

Co-operative Party Conference 2016
Personal Report by Chris Hall, Cymru / Wales Member 18 September 2016

1917-2016: 99 Years of the Co-operative Party: Conference:10-12 September 2016

Gareth Thomas, MP: The military credit union had lent more than £300,000 to military personnel. Centenary Conference next year to be held in London.

John McDonnell, Shadow Chancellor: There is deep disaffection with the capitalist model as years of growth allowed Labour to do some redistribution. We face an economy where there will be little or no growth and the next generation will earn less than their parents. Part of the solution will be more co-ops, local initiatives & solutions from below. Labour will create an investment bank & regional banks to stimulate business activity. We need to spread ownership & Preston Council is a fantastic example whereby they have sought to keep businesses locally owned. We will reconvene the economic advisory committee, which had been going round the country holding seminars (participants Joseph Stiglitz, Mariana Mazzucato, Ann Pettifor & Simon Wren-Lewis).

Building a Shared Economy: Paul Monaghan: Fair Tax Mark: This is a big issue and has really taken off (quicker than fairtrade by comparison). The public want to punish the bad/non-tax payers, as shown by Apple in Ireland most recently. Co-ops have been at the forefront: Midcounties, Co-ops UK, Co-op Group, Scotmid, the Co-operative Party, Revolver Co-op, East of England, Phonecoop, Unity Trust Bank, Go Ahead Group & Unity Trust Bank.

Seema Malhotra, MP: We have to build future generations of co-operatives. We have a low wage economy where job insecurity is the norm. Lower tax receipts mean less public investment. Whilst house prices rise so fast this is excluding more people from having the chance to own a home! We need to build our social capital to underpin good ideas.

Jennifer Tankard – Responsible Finance (New name for the Community Development

Finance Association): They seek to support & build the RF industry. They provide 60% business financing & 40% lending to individuals and social organisations. They lent £251m to 57,800 customers. Jobs, growth & development is taking place through small and medium enterprises.

Liv Bailey: Fabian Society: Need for radical tax reform and for changing KPI's (key performance indicators) to assess and understand the changing economy. The economy is "hollowing out" so that most of the middle tier jobs are disappearing leaving a few quality jobs at the top and millions of low skill low quality jobs at the bottom. The industrial base which had been 38% of our economy has fallen to 8%. There has been wage stagnation since 2008 but also output stagnation. There is a shift from big companies to a vast precarious self-employed population, which prevents planning for the future. There is an opportunity for co-operatives to emerge and thrive.

From the Floor:

Bi-lateral trade deals (CETA & TTIP) empower large corporations at the cost of the public/consumer (Marilynne Burbage).

- Saxon Spence called for a credit union on every high street.
- A Northern Ireland Credit Union has a £5m fund for social enterprises (Erskine Holmes)
- Co-operative businesses wouldn't send their jobs overseas. Technology should be liberating us; but is it?
- The Co-op model motions are an effective tool for local council co-operatives (Paul Kimber)
- We need brave politicians, brave businesses & brave ideas: Nationalised > Privatised > Mutualised: Is this the way ahead?

Co-operative MP's Panel Q & A's:

1. **Concerns over "Brexit"?** It was a binary choice in toxic circumstances & a vote by many in left behind communities. (Baroness Thornton). Can't have a 2nd referendum on Brexit; Oldham for example was firmly pro-Brexit (Jim McMahon, MP).
2. **Concern over Hungarian attitude to refugees?** The refugee crisis won't go away, but Tory government don't care about the refugees.
3. **Need to give people control over their own lives?** Downward spiral tax competition has to be stopped (hence the Apple victory) + success for the Caroline Flint amendment re country by country profits & tax reporting. Single market needs reform, but we must maintain our relevance to the EU (soft power).
4. **Brexit; sign of a broken democracy? Need for PR?** Devolution might be coming to

England, but we still need to fight racism, sectarianism and to sort out our voting system.

5. **A lot of racists voted Brexit? Need to keep an open & tolerant Society?** 70% of Redcar voted to leave; a sense of despair. We have never celebrated being in Europe for 40+ yrs and lost the referendum years before the campaign.

Lunch time Fringe Meeting: What next for Community Energy?

Joe Fortune: Community energy is in crisis as the government has done everything to undermine green energy options (reduced FIT since January 2016), whilst supporting Hinkley Point; but they appear to be putting all their eggs in the nuclear basket. We need to do all we can to promote & rebuild the pressure & support for the renewable options. This includes: advertising, publicity, policy development within the Party, lobbying MP's & government building the case for the "green economy".

From the floor: The cost of energy is a massive issue for older people (often a daily choice between food or heating).

- Sheffield Renewables have been delivering effectively in their local area.
- LED lighting can have payback within about 18 months.
- Technology is racing ahead so batteries could soon be available to store "green" energy.
- Planning permission remains a major obstacle for onshore wind turbines.
- Local Authorities should procure reputable (bulk) community energy provision and offer to local houses as a viable way forward.

Co-operative Action in Local Government (On 20.11.16 there will be a Co-op Party local government Conference in Manchester)

Sharon Taylor (Stevenage Council): "The heart of our Town lies in its People". They have 29 Lab Co-op councillors with a population up from 60 to 90,000 and about 300 community groups with which they engage. Pin Green has secured lots of community assets including the local playing fields. The extensive play service has become a childcare service. As well building houses they have built a skate park and are now developing "pocket neighbourhoods". [People, process, plan].

Debbie Wilcox (Newport Council): The gateway to Wales; Newport has a cluster of digital industries but also poor health, social inequality ageing population and a lack of jobs. Public services can't carry on in these circumstances with reduced funding. They are looking for a co-operative approach with social partnerships designed to keep money circulating in the community & ensuring greater accountability & openness for the people. ["Newport Live" & the "Fairness Commission"]

Matt Brown (Preston Council): 130,000 population 10 years of systemic failure. A radical new approach, learning from Mondragon, Spain & Bolognia, Italy, where businesses are locally owned co-operatives. Working strategically with local organisations (police, university, schools etc).

Evening Fringe: Taking Control: Supporting community Co-ops to change Lives:

Peter Couchman (Plunkett foundation): If a community wants to save an asset (pub, shop. Post office or playing field) they need to have a plan; they can't wait till the crisis is upon them.

Emma Hodinott; Oldham Councillor & Co-op Officer: Council must do things with people rather than doing things to people. Utilise the Localism Act (ACV= Assets of Community Value & CAT= Community Asset Transfer). ACV creates "right to bid", not a "right to buy". [Practical politics].

(SUNDAY) Policy Debate: Creating A More Equal Society

Speech from Chris Hall about sport for all based upon the inspirational #TeamGB Olympians returning from Rio, the Paralympians & @TeamRefugees & @Sportforall. Speech from James Cleverley calling for the nationalisation of the railways.

Co-operative Party AGM & Report by Claire McCarthy:

We have 9,800 members and a static income (£1, 029,049) with expenditure rising results in a deficit of £58,050. Is the centenary next year a real opportunity to re-engage with more co-ops, retail societies & to seek income diversification. **Future objectives:**

1. Grow membership (Target): 10,000 members by 2017.
2. Financial stability
3. Enabling the delivery of co-operative solutions.
4. Inspire, educate & inform the public & decision makers about co-operation.
5. Support the election of Co-operators at all levels of government.

EMERGENCY MOTION: Co-operative Response to Brexit: Tal Michael spoke in support of 2 conferences to discuss EU & Brexit with co-operators & Socialists across Europe.