

Guest Editorial

Everyone with a passion for co-operatives is aware that we are going through a period where there are both tremendous opportunities as well as tremendous threats to our movement. In the UK this has been highlighted by the new Coalition Government's attitude to co-operatives. Opinion is divided as to whether this represents an opportunity to expand the size and scope of the Movement or whether it is simply a figleaf for cost-cutting. This in turn will lead to a Movement divided between those dedicated to five years of opposition and those who will seek to make the most of that time.

The journal shows some of the opportunities. My colleagues', Mike Perry and James Alcock, article tells a modern co-operative success with around 250 rural communities creating co-operatives to save their village stores. What they have achieved makes the case for both sides. The majority of shops have been created without any central government support, but the momentum was created in the days when the pioneer stores were supported through the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Their success offers a lesson to Government on how to stimulate community action, namely that it should remove the barriers faced by pioneer communities and then spread that knowledge to a broader range of communities.

This issue also shares the knowledge of the US Food Coop movement. I've long argued that the UK could learn much from this wonderfully vibrant sector. Our belief that, having started Rochdale, there is little we can learn from other countries has been a major barrier to UK co-operative development. I hope that this contribution from Oklahoma will encourage more UK

co-operators to reach out across the Atlantic.

Closer to home, there is a really important contribution from Molly Scott Cato and Richard Bickle on Food Security. This has risen up the UK policy agenda at a rapid rate, but co-operatives have not made the journey with it. We are still stuck on a policy mindset that sees food as produced by farmers, manufactured by industry, sold by retailers and eaten by consumers. Anyone involved in local food in the UK knows that this misses out on the wonderfully vibrant contribution that communities are playing throughout the UK. They have become the new building blocks of local food and offer farmers and individuals new ways to connect through co-operation.

Of course, the call for co-operative action on food is nothing new and the review of Maurice Colbert's biography of Sir Horace Plunkett is timely. His lively telling of Sir Horace's life should be read by all who care about the role of co-operation in modern society. It is my view that we make a grave mistake to simply see Sir Horace's achievement as part of our history. He, and the amazing team of people he gathered around him, developed a way that created co-operatives which has stood the test of time. The need to generate belief in the co-operative possibility, the easing of the path to creating sustainable co-operative enterprises and the rooting of co-operatives in the communities from whence they came was not only important in nineteenth century Ireland, it is also precisely what is needed today.

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