

WORKERS CO-OPERATIVES — SOME PROSPECTS

FOREWORD

The articles under this general title were sought, not to yield in the aggregate a comprehensive and systematic review of worker Co-operatives, but to explore a few particular conditions and problems in their development.

A useful background to these explorations is provided by the summary in Bulltin 49 of John Berry's introduction to his address to the Society's 1983 Annual Conference about the 700 Worker Co-operatives then in existence:—

“Their average age was just under five years, the average workforce was seven and average annual turnover £125,000 but varying between £3,000 and £1,500,000. In short, most were not only small but tiny.

Three Phases

In terms of development, they fell roughly into three phases:

- (i) the older Co-operative Productive Federation Co-ops, mainly 1880-1920, which were in secular decline;
- (ii) The Scott-Bader model and the 'Tony Benn Co-ops', mainly 1950-1970, which had varying fortunes;
- (iii) the “new-wave”, mainly since 1970, falling into three major categories:
 - (a) Wholefoods, radical publishing and printing etc;
 - (b) Building Co-ops (mainly concerned with short-life housing);
 - (c) Local authority funded and job creation Co-ops (although there is evidence that Co-ops are more effective in improving job quality than quantity).

This third category, generally using ICOM model rules, was currently averaging one new registration a day.”

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