

**CO-OPERATIVE AND MUTUAL ENTERPRISES
IN BRITAIN:**

**IDEAS FROM A USABLE PAST
FOR A MODERN FUTURE:**

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Summary

This report uses an historical focus to explore the potential of cooperative and mutual forms of organisation, and thereby to inform the development of economic and social policy and practice. Drawing on social capital theory, the report explores the relevance of cooperation and mutuality to wider debates about the development of civil society, and successful enterprise which is socially and ethically orientated. This, it is argued, is a critical moment to reappraise the role of cooperation and mutuality. The shifts in public policy pursued by New Labour and many other democracies coincide with self-consciously modernising forces among co-operative and mutual enterprises. Productive joint ways forward are available in key areas of public policy and practice.

The report adopts a wide definition of cooperation and mutuality, including the long-standing group of organisations known as ‘the coop’. The report introduces ‘cooperative and mutual enterprise’ (CMEs) as the umbrella term which best describes the current, and growing shape of this sector.

‘Old old labour’ and ‘associationism’ are the related concepts used to describe the social and economic practices which effectively constitute the nineteenth century roots of the Labour Party. In the national and global policy climate of the early 21st century, these practices, embodied in CMEs, suggest the renewed relevance of modernised and re-created versions of ‘old’ associational forms. Cooperative and mutual forms, it is argued, fit well with a future policy agenda in which there has been a continued drive, since the 1970s, away from the state as the sole source of public policy, and towards private capital and public/private partnerships as a solution to public policy problems, and greater individual, community and collective independence and responsibility. While the direction away from the state appears

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irreversible, the solutions chosen remain problematic and create economic and social divisions.

It is argued that cooperation and mutuality can offer a successful alternative to polarised approaches to policy and practice. Contested concepts, territories and boundaries are explored, including: the public and the private; the state, independence and self-help; consumers, users and members; the relationship between belonging and democracy; and a different perspective on the division of labour. The contribution of 'old, old labour' in Britain may be rescued from the condescension of posterity by uncovering a series of 'social inventions' which CMEs developed over a century and a half. These are now being consciously reshaped and modernized so that they can be adapted to the early 21st century policy and economic context, thus providing 'capital' both for policy makers and for more successful cooperative and mutual practice.

The potential of CMEs is not yet not fully realized. There is a need for further research and policy work to create a stronger evidence base and wider discussion of possibilities.

1. OBJECTIVES

Realising capital

The aim of this report is to point towards ways of making the historical inheritance represented by Co-operative and Mutual Enterprises (CMEs) in Britain more widely understood, in order to inform policy and practice. The main proposition of the report is that focussing on *history*, alongside modern policy and practice, can enable features of the past to be *realised* as a resource for the present.

An *historical* focus - and methodology - is particularly appropriate for an understanding of CMEs, because they grow best organically, rather than by means of transplant. 'Where the past exists', wrote Peter Ackroyd in *London: the Biography* (2000), in a phrase which applies particularly to forms of human association, 'the future may flourish'.

The length of their own past is more than an incidental fact about CMEs in Britain. Instant policy can be helpful to CMEs, depending on who and where it comes from, but sustained practice, on their own behalf, is their characteristic vehicle. CMEs are most effective when seen by their members and potential members as solutions to their own, autochthonous problems, rather than as answers to questions raised by external policy-makers, professionals and managers. Otherwise unsustainable, destructive divisions of labour tend to develop between 'lay' or 'ordinary' members and external policy-makers or experts, and between members/potential members and their 'own', internal professionals and managers.

Such divisions of labour are endemic in private and public enterprises other than CMEs. They can be reproduced all too easily within CMEs, whose *raison d'être* has been to resist them. Demand from below, expressing itself over long periods of time and from multiple sources, has sustained CMEs better than instant, ready-made supply from above, or from a single source. 'The mighty power of the million pence' was extolled at the opening of the Co-operative Wholesale Society's Flour Mills at Dunston on Tyne in April 1891 (*Co-operative News*, 25 April 1891). Such power necessarily took time to collect. Hence the choice in this report of an historical point of view.

'*Realised*' is used here in two senses. First it is used to mean 'known about', in the impatient, modernising socio-political culture of early twenty-first century Britain, which does not always want to know about the past. Secondly, 'realised' is used to refer to the sense in which capital is realised, or made available for new uses.

Social capital

Social capital came into vogue during the late twentieth century in the U.S.A. and elsewhere, among social scientists and policy makers, as a term to describe the resource for human development which is represented by different forms of association. Like the term civil society ('perhaps the most important social science rediscovery of the 1990s,' according to Anheier et al, 2001), social capital became an 'island of meaning' (Zerubavel, 1991) inhabited by social scientists, policy makers and practitioners of social enterprise, voluntary organisation etc. Practitioners wanted to sail beyond ebbing late-twentieth century tides of

'market' *versus* 'state', 'private' *versus* 'public', 'economic' *versus* 'social' (Anheier et al, 2001;).

I will argue that the historical inheritance represented by CMEs in Britain constitutes social capital (Putnam, 1993,2000). Why? Because CMEs in Britain have constituted a species of associational forms among which one genus (trade unions) was described by Sidney and Beatrice Webb as a set of 'continuous associations of working people for the purpose of maintaining and improving the conditions of their working lives' (S and B Webb 1894). As 'continuous associations', trade unions, alongside many other forms of 'union' (e.g., co-operatives in the Co-operative Union, clubs in the Club and Institute Union, friendly Societies in the Association of Friendly Societies, building societies in the Building Societies Association etc) remain available to contribute to culture and to society, as they have done in the past, to the extent that the capital that is in them is realised and deployed.

As Putnam (2000) suggest, the term social capital has been independently invented at least six times over the twentieth century, commencing in 1913. Social networks and norms of reciprocity facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit. The core idea of social capital theory is that social networks of many kinds add value, in ways analogous to physical and human capital. 'The individual is helpless socially, if left to himself', wrote Hanifan, the first known user of social capital in its modern sense at the beginning of the last century. 'The community as a whole will benefit by the cooperation of all its parts, while the individual will find in his associations the advantages of the help, the sympathy, and the fellowship of his neighbours'. It was a supervisor of rural schools in West Virginia during the Progressive Era, a practical reformer not a theoretician, who wrote this. It was 'associations' which he called, for the first time, 'an accumulation of social capital' (Hanifan, 1916).

Since that time, education has continued to be a prime site for the development of the concept, for instance in the work of Pierre Bourdieu on 'forms of capital'. For Bourdieu, these forms included 'economic', 'cultural', 'symbolic' as well as 'social' forms (Bourdieu,1983; Woolcock 1998). James S. Coleman, a leading US sociologist of the rational choice tradition, put the term firmly and finally on the intellectual agenda in the late 1980s. As as Hanifan had originally done, he used social capital to highlight the social context of education (see Putnam, 2000; Coleman, 1988, 1990). By its very nature, education is also a prime site for its realisation, or communication, including research and learning provided about and by CMEs as continuing organisations.

It is to such research and learning that this report aims to contribute. One set of forms of social capital are continuous organisations. One set of forms of continuous organisations/associations are co-operatives and mutuals. Can social scientists, and the members of co-operatives and mutuals, learn more about the specific forms of social capital - including the creativity and social inventions - of which they represent an accumulation? One of the functions of co-operatives and mutuals - indeed it is the fifth of the seven Co-operative Principles agreed internationally in 1995 - is 'education, training and information' (ICA, 1995). 'They inform the general public - particularly young people and opinion leaders - about the nature and benefits of co-operation'. The Co-operative Movement in Britain has its own College. CMEs tend to value education, training and research as part of their mission to 'communicate mutuality' (the name of a new organisation founded by the Co-operative Party and the Co-operative Union in 2001).

For what purposes?


The past and the present of CMEs constitute a capital resource. This is particularly the case in Britain where they have been, and remain, large-scale organisations. This resource may be either inert or active. The aim here is to realise the resource for four main purposes:

- to widen the scope of twenty-first century *social* policy and practice: not only policy and practice directed towards the accumulation of social capital, but also social inclusion, social enterprise, the social economy, social democracy, and social or ‘new’ politics. Embellishing politics of many ideological varieties with the adjective ‘social’ has been a common practice in Britain for more than a century. How can this be more than decorative? How can it develop from good intention to material, social formation? (Kirkman Gray, 1908; Blunkett, 2001).
- to understand Britain’s past, present and future, in a manner which makes ‘social’ change more likely, because it releases the potential of the co-operative and mutual. The co-operative and mutual may be seen, perhaps particularly in Britain, as an available - but sometimes avoided - *specification* of the social. Such specification has been, in part, achieved in the past, in large-scale organisations. It is therefore materially available for projection, for the future. Phrases like ‘the co-operative commonwealth’, for instance, still resonate in some settings as visions rather than as dreams, because of repeated usage since 1866 in a large, ambitious, continuous movement or set of associations still identifying itself as the Co-operative Movement (Brown, 1937).
- to prepare the ground on which co-ops and mutuals, new and old, can multiply effectively. Co-ops and mutuals as concrete nouns, generally but not always, further specify the abstract nouns, co-operation and mutuality. They do not always do so because co-ops and mutuals, like other organisations, can lose their values and original impulses over time, and cease to be either co-operative or mutual. They can de-mutualise in practice long before they do so in legal form. Many have. They are not immune from the same dynamics, or sociological laws, which apply to other organisations. They are part of that which they came into being to oppose and replace.
- to enable the actual development of co-ops and mutuals co-operatively and mutually. There is usable space between the *ideas* of co-operation and mutuality and actually-existing co-ops and mutuals. Co-ops and mutuals are seldom one hundred per cent co-operative and mutual, either internally or in their relations with other co-ops and mutuals. As far as relations with other co-ops and mutuals are concerned, the sixth International Co-operative Alliance Principle, as agreed in the 1995 ICA Statement on the Co-operative Identity - ‘Co-operation among Co-operatives’ - is perhaps the least observed of the seven Principles. (ICA, 1995) But this is a dynamic fact, rather than a reason for rejecting co-ops and mutuals. Edgar Parnell changed the title, as well as some of the contents, of his 1995 classic *Reinventing the Co-operative - Enterprises for the 21st Century*, to *Reinventing Co-operation - the Challenge of the 21st Century* (Parnell, 1999). He became convinced that the *idea* of co-operation as ‘one of the most fundamental issues of our time’ was as fertile as the *fact* of ‘the Co-operative’.

2. APPROACH

This report aims to be independent, and academically sound. It is also engaged with practice, and in Williams' term 'aligned' (Williams, 1977, pp.199-205, *Alignment and Commitment*). It is aligned with the project of co-operation and mutuality and generally therefore - but not always - with the project of co-operatives and mutuals. That such alignment is open, and advocacy on behalf of Co-operative and Mutual Enterprises, is part of the method.

I want to objectify, or to present as object, a first person singular who is an historian of associational forms - independent in that sense - but also engaged in policy and practice, for example as Chair of the Board of the Co-operative College (*Independent Chair in the Articles and Memorandum of Association*) and of Co-operative Futures, a co-operative development agency supported by the Oxford, Swindon and Gloucester Co-operative Society.

The report draws on social science, in a line of descent of 'social science' from its invention as such by working-class Owenite co-operators and socialists during the 1820s and 1830s, through to its promotion in the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science in the Victorian period, and its early-twentieth century appropriation by the academy (Claeys, 1989;  Social Science, 1861; Bestor, 1948; Williams, 1976). The coiners of the term social science proposed it as a body of knowledge with which to replace anti-social science. Theirs was a formative rather than a decorative use of the adjective 'social'. Social science was to be science or knowledge, for sure, but knowledge in a co-operative cause and explicitly opposed to the 'dismal science' of political economy which worked then, they thought, in the cause of competition. They experienced political economy as divisive, dividing or alienating labour from itself and from its fruits, and therefore anti-social. From their point of view, the labour theory of value worked: their work or labour appeared to them as the *sine qua non* of the multiplication of value in economy and society.

As a social historian, I developed my trade during the 1960s, with the academic revival of labour history in the *Society for the Study of Labour History* during that decade. I specialised in voluntary associations, particularly those of labour with a small 'l', seen in the context of as wide a range of associations as possible including churches, chapels, political, leisure, educational, co-operative associations (Yeo, 1976). Labour History with a capital 'L' remains strong, publishing its twice-yearly Bulletin. Some of its vitality, however, went into a wider revival of social history seen 'from below' during the 1970s and 1980s. I worked with the History Workshop movement and Journal and in community or public history and literature, of the kind associated with the *Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers* from the mid 1970s onwards. I also researched and taught at the University of Sussex whose 'new map of learning' (Briggs, 1964) encouraged interdisciplinarity. Undergraduate degrees, and some faculty research, were based upon the study of problems by means of clusters of disciplines, understood contextually. Disciplines were seen as themselves constituted by, and hence limited by, associational forms (e.g. university departments) which had their own sociology, history, politics, psychology etc., to be understood and used historically. Disciplines were seen as practices as well as bodies of theory.

Ways of understanding or ways of seeing are regarded in this report as one essential route towards ways of changing. For interesting reasons, the Co-operative Movement during the second half of the twentieth century became somewhat anti-intellectual. It neglected its

friends in the academy, thinkers and policy advocates such as G.D.H. Cole who helped to celebrate *A Century of Co-operation* in 1944 (Cole, 1945). Ways of seeing the wider world were not its priority. Professional students of the movement went one way, co-operators another. The high ground of intellectual debate and practical invention which the Movement occupied across British culture in, say, 1900 was only just being recovered by the year 2000. This has made the aspects of this report which relate to modern social science more eccentric than they would have been a century ago, when CME needles in the social scientific haystack were more conspicuous. To take one indicator: the 1958 *Independent Commission Report* was bold for its time in its suggestion that university educated people might be recruited into Co-op. management. This seems an odd recommendation to have to make. But at that time it was radical. The 1950s were a time when the Parliamentary Labour Party, let alone Co-op. management, did not yet consist mainly of the professional and managerial class. At the turn of the new century this is changing. It is clearly more possible to join concepts and ideas relating to co-operation and mutuality in the open spaces of the academic, historical and social scientific worlds, with actually-existing co-ops and mutuals.

At the risk of losing focus, therefore, the stance of this report is to try to interest external observers, social scientists and policy-makers, as well as internal leaders, managers and members of CMEs. Co-operation and mutuality are outstandingly important *ideas* - in the world - as well as practices - in the Co-op. They are modern as well as ancient. Co-operation and mutuality are deliberate cultural creations, close to the surface of human consciousness, as well as native to, and buried deep within, human, species being.

What do social scientists, natural scientists and other thinkers, think about co-operation and mutuality? What implications do CMEs, their leaders, managers and members, have for social scientists and other thinkers? Is there a specifically co-operative and mutual body of knowledge (science) or a specifically co-operative and mutual theory of knowledge (epistemology)?

These are impossibly large questions. They can only be broached here. But simply to ask them will suggest work which is to be done. And to draw attention to work which has been begun again, close to the centre of large Co-operative Societies. For example in the 'International Joint Project on Co-operative Democracy' supported by the Co-operative Wholesale Society and published as *Making Membership Meaningful: Participatory Democracy in Co-operatives* (1995), external 'management literature' from a wide range of disciplines is surveyed, as well as 'co-operative literature'. The survey is conducted in the interests of 'the (Re-) Integration of Business and Association Components' ('Theory of Consumer Co-operatives', pp.264-314). Such work may be of *intellectual interest outside CMEs*, as well as important for *programmatic action by and on behalf of CMEs*. It is this double track on which this report wishes not to crash.

3. 'CO-OPERATIVE AND MUTUAL ENTERPRISE' AS CONCEPT, CME AS ACRONYM

Such a stance situates the proposition of this report that the concept 'Co-operative and Mutual Enterprise' with its acronym CME could offer a framework for practice and for

policy, as well as for analysis. The concept comes from *Mutuality: Owning the Solution: the report of the Oxfordshire Mutuality Task Force*, Co-operative Futures, 2000.

CME as policy handle

CME as a descriptor offers, first, a handle for policy makers and for politicians to grasp which is as serviceable as the acronym 'SME' became during the 1990s for Small or Medium-sized Enterprises. 'SME' served the culture and ideology of individual, competitive entrepreneurialism. CME points in a more social, co-operative direction. 'Co-opetition' has been coined to describe ways in which competitiveness does not depend only on individual competition: an enterprise culture can be generated by means of co-operation (Nalebuff and Brandenburger, 1997).

CME as new identity for old forms

CME offers, secondly, a modern identity for 'old old labour' 's nineteenth-century associational forms, and the characteristic practices which in-formed them. (I will introduce *old old labour* below). These forms include Friendly Societies, Clubs, Trade Unions, Co-ops, Building Societies and Educational Associations. Such associational forms once saw themselves as part of 'the labour movement' or even as '*the social movement*' (a term of the 1840s, particularly in its French form *le mouvement sociale*, von Stein, 1842). At the turn of the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries, they were beginning to see themselves once again as having a common identity. But this was at a time when nineteenth century 'movement' identities survive - perhaps surprisingly strongly in 2001 - but no longer spring so readily to mind in the world outside CMEs.

CME as a solvent for sectors

Thirdly, CME as concept and acronym, offers an erosion of 'sectoral' boundaries. The idea of a co-operative and mutual *sector*, has been found serviceable since the 1950s, alongside the voluntary, the public, the private etc. sectors. Could Co-operative and Mutual *Enterprises* add more value than the notion of a 'sector'?

Well-policed sectors - geographical, ideological, as well as organisational - were characteristic of the Cold War era, from the late 1940s through till the late 1980s. They tended to congeal into hard and fast divisions. An assumed division of labour between the public and the private sectors existed until recently in Britain. Ideas and forms might cross the division. Partnerships might develop between them. But the possibility that ideas and forms which were neither but both could become dominant - public *and* private - had not yet emerged (IPPR, 2001).

There is still a division of labour between the state and the voluntary sectors which is recognised in self-limiting ways by each. Neither sector puts forward ambitious programmes to replace the other. 'Sectors' tend to inhibit one set of forms (of enterprise etc.) from challenging another set of forms. They act as buffers against enterprises and other social organisations or ideas which might otherwise aim at new syntheses, until an entire society is trans-formed. They tend to vaccinate against new political philosophies, in the interests of pragmatism. For this reason William Beveridge (1879-1963), an ambitious thinker and reformer who is not responsible for the statist shape of the post-war welfare state, preferred

the term 'voluntary action' to voluntary organisation and 'the voluntary sector'. He wanted voluntary action to in-form society as a whole rather than to exist in a ghetto. 'So at last human society may become a friendly society - an Affiliated Order of branches, some large and many small, each with its own life in freedom, each linked to all the rest by common purpose and by bonds to serve that purpose' (Beveridge, 1948; see Harris, 1997). The *Report of the Co-operative Commission* (Commission, 2001) recommended a Mission Statement for the Co-operative Movement in exactly this unrestricted, unlimited sense: 'to *challenge* conventional UK enterprise by building a commercially successful family of businesses that offers a clear Co-operative *advantage*' (my emphases). Co-operative societies within a 'sector', or as an alternative to one sector *or* another, are one thing: a co-operative society is another.

CME as cutting edge for 'social'

Fourth, CME offers sharp definition to the ubiquitous adjective 'social'. This adjective was applied to everything 'economic' during the 1990s: social investment, capital, audit, enterprise, firm, business, credit, bank, accounting, economy etc. Without a cutting edge, however, 'social' can vaporise, emptying its meaning, in the same way that 'society' was emptied of meaning during the last two hundred years (Laski, 1933, p.64). 'Social enterprise', for instance, can point to good *intentions* rather than to achieved, detailed, *different* and *material* forms of governance, accountability, membership and distribution of surplus. It is important to note that social capital may be deployed for negative, anti-social purposes (sectarianism, ethnocentrism, corruption) as well as for positive purposes (mutual support, cooperation, trust, institutional effectiveness). Hence Putnam's distinction between bridging and bonding social capital (Putnam, 2000). Discrimination within the category 'social' becomes more necessary the more widely the category is extended.

CME as interface for 'co-operative' and 'mutual'

Finally CME offers conceptual and practical terrain on which co-operative and mutual can interact, thereby reinforcing and challenging the one with the other in ways which could make co-operatives more mutual and mutuals more co-operative.

Co-operation and mutuality may usefully be seen as describing a spectrum, on which actual co-ops and mutuals are variously placed. A *division of labour* between organisations described as one rather than the other grew up in Britain under Victorian legislation which distinguished between Friendly Societies (in Acts of Parliament from 1793 onwards) and Industrial and Provident Societies (in Acts of Parliament from 1852 onwards). As in all divisions of labour between and within productive organisations, a contrived and cultural set of social or sometimes anti-social relations, soon appears to be spontaneous, or natural. In this way Co-ops came to be regulated as such, and Friendly Societies to be regulated as part of a related but different 'industry', that of mutual insurance. Mutual Insurance Companies/Societies and Friendly Societies were regulated *sui generis*, as were Building Societies, it being problematic within a common law tradition to legally define a 'mutual'. State regulation of CMEs gradually became more differentiated. (Commensurate with the early twenty-first century revival of interest in CMEs as a species, there are now moves to bring its regulation back together again, rather than leaving each genus to its own law).

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, all Societies, of every type of CME, were

encouraged to see themselves as delivering a differentiated product (insurance, groceries etc.) rather than as delivering co-operation and mutuality as such. Chief Registrars of Friendly Societies were appointed from 1846 onwards, completing the nationalisation of the function of registration of working-class association which began in 1834. Edwin Chadwick took this nationalisation/centralisation as his model for the organisation of the New, highly centralised, Poor Law (Finer, 1952). As state officials, or civil servants working to HM Treasury, Registrars have always been anxious to classify and thereby to contain *residual* or *emergent* associational forms which might challenge rather than act as subordinates to *dominant* private (market) and public (state) forms. (For residual, emergent and dominant, see 'Cultural Theory' pp. 121-127 in Williams, 1977).

Friendly Society was the pre- Registry, generic form for many CMEs, before state officials encouraged a division of labour between such forms. Trade Unions, for example, found the Friendly Society form helpful, when outlawed as Unions under the Combination Acts between 1799 and 1824. Long after that, Unions retained Friendly Society functions. They still do, as do Co-operative Societies, Club and Institute Union Clubs, and many other associational forms, registered and unregistered. The Tolpuddle martyrs as Trade Union pioneers during the 1830s, and the Rochdale Pioneer co-operators during the 1840s, each originally registered their associational forms as Friendly Societies. So did the Chartist Land Company - a political initiative, or strategy, closely related to that of the Rochdale Pioneers.

Divisions of labour between co-operatives and mutuals as sites of social production/ cultural formation were the result of deliberate, external policy, at least as much as they were the result of organic, internal practice among CMEs. Such divisions may not have added to the co-operative-ness or to the mutuality of either set of forms, any more than the structural differentiation of 'Unions' as *Trade* Unions after the mid-nineteenth century added to the sum total of 'union' in society (Turner, 1962). Similarly, the Registrar hedged Credit Unions around with restrictions during the late-twentieth century in Britain, until the wider co-operative and mutual family, with the help of a government interested in inclusive or 'people's' banking, renewed their interest in such Unions and loosened the restrictions.

In such an historical setting, the concept CME may help to pull separated categories together again, against dominant divisions of labour, and to their mutual benefit. (*The division of labour* is a concept to which this report points, as it applies to divisions *between* sites of, and enterprises for, production - i.e. the social division of labour - and as it applies to divisions *within* enterprises and within the production process itself.)

4. 'OLD OLD LABOUR' AS CONCEPT

The relevance of associationism

'Labour' remains important in the political ecology of Britain in a way which differentiates Britain many other modern capitalist nations. As a brand, Labour has been re-marketed as 'new' rather than jettisoned in favour of another label. The Labour Party was dominant in the political ecology of progressive Britain for much of the twentieth century. Independent forms and forces tended to assimilate to its *Party* form, to such an extent that the associational forms and forces which generated the Labour Party in the first place (between 1893 and

1918), were either pushed aside from *Politics* or buried as independent, progressive, small political forces.

CMEs suffered both fates during the twentieth century. Their forms and functions remained, as retailers (the Co-op.), insurers (Friendly Societies), private home providers (Building Societies), *industrial* relations agents (Unions) etc. But their presence as political forms and forces was either annexed by Labour ('affiliation'), or buried so deep that it remained hidden for much of the twentieth century even from themselves.

At a time of renewal of less statist *Politics* in Britain in the early twenty-first century, as evidenced by the launch, for example, of the 'Mutual State' project at the LSE in October 2001 (with the support of the Co-operative Party), historical excavation might help. To this end 'Old old labour', a concept which includes 'labour' but in its lower case, pre Party Political, form, provides one way of conceptualising working people's associational forms in Britain before the Labour Party came together as a *Political Party*, with a capital L and capital P, between 1893 and 1918. (The Labour Party is generally dated as having started with the Labour Representation Committee of 1900, Pelling, 1954, 1958).

Why is 'old, old labour' of conceptual interest for the future, rather than historical or merely antiquarian? Why are its associational forms worth trying to understand, in the same way that Robert Putnam found the *longue duree* of North and Central Italy's past - back to medieval times - salient for the present governance of those regions? (Putnam, 1993). They are worth trying to grasp conceptually, and then empirically, because they were by no means marginal to, or a static 'sector' within, the culture as a whole.

Summoning witnesses offers one way of giving these forms a qualitative, introductory presence in this report here, as social capital in Britain. Quantities will then come alive. Three witnesses will be called, Beatrice Webb; J.Baernreither; and Raymond Williams.

Witness 1. Beatrice Webb

Webb was impressed by the large-scale, popular capacity for moral, collective, self-government which she observed in the North of England in the 1880s, fifty years before the Labour Party (now known as Old Labour, to contrast with New) had achieved anything like a majority, Parliamentary presence.

Labour, with a small l was 'independent' and powerful in Britain long before it sought independent *Political* representation. It was sufficiently powerful to be seen as the basis for an entirely new kind of society, and therefore to need digesting or answering by social thinkers and by state servants. 'How had this class', Beatrice Webb asked in a diary entry during the 1880s in *My Apprenticeship* (Webb, 1926) 'without administrative training or literary culture, managed to initiate and maintain the network of nonconformist chapels, the far-flung friendly societies, the much-abused trade unions, and that queer type of shop, the co-operative store?'

The Webbs' masterpiece, *Industrial Democracy* (1897) was, in part, an answer to this question. Indeed one way of seeing their life work, which included the invention of labour history as professional, scholarly activity, is as a response to the formidable fact of old, old labour. They documented old old labour's associational forms, bearing witness to them,

better than anyone else, before or since. But they also sought to contain these 'primitive' forms within an expert, professional and managerial state, thereby superceding them.

The Webbs theorised the labour movement as having three 'wings', thereby imposing a division of labour between citizens' organisations (government, local and national), producers' organisations (unions) and consumers' organisations (co-operatives). Before their time the CME impulse had been to bring such work together in whole people, by means of co-operative and mutual associational forms, working in and against these same capitalist divisions of labour by which they were surrounded. This impulse challenged - and fully realised would have trans-formed - capitalist divisions of labour, transforming the meaning of, and sites for, government, production, and consumption. In recognising old old labour, the Webbs sought to have it realised not in and for itself, but in a large-scale industrial democracy which prefigured - and they thought came into being in - the Soviet Union of the 1930s.

Industrial Democracy theorised a modern, expert, post 'representative', democracy in ways which twentieth-century politics in Britain, as science and as practice, has never caught up with (Harrison, 2000). The Webbs' analysis was built upon the old old labour phenomenon of large scale working-class association/enterprise, which they articulated by means of expert, professional and managerial, state forms. Their project was never realised in Britain. Since 1897 Schumpeter's 'mass' democracy, or 'another theory of democracy', superseding 'the classical theory' of democracy by means of consumer-oriented, market-based, machine Political Parties has been preferred to the industrial democracy of the Webbs, both theoretically and practically (Schumpeter, 1943).

Witness 2. J.M Baernreither

Baernreither was an Austrian M.P., who visited Britain for the purposes of study during the 1880s, and subsequently produced the volume, *English Associations of Working Men* (1889). He was impressed by the same potential as Beatrice Webb. But he did not wish to contain the potential by means of an expert, professional and managerial class. He wished to release it as the basis for a new social formation, in the same way that many British 'New Liberals' did during the generation preceding the First World War. He saw England as 'the theatre of a gigantic development of associated life, which gives to her labour, her education, her social intercourse, nay, to the entire development of her culture, a pronounced direction, a decisive stamp... The free union of individuals for the attainment of a common object is the great psychological fact in the life of this people, its great characteristic feature'. *English Associations of Working Men* was a sustained documentation of the old old labour forms which filled this theatre. He focussed mainly on Friendly Societies, in work which J.M Ludlow, the first Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies, prefaced by writing, 'I know of no book, in our own or any other language, which takes so large and clear a view of the great associative movement of the English nineteenth century working class in all its forms, as this of Dr Baernreither's'.

Witness 3 Raymond Williams

Williams was similarly impressed, when he examined class cultures during the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries as text and as practice, in *Culture and Society 1780 to 1950* (1958) and in *The Long Revolution* (1961).

In a conclusion to *Culture and Society*, Williams moved from mainly middle-class texts to mainly working-class associational forms. He drew attention to a 'very remarkable cultural achievement' in Britain during his period. This was the 'primarily social...rather than the individual' cultural achievement of working people. 'A culture is not only a body of intellectual and imaginative work; it is also and essentially a whole way of life'. This way of life was articulated in 'institutions, manners, habits of thought'. 'The culture which it has produced, and which it is important to recognise, is the collective democratic institution, whether in the trade unions, the co-operative movement, or a political party'. 'The human fund is regarded as in all respects common, and freedom of access to it as a right constituted by one's humanity; yet such access, in whatever kind, is common or it is nothing. Not the individual, but the whole society will move'. 'Class feeling is a mode, rather than a uniform possession of all the individuals who might, objectively, be assigned to that class. When we speak, for instance of a working-class idea, we do not mean that all working people possess it, or even approve of it. We mean, rather, that this is the essential idea embodied in the organisations and institutions which that class creates: the working class movement as a tendency, rather than all working-class people as individuals'. There is 'an idea that we properly associate with the working class: an idea which, whether it is called communism, socialism, or co-operation, regards society neither as neutral nor as protective, but as the positive means for all kinds of development, including individual development. Development and advantage are not individually but commonly interpreted. The provision of the means of life, alike in production and distribution, will be collective and mutual'.

Old old labour is perhaps a clumsy term for the phenomenon identified by the Webb, Baernreither and Williams. Elsewhere I have theorised the phenomenon as 'associationism', and situated it as one socialism among three, and contrasted it with the other two: 'collectivism' and 'statism' (Yeo, 1987).

The advantage of 'old old labour', however, is that the concept establishes a connection with New Labour, and therefore with present policy and politics. Old old labour is also less teleological than 'pre-Labour' (Conaty, 1998). The Labour Party did not have to take the orthodox, Party Political form that it took during the twentieth century, any more than Politics has to take a Party form for the entire twenty-first century. 'Pre-Labour' has the added disadvantage of encouraging its companion 'post-labour', which has emerged recently to add to the mystification of post...industrial, modern etc. The concept 'old old labour' provides:

- a way of drawing attention to the size and range of the small l 'labour' phenomena which preceded the Labour Party in Britain. (CMEs were only one of these phenomena, but very important among them. A full social history of 'labour' as keyword in Britain from the medieval period onwards is urgently needed);
- a way of contrasting these phenomena with the statist, Political Party forms of Old Labour from 1900 onwards. 'Old Labour' has been much used as an epithet since the late 1990s in order to make space for 'New'. Contrasting 'old Labour' with 'old old labour' may help to shift Old Labour from its status as an insult, or an answering badge of pride, towards a useful, sharper, more conceptual role; and

- a way of establishing an affinity between old old labour and the ‘new’ politics of the 1980s onwards in Britain, of which New Labour was one, but only one, example. There is no reason for the ‘new’ to weaken itself by pretending that the past does not belong to the same country as itself.

More ambitiously, old old labour lead back to Marx’s concept of ‘associated labour’. This grew from co-operative and mutual theory and practice using exactly that language during the first half of the nineteenth century. By leading back in that direction, old old labour points to a characteristically co-operative and mutual theory of ‘the transition’ to a post-capitalist social formation. This theory was heralded by Marx in *Capital* volume 3 (chap. 27) as ‘the associated mode of production’. It has been largely hidden from history by Old Labour, indeed by the old Left and by dominant ‘Socialism’ itself, about which CMEs were always doubtful. Such intellectual capital needs releasing (Yeo, 1983).

In summary, two concepts, one new, one old - CME and ‘Old, old labour’ are offered here as possible tools for the release of the capital being described. They could assist and encourage further empirical work on it - deeper excavation than can be attempted in a brief report of this kind.

What is going on now in Britain which might make deeper excavation relevant?

5. THE CO-OPERATIVE COMMISSION AS OCCASION

Why, in this context, does a Commission provide an occasion?

The thinking and research on which this report is based began some months before a ‘Co-operative Commission’ was set up in February 2000. The Commission reported in Jan 2001. The fact of a Co-operative Commission in 2000- 2001, however, as well as some of the content of its Report, became serviceable to this report in a number of ways. To return to the title of my report, ‘Co-operative and Mutual Enterprises in Britain: a usable past for a modern future’, the Commission immediately suggested why the past of CMEs in Britain as old old labour, may be usable now, in new times. The Commission provided a convenient sign of the times, pointing to as well as demanding further work. Together with annual conferences on mutuality co-sponsored by the United Kingdom Co-operative Council (UKCC), the Association of Friendly Societies (AFS) and the Building Societies Association (BSA) each year in London since 1997, the Commission constituted the most hopeful public forum for Co-operative and Mutual Enterprises as an entity, since the 1950s.

There are other signs of the times indicating that a period of stasis for old CMEs, which lasted from c.1960 to c.1990, and which was followed by a period of external attack, or demutualisation (from c.1990 to the present) may be coming to an end. The most dramatic sign of the times was the winning of a global domain name dot coop, to join dot com. This was the result of lobbying by Poptel, the co-operative internet service provider, working in partnership with the National Cooperative Business Alliance in the United States. In May 2001 Social Enterprise London (SEL) convened a conference at which a U.K. Social Enterprise Alliance was formed, with the support of the Co-operative Union. The objective of the Alliance is to amplify and to clarify the voice of Social Enterprise, widely understood, to government. Also during 2001, the Co-operative Union formed a functional alliance with the UKCC, and with Co-operative Support Organisations (CSOs) across the UK. A joint

Research Officer's post was created, between the UKCC and the Co-operative Union, and two 'All Movement' posts were also brought into being. These posts bridge an historic gap - a late-nineteenth century division of labour - between worker/producer co-ops on the one hand and the retail/ consumer movement on the other. In June 2001 the 7th and largest European Conference on Social Economy was held in Sweden, under the title 'The Social Capital of the Future'. Further de-mutualisation of mutuals which have neglected the co-operative and mutual advantage, such as Friends Provident which joined other insurance and financial services giants by de-mutualising in June 2001, could serve as old season pruning, to promote new season growth. 'Institutions which have', in R.H.Tawney's phrase 'died as creeds but which continue to survive as habits', can inhibit undergrowth, like large trees in the forest.

The Co-operative Commission was a joint initiative between the Labour Party and the Co-operative Movement. It worked with the leas of the idea of a labour movement in Britain with three 'wings', Party, Trade Unions and Co-op. The Commission was legitimised in Labour circles by harking back to the National Council of Labour (NCL) founded in 1934. The NCL began life in 1905 as the 'Joint Board' of the Labour Party, the TUC and the General Federation of Trade Unions. It had not met for many years. Such a revival is of interest to more than labour historians, coming about at the level at which it did. This was by agreement between a New Labour Prime Minister, the General Secretary of the TUC, and the Chief Executive of the Co-operative Wholesale Society (now the Co-operative Group). In his Presidential Address to Co-op. Congress in May 2001, Lord Len Fyfe, former Chair of the CWS and Chief Executive of the Midlands Co-operative Society, whose life has been lived within the retail Co-operative Movement, made it clear the extent to which he saw the Co-operative Movement, the Trades Unions and the Labour Party as historically inseparable, from a modernising rather than a heritage point of view. At the same Co-op Congress John Monks, General Secretary of the TUC, presented the Commission Report for approval by Congress.

The Commission's published idea of the 'process and overview' which informed its work was as follows:

The Co-operative Commission was set up ... with the backing of Tony Blair, following a call by leaders of the Co-operative Movement. The members of the Commission comprised business leaders, politicians, trade unionists and co-operators, under the Chairmanship of John Monks, General Secretary of the TUC.

The Commission was asked to take an independent look at the sector, against the immediate background of the (then) pending merger of the two largest UK Co-operatives, CWS and CRS (which took place in April 2000). This created a national Society which accounts for over half of the total sector, the other half being located in around ten regional Societies, and thirty or so local and community Co-operatives.

The wider background was one of long-term decline of the sector, in terms of numbers of Societies, market share, and profitability. Nevertheless, the sheer size of the Co-operative Movement still surprises those not familiar with it. The Co-op is a significant retailer, with a turnover of over £8 billion, a customer base of 10 million, upwards of 90,000 employees, and assets with a market value of perhaps £5 billion.. Within the Co-op 'family', there are notable success stories, such as The Co-operative Bank, while the Co-op is the leading player in

markets as diverse as funeral services and farming. On the other hand, overall, the return on the Movement's assets is well below comparable performance in plcs.

All this makes the Co-op in general, and CWS in particular, attractive to the 'demutualiser'. The Co-op has firmly rejected this idea, and has equally firmly fought off predators: nevertheless, there is now a widespread acceptance that the best long-term defence is to run a 'successful Co-operative business'. In other words, the sector must succeed both as a business, in terms of its performance - and as a Co-operative, meeting its social goals.

In their letter of 14 January 2000 to the Prime Minister suggesting the Commission, leaders of the United Kingdom Co-operative Council (UKCC), the Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS) and the Co-operative Union, showed a sense of the value of the past. They also showed a sense of the present coincidence between their values and those of the other wings of the movement: and a sense of what John Stuart Mill in later editions of his *Principles of Political Economy* called the 'futurity' of the movement.

In the 1950s, Hugh Gaitskell, then Leader of the Labour Party, chaired a commission to review the structure of the Co-op (Independent Commission, 1958). We believe that the time is now ripe for a new Commission to help define and demonstrate the relevance of co-operation for the twenty-first century and how it contributes more fully to the values which we all share.

The Commission Report, published in January 2001 as *The Co-operative Advantage* (Commission, 2001) provided a peg for this report. Whereas the 1958 report tended to recommend to Co-operative Societies that they should become more like contemporary businesses, the 2001 report tended to recommend that Co-operative Societies should become more like the best of themselves: *co-operative* societies trading on the advantage they have over contemporary businesses. Contemporary businesses could become more like Co-operative Societies. But only if they, and their customers, know about such Societies and their usable past.

One intended outcome of this report, therefore, is to encourage work which knows about, supplements and builds upon the Commissioners' analyses and recommendations. In seeking to go beyond *The Co-operative Advantage*, this report has a different point of address from that of the Commission.

The Commissioners addressed the retail Co-operative Movement directly, to the inevitable neglect of other audiences. They had a year to work in, and a giant family of enterprises to attempt to modernise, all of them proudly independent – indeed, by definition so: the fourth ICA Principle is 'Autonomy and Independence'. *The Co-operative Advantage* was written with evidence collected through consultative meetings organised through the Co-operative Union, with the Union's member Societies (overwhelmingly retail), and with regional Co-operative Support Organisations (CSOs). The public to which the consultations were open was largely an internal one.

CSOs reach beyond retail Societies, extending to Co-operative Development Agencies (CDAs) and Regional Co-operative Councils (RCCs). Crucial 'external' evidence was submitted to the Commission, for instance by the Building Societies Association (BSA). The Commission commissioned work from external consultants and from lawyers. But the

Report's formal passage was through Co-operative Congress in May 2001. It has been adopted for further action by and through the Co-operative Union and its governing Congress. Congress and the Union are still mainly 'owned' by the retail movement, even though this ownership is now being extended. *The Co-operative Advantage* was not written or marketed, as text, as if it could excite widespread interest outside the Co-operative Movement. So the most pertinent performance indicator for the Report will be whether its recommendations are put into action by retail Co-ops. more quickly and more completely than were those of the 1958 Independent Commission.

More than an occasion: features in common between this report and the Commission

The Co-operative Commission Report and this report share some key features and terminology. They may be set out, for clarity, as follows:

- the terminology of 'CMEs', which was adopted from the Oxfordshire Mutuality Task Force in the text of *The Co-operative Advantage*;
- the impulse behind *The Co-operative Advantage*. This was to protect and to grow the retail co-operative movement in Britain as host and support for co-operation among co-operatives. An example of this role was provided by Co-operative Futures and Oxford Swindon and Gloucester Co-operative Society's *Directory* published in 2001. This publication set a successful co-operative retail business alongside a network of CMEs within its trading area. Such a seemingly obvious initiative would have been unlikely even at the level of the Co-operative Union (whose inherited remit encouraged it) at any time between 1950 and 2000 (Co-op Directory, 2001);
- the direction in which *The Co-operative Advantage* points. This is towards a successful 'family' of Co-operative businesses. The word 'family' has become of great importance to the self-presentation of the Co-operative Group. Modern co-operators also place an equal emphasis on *successful*, *co-operative* and *business*. The word 'family' of businesses, first used within the Co-operative Movement to synergise the CWS, the Co-operative Bank and the Co-operative Insurance Society, is now deployed more widely than that, to include independent, regional Societies. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, there has been a dream of One Big Society. Mergers reduced independent retail Societies from more than 1,000 in 1900 to less than 50 in 2000. 'Family' introduces a new phase of working together, with Co-operative Societies independent but united, separate but together, autonomous but underpinned by a common brand, a single supply chain, and mutually-owned, federally-supplied services. (Such a usage of 'family' might also serve to enrich dominant and under-theorised usages of 'the family' in wider political and social discourse. It leads back to Robert Owen's ambition to replace the competitive, nuclear family with the co-operative, universal family - the family of humanity, of 'All Classes and All Nations'. Turning the Co-op into a family is one thing, turning the family into a Co-op is quite another thing: new, new, as well as old, old; and
- the instrument which *The Co-operative Advantage* favours for successful co-operative businesses. This instrument is a virtuous circle. The circle moves from social goals to competitive advantage to commercial success, back to social goals etc. This virtuous circle provided the graphic for the cover of the Commission Report, and informed its contents (*Commission, 2001*).

The *context* of this publication and that of the Commission Report is also held in common. The context is one of opportunity, as well as threat.

The *threat* is that of a continuing loss of market share by many older CMEs in Britain, combined with the ambitions of asset strippers inside and outside old and new CMEs. Assets can be stripped internally, through corporate de-mutualisation, some time before any actual sale - to a private buyer or buyers - takes place.

The *opportunity* is that of a revival of interest in co-operation and mutuality in many quarters in Britain, inside and outside CMEs. This interest extends from small groups in the community, to large businesses, trusts, charities and voluntary organisations; from local to national politicians; and from activists to policy makers and academics.

There were 60 **recommendations** in the *Co-operative Commission Report*. They included the convening of a Social Enterprise ‘Summit’ in the UK; a New Ventures Task Force to explore new areas for Co-operative and Mutual Enterprise; concentration of governmental responsibility for CMEs in a single Minister or Department; a Co-operative Foundation to promote social goals; publicly-funded, nationally accredited learning programmes in Citizenship conducted through the Co-operative College; technical support initiatives for improved Information and Communications Technology (ICT) among CMEs ; and steps towards a National Membership Card, usable across CMEs.

One recommendation, however, serves to illustrate the specificity of the Commissioners’ aims, and their willingness to look critically, even at their own CMEs. Sharpness and self-criticism will be preconditions for creative use of the space between idea and reality in this field.

During 1999-2000, the Central Executive of the Co-operative Union reviewed the key variables that determine the success or failure of the Co-operative Society members of the Union as successful co-operative businesses. Key Economic Performance Indicators (KEPIs) were grouped into four major categories: profitability, financial stability, growth, and the ‘co-operative difference’. Co-operative difference was measured a) by annual recruitment of members Society by Society, and b) by the provision of specific member benefits. The Commission recommended that the Union builds on KEPIs by developing another tool for its members: Key Social Performance Indicators (KSPIs). The Co-operative College and the National Centre for Business and Sustainability (NCBS) are working on these. The NCBS is supported through the ethical policy of The Co-operative Bank, based in the four Universities of Greater Manchester. KSPIs have strong roots, not only in the sophistication of ‘social audits’ as developed and applied by new CMEs such as Poptel, the internet services provider co-operative, but also in the social capital literature. (For instance in Putnam, 1993, pp.63-82).

6. NEED AND DEMAND: WHY NOW?

There are reasons beyond the Co-operative Commission for thinking that the early years of the 21st century are a good time for re-viewing CMEs. And for doing so from a base in Britain but with an international outlook. It was not only for ‘heritage’ reasons that Richard

Rodgers' Greenwich Dome contained a giant enlargement of an iconic photograph of the Rochdale Pioneers. Amongst the most generous supporters of the Toad Lane store, the original home of the Pioneers, have been modern Japanese co-operators.

Co-operation and mutuality are subjects 'in the air', to an extent which suggests a diffused need - a weather pattern rather than a single summer day - to which actually-existing CMEs are one appropriate response among others. The *need* is sufficiently evident to be developed as *demand*, among:

- tomorrow's companies;
- today's customers;
- states and markets; and
- 'new political' entrepreneurs.

These may be taken in turn:

Tomorrow's companies

During the 1990s there were a number of signs among private and public companies which suggested that an era of 'mass' production driven by de-skilling and subordination of labour, of the kind associated with F.W.Taylor and Henry Ford, was coming to an end, at least in metropolitan economies and at least at an aspirational level (Braverman, 1974).

The signs included:

- stated commitment to releasing potential amongst *everyone* in all companies
- preoccupation with good 'governance'
- a search for actual rather than abstract 'accountability', by means of hypostasising 'the market'
- burgeoning ideas concerning multiple stakeholding
- interest in 'ownership', at least in the senses of a) co-owning problems and their solution, and b) co-generating and sharing information in a 'knowledge economy'. Knowledge, even when commodified, is more difficult to enclose and to privatise than other commodities.

Examples included: the Royal Society of Arts (RSA), Tomorrow's Company initiative; Investors in People (IIP), driven for its first decade by business-led Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs); cross-grade, all-company, jointly run, work-related (but not job related) learning initiatives such as Employee Development Programmes led by the Ford UK EDAP scheme; flagship private companies such as Unipart and Rover using the language of 'associates' rather than employees, workers, or 'labour'; the ubiquity of the language of 'partnership' and of win-win, long-term shared destiny relations with stakeholders other than external shareholders; Will Hutton's work on stakeholder capitalism, achieving breakthrough with *The State We're In* (1995); and European Social Chapters/ Social Charters, suggesting that individual economic actors are also human, species beings with mutual responsibilities as well as rights, and that states are collectivities which can do more than 'hold the ring'.

Today's customers

During the last five years, there has also been evidence of need for ‘consumption plus’ amongst consumers, patient of being developed as demand amongst customers on the way to becoming members. The word ‘customer’ itself suggests more continuity and greater loyalty than ‘consumer’ (Williams, 1983, 27-36, 188-9). Customer loyalty has become a sought-after prize across many types of enterprise. It can turn into affiliation to, or in co-ops and mutuals membership of, a brand.

There is survey evidence which suggests that the values that underlie co-operation are valued around the world; that a high percentage of people would prefer to buy from co-ops and buy co-op products, other things being equal; and that co-operatives are seen as being of greater benefit to communities than their competitors. At the same time, ‘many co-operatives are not recognised as being co-operatives and their products are not seen as co-operative products’ (Webb, 2000). There is also evidence of an ‘emotional and psychological bond’ between consumers, potential consumers and mutuals such as Building Societies, even where precise understandings are absent (Waite, 2000). Commercial imitation of the Co-operative Bank’s ethical trading, ‘customers who care’, stance; successful consumer revolt against GM foods; widespread interest in declared supply chains; labelling; organic products; environmental impact auditing; fair trade; and sustainability as a common concept, all point in the same direction. Even where such practices are not embedded, they are marketed in order to add to sales. Ideas of a ‘moral economy’, which catalysed co-ops in the eighteenth century flour trade, are emerging once again. The wind against which such ideas took off during the eighteenth century was ‘industrialisation’: in the late twentieth century, the wind blew as ‘globalisation’.

States and markets

There is political encouragement, in the early twenty-first century, to market more social (less anti-social) relations, as the equity contract a good business has with the world.

‘The Market’ is no longer seen as a simple, undifferentiated alternative to ‘The State’. Markets now appear in the plural, along with laws and States. Actual markets, in towns up and down the land always posted their Rules in a prominent place. Those applying to Covent Garden market may still be seen, as part of its re-birth as a site for heritage retailing. Struggles took place over the observance of such Rules, involving the highest Political authority, particularly in times of poor supply or high prices of grain. Regulators are, of course, similarly in place at the present day, for instance in newly constituted markets for necessities such as energy and transport. They steer uneasy paths between public politics and private economics. How markets, states, producers, users, and rules relate to each other in different trading blocs, determine differing ‘business cultures’, differently ruled. Whole national capitalisms are seen as representing different ‘models’, with different social ‘costs’ as seen from one point of view and social ‘benefits’, from another.

There is a new business agenda which, at least in aspiration, echoes co-operative and mutual language. Competition and Co-operation have been put together, in management books with titles such as *Co-opetition* (Nalebuff and Brandenburger, 1997) Dynamic parts of the European model are analysed as *The Associational Economy* (Cooke and Morgan, 1998) Attaching the label ‘social’ to businesses has become a marketing tool. ‘Trust’ is no longer seen as oligopoly, but rather as cost-saving. ‘Social’ businesses range from those with good intentions to those with fully socialised forms. Associates, partners, stakeholders, long-term

shared destiny approaches to the supply chain ...are encouraged within and between tomorrow's companies, and between tomorrow's companies and tomorrow's labour force. Up-skilling is seen as functional to business in a way that de-skilling once was. Qualities such as 'self-reliance, flexibility and breadth' are cultivated generally, for all employees, in a way which would have raised the eyebrows of disciples of F.W.Taylor and Henry Ford.

Giving material expression to such language has been the project of CMEs. Constitutions and rules, values and principles, identities and ethos, partnerships which are co-owned practically as well as in management-speak have been and remain the daily diet of CMEs. The route from naïve, passive consumer-centredness, to user-centredness to partner, to citizen, to member, to informed, active member, is one which Co-operative and Mutual Enterprises set out to travel every day. Such an ambitious destination, for all, is seldom reached. But that is the journey. Built-in to the reach - and sometimes to the grasp - of the 'consumer' co-operative movement in Britain for instance, has been the vision, and the fact, that the 'consumer' and the producer unite in the same humanity, and often in the same human being. They are associated. It is possible to structure divisions of labour in such a way that consumers and producers seldom meet in reality, and only in theory by virtue of a hand which is hidden. Such structured differentiation has never been the project of CMEs. That it has become the project of private capital in a global market was well documented, for example, by Naomi Klein in *No Logo* (1999).

'New political' entrepreneurs

There has been evident need among 'new' politicians of the Right and of the Left - and particularly among those who jettison such categories - to enter the co-operative and mutual discourse, since the New Right of the late 1970s. There was evidence of such need twenty years earlier and at a greater distance from formal Politics, in Ferdinand Hayek on the Right, who influenced Keith Joseph, and in the New Left after 1956, whose influence on New Labour has been well concealed.

Need surfaced as *demand*, by means of the Thatcher government's wish for individuals to take care of their own welfare. This helped to rekindle an interest in Friendly Societies, in the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), the Regulatory Policy Institute (RPI), and the Institute for Civil Society (ICS). Such interest enabled Frank Field's brief license to think the unthinkable, as Minister of State at the Department of Social Security (DSS), through 1997-8. Field suggested that products like Stakeholder Pensions (and later Individual Welfare Accounts) might be ring-fenced to providers with one type of governance rather than another, namely to financial service providers who could add the CME adjective 'democratic' to the plc adjective 'financial'. The Co-operative Group's portfolio of financial services products, such as Individual Savings Accounts provided through the Co-operative Insurance Society (CIS), and Shop and Save Accounts provided by the Co-operative Bank and retail stores, combined with a recommendation in the Co-operative Commission's report for a New Ventures Group to come into being across Societies, articulated demand in this area. HM Treasury was consulting on Development Accounts or 'Baby Bonds' as potential contributors to an Asset-Based Welfare Strategy during 2001. CMEs historic project was to pioneer asset-based welfare, mutual because it was welfare by and for those for whom their capacity to co-operate was their main - at times their only - asset.

Demand may be too weak a word. Goethe's phrase '*elective affinity*' might be better. In his *Elective Affinities* (1809), Goethe was interested in natures and in substances which 'most decidedly seek and embrace one another, modify one another, and together form a new substance'. 'Those natures which, when they meet, quickly lay hold on and mutually affect one another, we call affined'. For Max Weber, the protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism, in his book of that name, were elective affinities in the same, alchemical sense. Throughout his comparative work, on ancient Judaism, Chinese society, and among other 'religious rejections of the world and their directions', Weber searched for that which precipitated (or prevented) the fusion which produced and then diffused modern capitalist 'rationality' (Weber, 1930). H. Tawney followed Weber in his *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* and wondered whether modern (1920s to 1950s) socialists could find, in their own associations and movements, natures which could together form a new substance. The mystery is why such a moralist as Tawney overlooked the moral economy latent in the CMEs by which the Labour Party - his chosen vessel - was surrounded and by means of which it had been brought into being.

7. ELECTIVE AFFINITIES?: THE NEW POLITICS AND CO-OPERATIVE AND MUTUAL ENTERPRISE

Elective affinities between the new politics and co-operative and mutual enterprise at the beginning of the twenty-first century could cluster in any one of five areas. In each of these areas 'modifications between one another' are taking place. 'New substances', as yet indeterminate, are forming.

In this report, these five areas will be described as modern 'agenda headings' for CMEs. CMEs are now being in-formed and determined/limited by questions and issues in each of these areas, whether they are aware of them or not. More positively, CMEs are now contributing, and could contribute more to these questions and issues to the extent that they are made explicit. The areas are:

- the private and the public
- the State
- independence
- belonging and democracy
- divisions of labour

Brief consideration of each of these will serve to outline questions and issues for further discussion and research in the subject area of this report.

The private and the public

There has been a search in the new politics for forms of enterprise and association which are neither old style private, nor old style public. CMEs are such forms, in practise (Goethe's 'new substances') As such, they extend dominant meanings of the 'private' and the 'public'. They retain and conserve residual meanings of these keywords. They may well constitute emergent, or new meanings, which are not *either* public *or* private (Williams, 1976. The idea of a 'keyword' is fundamental to this report, related to 'islands of meaning' as used above).

CMEs are public in so far as they have open membership. Open membership is ‘membership unlimited’ in the sense that membership is not limited by privilege, or private law, of the kind which excludes by birth, property, class, race, creed or ‘attitude’ more generally.

Faces fit CMEs by virtue of being human, not by virtue of those to whom they belong, and not by virtue of what belongings those people may have. ‘Our humanity is our title deed’. ‘Members unlimited’ was a phrase of the 1790s, expressing what was then a revolutionary claim towards universality, or social inclusion, of the people by the people for the people, everyone. This was revolutionary because it was a claim to extend and thereby to redefine the ‘public’. It was an attempt to extend an emergent ‘public sphere’ in Habermas’ sense beyond an emergent - and self-defining - ‘middle class’, in unlimited ways.

The question at issue was a revolutionary one. Did ‘the people’ or, as Tom Paine used the term, ‘the nation’, include everyone, or not? A new universe of voluntary association (Eley, 1981) was coming into being during the second half of the eighteenth century in Britain. How universal would it turn out to be? ‘Association’ for many purposes - for forming ‘public opinion’, for defence of particular, new ‘publics’ and their ‘interests’ against more ancient ones - was a major feature of late-eighteenth century Britain. Then, to put it crudely, came the French Revolution. Could everyone, *tout le monde*, gain entry, even those without particular kinds of *culottes*? The question has been there to be asked ever since.

The phrase ‘members unlimited’ appeared in the rules of Corresponding Societies, which were designed to establish free, national channels of communication between working people. In ‘Members Unlimited’, the opening chapter of *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), E.P. Thompson wrote that:

Today we might pass over such a rule as a commonplace; and yet it is one of the hinges upon which history turns. It signified the end to any notion of exclusiveness, of politics as the preserve of any hereditary elite or property group... To throw open the doors to propaganda and agitation in this ‘unlimited’ way implied a new notion of democracy, which cast aside ancient inhibitions and trusted to self-activating and self-organizing processes among the common people (p.24).

For all, everyone ... thus acquired a more than Platonic meaning.

CMEs are also public - public-making - in so far as they grow by means of federation, or co-operation among co-operators, until, in aspiration at least, they become universal. The project was for such forms to become the norm; to set the rules of economy and society ; to define, in action, a common- or public, wealth, a state of the union, a new moral world. This was a re-shaping or rather, a discontinuous extension, of the ‘public’, redefining that space at a molten moment, just as it was coming into being. The public space need no longer be for some self-defining ‘middle’ class, an enclosure for those who brought the language, and fact, of ‘class’, in its modern sense, into being. It was not to be confined to a hole in the corner. It was not to be limited by being forever emergent or residual (a ‘sector’) among dominant, old-style ‘private’ or old-style ‘public’, forms. It was not to be patronising, or to need patrons, though dispensing with such has been a long and unfinished struggle.


CMEs are private too, in so far as their value accrues to members, as *mutual* capital. The value they labour to make is their own, but more than individually so. (In the same way that

CMEs loosen twentieth-century ties between public and state, so they also loosen ties between private and individual). Within their project there is an idea of exclusive dealing, leading to exclusive member benefit. The value belongs to no *one* in particular. In that sense it is 'common', and 'open'. But there is also a material bond, expressed as and enabling 'membership': a 'common bond', as in Credit Unions. The bond is deliberate and specific ('voluntary', in the words of the ICA Values and Principles and the Rochdale Pioneers' Rules), as well as unconscious and Platonic (common humanity, fraternity nationhood etc). The value can be alienated by no one in particular. Much older ideas of ownership than emergent private capitalist ones were at stake during the early-nineteenth century. The question was: could an older 'moral' economy, which centered multiple (not exclusive) use, human need, and customs in common, be customised and made more deliberate through freely chosen 'membership' modes? Could society be constituted by means of Societies?

"Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn". The breakthrough of the new political economy of the free market was also the breakdown of the old moral economy of provision. After the wars all that was left of it was charity - and Speenhamland. The moral economy of the crowd took longer to die: it is picked up by the early co-operative flour mills, by some Owenite socialists, and *it lingered on for years somewhere in the bowels of the Co-operative Wholesale Society* (my emphasis, Thompson, 1991 p.258).

When J.T.W. Mitchell was in charge of the CWS, during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the moral economy implicit in the operations of the CWS was displayed more publicly than Thompson's words imply, as indeed it still is under the stewardship of Graham Melmoth, Chief Executive of the Co-operative Group (CWS) Ltd. (Yeo, 1995).

The value in such enterprises, or Societies, belongs to users/ members, by virtue of their use and membership, their work or labour. Members/users are the owners. Hence Nigel Lawson's puzzlement concerning the Trustee Savings Bank movement, when he was trying to 'privatise' it during the 1980s. None of his advisers could tell him who the owners were, in the sense of enabling him to sell the Bank in such a way as to put money into the 'public' purse, thus reducing 'private' taxation. In a sense in CMEs, ownership is specific, enclosed, or 'private'. But it is not the same as *individual* private ownership. In Trusts, ownership rights are held in trust. In CMEs they are held severally, together, or in common. Ownership as membership, is ownership of more than an individual, alienable entity. Membership is of a Society which has continuity across time.

Such an idea of ownership is both an historical survival, and a future possibility (Cohen, 2001 

New forms began to be advocated: community trusts, public interest companies, and so on. Societies, such as CMEs, exist by virtue of more than singular decisions. Living members are

heirs to the capital of former members. They are trustees for the capital of future members. That is in the nature of co-operative and mutual enterprise. Ownership means co-owning a Society which has an existence beyond the aggregate of any particular cohort of individual owners. Owners (members) have material responsibilities as well as rights, because of the nature of what it is that they own (are members of). Members belong to what they own, as well as the other way round. They are neither subordinate to what other people own, nor superordinate to what they themselves own. They form part of it. Something not easily described as private or public, in the dominant senses of those terms, has been residual in Britain for two centuries. It may now be emergent once more.

The State

The State is no longer seen as the sole - or even the main - instrument with which to address public, policy issues.

This has been so in the new politics of the Right, going back to the late 1970s. Ever since then, the state has at least been problematised. This was also the case in the new politics of the Left, at a theoretical and 'community' level since 1956 (the New Left). And at a practical, Political level since the late 1990s (New Labour).

At a theoretical level, there was an emergent view of the state among tendencies in the New Left in the 1970s as a set of (changing) relations of production and thus as amenable to reconstitution through newly constructed relations, of a more communal, even co-operative and mutual kind. Powerful critiques of statist social democracy from the Left prepared the way for related critiques from the Right, some fifteen years later. The political centre - centre-ground politics - also distances itself from the State, defining itself in terms of middle, third etc. ways, running between public and private, state and market etc.

CMEs do not and never have seen the State as the main instrument with which to address policy issues.

Indeed, for CMEs, 'policy' means their own practice rather than that of some other agent. CMEs tend to go direct, rather than through middlemen, against whom they have always worked. People who only add value to, or subtract value from, the productive process by means of an exclusively financial role (like private shareholders) or by means of an exclusively bureaucratic role (like public functionaries) have not been highly rated within or between CMEs. Parasitism has been as obnoxious to them as it was to another twentieth-century 'New' formation - the New Liberals before 1914. (New Liberalism dared to address aristocratic landowners as parasites: 'they toil not', as Lloyd George said from the steps of Limehouse town hall in 1909, 'neither do they spin').

CMEs join up policy by means of joined-up practice. Joining-up, in that sense, is what they are and what they do. Joining up is done as directly as can be achieved in a complex economy and society. Hence the affinity of CMEs with new political initiatives like LearnDirect, HealthDirect, or Supporters Direct. Such initiatives cut out middle layers which are *only* bureaucratic or only financial.

As democracy itself becomes more direct, aided by information and communications technology, political processes will become more available to direct, unmediated reciprocity.

CMEs do not endow the State with a capital letter or a definite article. They are not statist, in that sense. And they are not anti-state, either. Unlike the New Right, they tend not to abstract 'the Individual'. To each according to what they can get, becomes from each according to their ability. To abstract the individual is simply to flip the State/Individual coin : two sides of the same coin, historically inseparable. CMEs prefer to deal in other currency. They see the task as that of re-making the changing set of more, or less, social relations which constitute states. The *prima facie* affinity is more with a Left than with the new Right, in so far as CMEs never considered that 'the State' could be magic'd out of existence by 'sovereign' Individuals or by the hidden hand of 'the Market'. That dream was always likely to work out in exclusive rather than inclusive ways, for the few rather than for everyone. The affinity, however, is not with Old Labour either which, at its most extreme, magic'd the market out of existence. The affinity is with old, old, or pre-statist labour: a deep resource for New Labour, in the lands of its heart where 'these things' are still remembered, and where The Thing (William Cobbett's characterisation of the state apparatus and old corruption) has never been seen as an ally.

Independence

'Independence' is now highly prized. It is seen as a virtue, at most points on the new political spectrum. From the top down, independence is nurtured as a necessity, at a time when rising demand and rising costs mean that dependence, say on the State or the employer, would be expensive and unlikely to generate the enterprise capable of meeting the alienated costs. From the bottom up, independence is also cultivated, at a time when pressure on resources, and their deterioration locally and globally, means that self-help is also seen as necessary for sustainable life.

Independence has also been a keyword for old, old labour's associations and enterprises. The proliferation of Unions and union branches; of Co-operative Societies; local Building Societies; place-specific and craft-specific Friendly Societies; and Mutual Improvement Societies and Institutes which resisted regional, let alone national Unions, was a feature of nineteenth century culture in Britain. Clubs in the Club and Institute Union are independent. A national Union was funded through Associate or Pass Cards, using the Union as a paid clearing house for such cards, allowing members of one Club to socialise and to drink in any other affiliated Club while away from home. So jealously do independent Clubs guard their independence, and such is their status as 'private' clubs, that who they admit as members, and whether, for instance, they admit women, remains a matter for them rather than their Union. Mergers and rationalisations, laws and regulations, began to bite on the independence of CMEs in noticeable ways only during the second half of the twentieth century.

Pride in independence in CMEs, however, goes with realising that it is not the same as individualism, or with the 'private' in the dominant, individual sense of that word. Co-operative and Mutual Enterprise is based upon association, or getting together. CMEs think and act in the way that they do because of their experience that independence is only available to excluded, less privileged people by means of getting together, or co-operating. Independence, for people without 'private' means, demands organisation, or co-operation. Co-operation requires specific forms of association: self generated, self managed, and self controlled.

Belonging and Democracy

There is an ecology of 'belonging' and of 'membership' in the modern world which has ugly and dangerous elements within it.

Belonging remains an evident human desire, even a demand. It is currently expressed within modern societies in at least four forms, each of which may be read as de-formations from a fully, or generally, democratic point of view. Each of these four forms co-exists with a widely acknowledged 'democratic deficit', that is to say a deficit among all existing organisations of organisations which are formally democratic, and a deficit among formal democratic organisations of organisations in which a large number of people practice democratic participation.

The four forms are:

- familial, or domestic belonging, known as belonging to 'the family'
- tribal, known often as 'sub-cultural' belonging, including hyper-active membership within 'cultures of exclusion'
- millennial, or sectarian belonging, known now as membership of 'faith-based communities'. These are very tightly, even totally, participatory, with membership occluding everything else in members' lives. 'Fundamentalism' is too narrow a term for such forms of total belonging, *against* society not *to* society.
- ethnic, or national belonging, where membership of the 'nation' inheres, not in people who live in a place, but in people of one ethnicity and/or of one belief. Such people belong to each other so much that they indulge in 'cleansing' of other folk, especially those, on the face of it, near to them.

All these flourish. Numbers and organisational forms need detailed mapping. With the help of such maps, a typology and then an ecology of membership in modern Britain and elsewhere in the world could be outlined.

The importance of these forms in the context of this report is that all of them may be contrasted with CMEs. An ecology in which such forms flourish is not one in which CMEs are likely to flourish, unless they take on similar characteristics. There is an obvious affinity between CMEs and fertile soil for flourishing, active associational forms in civil society, at some distance from 'state' and from 'market', 'public' and 'private' etc. but not with the particular forms outlined here. The contrasts should by now be obvious. The privacy, lack of civility, lack of interest in - sometimes explicit hostility to - participatory democracy at any federal, general, level (as opposed to within their own forms) - of families, tribes, sects and 'nations' is a striking characteristic. Families, tribes, sects and 'nations' are not about co-operation and mutuality, even between themselves and cognate forms, let alone between themselves and (to them) dissonant forms. Their energy comes from working against allies - the closer, the more opposition - rather than from working with them in order to constitute a wider society. Their identity comes from having *no* allies. Tightness and exclusivity characterise them all. 'Mutuality' *within* may be strong, as *gemeinschaft* if not as *gesellschaft*, but mutuality *between*, especially where difference is in play rather than homogeneity, is weak. In Putnam's terminology such forms bond, but they do not bridge.

This is rather different from ‘voluntary and open membership’ as a Principle or, another Co-operative Principle, ‘co-operation among co-operators’. Within the CME intellectual and practical inheritance, there is a wealth of (now neglected) critique of exactly these familial, tribal, sectarian and national deformations. It may be time to risk renewing such critique, as part of the ‘product’ of Co-operative and Mutual Enterprise. In other words CMEs could risk producing the critique themselves, as part of their public stance. Robert Owen’s critique of the family in the name of community was one, formidable example. Within the CME inheritance the critique would need to be sharp, because some of the deformations have been strongly present, within the practice of older CMEs. Millennial sectarianism has been one way in which social historians have understood the later trajectory of Owen and the Owenites (Harrison, 1969). Many older CMEs turned in on themselves, often in quite ugly ways, during the second half of the twentieth century.

But Co-operative and Mutual Enterprise as idea and as practice - however partial and ‘unsuccessful’ its efforts to make membership meaningful may be - remains a key player within the ecology of ‘membership’ in modern societies, and in contests over its meanings. CMEs have more than an affinity with ‘belonging’. That is what they are about. They therefore raise the question quite sharply: in what forms of association? They need not accept de-formations of membership and of belonging as the only forms for which there is demand. CMEs could mount a positive critique of them in the name of conscious co-operation, deliberate mutuality, union, a friendly society. The slogan ‘successful co-operative business with an equal emphasis on all three words’ is now much used by dynamic Co-operative Societies in Britain. The Co-operative Commission report, *The Co-operative Advantage* (2001) returned to it. As key elements in a wider ecology of associational forms of belonging, and as players in a wider, democratic game, CMEs may need to get used to playing their high risk card in the twenty-first century: *co-operative* (and mutual), alongside the safer cards which have shaped their game (but not always taken the tricks) during the twentieth century: *successful* and *business*. Their business *is...* co-operation and mutuality.

Divisions of labour

One way of putting together the four affinities described above is that each of them addresses the question: ‘who does what?’. Pursuing this question may also serve to further specify the unique offer made by CMEs - their ‘nature’ as elements of a potential new substance.

‘Who does what?’ is a simple way of referring to the social division of labour. How the ‘who does what?’ question is answered, in detail, determines how social or anti-social the division of labour at any one time actually is. A social division of labour, in a full sense of the word ‘social’, would be an inclusive set of arrangements, working against ‘social exclusion’. The ‘many’ join, own, can be and can do...more of what there is to join, own, be and do at any one time, in any one place. At utopian, inspiring, motivating, best, this becomes all for everyone: all for one and one for all. A less social division of labour is an exclusive one, in which only ‘the few’ can join, own, be and do what there is to join, own, be and do.... At divine, theological, de-motivating worst, only One, God alone. The single whole was fashioned for a god alone’. Samuel Smiles, a nineteenth-century prophet of associated or collective self-help rather than of the individualism which appropriated him during the twentieth century, summarised the urge towards sociality, in his liberal, revolutionary proposition that ‘all men might become what some men are’. Writing a century later than

1859, he would have written ‘people’, not ‘men’. When John Ruskin opposed divisions of labour in Victorian capitalism as divisions between *humans* generating illth (competition) and proposed divisions of labour as divisions of work generating wealth, it was social co-operation which he was advocating (Ruskin, 1857).

In the ur-drama of modernity, *Faust*, Goethe stated the extremes. On the one hand, the social, or inclusive. This was Faust’s impulse, in Part One of the drama,

‘Whatever is the lot of humankind/ I want to taste within my deepest self’.

This impulse was latent in nineteenth-century liberalism. The same impulse drove some, but not all socialisms, and communisms. On the other hand, the anti-social. This was epitomised in Mephistopheles’ dictum:

‘Believe the likes of me: the single whole/Was fashioned for a god alone’.

Later in the story of *Faust*, the roles were reversed. It is Mephistopheles who urged:

‘If life you want, then find it as your own’.

By then, Faust had been driven towards the few, or rather the One, or the ultimately anti-social division of labour:

‘To end the greatest work designed/A thousand hands need but one mind’³

Such a single mind may, of course, be divine. But during the darkest days of the twentieth century it became terrestrial. It appeared as such in the worst of twentieth-century, Fordist, very un-mutual and unco-operative enterprises, economic and political. This was anticipated in Marx’s *Capital* (volume 1) where he speculated that, if allowed, there would only ever be one capitalist, pure and simple, perfect and entire, in whom the drives of Capital had been completely embodied in human, singular, intensely exclusive, anti-social, form. The socialisation of capital, the already visible ‘associated mode’, epitomised in CMEs, could, and perhaps now will, prevent such a single headed, hydra-handed body from ever stalking the face of the earth.

Answering the who does what? question carefully and critically, is one way of describing what CMEs do. A *social* division of labour, in the strong sense of the word social, in other words a division of labour which shares the tasks rather than divides the humans, is the product of CMEs. This is what CMEs make: social, rather than anti-social relations.

Answering the ‘who does what?’ question in detail, within and between enterprises, may also be a way of calibrating *degrees* of co-operation and mutuality, more precisely, for instance, than Leadbeater’s distinction between *ethos* and *form* (Leadbeater and Christie, 1999). It may be a way of answering the question: ‘how co-operative and mutual is any given CME?’, or, for that matter, ‘how co-operative and mutual is the polity - the society itself, as well as the Societies which constitute it?’

³ *Faust*, Part One lines 1770-1, and 1780-1, Part Two, Act II and Act V.

Leadbeater and Christie discriminate - or clarify the co-operative and mutual difference - by using a distinction between *ethos* and *form*. Some CMEs may be mutual in legal form, or in their rules, or in their memoranda and articles of association, without being mutual in their ethos. Conversely, some Companies, Voluntary Associations etc. may not be co-operative and mutual in their form, but may be more co-operative and mutual in their ethos than some CMEs.

But it is also possible to discriminate more precisely by asking the simple question: *who does what?* within any particular CME or group of CMEs. If the division of labour within any particular CME or group of CMEs can be analysed in an identical way to the way in which it can be analysed within and between any other form of enterprise, then it is probable that the enterprises concerned are not very co-operative and mutual.

In other words, if managers manage in exactly the same way as in any other enterprise, and boards govern in exactly the same way as in any other enterprise, and employees work..., and consumers consume..., and investors invest ... and stakes are disposed in exactly the same way as in any other enterprise, then *where is the co-operative and mutual difference?* Such a question can clearly be put, in those precise words, to any CME. An encouraging feature of the present time is that old CMEs are putting it to themselves. As Tom Webb of Global Co-operation Inc (2000) put it, 'co-operatives need to reinvent their businesses continuously', 'in a co-operative, every area of management activity requires a unique co-operative approach'. Such a question is also being put, in different words but from many quarters in the new politics, to the wider society. How 'social' is this society, here and now? How might it be made more so through new, new politics drawing on old, old associational forms?

Mutuality may be used as one way of calibrating degrees of co-operation, just as co-operation may be used as one way of calibrating degrees of mutuality. How mutual is Co-operative X, Y or Z? How co-operative is Mutual X, Y or Z? In pursuit of such questions, *the division of labour* may be helpful, in order to press the question which that notion proposes, and which is also at the heart of the project which in-forms co-operative and mutual enterprise - the question *who does what?* How 'social' at any one time is the division of labour within 'society' in general, within enterprises... but also between enterprises? What can CMEs contribute to the sociality, in a positive sense, of the division of labour between enterprises? Might the contribution of CMEs in this field be one of their unique selling points, banked as it is in their past as social capital?

Commissioners on the Co-operative Commission were concerned to some extent with producers' or workers' or community co-ops, as well as with the retail movement. The Co-operative Union, under the leadership of Pauline Green (Chief Executive since January 2000), more ambitiously, is now aiming to heal the late nineteenth century organisational and conceptual split between producers' and consumers' co-operation. Sidney and Beatrice Webb aided and abetted this split, as they did so many other modern divisions of labour (Harrison, R.J., 2000). The Webbs' work leads to politics as expert, professional function, rather than to politics as everyone's public fulfilment. The Industrial Common Ownership Movement (ICOM) became in significant ways the 'union', or trade association of producers' or workers' co-ops, divided from the Co-op Union. During 2001 the two organisations moved into close association. They are to share office space and common support services, as the Co-op Union develops a wider membership base among CMEs other than retail Co-operative Societies and a more inclusive Co-operative Congress.

Although at their first meeting the Commissioners decided to extend their remit, in principle, beyond 'the' co-op, i.e. the retail movement, and to include other co-operative organisations, their main work had to focus on modernising and extending the co-op. They pointed to the wider field of mutuality without having time to climb over its gate, even to meet old old labour companions of the co-op such as friendly societies, the workers education association, clubs or building societies. Research now needs to enter this field, and to examine its ecology, past and present.

These nineteenth-century, old old labour companions travelled together, for instance, in the life and work of Albert Mansbridge (1876-1952) who worked for the CWS, founded the W.E.A., and championed the Building Society movement, 'brick upon brick' (Mansbridge, 1934). They were still good companions on the Governing Council of Ruskin College, a company limited by guarantee, when I became Principal in 1989. Unions, Clubs, and the Co-operative Movement remain together on the Council of the WEA, even though that Association, at Executive level, now defines itself as a voluntary organisation rather than as a mutual. The WEA no longer sees itself as anything other than vestigially connected to the Co-operative Movement which was integral to its origins. The connections with the Trades Union Movement remain strong (Harrison, J.F.C.1961; Yeo, 1976; Corfield, 1969). As in the case of Town and Country Planning, which was also close to the Co-operative Movement in the days of Ebenezer Howard's pioneer work in the Garden City Movement, the WEA went its specialist, professional, state-funded way during the twentieth century.

Structural differentiation between themselves is a dynamic to which CMEs are subject, as an aspect of the division of labour between organisational forms which takes place within industrial capitalism. Such structural differentiation is also the oppositional wind against which CMEs took off during the early nineteenth century (Smelser, 1959; Thompson, 1963). Their members brought them into being in order to put back together again aspects of their lives which were being divided by industrialisation, its sibling, modernisation and its descendant globalisation. Such divisions were deeply embedded within the economic and social history of labour (Standing, 1999).

8. SOCIAL INVENTIONS AS CAPITAL FOR CMEs TO DRAW UPON

What capital, as it were, have CMEs in Britain inherited from their past which could be released, or made available, for addressing the questions and issues outlined above? A preliminary answer to this question will be offered here in terms of some **social inventions** for which CMEs in Britain have been responsible, each of which merits detailed research.

There are significant ways in which old old labour's associations - friendly societies, working men's clubs, credit unions, building societies, educational associations, and co-operatives - may be seen, not only through their reviving modern presence but also through epitomes of their past, as creatively or useably modern. They were right to see themselves as 'pioneers'. And in ways with which the modern world has not completely caught up.

Social inventions are rarer than technical inventions. CMEs in Britain have been the site of many outstanding social inventions. Indeed, inventive forms of association was the 'product'

of CMEs. This product, better described as *process*, is still useful, from a twenty-first century point of view. Eleven examples will be listed here, in the hope that :

- the policy community beyond CMEs, including government, becomes more prone to act in ways likely to strengthen their practice.
- *today's* users and members of CMEs become more affirming of their values, principles and practices; and *potential* users and members of CMEs see their unique offer more clearly, as modern resource rather than inert heritage.

Headlines for these eleven, exemplary social inventions may be written as follows:

- *Actuarial science is a form of social knowledge*
- *Benefits of centralisation can be combined with those of local autonomy*
- *'Social' is the full opposite of anti-social, rather than an empty adjective.*
- *The form of the enterprise is the product of the enterprise.*
- *Joined up practice is different from joined up policy*
- *Society materialises by means of Societies.*
- *Now need not be mortgaged to Then*
- *Self Help is social, not individual.*
- *Users becoming Members add more value than Purchasers becoming Consumers.*
- *General democracy works, in richer ways than general elections.*
- *Learning is organic*

Brief summaries of each of these follow:

Actuarial science is a form of social knowledge

This came from the early years of the Friendly Society movement, particularly from the giant Affiliated Orders, such as the Oddfellows and the Foresters. How could Societies be grown which were just and fair to people of different ages and states of health - 'equalizing' appeared in the titles of some - while at the same time budget for organisational survival?. Actuarial science quickly became a branch of social science with which to humanise political economy. What was actuarially sound was not necessarily desirable from the point of view of associational equity. The point, however, was to contrive a branch of knowledge within which this could be worked through.

Benefits of centralisation can be combined with those of local autonomy

This social invention came from the retail Co-operative Movement, in the form of the chain store with 'branches' which combined many functions other than shopping. The aspiration was a chain with many links, joining the commercial and social life of its members in their Societies and branches, without constituting a 'chain of command', or a command organisation. The Co-operative Wholesale Society, a major manufacturer, constituted the supply chain. By 1900 the CWS was in the top dozen world businesses by size, quite apart from its other, unique, characteristics. The point, however, was to contrive associational forms with enough horizontal lines to constitute vertical lines, without top-down 'vertical integration'. Early Trades Unions did the same, as did the Club and Institute Union as a member (club) owned union, as did the giant Affiliated Orders of Friendly Society (the Foresters, Oddfellows, Rechabites and others).

‘Social’ as the full opposite of anti-social, rather than as an empty adjective.

‘Social’ and ‘society’ have been abstracted in such a way that they can be applied to almost any human or animal entity, regardless of process, and of forms of ownership, membership and governance. One way to recall the ‘social’ (alongside other abstractions such as ‘the public’, and ‘the community’) is for CMEs to take pride in the fact that the *social* movement once meant the actively democratic direction in which working people’s associations were pushing the wider society from the 1840s onwards. It may come as a surprise that the phrase ‘social science’ springs from the early-nineteenth century co-operative and mutual movement. It was coined by that movement in order to critique a body of thought and practice which they saw as opposed to CMEs, and as distinctly anti-social, namely ‘political economy’ (‘the dismal science’). We might now call much of the latter ‘economics’. *Social* science, the *social* movement, *social* democracy, were all full, material adjectives, belonging, originally (like socialism) to co-operative and mutual enterprises. Socialism, was originally the opposite of individualism and competition. It pre-dated ‘capitalism’ as a label for human arrangements (as did ‘communism’).

The form of the enterprise is the product of the enterprise.

‘Branding’ is a much used modern notion. Logos, in advertising speak, have recently assimilated to the Greek *logos*. Jesper Kunde’s *Corporate Religion* (*Financial Times*, Prentice Hall, 2000) puts it thus:

‘Corporate religion is that which expresses the soul of a company and supports the building of a strong market position.... You have to describe your internal organisation as well as your external market. These internal values create an internal movement that delivers the whole heart and soul of the company.’

Many brands are elaborately wrought illusions that exist only in customers’ minds. According to Kunde, this is outdated. Customers no longer buy the product, they buy the entire company ethos. What companies do, make, or sell is inseparable from what they are. And what they are is socialised first by employees, thus transferring the state’s role, in Durkhemian terms, onto the company. Employees belong to the company before they belong to anything else.

In modern terms, the brand is a set of *relationships* rather than a list of *things*. The contract between the supplier and the purchaser is an *equity* contract, in which it is an ongoing relationship which is sold, more than one-off commodities. Hence the language of ‘equity advertising’, and ‘long-term, shared destiny relationships’ in the new business agenda. Customers are no longer seen as passive consumers, but as co-producers. Hence the use of terms like ‘associates’ in modern companies, rather than ‘employees’.

Were we not here before? Associates is an early-nineteenth century CME word, in the ‘utopian’ work of Charles Fourier, along with association, and associationism. The form itself, in a Co-operative and Mutual Enterprise, is the product, rather than a list of separate commodities. For CMEs their name is their product: a *friendly* society, *union*. The logo **CO-OP** must be one of the most intelligible four- letter words across the languages of the world. It has a meaning more intrinsic than, for instance, an equally successful word which begins

with the same two letters: **COKE**. Co-operation itself - a co-operative society - is the product of Co-ops, more than groceries.

Joined up practice is different from joined up policy.

Joined-up policy is much favoured early in the twenty-first century. The phrase generally refers to policy which is joined up between government departments. It also means policy which derives from more than one compartment of the mind, or university department. Multi-departmental policies in both these senses are now seen as best adapted to tackling urgent issues of public policy.

There are, however, formidable resistances. These are at the level of organisational form. Departments of State and University Departments resist as organisational forms, as well as through the ideas which those organisational forms select. The originality of CMEs is that they brought associational forms into being which have no such built-in obstacles to joined-up practice. CMEs are *about* joining up. That is what their members do with them. They join them. And that is what they do with their products. They join one to another. The policy of CMEs *is* joined up practice. Disembodied policy is what someone, or some specialist group, says some other person's or group's practice should be. Policy implies a division of labour between itself and practice. Policymakers and practitioners within and between CMEs, however, are the same people, doing, with different parts of themselves, different things at different times. Otherwise, they observe, divisions harden into classes. CMEs do not always achieve such co-operation and mutual inclusion. But their values and principles build-in a bias in that direction.

Society materialises by means of Societies.

'We have resolved to constitute the society for which we work', said an early-nineteenth century Co-operator. This is the work which CMEs invented for themselves and still attempt: that of constituting society, by means of Societies.

CMEs consist of Societies whose object is not to define and patrol an insulated 'sector'. CMEs invented plurals (*Societies*) by means of which 'pluralism' - a pluralist society - has a chance to hold together rather than to fall apart. Some types of Society, of course, are not like that. Some clubs, sects, lodges etc. specialise, form alternatives, differentiate, exclude. Some sects reject this world, rather than seek to re-constitute it. CMEs as Societies have more general, universal ambition than that. Their drive is to move from the particular to the general which will consist of and be in-formed by its particulars. Their object as Societies is to multiply productive cells through which other cells join and divide, making for an inclusive whole. In the Co-operative movement this was most often expressed as a Common-wealth: the Co-operative Commonwealth. The originality of CMEs as a method of social advance is that, in their Societies, they proposed that some of this Commonwealth was already there. Either we already are living in a new moral world, in preliminary ways, and have been for some time, or we never will.

Now need not be mortgaged to *Then*

The world cannot be changed all at once. Or rather, it can: people have been and remain inspired by a politics through which the world may be changed all at once. The twentieth

century saw a great deal of such politics. But to the extent that it worked, the general result was scarcely co-operative and mutual. Indeed it was inhuman. It encouraged the view that history had ended, world-change was no longer possible. The poor you have with you always.

The genius or alchemical capacity of co-operation and mutuality, however, is to turn everyone's ordinary materials of today - you and me and our daily needs for food, shelter, sociability etc. - into a practical vision for tomorrow, part of which we make for ourselves today. Now need not be mortgaged to then. By means of what we need, and use, *now*, we build, though Co-operative and Mutual Enterprise, what we want *then*. Necessity and desire need not divorce, or collide. Agency and structure need not for ever quarrel. We *can* be present at our own making, be gardeners of our own circumstance. Co-operators in the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society called such inventive alchemy, 'eating our way into the future'.

Twentieth-century socialist Politics characteristically mortgaged Now for Then. In the twentieth-century Communist narrative, it was 'after The Revolution' to which all must be subordinate. Once the revolution had been made, it became 'after the 'productive forces'', or the base, was in place. In the Social Democratic narrative, it was 'after The Election', to which all must be sacrificed. In each case, the idea of power without office began to seem odd, even disloyal to The Party. Means were divided from ends, processes from products.

In Co-operative and Mutual Enterprises, world-change is worked for. But the benchmark is Now. If everyone is to be contributor as well as beneficiary, process must precede, and determine, product. Members of CMEs do not seek reforms, from above, after which things will be changed. They invent forms, from within, through the ordinary activities of which relations are now changing. For members, process is not divided from product: a successful CME *and then* social, community, ethical, charitable outcomes. A successful co-operative business does not only place equal emphasis on all three words, but *simultaneous* emphasis. Co-operation and mutuality are not a spin-off or bye-product. They constitute (in-form) the producers, and the product.

Self Help is social.

Self help has commonly been seen as individual, even selfish. The lone individual, sovereign, entire and most often male, helps himself. He thereby gets to the top of what is seen as the heap. Such individuals have been heroes to anti-statists - and to little piggies going to market - since the late-nineteenth century.

Nineteenth and twentieth century 'autodidacts' have been conceived as solitary learners, leading heroic lives. They achieved great feats of learning. But, allegedly, on 'auto', as if no one else, no specifiable social relations, were involved. There are dominant forms for education and training. These are public, or State forms, or private forms licensed by the State. They consist of schools, colleges, and universities. 'Education' has become synonymous with what these dominant forms provide. Being 'educated' is measured by what they provide. So an autodidact can be quite 'uneducated', but know a very great deal. From within the dominant forms, everything else appears as if it is without form, or 'informal'.

In fact, of course, the intricate forms of the 'informal' have been painstakingly produced and protected, often by means of association of a deliberate and inventive kind. The inventor and

most famous nineteenth-century exponent of *Self Help*, Samuel Smiles, has been appropriated for the individualist myth. His best seller on the subject was published in 1859, and has been reprinted many times since then. He took the idea of 'self help' from a co-operator, George Jacob Holyoake. Holyoake used 'Self-Help by the People' as the strap line for instalments of his *History of the Rochdale Pioneers*, written for the *Daily News* in 1857.

Mutual Improvement Societies were the original form of what would now be known as Learning Centres. According to Holyoake, they

'consisted of a small number of members who met together either in each other's houses or in a small room hired for the purpose. A few simple rules, a programme of classes, essay readings, and discussions were drawn up, and a small stock of books was collected as the basis of a little library. The instruction was given voluntarily by the members themselves, and was designed primarily to promote proficiency in the three Rs; but in some instances was extended to geography, history, French and chemistry. A discussion circle and opportunities for practising public speaking in debates were also frequently provided. The very simplicity of these societies was their chief virtue, providing a seed which could germinate in many different types of soil. 'They may be regarded', wrote Smiles, 'as the Educational Methodism of our day' ... (he) took a great interest in their development, claiming that in 1847 there was scarcely a town or village in the West Riding without one or more mutual improvement societies.'

The Society that Smiles knew best was started in 1844 in Leeds by four young workmen. By March 1845, they had about a hundred members. It was from lectures he gave to this mutual organisation that Smiles formed the nucleus of *Self Help*, selling more than a quarter of a million copies during his lifetime.

Users becoming Members add more value than Purchasers becoming Consumers.

Since the 1980's, first from the New Right and then from New Labour, there have been powerful new-political impulses against 'producer' and or 'provider' domination. The 'demand side' has been prioritised. And then disaggregated into private units, individual 'consumers' or 'purchasers'.

Wherein, at this point, lies the creative, social invention, capable of coming from the CME inheritance?

The answer lies in the progression - in the early twenty-first century - from *consumer* as antonym to producer, to the notion of *user*, to that of *member*. And in the more-than-individual social benefit such a progression will bring, through belonging to an entity - a Society- through which needs can be articulated as well as demand. The very idea of 'membership' in secular social movements seeking to generalise their own practices, took root in CMEs two centuries ago.

Membership and members take the progression from consumption to use one stage further, uniting user and producer in the same Society, and in the same person(s). We are members one of another. Each of us has many parts. We belong to each other, and hence to a full, less divided notion of our selves. Such belonging is not adequately expressed in thin antonyms between producer and consumer, provider and purchaser, any more than human wholeness is

adequately expressed in splits between separate parts of our selves. Use-value needs to be revisited, through the eyes of those to whom it was a presumption, informing their associational life, rather than purely a scientific term, informing their theoretical positions. The idea of membership is being revisited, in the day-to-day practice of CMEs.

General democracy, or democracy works.

To say that such a phrase as ‘democracy works’ refers to a social invention which attaches particularly to CMEs may seem eccentric. But so was the practice of Co-operative and Mutual Enterprises for all of the nineteenth century, and much of the twentieth. During that time they may be seen as what Blackstone called ‘eccentric remedies’ for a dis-ease in the wider society which they deplored, namely its attenuated democracy. This is now referred to as the democratic deficit.

There is a sense in which CMEs invented general democracy, a fuller concept than general elections. The practice of CMEs was to associate in ambitious enterprises. They believed in the unlimited extension of those enterprises: members unlimited, or open membership, as it is called in the 1995 ICA Identity Statement and in the Rules of the Rochdale Pioneers. Co-operators see their enterprises as emergent versions of an entire society, or world order. They aim at democratic control by members. Members’ democratic opportunities depend upon their voluntary membership, rather than upon their wealth, their qualifications, or the size of their stake in the enterprise.

To call this practice a social invention may be justified when the safeguards for democracy which have characterised dominant versions of representative democracy in Britain are seen for what they are, namely prophylactics against general democracy. The safeguards include careful segregation of the economic from the political, property qualifications for voting, and a very sacred cow, the representative (as opposed to the delegate, and the direct) nature of Parliamentary-democracy-as -we-know-it.

It has been very important to the acceptance of democracy as an idea which the political class feels comfortable with during the twentieth century (which they were not during the nineteenth), that it remains indirect. It also remains seasonal rather than all-weather. And it remains technologically archaic. In spite of a revolution in information and communications technology, modern communications are only beginning to be employed to compile the electoral register, to record votes, to multiply the occasions for general voting, to modernise democratic assemblies including Parliament, and so on. Someone else does democracy for you: your representative. You do not mandate or instruct such a person, who does not count or weigh votes before exercising their own judgement. Edmund Burke remains the prophet, not Tom Paine.

In spite of the fact that modern democracy has been contrasted with classical democracy for more than a century, and analysed with frightening clarity by Schumpeter during the 1930s, its representative nature remains sacred. Fuller versions of democracy are greeted with scepticism, or more harshly.

In such a situation, the idea that democracy works is a social invention attaching to Co-operative and Mutual Enterprises, is not so strange. For much of the last two hundred years the project of CMEs, and occasionally their achievement, has been to show that the economic and the political can be folded back into each other without putting history into reverse; that

democracy need not be limited, and could be general; that detaching democracy from size of stake, and attaching it to humanity, is possible; and that devices for delegation and direct communication among and between members and blocks of members within a democracy, are worth looking at again. *Direct* has always been a key word in Co-operative and Mutual Enterprise, cutting out the middlemen, making the circuits as lean, the lines of communication as flat, as can be. New attention is being paid to *direct* now, as in Learn Direct, Supporters Direct (mutualising the football industry), Health Direct, Unison Direct and so on. That CMEs have existed and continue to do so, may provide resource and reassurance towards politics direct, or general democracy. CMEs are available to begin to redress the widely acknowledged, and dangerously accumulating democratic deficit which exists within the U.K. The alternatives to making membership of a democratic society meaningful to everyone in the twenty-first century are not attractive. Ugly, world-threatening, forms of belonging wait in the wings.

Learning is organic.

Learning centres are now seen as the way forward in education and training, including in the workplace. They have been driven, in the first instance, by information and communications technology. Providers, and even teachers, become less central to learning at a time when so much information is available on line. The old elision between teaching and learning becomes appropriate again. Mentors and facilitators are central. They provide experience, mutual support and encouragement.

Inter-activity becomes increasingly characteristic of on-line learning, allowing instant, and multiple correspondence at a distance and on a scale impossible in single space, face-to-face situations. Communication replaces transmission. As the technology becomes more available in everyone's front room, it is social support, or co-operation and mutuality, which will provide the rationale for getting together to learn in accessible, open-all-hours environments.

As the ideal twenty-first century learning situation is described, it resembles what a learning co-op, or a learning mutual might be. And it also resembles what a Mutual Improvement Society actually was. Such things can be. They have been. In *The Learning Age (1998)*, David Blunkett named the 'great tradition' of learning in Britain as learning through clubs, unions, mechanics' institutes, evening classes and so on. Mutual Improvement Societies, a generic form of co-operation and mutuality in the mid-nineteenth century, were at the core of such learning. They are curiously modern in flavour.

Lifelong Learning as supine training or alienated education is now seen as less inclusive than learning which is organically integrated with the rest of life. The distinction between education and training has broken down, as learning becomes the favoured word. Given sufficient motivation and appropriate support, realising everyone's potential without the inhibiting hierarchies which have been the rationale for so much English education becomes possible.

Such motivation - the capacity to move because there is a purpose to move for - is, of course, the stuff of social movements such as co-ops and mutuals. The organic intellectuals they produced were major players in British social life through the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. Such movements provided much of British education during the most

dynamic phases of the first industrial revolution. They brought much of secular British education into being, long before it congealed as a system.

A characteristic branch store in a retail co-operative society at any time between the mid-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, particularly in the North of England, was the very model of a modern Learning Centre, awaiting only the latest developments in communications technology. In the same, purpose-built building as the shop which supplied the necessities of life, could be found an office, a meeting room or rooms and a library or reading room. Delivery networks delivered sociability as well as bread. Such Institutes - the word survives among modern adult education providers as well as among social movements such as NIACE, the W.I and the C.I.U. - were not seen as separate from life. They grew from life.

9. IMPLICATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

This report has sought to show how the ethos and forms of Co-operative and Mutual enterprise, approached in Britain historically, have a relevance to future economic and social policy and practices in unprecedented ways. They have the potential to support the transition to a learning age, a reformed and viable welfare state, the development of a stronger civil society based on active citizenship and communities, and to offer ways of providing goods and services as an alternative to the polarised public and private sector solutions, with their often conflicting purposes, values and interests. This is in an era when there is a break up in traditional categories and assumptions: CMEs can reflect these changes in positive ways, managing paradoxical practices and interests through multi-stakeholding, bringing together consumers and producers; individuals and communities.

The report has also argued for a reassertion of the value of using history to inform the future, particularly in Britain and particularly in the area of Co-operative and Mutual Enterprise, not as an antiquarian pursuit, but to turn over the soil and enrich an old/new ecology of associational forms in order to enable new growth and development. The cooperative and mutual sector has woken up and become self critical and creative. Old CMEs have begun to ask themselves how co-operative and mutual they have become. This has enabled a recontextualisation and adaptation of successful ideas, inventions, policies and practices. These processes need to be accelerated, aired and promoted and developed if CMEs are to shake off the dusty, Victorian - 'old, old' - image from which they still suffer. In the current policy climate, Co-operative and Mutual enterprise is known and classified, but as yet insufficiently recognised to ensure that its potential can be realised and exploited.

Policy implications

- To encourage a range of government departments to engage in joined up debate about the role and potential contribution of CMEs by bringing together policy makers from different Government Departments, including DTI, the Treasury, Education and Skills, Work and Pensions, Health, and others.
- In the light of the current commitment to evidence informed policy, to make available to policy makers, from the CME side, the case for the value which CMEs can add to social and economic thinking, and hence to policy development.

- To encourage Government departments to consider the value, alongside other options, of a mutual or cooperative solution to problems in policy development and implementation, particularly in areas such as transport, lifelong learning and health, where inherited public and inherited private associational forms have visibly become less than adequate.
- To use the Cooperative Commission report, in itself evidence of Government commitment to exploring the benefits of mutual approaches, as a vehicle to encourage policy debate and inform policy development including but beyond ‘the Co-op.’
- To bring mutual approaches to bear on existing policy initiatives such as neighbourhood renewal, social inclusion, healthcare, asset-based welfare, and learning centres.

Future and next steps

- an empirical survey, or overview, of Co-operatives and Mutuals in Britain today, updated annually
- a conceptual survey of Co-operation and Mutuality in Britain today : from ‘old, old labour’ (the pioneers) to CMEs. Such a survey to address definitional questions - ‘what’s in a name?’ - but by means of an historical, keywords (Williams, 1976) approach, paying close attention to contested meanings of categories such as ‘social enterprise’, ‘mutuality’ and to legislative attempts to define/confine CMEs
- a souvey, or underview, of ‘theory’ *from within* co-operative and mutual enterprise. What questions and issues in and for social scientific and other theory do CMEs, old and new, raise? What issues have they raised in the past? Disciplines need to be dealt with one by one: economics, politics, sociology, law, social psychology, analytical psychology etc. How have CMEs, old and new, dealt, if at all, with these issues? How have social scientific and other theoreticians dealt, if at all, with these issues?
- an organisational souvey, or examination of the organisational dilemmas facing CMEs in Britain, but not only in Britain. Some of these dilemmas have been explicitly realised, or faced, by CMEs. Others are implicit in, or intrinsic to, their existence, and no less important
- a gazetteer of policy issues, analysed in such a way as to make them less vulnerable to marginalisation as interest-group issues - ‘they would suggest that wouldn’t they...’

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