



The hidden alternative

Co-operative values, past, present and future

Edited by

Anthony Webster, Alyson Brown, David Stewart, John K. Walton and Linda Shaw

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The hidden alternative?

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The proclamation by the UN of 2012 as the International Year of Co-operatives represents a milestone in the history of the international co-operative movement. It marks an important recognition within the international community of the role of co-operatives in promoting the ‘fullest possible participation in the economic and social development of all people’, including women and peoples of all ages, creeds, ethnicities and disabilities.¹

It reflects the growth and renewal of co-operatives globally during the early part of the twenty-first century. Whether we focus on the rapid growth of financial co-operatives² or the increase in the numbers of co-operatives across Africa,³ the evidence of a co-operative revival is becoming impossible to ignore. The International Labour Organization (ILO), the lead UN agency on co-operatives, developed the only international government instrument on co-operatives in its Recommendation on the Promotion of Co-operatives (2002).⁴ Furthermore, co-operatives have proved to be more resilient in the wake of the global financial crisis of 2008–09 than many mainstream commercial organisations.⁵ In 2010, for example, the European Commission recognised co-operatives as a mainstream development actor alongside non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and trade unions.⁶ Crucially the Recommendation includes a definition of co-operatives based on the movement’s own core values and principles – an unusual and perhaps unique occurrence.⁷ A systematic re-focusing on core values has also been critical to the process of co-operative renewal as many of the articles in this collection demonstrate.

This international acclaim for co-operation was mirrored by some startling developments in UN member states. Perhaps most notably in Britain, following its victory in the May 2010 election, David Cameron’s Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition government identified co-operatives and other forms of mutual enterprise as integral to its strategy for reducing public expenditure and public sector employ-

ment through the development of non-state structures to deliver essential public services.⁸ This idea was mooted in the Conservative election manifesto and in a special policy document published in March 2010, which coined the phrase 'Big Society'. This has become the cornerstone of coalition policy presentation, despite criticism that it lacks definition.⁹ At the time of writing, in light of the absence of any clearly articulated strategy or resources to establish the new co-operatives which are supposed to 'take up the slack' left by massive public expenditure cuts, it is hard not to conclude that the 'Big Society' is little more than cosmetic political 'spin' to placate deepening anxieties caused by the deepest cuts in public services in living memory. Nonetheless, even this dubious nod in the direction of co-operation shows that co-operatives are beginning to become part of the mainstream political economy. As such they are experiencing an unexpected surge of political and intellectual approval and celebration, even as doubts intensify about the coalition government's seriousness about the 'Big Society'.¹⁰ Nevertheless, it is clear that, in some circles and some senses, at least, co-operatives are in fashion.

It was not always so. As recently as the late twentieth century, the global prospects for co-operation were gloomy indeed. By 1990, co-operatives were in decline in many parts of the developed world – especially in Europe. Nowhere was this more apparent than among the great consumer co-operative movements of Western Europe, most of which were in full retreat, losing market share to formidable investor-owned corporate retailing chains of supermarkets and department stores. By 1990, the main consumer co-operative organisations of Austria, Germany, France and Belgium were either dead or dying, while in Britain the future of co-operation looked perilous indeed.¹¹ In Britain, the social democratic model for managing the economy was abandoned in favour of a neo-liberal, 'free' market one. Advocates of the new orthodoxy tended to idealise the investor-led model of business organisation over alternatives such as co-operatives, which were associated with left-wing ideas and the previous social democratic approach to economic development. Co-operative associations also conflicted with the neo-conservative model of individualised 'classless' consumerism and the New Right's desire to disempower organised labour. This negativity towards co-operatives was exacerbated by the failure of the Soviet socialist model, completed by the regime's collapse in 1991. This was widely represented as not only a victory for the Western liberal 'democratic' political model, but also of the Western investor-led corporate capitalist system, as exemplified by the USA, much of Western Europe and Japan.¹² Co-operation tended

to be seen by the neo-conservative orthodoxy which emerged from the Cold War as an adjunct of socialism and therefore almost equally discredited. The emergence of state-controlled 'co-operatives' in the Soviet bloc during the Cold War period, though strongly criticised by Western elements within the international co-operative movement itself, served to reinforce this perception of co-operation as a questionable quasi-socialist experiment, as did the left-leaning political credentials of some Western movements. Triumphant advocates of Western corporate capitalism consequently believed that co-operatives would, in due course, be consigned with the rest of the left's economic ideas to the dustbin of history.¹³ Even among those economic thinkers resistant to such ideological stereotyping, there was, and still is, a tendency to see co-operation as a 'stop-gap' response to the rare cases where markets are temporarily unable to respond to the needs of groups in society. Such failures are, it is argued, short-lived, as are the co-operatives which address such failures, before more efficient investor-led firms soon emerge to meet the group's needs. As Robert Grott, a particularly strong supporter of this view, puts it:

In summary, the consumer co-op structure is a useful one which can offer many things to individuals and a community. However, it seems that, for the structure to be appropriate, certain environmental conditions must be present. These include a real need for a product or service and the presence of an active desire for social/economic change. History has repeatedly shown that when those conditions change, the movement that they engendered begins to diminish.¹⁴

A wave of demutualisations across the developed and developing world, together with a rejection of co-operatives in the former Soviet bloc countries, largely because of the association of the model with Communist oppression, seemed to point the way to the probable extinction of co-operative models of economic organisation within a generation. In short, co-operation was being measured for its shroud.

This introduction will return to the reasons for the intriguing upturn in co-operative fortunes, but first the theme, aims and provenance of this book should be explained. In July 2009 the Co-operative College in Manchester and a consortium of universities in the north-west of England, aware of evidence of co-operative revivals in the UK and elsewhere, held a major conference of academics and co-operative practitioners to consider the question: 'Can values make a difference? Moving from the Rochdale Pioneers to the Twenty-first century'. The aim was to share the varied ways in which the values of co-operation have been interpreted and translated into action at different times and

in different places and contexts; how the basic philosophy which underpins the movement has been adapted to meet a diversity of circumstances and to overcome a wide range of obstacles and problems. Over a hundred delegates from 32 countries attended the two-day event, at which case studies were presented and discussed, highlighting the interpretation and application of co-operative values and principles in a wide variety of contexts. The remit of the conference was wide. Papers were invited and presented on a broad spectrum of themes, encompassing social, cultural and political aspects of co-operative practice as well as business and economic activity. Themes included education, politics, environmental sustainability, ethical trade and development, finance and international law, governance and economic performance, and relationships between co-operatives and the state, as well as the history of co-operatives in different national contexts. There were also discussion sessions on the development of co-operation in particular countries. So thought-provoking were the contributions, and stimulating and fruitful the debates, that the conference organisers decided to publish this edited volume of expanded versions of some of the papers, with the addition of two significant contributions which have been offered subsequently. It is a book which seeks to present the many different ways in which co-operative values and principles have been developed, re-interpreted and adapted to meet the diverse challenges faced by women and men seeking to put them into practice.

In the light of the decision to make 2012 the UN International Year of Co-operatives, and the recent growth and renewal of co-operatives globally, the title *The Hidden Alternative* might be regarded as unnecessarily pessimistic about popular appreciation of the importance of the movement. It is true that the early twenty-first century has seen something of a revival of historical interest in co-operatives as important actors in the development of consumerism and voluntarist social traditions, especially in Britain. Birchall, Gurney, Purvis, Ekberg, Friberg and others have all made important contributions in these fields. But this flowering of academic writing on co-operatives has been largely confined to historians working in specialist fields of social and economic history, and so far has made limited wider impact in other disciplines. In particular, it has yet to substantially change the curriculum or challenge the hegemony of the investor-led business model in economics and business studies.¹⁵ A brief glance at most university undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in business, history and the social sciences reveals a startling lack of awareness of and curiosity about co-operation and co-operatives, even within the

academic community. Nor are co-operatives any more visible on school syllabuses or on the shelves of the big bookselling chains. In Britain, the movement is almost absent from GCSE syllabuses. Where it does appear, on the AQA and EDEXCEL syllabuses, it is as an after-thought in options covering social problems, popular politics and radical movements between 1815 and 1851. AQA offers a sample question on ‘What was the Co-operative movement, and why did it succeed?’ But this is for a module whose time-frame ends in 1851.¹⁶ Courses on later periods of British history, when the movement was at its most dynamic and influential between the late nineteenth century and the Second World War, ignore it completely. Much the same applies to textbooks and popular surveys, where Richard Tames and A.N. Wilson are unusual in giving even a page of coverage to the movement in its late Victorian pomp, while Eric Evans’s widely used survey is briskly dismissive.¹⁷ In similar publications on the twentieth century the co-operative movement is almost invisible: to gain a purchase on its importance it is necessary to be able to access more specialised texts, and historians with a strong research focus on co-operation are a tiny minority who command little attention outside particular circles in labour and social history. Perhaps even more significant is the creeping collective amnesia about co-operatives among economists. Kalmi has tracked the slow but inexorable fading and disappearance of co-operative models from economics textbooks since the Second World War.¹⁸ The incorporation of citation indices and measures of research ‘impact’ into academic management systems have also tended to marginalise co-operatives, especially in economics, where the dominant journals have imposed a neo-classical monoculture which consigns work on co-operatives to niche areas which carry little professional weight.¹⁹ Little wonder that many, if not most, academics with expertise in disciplines for which co-operation has much to offer, possess little awareness of and less expertise in what has been, and still should be, a major field of human thought and practical endeavour.

In the UK, even with the deployment of Bob Dylan’s ‘Blowin’ in the Wind’ to front a major 2009 television campaign to trumpet the successes of the Co-operative Group, what little popular awareness there is of co-operation tends to oscillate between rose-tinted memories of a family ‘divi’ number, and a general assumption that the ‘Co-op’ is a rather outdated shopping chain, on the brink of extinction. Media blindness towards the movement does not help. A recent BBC reality series which claimed to bring to life the retail history of a notional British High Street over several generations from the Victorian period

onwards, simply ignored the existence of the local co-operative stores, in a display of complacent historical ignorance which should have had Lord Reith spinning in his grave.²⁰ The historic Somerset town of Shepton Mallet was used as a guinea pig for the BBC's experiment, and the series was associated with a full package of educational activities for use by teachers, schools and the general public – all of which testify to the serious historical intent which underpinned the project.²¹ For the record, in 1882 Shepton Mallet had its own co-operative society, with 380 members, and sold produce to the value of £6,832 during that year – making it by value sold the second most successful co-operative society in Somerset for that year.²² Formed originally in 1861, by 1944 the society boasted over 1,100 members, sales in excess of £27,000 for a 34-week period and 26 employees.²³ Astonishingly it was simply ignored by the producers of the programme, regardless of the fact that they had set for themselves serious educational objectives. Internationally, notwithstanding the UN's 2012 initiative, the spectacular failure of flagship co-operative businesses in Germany, France, Austria and Belgium in the later twentieth century had contributed to a widespread perception that this was a business form which had had its day. From such perspectives, the editors remain convinced that the co-operative alternative remains, to a large extent, hidden.

Of course, the theme of the book begs the question: what *are* co-operative values and principles? Given the diverse international origins of the movement, and the different types of co-operatives which have been formed in different contexts, the answer is not as straightforward as one might expect. A good starting point perhaps is the definition of co-operative values and principles offered by the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA), the organisation which represents co-operatives and co-operators on the global stage. Following its major conference in Manchester in 1995, the ICA published a 'Co-operative Identity Statement' which set out values and principles which guide most if not all co-operatives.²⁴ In the introduction to this, the ICA statement defines a co-operative as: 'an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise'. It goes on to identify seven main principles which define co-operative organisation and practice: voluntary membership open to all; independence from state control, or by other bodies; autonomous decision-making by democratic structures which allow for democratic control of the co-operative by its members; participation based on membership in the economic benefits of the co-operative, rather than the size of

share-ownership in the co-operative; and a commitment to work collaboratively towards common goals with other co-operatives, generally define the political and governance principles which underpin how co-operatives should be organised. In addition, co-operatives work more generically towards the common good, through education both within and beyond the co-operative movement, and through the promotion of the general well-being of the societies within which co-operatives exist and operate. This recognises and affirms that although co-operatives are economic organisations – businesses, in many cases, in the commonly understood meaning of that term – they embrace and promote defined moral obligations based upon equity, participation and an overt commitment to the wider welfare of society.

The 1995 statement by its nature was the product of compromise between the highly diverse traditions and forms of organisation which make up the global co-operative movement. As MacPherson's chapter shows, it was the product of a long debate within the International Co-operative Alliance about the common values of a varied global co-operative movement, and how these values interacted with notions of community and individuality. It is worth identifying a few of the component traditions of the international movement, and their intellectual and ideological origins, in order to get a sense not only of the roots of some of these core values, but also of the underlying tensions between the different strands in the movement. Perhaps the most celebrated of these is the 'Rochdale model', which emerged from the consumer co-operatives movement in the UK during the nineteenth century. This provided probably the first attempt at a definition of co-operation, in the form of the 'Rochdale principles' based on open membership, democratic control, limited and fixed return on capital invested, education for the membership and distribution of surplus *pro rata* upon members' purchases.²⁵ But during the nineteenth century a separate co-operative tradition emerged in Germany, influenced by the ideas of Friedrich Raiffeisen, the leader of the rural credit union movement which emerged in the 1860s. At the same time in Germany, but separately, Hermann Schulze-Delitzsch established a similar credit union movement, but one aimed at helping handicraft workers and artisans. Both of these movements stressed the need for self-help and a substantial commitment to the co-operative. Schulze-Delitzsch emphasised the importance of self-reliance and rugged independence in the movement, together with vigorous resistance to external interference, a stance which precluded state involvement in the promotion of co-operatives. Charles Gide, the French economist, stressed the flexibility of co-operative models, and their usefulness in meeting a wide

range of human needs. Gide argued that so useful were the models that they transcended political philosophies of the right and left, arguing that:

conservatives or revolutionists, bourgeois or workmen, collectivists or anarchists, Protestants or Catholics preach co-operation in turn, although with very different objects.²⁶

Gide rejects the idealism of such early advocates of co-operation as Robert Owen or some of the early Christian Socialists, who saw in co-operation the basis of a new society organised on collective, co-operative and socialist lines. For Gide, co-operation is fundamentally a practical economic philosophy which is adaptable to many socio-economic circumstances, including co-existence with private, free market capitalism. Indeed Gide argues that political neutrality is the ideological position of 'true co-operation'; as it allows for such adaptation to a wide range of contexts, and a flourishing and varied range of versions of the co-operative model.²⁷

The varied contexts in which co-operatives have arisen, and the differing ideological strands in co-operation, tend to confirm Gide's notion that the development of co-operation is based at least as much on instrumental practicability, as it is on adherence to a coherent co-operative ideology. Take, for example, Battilani's chapter in this volume, which identifies late nineteenth-century Italian co-operatives emerging from separate liberal, religious and socialist traditions, albeit sharing some common notion of an 'ideal of community happiness'. She argues that co-operation flourished in a wide range of regional, social and cultural contexts in Italy because it offered practical advantages such as strengthened bonds of trust and stronger commonalities between different socio-cultural groups which reduced conflict and built consensus around collective political and economic decisions. In some instances, the specific intellectual traditions from which particular co-operative movements sprang provided practical assistance for survival and growth in what seemed highly inauspicious contexts. For example, Molina and Walton's study of Mondragón, in the Spanish Basque Country, illustrates how the religious origins and connections of that co-operative initiative helped to secure it against Franco's rabidly centralising, anti-leftist, and conservatively Roman Catholic regime.

This plurality of co-operative origins, ideological positions and practical adaptations to specific socio-economic and political contexts also prompts careful reflection on the notion of co-operation as an alternative to the business and social models offered by mainstream

capitalism. It is fair to say that the aspirations of co-operators to displace or offer something different to mainstream capitalist business and social relations vary between national movements, types of co-operation (producer, consumer and other forms of co-operative enterprise) and even within the same bodies of co-operators over time. At one extreme the British co-operative movement in its earliest phase of development during the early and mid nineteenth century unequivocally aspired to the gradual replacement of privately owned capitalist business by co-operatives in all fields of economic activity. At the other, the supporters of Mondragón during the Franco period could not afford to antagonise the regime by offering such lofty ambitions even had they wished to do so. In many contexts, co-operatives (especially producer ones) are seen as alternative modes of business organisation *within* a predominantly capitalist economy and society. Indeed it is fair to say that this has become the prevailing sense of the way in which co-operation offers an alternative to capitalism; as an alternative option within capitalism rather than an alternative to the system itself. Thus the British Co-operative Group, notwithstanding the recent revival of its fortunes, sees itself continuing and developing in the twenty-first century as an important player in a market of predominantly capitalist competitors. But what appears at first sight to be a scaling down of co-operative ambition, a surrender to the notion that capitalism will forever be the dominant form of economic organisation, on closer scrutiny arguably offers an effective and nuanced role for co-operation in shaping the world of the twenty-first century. This is arguably more realistic than a project to completely replace global capitalism, for which there appears as yet to be little widespread support. However, co-operatives, with their suspicion of speculative activity and their emphasis upon commercial accountability and wealth distribution, may yet shape capitalist organisations, prompting the adoption by investor-led firms of practices more normally found in co-operatives. Certainly the recent global economic crisis has exposed many of the inherent problems of investor-led corporate capitalism, including its propensity to rampant and perilous financial speculation, its lack of accountability to shareholders and governments, its dubious morality and its tendency to exacerbate social and economic inequalities. It is perhaps significant that many supporters of the investor-led model who supported the demutualisation drives of the 1980s and 1990s, are beginning to think again, especially in the wake of spectacular failures in the banking sector such as in the case of the demutualised building societies in Britain (Northern Rock, HBOS). Such reassessments of co-operative and other alternatives may also be

encouraged by the tendency for co-operatives to develop new, 'hybrid' modes of organisation, which blend co-operative forms of ownership and control with elements of 'command and control' structures more commonly found in investor-led firms. Such strategies have emerged where co-operatives have moved into new areas of commercial activity, in which collaboration with other co-operatives, or even with non-co-operative organisations, has been necessary. The work of Chaddad and Cook, on the development of 'New Generation Co-operatives' in US agriculture since the 1980s, has been important in highlighting the adaptability of co-operatives when faced with a fast-evolving capitalist environment.²⁸ How such developments will shape the trajectory of co-operation in the twenty-first century is of course uncertain, and speculation is perhaps unwise; the history of global co-operation has been, after all, quite volatile.

The global co-operative movement experienced dramatic shifts in fortune during the twentieth century. The demise of major co-operative organisations in Western Europe by the 1980s, and the subsequent rejection of the model in much of the former Eastern Communist bloc, seemed to presage its demise. Yet within twenty years co-operatives were flourishing again, not just in the developing world, but also in advanced economies such as the UK. Several of the chapters in this book highlight the severity of some of these challenges, and also some of the reasons for the durability of co-operation, occasionally against the odds. Cook and Clegg's study of the 'Gung Ho' co-operatives in China demonstrates both the adaptability of that specific model of co-operation to the extremes of war and socio-political collapse, and its attraction for people living through such dire times. Myers, Maddocks and Beecher focus upon the durability of building societies and financial co-operatives during the recent global economic crisis, stressing the importance of such co-operative principles as proximity and accessibility to clients, strong community links and an emphasis upon stability and security in preference to profit maximisation, as explanations for their success in weathering the fluctuations caused by global financial meltdown. This resilience has been evident in the face of international institutions and assumptions which have rarely been congenial to co-operative needs. As Maddocks, Hicks, Robb and Webb show in their chapter on co-operatives and global accounting, even in the face of global accounting standards set by an International Accounting Standards Board steeped in the ideology of the 'free' market and the investor-led business organisation, co-operatives adapt and survive.

A theme common to many stories of co-operative demise and

survival is the question of co-operative values – how they are interpreted in the light of prevailing conditions, and the extent to which they sustain real and continuing purchase on the moral and commercial judgements of key decision-makers within co-operatives. Wilson's chapter on the infamous attempt in 1997 by Andrew Regan's Lanica organisation to take over the Co-operative Wholesale Society shows that the revival of belief in core values amongst a new generation of leaders was crucial in defeating the attack, and setting the scene for a comprehensive reform and renaissance of the co-operative movement in the UK. Crucially this meant reinterpreting co-operative values for the demands of a post-industrial consumer society, shifting the emphasis away from direct democracy and localist co-operative independence to notions of ethical trading, and the application of the market power of the consumer for socially and morally desirable ends. Conversely, many of the demutualisations which occurred across the world from the 1980s were made possible by a 'hollowing-out' of the values of those organisations, as belief in core co-operative ideas was abandoned by their leaders. Here of course lies one of the great dilemmas faced by co-operatives the world over, confronted by powerful multinational corporations and a fast-changing market environment. How far should co-operative principles be compromised in the battle to survive and flourish? To what extent should co-operatives mimic their capitalist rivals in order to defend and enhance their positions? How far should they recruit key personnel from beyond the culture of the movement? As alluded to earlier, much recent work on the commercial strategies of co-operatives emphasises the proliferation of organisational variations and innovations to meet the challenges of a fast-evolving global market. Many of these organisational variants have involved the adoption of practices and structures more commonly found outside the original core of the movement, as 'hybrid' co-operative models emerged, such as the 'New Generation Co-operatives' in US agriculture.²⁹ More recently, the decision by the Co-operative Group in the UK to transfer its travel business to a joint venture with Thomas Cook might be viewed as the creation of a hybrid model, and has not been without controversy, as it is seen by some as a compromise too far for the principles of the organisation.³⁰

The manifestation of co-operative values in fields other than commerce is also an important theme of this book. In the British movement a mission to educate was enshrined in the original 'Rochdale principles', and other national movements followed similar paths. Woodin's chapter provides a useful overview of the evolution of co-operative education in the UK, with a particular focus on the Co-

operative College, and its role in both the development of wider understanding of co-operative principles and in furnishing the movement with staff equipped technically to run its wide spectrum of businesses. The latter theme is taken up by Vernon, whose chapter on the training of co-operative managers and personnel brings home just how far ahead of the private sector the British co-operative movement was in this field during the inter-war period. Shaw's chapter takes the debate about co-operative education onto the global stage, with an overview of the varying strategies adopted by co-operative educators across the world, particularly in Africa.

Co-operation is, by its nature, an all-encompassing approach not only to business, but to the full spectrum of human endeavour and experience. Its philosophy has implications for global economic relations, the moral codes which underpin social interaction, how power is distributed and exercised and even how the human environment is shaped and planned. All of these themes are addressed in the chapters of this volume. Co-operative politics are brought into focus by Stewart's chapter on the British Co-operative Party, the only co-operative political party in the world. Focusing on the Co-operative Party's role in the formation of the Social Democratic Party during the early 1980s, Stewart explores the complex and contentious relationships between the British co-operative movement, the trade unions and the Labour Party. In perhaps the most unusual examination of the social impact of co-operation, Maccaferri shows how in post-war Italy, a unique 'co-operative of intellectuals' (*Caire*) influenced urban planning in several cities.

Yet another important theme in the book is the role of co-operation and co-operatives in international economic development. The rise towards the end of the twentieth century of the Fair Trade movement is the focus of chapters by Friberg and Lacey. Friberg explores the problems involved in negotiating equitable international relationships between producers and consumers through co-operative organisations, by linking historical developments and debates in Sweden and Britain with modern problems of Fair Trade. Lacey provides a contemporary assessment of co-operative involvement in the Fair Trade movement, and offers some important options for future strategies in this field. These general explorations of Fair Trade are supplemented by chapters that provide insights into specific national contexts. Vaswani's chapter addresses the challenge for co-operative revival in India in the context of continuing government interference. Greater autonomy is needed to enable co-operatives to align their governance structures more closely to member need and democratic control. In South Africa, as Satgar and

Williams' chapter demonstrates, co-operatives were placed at the centre of the post-apartheid regime's strategy for reconstruction, albeit with mixed success.

It would be impossible in a volume of this length to explore the multiplicity of fields in which co-operatives have shaped the modern world. Only a partial overview can be presented of the huge global impact that this movement, in its many manifestations, has enjoyed. The editors are aware that co-operation has received insufficient attention from both academia and the media, and the main purpose of this volume is to begin to remedy this impoverishing oversight. A key aim of the book is to stimulate further research and both academic and public debate about co-operative solutions to the pressing global problems of the twenty-first century. Since the end of the Cold War, and the steady retreat of state-led alternatives to free market capitalism, the investor-led, corporate model has been in the ascendant, and at times has seemed unchallengeable. The global financial catastrophe of 2008 confirmed the suspicions of many that this neo-conservative orthodoxy was inherently flawed, and that a new vision was needed of how the global economy might operate. At the heart of all of the contributions in this collection is the belief that co-operation offers a real and much-needed alternative for the organisation of human economic and social affairs. This alternative should no longer remain hidden.

Notes

- 1 Resolution adopted by the General Assembly of the UN, on the report of the Third Committee, 64th session, Agenda item 61 (b).
- 2 C. Cuevas and K. Fischer, *Cooperative Financial Institutions: Issues in Governance, Regulation and Supervision* (World Bank Working Paper No. 82, 2006).
- 3 I. Pollet, *Co-operatives in Africa: The Age of Reconstruction – Synthesis of a Survey in Nine African Countries* (CoopAfrica Working Paper No. 9, Dar Es Salaam: ILO, 2009).
- 4 Full text available at www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/convde.pl?R193.
- 5 J. Birchall and L. Ketilson, *The Resilience of the Co-operative Business Model in Times of Crisis* (Geneva: ILO, 2009).
- 6 See ec.europa.eu/europeaid/who/partners/civil-society/structured-dialogue_en.htm.
- 7 International Labour Organization, *Report of the Committee on Co-operatives 2002*, available at www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/relm/ilc/ilc90/pdf/pr-23.pdf (accessed 22 December 2010).
- 8 *Building the Big Society* (Cabinet Office, May 2010).
- 9 *Big Society, Not Big Government: Building a Big Society* (The Conservative Party, March 2010).

- 10 An important source for these new ideas is Philip Blond, founder of the Conservative-leaning think tank *ResPublica*. See P. Blond, *Red Tory: How Left and Right Have Broken Britain and How We Can Fix it* (London: Faber, 2010) for some of Blond's thoughts on the use of mutuals in the Post Office and in lieu of other state agencies. For a powerful critique of the book, and its arguments, see Jonathan Raban's review, 'Cameron's Crank' in the *London Review of Books* April 2010 at www.lrb.co.uk/v32/n08/jonathan-raban/camerons-crank.
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The Hidden Alternative: Co-operative Values, Past, Present and Future

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The proclamation by the United Nations that 2012 would be the International Year of Co-operatives represents a milestone in the history of the international co-operative movement. Marking an important recognition within the international community of the role of co-operatives in promoting real democratic participation in economic and social development, it reflects the growth and renewal of co-operatives globally during the past decade and a half. Co-operatives have proved resilient in the wake of the global financial crisis of 2008-9 compared to the investor-led business and financial companies which have been found profoundly wanting, both financially and morally. The contributions to *The Hidden Alternative* demonstrate that co-operation offers a real and much needed alternative for the organization of human economic and social affairs, one that should establish its place at the forefront of public and academic discussion and policy-making.

This fascinating and timely book includes chapters on education, Fair Trade, politics and governance, planning and sustainability, and on how co-operatives have coped with the global economic crisis. Chapters discuss not only developments in the West but also in Africa and Asia, offering a genuinely international perspective on the fortunes of co-operation.

The Hidden Alternative will be of interest to students and academics studying economics, business studies, history or politics, and also to policymakers who have witnessed the inadequacies and lack of accountability of investor-led business models demonstrated by the global recession.

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