

Editorial

The Journal's tradition of encouraging international perspectives on co-operation is again reflected in this edition. There are peer reviewed contributions from Canada, Germany and New Zealand and a paper on the development of credit co-operatives in India at the time of the British Empire. The book reviews add to this international focus with reviews of a publication on the co-operative movement in Botswana and of a volume emanating from the Robert Owen Association of Japan.

Interwoven throughout these papers and reviews are themes that emerge from an analysis of the co-operative difference and of the historical and contemporary relevance of co-operative principles and values. Sonja Novkovic reflects on the results of a survey of managers and board members and highlights the practical relevance of the co-operative difference to the management strategy of Canadian co-operatives. She reveals both the value of democracy and commitment to community to co-operative business practice. Hans-H Münkner expands on the importance of the values that underpin business management with his analysis of the dominance of, what he terms, *the investor driven model* over other forms of business organisation including that of co-operatives. He examines management in investor driven companies and compares it to the more values based approach of co-operatives and broader social economy organisations. In identifying and evaluating the particular features of co-operative management, he highlights the business case for respecting basic co-operative values particularly in respect to the management of co-operation between enterprises.

In his analysis, Hans-H Münkner identifies transparency, and the obligation to publish data and returns, as a particular feature of the management of co-operation between enterprises. Interestingly, it is the theme of the understanding of published data within co-operative businesses that Alan Robb, Yvonne Shanahan and Beverly Lord pick up on in their paper on the readership and understanding of annual reports. Their work develops their previous paper, *Annual Report Readership and Understanding: a*

Co-operative perspective, published in the Journal in August 2005, by offering an international comparison of the readership and understanding of annual reports. Last year's paper focused on research within a New Zealand supply co-operative, whereas this current study is of two United Kingdom consumer co-operatives. There are interesting lessons and pointers for improvements in both of these papers.

The importance of co-operative values and principles as underpinning the co-operative difference are well made particularly by Novkovic and Münkner. However, in his review of the value laden ILP pamphlet, *Co-operatives and Mutuals: the new challenge*, Trevor Bottomley stresses that the growth of the British co-operative consumer movement in the past perhaps owed more to its ability to respond to the economic and social needs of its members than it did to the promotion of mutuality or political concerns. In other words, values are fundamental but, ultimately, business success depends on the effective and efficient delivery of quality products and services that make a real difference in people's lives. In her paper, Rita Rhodes refers to the development of credit co-operatives and credit unions throughout the British Empire and marvels at their introduction into Britain by immigrants from former colonial countries. In fact, the first credit union in Britain was formed in London in 1964 to serve an emerging West Indian community. Undoubtedly, co-operative principles of democracy, self-help and common ownership inspired and drove early credit union pioneers. Yet, credit union success in islands throughout the Caribbean ultimately owed as much to their ability to develop and to deliver the kinds of quality financial products and services that people both wanted and needed. Exploring the inter-relationship between co-operative principles and effective business practice is a challenge that continues to be faced in British credit unions today, as in other sectors of the co-operative movement. As Novkovic and Münkner, in their own ways, point out, it is not a question of either co-operative principles or effective business practice; properly understood and developed, the co-operative

difference results in a definite and long-term co-operative advantage within the wider competitive and commercial world.

The international flavour of the Journal is to be welcomed and to be promoted. To this effect, it is encouraging that the Canadian Association for Studies in Co-operation (CASC) has entered into a partnership arrangement with the UK Society of Co-operative Studies so that the Journal will be distributed to CASC members throughout Canada. This edition will be the first to be so distributed and so, may I welcome our fellow Canadian co-operators into readership of the Journal and invite them to consider writing papers and articles for inclusion in future editions. The challenge of this new Journal editor, on this side of the Atlantic, is to ensure that international contributions are complemented by an increasing number of research papers and articles emanating from the UK.

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April 2006