

Editorial

This is a special issue of the Journal, containing the final report of the 'Co-operative Advantage' project. This project was commissioned by the UK Society for Co-operative Studies and funded by contributions from the Society and from several UK consumer co-operative societies and individual contributors. Consisting of an introduction and summary followed by three separate research reports, this project is the most extensive piece of academic research on the UK consumer co-operative sector in a long time. It is also very timely, because a Co-operative Commission has recently been set up to provide the first in-depth look at the sector since the famous 'Gaitskell Report' of 1958. As well as taking up the whole of this issue of the Journal, this final report of the Project is being submitted by the Society for Co-operative Studies as its contribution to the work of the Commission.

I will not try to summarise the Report here - Roger Spear is doing this in his introduction. I do want to add an editorial comment, though. From the point of view of readers who are not familiar with the UK consumer co-operative sector, the reports may be a little difficult to grasp. However, they tackle one of the most basic questions facing the co-operative movement worldwide - how to gain competitive advantages from being a member-owned and controlled business. As globalisation and market competition intensifies, we cannot continue with the old idea that a co-operative has a dual character, as an association of members and a business, and that what the managers and board of directors have to do is somehow to live with the tension between them. If co-ops and mutuals cannot fuse together the association and the business into something new that builds on the strength of membership to gain market advantages, then they will not be able to survive. Co-operatives have for too long tried to ape their competitors by hiding the fact that they are member-owned, while their competitors have been trying - through devices such as customer clubs and loyalty cards - to pretend they are co-operatives. There must be a way in which co-ops can become in practice what they already are in principle, and in so doing begin once again to meet the needs of their members.

We have several book reviews and some interesting articles waiting to be published, and these will be in the December Issue. The Journal will by then have a new editor. When I took the job I said I would retire after five years, and this is what I am doing. The new editor will be chosen by the members of the UK Society for Co-operative Studies at the AGM in October. The Executive Committee will be recommending someone, but it would not be fair

of me to pre-empt the democratic process and mention a name. Suffice it to say that I am confident that the Journal will be in good hands. If the new editor agrees, I will stay on for a while as an 'international editorial consultant', with the specific task of keeping up my contacts with potential contributors around the world and persuading them to write for the Journal. I have to thank Gillian Lonergan, our deputy editor, for all her patience and skill in handling the production side of the Journal. Peter Davis, the review editor, the Executive Committee of the Society, and many other people who have written for the Journal, also receive my thanks for all their support over an interesting five years. I am now going on to edit a book with Routledge, called 'The New Mutualism in Public Policy', which I hope will be the first of a series of edited books on co-operative themes.

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