

REVIEWS

by

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The range of prices of the books in the Reviews section this time is striking (there should be something for every pocket, if not for every interest). Possibly this is a reminder that Co-operation is by no means a monolithic subject, but an extremely diverse one in terms both of its variety of forms and of its interest for such a span of people, from the directly and practically involved through to the highest levels of speculation.

First, let me take three very different books which have reached me recently, each dealing with aspects of economic development through Co-operatives.

Co-operatives for Developing Countries: Objectives, Policies and Practices by Pierre J. van Dooren (Plunkett Foundation £7.55; first published, in Dutch, in 1978) is a very broad analysis indeed, taking lessons from many countries and covering the engagement in development policy of practically all Co-operative types, both rural and urban. The book does not assume extensive prior knowledge of Co-operatives, and explains the functions and structures of the different types as well as their relationship to the process of development. Written from a Dutch perspective, some of the examples used in the book relate to countries less familiar to the British reader than the Commonwealth examples more often met with - a useful feature. Occasionally the language seems a little stilted, whether as a result of the translation or of the original I cannot of course say.

As proclaimed by its title Co-operatives and Development by Crawford Young, Neal Sherman and Tim Rose (University of Wisconsin Press £22.50) also deals with Co-operatives in less developed countries. In this book, however, the global survey is replaced by three studies - of cotton and coffee Co-operatives in Uganda; Ugandan dairy Co-operatives; and cocoa Co-operatives in Ghana. These are related by the authors to the economics and governmental attitudes of their respective countries, and an overall assessment is attempted, particularly of the role of the state in promoting development through Co-operatives. It should be noted that the studies on which the book is based were executed in the mid-sixties and early seventies, although some more recent data has been brought to bear.

Roger Clarke's book Our Own Resources (Arkleton Trust £2.50) draws on visits to a number of rural Co-operatives in Canada and interviews with Co-operators and rural development personnel. It sets out to examine the Co-operatives within this specific context of rural and community development. A number of projects are examined - some being Co-operatives in rural areas which have been set up simply as fishermen's Co-operatives, processing Co-operatives, or whatever, but which inevitably have wider implications for the general development of the small communities in which they are situated and of which they are part; Newfoundland's Development Associations are treated next, with their wide responsibilities for encouraging or sponsoring community initiatives (not necessarily of a Co-operative nature); and finally there are community Co-operatives, established with the specific intent of fulfilling a need within their community, and contributing to the welfare of that community as a whole. Clearly there are

points of contact between this book and the other two, though the context is very different; even more striking are the parallels with work in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland.

Participatory and Self-Managed Firms edited by Derek C. Jones and Jan Svejnar (Lexington Books £28.95) has a very broad scope, including studies of a variety of forms of labour-managed enterprise in many parts of the world at different periods. About one third of the text relates specifically to Co-operatives, and comprises papers on: Mondragon (two papers - one by Hendrik Thomas, condensed from his recent book; the other by Keith Bradley and Alan Gelb, dealing particularly with the characteristics of workers in the Mondragon co-operatives); British producer Co-operatives 1948-1968, by Derek C. Jones (working in his by now familiar territory of the long-established footwear/clothing/printing society); an analysis of the performance of Italian Co-operatives, principally of large manufacturing and construction Co-operatives during the period 1975-1978, by Alberto Zevi; the capital problems of small producer Co-operatives in less developed countries, by Peter Abell and Nicholas Mahoney (many SCS members will already be familiar with the research underlying this paper); and the performance and productivity of Jamaican sugar Co-operatives during the late seventies, by Vincent Richards and Allan N. Williams.

Given this considerable range of topic and interest it is a pity that parts of several, though fortunately not all, of these papers are quite incomprehensible to the uninitiated. All of them are hard work, but that is a different matter. The combination of the book's price and the abstruseness of some of its contents makes it

hard even to consider buying it. If, like me, you are short of the expertise to tackle large chunks of economic algebra, you may find thirty quid rather a lot for bits of a book. No, this is a useful book to refer to, but for purchasing it is strictly for libraries and the better-heeled academic economist.

The ICA has just produced the report of the latest International Conference on Co-operative Thrift and Credit - the fifth, held in New Delhi in 1981 under the title Thrift and Credit Co-operatives in a Changing World (ICA £3.00). This wide-ranging report, including both a summary of proceedings and selected extracts from conference working papers, is as welcome and valuable as its predecessors.

An Outline of the Co-operative Union (Co-operative Union) is a workmanlike little pamphlet which does exactly what its title promises, and no more. As such it is a useful guide to a difficult complex of relationships (and the organisational chart which forms its centre spread is particularly welcome). It would be too much to expect, perhaps, of such a document that it should attempt a full analysis of the Union's role and value, and the pamphlet is indeed purely descriptive. Nevertheless, even a straight and formal introduction is well worth having, and this job is smoothly performed. Similarly, the Co-operative Union's larger format pamphlet An Outline of the Co-operative Movement provides a very adequate descriptive sketch of the retail movement (other aspects are treated just too briefly), but one which is short on analysis. Nevertheless, a copy of this in school and college libraries would be an effective way of conveying some of the basics of Co-operative organisation to young people in

education. The British Co-operative Movement (Distributive Industry Training Board) performs an even narrower task in slightly greater depth, and in fact displays in fair detail the various parts of the retail movement and their structures. A pity, though, that it seems on occasion barely literate.

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