

Book Reviews

Co-operatives and Peace in the Era of Globalisation: A Retrospective Look at the ICA's Concern, Resolutions and Action throughout the 20th Century

By Dionysos Mavrogiannis

Ant N Sakkoulas Publishers, 69 Solonos Str, 106 79 Athens, Greece. 2002. ISBN 960-15-0747-7

Reviewed by John Courtneidge

This book is like a glass of water to a thirsty man.

It is the text of a paper that was submitted to the 2001 General Assembly of the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) for its discussions on the theme of Co-operation and Peace in the Era of Globalisation. The text comprises a collection of the resolutions, declarations and so on, that have been made at ICA Congresses since 1902, along with a relevant 1999 Resolution of the United Nations General Assembly, and a 2002 Statement by Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission. Together with this resource which comprises three quarters of the book, the author provides a short introduction note, comments upon all of the texts, and some concluding remarks.

That said, and before I sing its praises more fully, it is necessary that I comment on the book's standard of production.

The print quality and binding are of acceptable, if somewhat plain style, and the collected texts, (all in English save those, in French, from the 1902 ICA Congress) are well presented. The author's own introduction, commentaries, and concluding remarks are, however, severely marred by a range of flaws.

As a former research worker at University College, London, and as a manuscript referee for journals of the Royal Society of Chemistry, this reviewer has had experience of polishing the texts of authors whose first language is not English. It is clear that the present author did not have access to the resources necessary to clarify some of his remarks, the text of which in some places defies this reviewers' understanding. This might be excused, were it not for a thoroughly poor standard of proof reading.

The Endnotes, as a starting example, contain a number of extraneous typesetting control characters that probably are artefacts of production. Moreover, the author's own text

contains inconsistencies, transposition and spelling errors that should have been dealt with at page proof stage. Finally, the book has no index, and the contents page is located, unhelpfully, at the end of the book, before the author's biography. These production matters raise a number of points that the movement might consider.

Firstly, although not references as such, the texts of the resolutions, and so on, appear to come from an electronic archive (or at least, could form part of an electronic archive: no web reference is indicated), which many workers, now and in the future, would find a highly useful resource. Secondly, the text would have benefited from both preview by first-language-English (sub) editors, and concurrent translation (and publication) in the world's other principal languages. I wonder if a decentralised global co-operative of pre- and post-print publishers might make such resources more widely available, through local printing and local promotion. A possible task for the ICA and/or the UK Society for Co-operative Studies?

That said, I am delighted to see this book published.

As a co-operator and peace-worker, who works for the international magazine Peace News, and is a member of the Management Group of the (UK) Network for Peace, this reviewer has, over several years, attempted unsuccessfully to discover (or help create) deep, systematic co-working between the peace and co-operative movements. Historically, the linkage between these two movements has been much more active than is presently the case. Within that fact, this reviewer (and he suspects this book's author) wishes that the commitment of the ICA and its member organisations to active peace-making were a more prominent feature of the present pro-peace, anti-war world movements.

As the author indicates on page 12, these

collected texts are an essential tool for co-operators to engage the world's Peace (and social justice) movements. Co-operators might well, therefore, use them in pointing out our movement's century-long commitment to active peace work, and of our inclusive, voluntary, co-operative socialist alternatives to the failed authoritarian Marxist models that are still being touted by certain adherents of the pseudo-left.

In the light of the foregoing, I quote from page 34 of Professor Mavrogiannis's text. "Because, we co-operators have the firm conviction that ICA is the only international economic and social organisation which, in spite of the strong impact of the capitalist economy and the disasters caused by two World Wars, has managed to preserve its unity and, overcoming adverse conditions from both sides, exterior and interior, to avoid division or collapse. It has therefore the experience and the right to proceed with the New Economy for further developing the co-operative system, encouraged in that and enhanced as well by the quest of the working and labouring people for decent conditions of work, for social justice and for Universal Peace."

As an indication of the struggle for clarity within the co-operative movement, one can point to the interchange between Danish and Czechoslovakian co-operators at the ICA's 1934 Congress. Such debates serve to show how co-operators through the twentieth century gradually came off the fence with regard to contesting the social injustice that is an ordinate cause of war.

Thus, the Resolution for Peace at the 1995 ICA Congress recalls that ICA Rules call upon member organisations to "contribute to

international peace and security".

This remembrance of a core ICA objective suggests that member co-operative organisations could do well now - in this era of global warfare - to put substantial resources (both material and intellectual) into active peace work.

In so doing, they (we!) would be following the shining example of the International Co-operative Women's Guild at the 1930 ICA Congress, (page 76) which affirmed in both words and actions, "... the conviction of co-operative women that there can be no permanent security for World Peace except in total and universal disarmament and called on the Guilds to collaborate with other organisations for that object."

On page 47, in the reproduced text of the report of the ICA's Congress, 1902, Mr T Bland, the then Vice-Chairman of the Co-operative Wholesale Society, said that he was: "old enough to remember very vividly the disastrous Russian (Crimean) war; and I can see in my mind's eye today many of the men in the streets with arms and legs off."

Today, co-operators - world-wide - see a flood of news reports which prove that, one and a half centuries on, such outrages are now the daily experience of millions throughout the world.

This book, then, is a call to heed the slogan "Co-operation, the hope of the world" and for our Movement to work co-operatively for the true peace that only deep-seated, whole-hearted co-operation can bring.

In summary: for all my reservations about this book's production flaws, this is a valuable resource in humanity's quest for world peace, and I recommend it to all libraries and collections.

The Future of Co-operatives in the European Union at the Threshold of the 21st Century Report on the 14th International Conference of Co-operative Science, Nuremberg 2000

Forschungsinstitut für Genossenschaftswesen, an der Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg,
Königstorgraben 11, D-90402 Nürnberg, Germany, ISSN 0176-2052

Reviewed by Jim Craigen

The Future of Co-operatives in the European Union at the Threshold of the 21st Century, edited by Wolfgang Harbrecht, Chair of the Board of the Research Institute for Co-operative Studies at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg (published 2002) brings together various Papers presented to the 14th

International Conference on Co-operative Science held in Nuremberg in September 2000.

One of the papers then presented was given by our own Ian Snaith on the co-operative movement in the United Kingdom. This report raises some basic issues for co-operatives. Seminal you could say considering the 14th

Conference was attended by over “200 scientists and practising co-operators”. For me co-operation somehow calls for more art than science. However, it might be a matter of translation. One speaker did observe that the German translation of the 1995 ICA Statement of Co-operative Identity contains errors which had remained uncorrected.

At this time in European Foreign Policy (if such a thing is possible) New Labour loves to see Britain as a sort of cross-Atlantic bridge spanning from Washington to Brussels in an attempt to make fewer waves. I was therefore the more fascinated by the ideological gulf in Europe between Co-operators in France and Germany. The UK can probably be found somewhere in between.

The fault-line between the French statist attitude and German self-help approach to Co-operation is mapped out only too well in the presentation by Thierry Jeantet on the French idea of the Social Economy and that by Professor Dr Theresia Theurl on the central European concept of the co-operative society as a self-help facility in the tradition of Raiffeisen and Schulze-Delitzsch. I first visited Germany as a teenager and was impressed. A year later in 1959 I went to Paris and was mesmerised! I know now it was a case of style over substance. Germans are serious. The French take themselves seriously.

As every co-operator knows: we are different. The thing is we do not like being pigeon-holed in the private or public sector of the economy. Alas whilst significant to us, a “Co-operative Sector” is insubstantial compared to the big two in terms of capital, employment or technology never mind influence.

Step forward concepts like Third Way, Middle Way, Middle Sector or as the French say *Economie Sociale*. Back in 1998 the European Commission set up a consultative committee for co-operatives, mutual societies, associations and foundations. There were earlier comings and goings in these disparate areas as diverse as non-profit associations and trading businesses run by their customer/members.

The European Commission did not have a spokesman at the conference to speak on attempts to get a European Co-operative Statute, but Dr Hans-Jurgen Schaffland, General Counsel to the German Co-operative and Raiffesisen Confederation, succinctly surveyed the legal terrain in which the

co-operatives in the European Union already operate in fifteen member states, soon to be twenty-five. Dr Hans-H Munkner, University of Marburg, Germany, who also translated many of the conference papers into English, went into greater detail on this in his paper *Development Trends of Co-operative Legislation in European Member States* (all of which are coming from different backgrounds). Pan-European support and recognition of the role of co-operatives is important. Member states may create a favourable climate in which co-operatives can operate. However, co-operation is about spontaneous combustion and common purpose and the state is not best-suited as a surrogate mother.

Somehow reading parts of the Conference Report brought lines of William Shakespeare to mind. One could say some are born into co-operatives. (I was through family membership of a consumer co-operative.) Others achieve co-operation in setting up a co-operative whether for workers, farmers or people wanting housing. Whilst others may have co-operation thrust upon them!

I see a potential danger lurking for unwary co-operators. The day people have co-operation thrust upon them as some kind of state political tool or even European Union handiwork will see collectives not co-operatives.

Co-operatives, certainly those in wholesaling, retailing, banking or insurance and the like need to make a profit. It is what they do with the surplus which contrasts with private companies. Housing co-operatives have to repair roofs and floorboards and employ staff and so costs and income must be in step. Worker co-operatives are not charities either. In fact even charities must pay their way in terms of staff salaries, office accommodation and other expenses before one pound or euro is paid out to beneficiaries!

Some navigational questions face Co-operators who find themselves in the same boat as all other types of organisation vaguely assorted in the Social Economy. Little wonder the Germans with their self-help traditions in banking and rural and other activities have been raising questions on the quayside.

It was a Frenchman, Prof Charles Gide, economist and co-operative philosopher who contended “we must not lose sight of the aim of co-operation which is not so much to destroy private traders as to transform commercial methods and manners.”

Benjamin Franklin: An American Life

By Walter Isaacson

Simon and Schuster. ISBN 06848 07610

Reviewed by Rita Rhodes

I was pleased to find this recently published book in our local library and read it for several reasons. One is that many American co-operators believe that Benjamin Franklin (1704-1790) founded their first mutual society and, in recognition of this, inducted him into their Co-operative Hall of Fame in 1987. Another reason for reading the book was the hope that I would gain a better understanding of why the American colonies seceded from the British Empire in 1783 which has some bearing on my current research into the development of co-operatives within the British Empire. The Empire's loss of America helped to shape constitutional developments in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa; necessitated finding new sites for British penal colonies, and new markets to compensate for those lost in the Americas; and hardened Britain's resistance to later colonial demands for independence. Benjamin Franklin played a central role in America's secession, signing both the American Declaration of Independence in 1776 and the American Constitution in 1787.

At the outset let me emphasise that this is an all-American book. Its subject is American, its author, Walter Isaacson, a former Chairman of CNN and Managing Editor of *Time* magazine, is American as are the book's publisher, Simon and Schuster. Therefore, readers might initially find the American spellings of familiar English words offputting but Isaacson's clear and unpretentious style of writing more than compensates.

He shows Benjamin Franklin to have been a giant of a man: an important politician; a skilled negotiator and diplomat; an eminent scientist, and also a popular journalist and author. Sadly, Isaacson does not elaborate on the possibility that Franklin was also a founding father of American mutuality although his book points to a number of co-operative traits in his personality. For example, Franklin disliked disputes, believing them to be wasteful and best avoided by sensible people. However, where disputes did exist he believed that they should be settled through negotiation. In other words, he was not a natural revolutionary.

Franklin was initially opposed to American independence, his pro-British stance possibly being shaped by the 18 months he spent in London as a printer. Nevertheless, he recognised that the Americans in negotiating with the British needed to strengthen their position by acting more in concert. Otherwise they would be "like separate filaments of flax before the thread is formed, without strength because without connection. "A co-operative simile if ever there was one. This led Franklin, in the Albany Plan of 1754, to propose a Federation of American colonies which would have a general government but allow individual colonies to retain their legislative autonomy.

Such a federal division of powers became an important feature of the American Constitution of 1787 and has led some to believe Franklin to be the progenitor of modern federalism. This may lead us to wonder about the extent to which his federal ideas influenced those of British do-operation in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As far as the American colonies were concerned, Franklin hoped that federation would make them strong enough to defend themselves, thus obviating the need for British troops and depriving the Westminster Government of the argument that it needed to raise American taxes to pay for them. Franklin had also hoped that the Albany Plan would help avoid war between Britain and America. However, the British rejected the Plan as being too democratic and continued to insist on the sovereignty of the British Parliament along with its right to tax the American colonists without their consent. At that stage, Franklin reluctantly moved into the pro-independence camp.

He was already well known through his journalism and as a politician in Pennsylvania. In 1736 he became Clerk of the Assembly, a year later the Postmaster of Philadelphia and in 1754 the deputy postmaster-general for all the American colonies. Britain's rejection of the Albany Plan led to his also becoming a prominent negotiator and diplomat. In 1757 and 1764, he was sent to London to try to negotiate a settlement. The failure of the latter mission led to America's Declaration of Independence

in July 1776 with Franklin being one of its signatories. During the following War of Independence, he was sent to Paris and successfully negotiated a Treaty of Alliance which gained French support in money and munitions. After America won the War and her independence in 1783, Franklin returned to Paris as the US Minister to France.

I have come across no book which explains so well and so clearly the constitutional disputes at issue between Britain and America as this one by Isaacson. If you are interested in American history it is therefore a book to be read. However, Isaacson goes on to show that, if anything, Franklin achieved even greater eminence in science, although a wholly self-educated man. He identified the nature and elements of electricity and proved that lightning was electricity. Some suggest that these discoveries ushered in "a scientific revolution comparable to those wrought by Newton in the previous century". The Royal Society acknowledged their importance by awarding Franklin its prestigious Copley Medal, the first time it had had given it to a non-Briton. Franklin's practicality is shown by his later invention of the lightning rod, or conductor, to deflect lightning from homes and other buildings and also in helping to form the Union Fire Company. In 1752 this became the Philadelphia Contributionship for the Insurance of Houses from Loss by Fire and is believed to be America's first mutual organisation. Sadly, Isaacson does not elaborate on this which is the one disappointment of the book.

However, he is quite clear about Franklin's contribution to American literature and folk humour, charting his career as journalist, author

and publisher. It seems that Franklin's *Poor Richard Almanac*, which he wrote and published over 25 years, earned him the kind of following that Charles Dickens enjoyed with the instalment publication of some of his books in Britain a century later. *Poor Richard's Almanac* was America's first folk humour classic. Later writers in the genre included Mark Twain, who is probably the best known of these in Britain. *Poor Richard* and his nagging wife became national figures, passing their lives in fictional vicissitudes and summing these up with their home-spun philosophies. Some of their short pithy maxims remain in common usage today, including: "Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise", "Necessity never made a good bargain", and "He that lives upon hope will die fasting". King Richard III would no doubt have heartily endorsed *Poor Richard's* belief that "A little neglect may breed mischief ... for want of a nail, the shoe was lost; for want of a shoe the horse was lost; and for want of a horse the rider was lost." As a fan of westerns, and particularly the film *The Alamo*, I was touched to read that Davy Crockett had a copy of Franklin's autobiography when he fought and died at the battle of the Alamo.

Franklin continues to influence our lives politically, scientifically and through literature. His contributions to early co-operative ideas are less clear but he undoubtedly had co-operative personality traits. He was such a giant of a man, and his achievements so disparate that you feel that only a polymath could really have done justice to his life. However, by the time you come to the end of Isaacson's biography, you feel that he has done a pretty good job.