

My Friendship with Johnston Birchall

Akira Kurimoto

Johnston has written three volumes in commemoration of historical events: *Co-op — The People's Business* for the 150th anniversary of the Rochdale Pioneers Society in 1994; *The International Co-operative Movement* for the centenary of the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) in 1997; and *People Centred Businesses* for the International Year of Co-operatives (IYC) in 2010. He also contributed papers for the International Labour Organisation, and his paper *Resilience of the co-operative business model in time of crisis* together with Lou Hammond Ketilson in 2009 is thought to be one of triggers of the International Year of Co-operatives (2012). He authored reports on governance of large co-operative businesses in 2014 and 2017. Most of these books and papers were translated into Japanese. I might say he has made a tremendous contribution to the international co-operative movement for decades.

I had the pleasure of a longstanding friendship with Johnston since the 1990s when we had often met on the occasion of the ICA research conferences. He visited Japan under the invitation of Meiji University and gave a lecture for the Robert Owen Association of Japan (ROA) in 1998. He contributed a chapter in the English volume named *The Emergence of Global Citizenship: Utopian Ideas, Co-operative Movements and the Third Sector* in 2005. He was invited by the Consumer Co-operative Institute of Japan to give lectures commemorating the IYC in Tokyo and Kyoto in 2012. I remember he was moved and cried when he saw the Golden Pavilion Temple in Kyoto designated as a UNESCO world heritage site.

When I visited his former house in Scotland, we climbed the nearby hill and talked a lot in the 1990s. He invited me to his new house at Glendevon before the ICA Research Conference in Stirling in 2017. He sang songs playing guitar, and we enjoyed Bernadette's dinner. He drove a newly-bought Jaguar to travel across the Isle of Skye and the Highlands. We discussed a wide range of topics on co-operative history, governance, new mutualism and so on. But soon after my visit, I was informed of his illness. Johnston kindly answered my inquiries from time to time but our communication became rare. Now I pray for peace of his mind.

The Author

Akira Kurimoto was a professor on the cooperative programme at the Institute for Solidarity-based Society at Hosei University, Tokyo (2015-2020). He was a board member/chief researcher for the Consumer Co-operative Institute, Japan, from 1998 and the general secretary of the Robert Owen Association. He served as the Chair of the ICA Research Committee (2001-2005). He is a founding member of the Asia Pacific Co-operative Research Partnership, which published a volume *Waking the Asian Pacific Co-operative Potential* (Altman et al., in 2020). He is Senior Fellow of the Japan Co-operative Alliance and in November 2021 became the Chair of ICA Committee on Co-operative Research.