carbrook Co-operative Society's Restaurant.

Teething troubles with respect to the new co-operative Ecclesfield Steel were touched upon by Mike Bower later in the meeting, together with informing the Board of delicate discussions that had taken place at Firth Vickers regarding the formation of a co-operative involving thirty-three machine shop workers.

Colin Bell, a member representative, drew attention to a letter which had been sent to Labour Party branches in Sheffield relating to the SCDG. He said that it should have been discussed by the Board first. I responded that it had been sent by the Co-operative Party and, in my view, it was wholly helpful to the SCDG cause. (APPENDIX 79)

August's Board meeting saw the attendance of Councillor Helen Jackson for the first time. Being holiday time, there were five absences including my own. The minutes show that it was agreed that the SCDG AGM should be held separately from the Group/Co-operative Party public meeting.

Another "frank" discussion had taken place between the SCDG and the Employment Department! Interviews for the accountancy post would take place on Thursday 22 September, and arrangements were in hand for the

Sheffield Show. The Organiser's report took in up-dates on the state of things at Ecclesfield Steel and Albyn Co-operative and the procedures to be followed in the future regarding the involvement of trades unions when workforces were actively negotiating with their employers in association with the SCDG for the possible transfer of engagements to a workers' co-operative.

Other business included correspondence from the Co-operative Party encouraging industrial co-operators to join the Party, the alerting of the Board to a newspaper article concerning the future of the Council's Employment Department, and agreement that Alan McGauley should be given up to four weeks' paid leave to finish his PhD. (APPENDIX 80)

Inevitably, since certain issues take some time to be resolved and activities need time to plan, there are always recurring items on organisations', committee or Board agendas. The SCDG Board was no exception. High on the list of recurring items was the SCDG relationship with the Employment Department. It seemed to me that the Employment Department was unnecessarily becoming the bête noire of the SCDG. Given that a further meeting was proposed between the SCDG and the Employment Department to "smooth things out", I as chairman asked if I could be involved. The Board agreed but there was a heavy inference that representation should consist of members who had previously been elected for this purpose.

In matters arising from the previous meeting, it was made known that the organiser of Credit Unions - Mr Len Nuttall - would be invited to address a future members' meeting, the Firth Vickers proposed co-operative had fallen through, the AGM would be 1 November followed by a social, and that the joint SCDG/Co-operative Party public meeting was arranged for 24 October with Mike Bower and Brian Hellowell - National Chair of the Co-operative Party - as the main speakers.

Regarding the accountancy post, the meeting was informed that there had been three people interviewed and, after much deliberation, the interviewing panel recommended Mike King to the post. On being put to the vote, the Board agreed the appointment - the voting being four for, two against and two abstentions.

Future funding of the Group figured prominently in the September Board meeting. The Organiser outlined the sources of funding from the Sheffield City Council and the South Yorkshire County Council in terms of grants and loans. It was stated that the Sheffield City Council had a sum of £150,000 in its budget to assist co-operatives and part of this had already been used for this purpose. Councillor Jackson stated that the Local Authority felt it important to keep the funding of the SCDC and any funding body for co-operation separate. The Organiser dissented from this view.

As on previous occasions, it was felt that the SCDC PR exercise at the Sheffield Show had been a success, but there was some criticism of those member co-ops which had failed to be involved. (APPENDIX 81)

The October Board meeting was largely concerned with the Fourth Annual General Meeting to be held at the Trades and Labour Club on 1 November. (APPENDIX 82)

My records for the 19 November Board ordinary meeting are incomplete but the main business concerned the Group's rules, dates for the Brightside and Carbrook Education Council, Co-op Fairs 85, and a SCDC/Employment Department meeting planned for 28 November. (APPENDIX 83)

December's Board meeting mainly centred upon lack of funds, in fact there was an over-spend of £1,120. In an attempt to overcome this crisis which stemmed from the Employment Department's failure to pay the remaining three-quarters of the annual grant, an approach to the Co-operative Bank was mooted: if all else failed, constituent co-operatives would be prevailed upon to make grants or loans to the Group, in order to pay the wages of the staff. The criticism of the Employment Department perhaps had one variation on the theme, namely that other small organisations such as the Manor Employment Project and the Sheffield Centre Against Unemployment were equally being treated badly.

The Group's social, which had taken place on Friday 12 December, was deliberated upon and various ideas tabled as to how to bridge the gap in income and expenditure. Any other business rounded off the meeting, with a discussion which indicated no real interest in members taking part in the Co-operative Trade Fair 1985 to be held in London, and again a further "raspberry" for the Employment Department's failure to circularise all Committee Chairs regarding purchasing from co-operatives.

Finally, before "repairing" to a city centre hostelry, members bemoaned the stalemate that had come about in the SCDG/Employment Department discussions consequent upon a NALGO dispute with the City Council. (APPENDIX 83)

At the beginning of 1985 I was hoping that all the effort that had been put in for at least eight years by a number of us would now really pay off in terms of co-operative enterprise in commerce and industry. In fact there were about twenty worker co-ops in Sheffield employing one hundred and fifty or so people. However we travelled in hope, perhaps faith, because the relations between the SCDG and the Council were still a great deal less than perfect!

One saving grace was that a second tranche of money had arrived in time for the staff to be paid just before Christmas. The rest of the Group's grant, it was reported at the January Board meeting, was to be requested to avoid further crises.

Participation in Co-ops Fair 1985 was discussed and Councillor Jackson indicated that if the Group wished to participate the Council would in all probability assist financially and organisationally.

It was noted that Committee Chairs of the Council had not as yet been notified of the products and services available from local co-operatives. It was agreed that this information should be up-dated and sent to the Council.

With the future funding of the Group figuring larger and larger in the Board's discussions, it was decided to seek financial assistance from the DTI for a marketing/development worker.

A positive aspect of this Board meeting was the report that the Council's solicitors had agreed a draft set of rules. The downside of this report was that a funding agreement had as yet not been drawn up. The "postscript" to this meeting was that the Manager of the Co-operative Bank was to talk to members later in the month on the services on offer from the Bank. (APPENDIX 84)

Councillors Lambert and Jackson and I were absent from the February Board meeting and, from the minutes of that meeting, it would appear that the

Council were "in the dock" as far as the Group was concerned. On funding from the Council, it was reported that the final part of that year's grant had not been paid and that was dependent on a Funding Agreement having been signed. Unfortunately the said Agreement had not been provided to the Group. To speed up the process the Chairman and the Organiser were charged with the responsibility of endorsing the Agreement if it met with the Board's requirements. It is perhaps very understandable that co-operatives struggling for survival were not very interested in "burning up time" at events such as Co-ops Fairs or having very much patience with a Council which was becoming more obsessed with its own financial difficulties. From this point onwards, it would seem that the nature of the relations between the SCDG and the Council was taking a turn for the worst. The potential if not actual conflict of interest which existed for the Organiser must also have been unhelpful - he being a City Councillor.

So at the February Board meeting the question was again raised, "Why haven't Chairs of Committees received a letter outlining the services on offer from co-operatives?" The line of critical commentary at this meeting alighted upon a City Council booklet "Services in Sheffield" which quoted largely from the current Labour Party Manifesto. Closer working relationships between the Council and co-operatives were suggested as being desirable but somehow the SCDG did not get a mention.

By inference, both the Co-operative Bank and the Sheffield City Polytechnic came in for criticism.

However, in spite of all the criticisms of the Council, there was a recognition that the Tory Government was hostile to Labour Local Authorities especially with the rate-capping legislation they were introducing. In this context, the ARM Co-operative made it known that they would stop work on 7 March to take part in an anti-rate-capping demonstration in the city. The Board agreed to urge all co-operatives to take similar decisions. (APPENDIX 85)

The March 1985 Board meeting noted that the Funding Agreement with the Council had been vetted by the Organiser and the Chairman, and some amendments had been agreed to the satisfaction of both parties. It was reported that the final instalment of the 1984/85 SCDG funding had been received, making a total of £21,000.

Registration of the rules of the Group were amongst the issues raised at the March meeting and it was decided that the rules and the new constitution of the Group ought to be discussed at a members' meeting before submission to a general meeting.

Under the heading of finance, it was agreed to support the Independent Bookshop Limited to the tune of up to £200 for a consultant's plan for premises situated at 67 Surrey Street, Sheffield. Copies of a SCDG draft budget for 1985/86 were discussed: a £10,000 grant from the South Yorkshire County Council was felt to be the probable outcome of applying for £15,000!

The Organiser's report mentioned Council financial assistance to Albyn Co-operative Press Limited, that there had been twenty to thirty enquiries from potential co-operatives since January 1985 - one involving high-quality software which included an Urdu word processor, and La Parrillada - a restaurant business - was "holding fire" on new premises because of difficulties with the lessor.

Tentative discussions with the Employment Department regarding a project in the Lower Don Valley were outlined, with the Board agreeing that officers should investigate the matter further. A paper was circulated concerning an organisation called Yorkshire Business Services Limited and its application to the DTI for funding. The Board members present were of the view that the Yorkshire Business Services Limited item and that of the Lower Don Valley should be properly aired at members' meetings first and not left exclusively to the Board to pass judgment. This would also apply to the new rules.

The 1986 Sheffield Show, a Co-op Fair at Barnsley, and Credit Unions were also agenda items. Under the heading of correspondence, attention was drawn to a letter which had been sent to the Employment Department, with copies to Councillors David Blunkett (Leader) and Helen Jackson. The subsequent response would be given immediately to the Group on its being received. The letter catalogued the role of the Group, its achievements, the failure of the Council to give it due recognition and the antagonisms which had grown up especially around the processing of applications for finance and support in kind. (APPENDIX 86)

The April 1985 Board meeting dealt essentially with the rules of the Group, a response from the DTI concerning Yorkshire Business Services, correspondence from the Department of Employment, and budget proposals for the

coming years. The exchange of letters between the Organiser and the Employment Department of the City Council were made available at the April Board meeting. (APPENDIX 87)

At the City Council's Employment Programme Committee meeting on 22 April 1985, I submitted a report on the Second International Trade Fair for Worker Co-operatives which I had attended in Kensington Town Hall, London. Four Sheffield co-ops had exhibits at the Fair. In total there were a hundred and twenty-one exhibitors, some of whom were from European countries. (APPENDIX 88)

In April John Bennington - Director of the Employment Department - left and his successor was Dan Sequerra who had been an MSF TU official and was an active and prominent member of the Labour Party. A letter dated 1 May 1985 to him from Mike Bower began with this paragraph: "Members were very unhappy about the tone and content of the letter (John Bennington's) and were also unhappy that copies of such a hostile and inaccurate letter have been circulated so widely among Council members and officers." The letter ended with the sentiment that he looked forward to meeting Dan Sequerra and his colleagues on 2 May. (APPENDIX 89)

An Extraordinary General Meeting took place on 21 May with five Board members and three SCDG staff in attendance. Unanimously they voted in favour of the proposal and resolved, "That the present Group should be dissolved from such date of registration and all the assets of Sheffield Co-operative Development Group be transferred to the Sheffield Co-operative Development Group Limited from such date of registration." So ended an era. (APPENDIX 90)

From time to time reports on the SCDG were submitted to the Council's Employment Programme Committee. The June 1985 Employment Programme Committee meeting received such a report which outlined the progress of the SCDG from its inception in October 1980. The report was comprehensive and balanced. It failed to acknowledge the part played by the Co-operative Party, not even recording that the Party was represented on the Board. However by and large the account was accurate and its "bottom line" was a recommendation that a grant of £36,500, with some specified conditions, should be agreed for the 1985/86 Financial Year. (APPENDIX 91)

Mike Bower's report to the Fifth AGM held on 27 November 1985 was decidedly upbeat. It was reported that there were twenty-five registered trading co-operatives in the Group, employing more than a hundred and fifty people, and that their combined turnover was about £1.5m. The report acknowledged the "significant" financial assistance given by both the South Yorkshire County Council and the Sheffield City Council, "although" to quote the report "relationships with City Council officers have continued to be very unsatisfactory." There followed a short comment on each of the twenty-five co-ops, reference to the interest shown by a number of academic institutions, the benefits of the Group having the services of a qualified accountant, the resignation of Mike Bower as Chair of the City Council's Education Committee (hence his ability to spend more time on co-operative business), the intended employment of a market development worker, and a re-cap on the adoption of the Group's new rules. The successful application by the Group and the Barnsley Co-operative Development Agency to the DTI for a worker via the South Yorkshire Business Services to provide a range of business services to co-operatives and other businesses was reported and there was mention of the agreement in principle to set up a credit union. Finally the prospects for the Group were outlined and a series of aims projected for the ensuing twelve months.

My feeling at the time was - and in retrospect is - the same: that the Group predicated its plans too heavily on financial support from Council and Government inputs. Support from the Retail Societies was also taken for granted. These views of mine did not endear me to some members of the Group! (APPENDIX 92)

In November the Organiser wrote a detailed background paper on the formation of the Group and the lead-up to it, together with his account of its modus operandi. In all probability the purpose of the paper was that it would serve as a basis for discussion and opinion-forming, especially in relation to Councillors. (APPENDIX 93)

From December 1985 until leaving Sheffield in 2000, I continued to be associated with the SCDG. Eventually worker co-op members were of the view that one of their number should be the chair. This I fully understood but it was still a little hard to take, given my consistent commitment to the cause and my role in the formation of the Group. It was probably felt

that, since I was by then a City Councillor and on the Committee directly concerned with the funding of co-operatives, I did not do justice to their case for more financial support from the Council. Council financial and other support for worker co-ops was not an easy issue to discuss in a calm and rational manner.

Many of these new co-operators had had a traumatic time, in most cases having been made redundant. Raising their own money and pooling it with others to start up their businesses was a struggle and keeping them viable with limited experience was exhausting. Some SCDG members who had been trades union and political activists believed that the City Council had reneged on its pledge to assist worker co-ops. Amongst this group particularly there was not a sympathetic understanding of the Council's financial plight nor of its attempt to assist other vulnerable people and groups throughout South Yorkshire. There may have been some resentment concerning funding for the SCDG staff whose wages, though relatively low were in most instances higher than those of people in the co-ops.

From a City Council point of view - it was certainly the view of the Conservatives - my being the Chair of the SCDG represented a conflict of interests, namely that I was likely to give more favourable consideration to the worker co-ops than to the Council's interests.

For all the trials and tribulations of being involved in fostering co-operative enterprise via the SCDG, on balance I am glad that I played a significant role initially in the launching of the Group. What happened subsequently was a disappointment to me especially in terms of the relations with the Council, the Retail Societies and the TUs. However the show goes on and there is reason to believe that co-operative modes of enterprise, production, distribution and organisation have not yet shown their potentials fully, locally or globally. Perhaps in the Third Millennium such potentials will be realised.