

BOOK REVIEW AND REFLECTIONS ON CO-OPERATIVES AND PEACE by Peter Davis

Series on Co-operatives and Peace: Volume One: Joy Emmanuel and Ian MacPherson (Eds.). (2007). *Co-operatives and the Pursuit of Peace*. Victoria, BC: New Rochdale Press. Volume Two: Ian MacPherson and Yehudah Paz. (2015). *Concern for Community: The Relevance of Co-operatives to Peace*. Joy Emmanuel (Ed.). Turning Times Research and Consulting.

Introduction

Why review two volumes published respectively 16 years and 8 years ago, the first of which was the subject of an extensive and sympathetic review by Prof Mary Mellor (2008) in the *Journal of the Society for Co-operative Studies*? The answer is because Prof Mellor's conclusions, so it appears to the present reviewer, have been largely ignored. She said, "This is an interesting and thought-provoking collection of papers that deserves to be widely read and the case made for the role of co-operatives in promoting peace and resolving conflict is a convincing one" (Mellor, 2008, p. 52). The evidence that this conclusion has been ignored is the lack of co-operative peace building activities and lack of policies on peace initiatives in conflict zones.

Prof Mellor's review of the case material is thorough although the author of this review thinks her criticism of the Co-operative Women's Guilds Pacifist stance is a little misguided. In the aftermath of the carnage of the 1st World War these co-operators and mothers could hardly be blamed for their pacifism. How many of these activist women co-operators lost sons, brothers, boyfriends, fiancés, and husbands in that conflict, not for freedom but for empire? At the end of the conflict there followed a xenophobic demand for crippling reparations on Germany. These reparations led not to a social democracy in Germany but to chaos and ultimately Fascism and to yet another war. For the victors too their 'success' was short lived and after 1926 their people became the victims of recession. Today those post war 1930s soup kitchens have morphed into food banks in the UK whilst inflation rages as the country fights America's proxy war in Ukraine.

Thus, a second reason for a review of these two important volumes is that the UK and NATO partners are again at war in all but name. The fact that it's not NATO's populations doing the fighting and dying and not its cities being destroyed, for now at least, should be of less concern than the enabling of a conflict that might have been avoided with a policy that put reaching a compromise agreement ahead of just issuing threats (Davis, 2022a). It should be dawning on even the most right-wing hawks that this is not a war that will end anytime soon unless the West tries to bring it to an end by facing up to some of the more legitimate concerns the Russians have and opening negotiations without prior conditions. For *all* of Europe, including Ukraine and Russia, this is an essential and urgent task.

To see why we in the co-operative movement should be taking the lead, we need look no further than the behaviour of western politicians. Biden's grandstanding in Warsaw did nothing but raise the temperature and was aimed more at his bid for re-election. The centre right is in power today right across Europe and, indeed, in some places their main challenge is coming from the extreme right where people feed on fear, misinformation and xenophobia, all of which war facilitates. Today the issue of whipped up xenophobia and fear are complicated by the availability of a manipulated social media. The dangers of the negative impact of technology were touched on by Mervyn Wilson in his introduction to Volume 2 of Co-operatives and Peace. Is it just chance that the Marcos are back in power in the Philippines, Modi in India, Netanyahu in Israel, the Fascists back in power in Italy and coming in second during the French presidential elections, and of course Zelensky, whose ambition gave Putin a pretext to invade for a second time, in the Ukraine? There are many further examples across the globe, starting with the for now defeated Trump (USA) and Bolsonaro (Brazil). What lies behind the swing to the populist right are the hate speeches, conspiracy theories, misinformation, manipulation, the collapse of privacy, and the commodification and sale of human behaviour in a *privatised social media* and the Deep and Dark Web. The web-based buying and selling of our data with no transparency or accountability is where the populists and fear mongers gain influence without ever being recognised. So far, the Co-operative institutional frameworks have failed to come up with any co-ordinated response to this global threat to peace and co-operation which is functioning at many levels in all cultures and societies.

The third reason for this review, is that our Co-operative agenda is being threatened by war and the covert manipulation of opinion. We in the co-operative movement stand for a free just civil society informed by education, searching for truth grounded in realism. War and other civil strife generally undermine the realisation of such possibilities. The message of the two volumes being reviewed is that although co-operatives operate in widely different political and economic contexts and segments, our shared values enable us to continue dialogue across political, economic, and cultural divisions. This claim is very clearly articulated in the contributions by Ian MacPherson in his opening chapter and, in chapter 2, by the English historian Rita Rhodes, and reinforced by the late Yehuda Paz and Raffi Goldman in their later and concluding chapters. Co-operatives can operate for peace at many levels from the global level (ICA) to state level and right down to relations and hostilities at the level of civil society. The message from both these volumes is that such a multi-level approach to growing peaceful relationships is precisely where the co-operative movement has a unique role to play. The reviewer wants to add: *but only where there is a co-ordinated effort* in which all co-operatives see prioritising peace as key to achieving their primary role of the sustainable economic development of their members and their communities - a key point Yehuda Paz makes again and again (see for example his comments on p. 330 in Volume 1).

The two volumes' scope and remit

These volumes' *raison d'être* (Volume 1, pp. 13-14) demonstrates a very wide remit aiming to illustrate the positive role played by co-operatives and co-operators contributing to peace in those, '...communities and societies where excessive competition and conflicts have emerged - in any of its deleterious forms'. (Volume 1, pp. 13-14)

Prof Mellor's review covers quite fully Rita Rhodes important chapter and also the contributions by Chushichi Tsuzuki and Akiro Kurimoto from Japan and Milford Bateman on co-operative peace-making initiatives in the former Yugoslavia. The work of co-operatives in Brazil, West Africa and Togo provides further examples in Professor Mellor's review of what can be achieved. Prof Mellor also considers the chapter by Lota Bertulfo, reminding us that violence is not just interstate or intercommunal either. Bertulfo's chapter notes the work on domestic violence by credit unions in Malaysia and women only co-operatives in the Philippines. So please refer to Prof Mellor's review for a commentary on these important contributions. This review focuses elsewhere on the contribution of co-operatives *and with a greater emphasis on those contributions calling for more to be done*. It will also look at the impact of conflict on Indigenous peoples in the two contributions by Robby Tulus. It will identify the key points in the closing challenging chapters by Yehudah Paz and Rafi Goldman.

There are many examples covering a very wide range of papers looking at the co-operative role during local conflicts in Asia, Latin America and Africa which the author could have drawn upon for this review and commends to the reader. Roby Tulus in his case studies from Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Indonesia has given a glimpse of the interface between climate catastrophes, post-colonial legacies, poor governance, the greed of political elites, and conflict over natural resource extraction. These factors create separatist movements and a central government response of regional militarization with devastating consequences for Indigenous peoples caught up between insurgent and government forces. Wars prevent infrastructure, adding to the poverty and hardship endured by local communities as the wars in Syria and Afghanistan have recently demonstrated. Today, as the rainforests shrink further still and the ice caps melt, the plight of Indigenous peoples has deteriorated. Robby Tulus also mentions the negative impact of 'brainwashing propaganda' a feature of modern society that technology has greatly amplified.

Although some conflicts have been resolved others are flaring up with the Arab-Israeli conflict threatening to go to a new level as the two-state solution appears even to some of its advocates to be dead. Raffi Goldman points to farmers' co-operatives on both sides of the Palestine-Israel conflict so it really does put to the test the idea that co-operation can reach out across conflicting parties. He points to how cross conflict attempts to collaborate with projects such as *Co-operative Produce for Peace* are being tested by the rise of extremist rhetoric and actions on both sides. The problem with co-operative initiatives for peace is one of scale. Goldman concludes his chapter thus:

We need to ensure the mobilization of international co-operative resources and co-operative agencies on behalf of practical efforts of conflict resolution. If we do so, we may be able to improve our co-operative contribution to the pursuit of peace. (Vol. 1, p. 340)

The danger of emphasizing democracy while ignoring leadership is a mistake that many in the Co-operative intelligentsia seem prone to make. Such an emphasis flies in the face of co-operative history littered as it is with leaders of great vision, courage, compassion and in *some* cases humility. Both the first and second volumes of the Cooperatives and Peace series demonstrate local co-operative initiatives led by courageous local leaders that make a difference in specific communities. *But we should not really see all these partial fragmented and isolated cases as a single movement just because they are all using similar means – Co-operation.* In terms of the billion plus members the ICA has in formal membership these initiatives represent a drop in the ocean and leave the major centres of co-operative membership, investment capital and social, cultural and economic potential fragmented and largely disconnected at the global level. In short, the movement as a whole has for many years remained unengaged with peace and development as a global co-operative strategy.

The globalised and monopolised culture and media, supporting the mantra of freedom while denying its basis for being realised, is the principal force manipulating the very people co-operatives are meant to be engaging with. It's not that the co-operative solution should not act in building local and resilient communities but that to get the critical mass to challenge the current authoritarian and libertarian models of capitalism such local initiatives require what Raffi Goldman called for: an international strategy and resource support - in short, investment in cultural and political messaging and development capital. For Co-operation to become a movement for peace and development, it needs to look outside its own ranks for allies from NGOs and from within the ethical investment community as well as from the big co-operative sectors in Agribusiness and Financial Services (Davis, 2022b). Indeed, this is the very point upon which the late Yehuda Paz closes the first volume when he states, "...if development is not an integral part of conflict resolution, then you not only lose the development, you probably lose the peace as well" (p. 370).

It's the people at the economic margins left to rot by libertarian capitalism that are most prey to xenophobic rhetoric electing the very people who will ensure their continued marginalisation and enlistment into the ranks of violent sectarianism and war. If the co-operative movement does not provide a development path for these people, we shall not win peace or social democracy.

The question is why?

Volume 2 opens with many well-deserved tributes to both Ian MacPherson and Yehuda Paz. The author knew and respected both men and shared the same platform with Ian at a number of ICA seminars over the years. The author was the keynote speaker at the Co-operative Bankers Association in Manchester in 1995 and took the opportunity to criticise The Co-operative Identity Statement adopted at that ICA Congress. It is not that I disagree with what it states but felt then and still do feel that without a principle of Co-operative Value Based Management stating the values and roles of managers in co-operatives the inevitable civil service cultural divide between elected and appointed leadership, given managements privileged prior access to organisational data and day to day control, would dilute member engagement and undermine co-operative social purpose. Ironically this managerial emphasis on economics, so I believe, actually undermines the business and commercial competitiveness that co-operation, potentially at least, can establish. Ian and I became friends over the years but the issue remained one of cordial but unresolved debate between us. Yehuda's somewhat more explosive personality however meant that the first time we met at an ICA HRD seminar in West Africa where I criticized the HRD Committee for not having Co-operative Management Development as an item led to what, using the language of diplomacy, I shall call a 'full and frank' exchange of views between Yehuda and myself. Notwithstanding this rather unpromising first encounter, I was shortly afterwards appointed as a Special Advisor to the ICA Global HRD Committee chaired by Yehuda and went on to work with him and Rafi Goldman and Vivian Silver and Ilana and many others on a series of management development programmes at the Centre of Strategies for Peace and Development at Beth Sheba, Israel.

In MacPherson's opening chapter in Volume 2, 'The Claims of Co-operative Thought' (pp. 21-28), he makes a characteristic claim for the potential of co-operative ideas to transform conflict with an equally comprehensive review of the post-Soviet new world order and its emerging challenges, including the decline in Social Democracy, the rise of libertarian free market economics, the IMF and World Bank Structural Adjustment programmes encouraging globalisation, and extensive cross border migrations of people. He put it thus, "If peace meant the fostering of harmonious relationships – a better understanding than just the avoidance of war – then the record associated with the major changes globalization brought to our times was definitely mixed" (p. 24).

MacPherson insists co-operatives should not be tools for others and should be free from restrictions on what their members would want them to do. But there is one potential flaw in this argument for democracy and autonomy that his review of the results of liberalization and globalization overlooked. It's the point made by Mervyn Wilson in his introduction and one that is all the more amplified in our experience in the years since Volume 2's publication. Mervyn Wilson wrote:

The advances in technology seen in the last fifty years have created a globally interconnected society. But those very advances in technology can also exacerbate issues of exclusion fermenting intolerance that can all too easily create a climate where sectarian violence can emerge. (p. 3)

How safe are democratic processes today where the elector's behaviour has become commodified and profiled for targeted manipulation and misinformation? MacPherson recognised the fragility of co-operatives in the context of conflict, picking up the development point Yehuda made in Volume 1, and raised a critical question if we are to produce an answer to the threat posed by the digital revolution and raise awareness of the transformational role a united co-operative development strategy could make towards greater justice and peace globally. Ian asked, "Do they (co-operatives) have the special kinds of leadership needed to make what they wish to create possible?" (p. 22).

Both Volumes 1 and 2 carry excellent case studies with examples of just that special kind of leadership in evidence. But there is no systematic discussion in these volumes or in the wider movement about how to define or profile such co-operative leaders or how to attract, recruit and select and develop potential *co-operative value based* senior management and other professional roles for co-operatives. This is the issue the author has devoted a large part of his own writing and research to exploring. His ideas (Davis, 1995, 1999, 2004, 2013 and 2018) have largely remained unattractive to and thus ignored by the mainstream in co-operative human resources development (HRD), governance and organisational behaviour writing. For any reader who may be interested, he explores why in a paper in this issue of the International Journal of Co-operative Accounting & Management (p. 65).

MacPherson's historical chapters on co-operation and peace represent one of the high points in Volume 2, in Section Three: *What the Past Suggests* (pp 67 – 146). These chapters are gems of historical analysis, stopping, regrettably in the author's view, with the 1930s. However, there is a gap in that MacPherson did not really account for why the co-operative movement did not put up a more robust case either against the war in 1914 or for reconciliation rather than reparations at the end of the War in 1918? He documented the well-intentioned resolution passed at the ICA conference in Scotland in 1913 (p. 113) which failed to rally opinion sufficiently to stop the slaughter in Britain or in the countries of Europe. The point today in 2023 surely is to accept that the movement has failed to deliver peace or economic justice in the world two hundred years after its early attempts at formation. We are so sure of our moral superiority that we fail to recognise that not only are these values not shared by many but that they are not always trusted by those we seek to support - the working people themselves. These two volumes rightly celebrate co-operation's achievements and relevance but remain silent and refuse to reflect upon our failure.

Ian Macpherson's role was pivotal in making the current statement of Co-operative Principles such an advance on the previous minimalist statement. But we should not overlook the vulnerability contained within it for distortion and manipulation of its democratic processes that can occur without value-based leadership, Nor should we ignore the threat that manipulative social media messaging and misinformation can pose by enabling the removal of such leaders where they do exist. In celebrating our principles as the two volumes do, let us not overlook their vulnerability.

Open and Voluntary Membership requires a civil society with openness where non-conformity is accepted, but often civil society contains sectarianism which can be hard to break down.

Democratic Control by Members including the principle of one member one vote in primary societies, is often presented as one of the key advantages of the co-operative ownership model. But this democratic principle is not so highly valued amongst the membership themselves, as low engagement figures demonstrate, as it is for co-

operation's advocates. Will Watkins was a notable exception who placed unity as more important for co-operatives than democracy (Watkins, 1990, p. 17). Co-operative Democracy often results in unrepresentative boards and disengaged members.

Member Economic Participation is based upon equitable member contribution and participation as the basis for distribution of surplus meeting local needs first. In fact, this principle has been very destructive, encouraging members to adopt short term and instrumental approaches to co-operatives often denying their co-operative the capital it needs to develop and provide greater services to the very communities the co-operative should serve. How much stronger and well developed would our movement have become had we continued with the principle adopted in 1832 at the London Congress that none of the surplus should be divided but reinvested?

Autonomy and Independence is fundamental for self-help associations to avoid the distortion, manipulation, and control by government and other powerful institutions. But of course, this principle has been breached not only during the communist periods but across many polities where there have been inadequate legislation, deliberate attempts by elites to restrict co-operatives to the low value-added end of the value stream, and of course the use of co-operatives to place political supporters and distribute political pay offs. These events have occurred across a wide range of continents and cultures.

Co-operative Education Training and Information is a critical idea that has been reduced in practice to board of director training, governance, dispute resolution and diversity and gender awareness training. In fact, co-operative education has in general failed miserably to inform members of their economic, political, technological, ecological and climatic contexts. The real threat to co-operative values posed by the culture of capitalism is often ignored entirely. During the author's time as a special adviser to the ICA Global HRD committee there was never any money to do anything, which rather summed up the movement's real commitment to education and development.

Co-operation among Co-operatives is vital but our structure in discrete silos makes it hard to achieve in practice and even within silos there is often less than wholehearted concern to co-operate, with parochialism amongst co-operative leadership often trumping the advantages of co-operation and integration.

The introduction for **Concern for Community** suggests co-operatives are about more than meeting the economic needs of their members but that they address the social needs found in communities. It's actually in community development in terms of community solidarity, identity and well being that co-operation between co-operatives could have a most immediate impact by providing the educational and cultural facilities to support peaceful and just community development. Today, the urgency of the climate crisis suggests co-operation between co-operatives at the community level is essential in order to educate for resilience in the face of the extreme weather events that are increasingly occurring, and the by now virtually unstoppable breach of the 1.5% increase in global temperature.

The author's point here is that it's all very well praising the principles as the introduction to Volume 1 (pp. 4-5) does, but we are only fooling ourselves if we do not go beyond the principles to explore the context they operate in and recognise the challenges their application faces in a global, polarised, and manipulated world — a world where the very ecosystems humans have relied upon are becoming subject to rapid life-threatening deterioration. It's not our principles that are wrong but the failure of our leadership and co-operative activists to implement our principles. This has resulted in a feeble response by the co-operative movement to those forces that profit from war and sectarianism and which have used technology not to enable wealth redistribution but to promote greater polarization and the concentrations of wealth while one person is dying every four seconds from a poverty related illness.

It's easy to blame members' apathy and ignorance and often misplaced avarice but they live and work amongst the most intense barrage of cultural messaging (brain washing to use Robby Tulus's term) that people have ever been subjected to. This messaging is totally contrary to the truth and celebrates all the values and attitudes that undermine our own. As co-operative leaders, managers, educators and researchers we bear the responsibility for not setting the right co-operative agenda, not establishing the right co-operative strategy, and having no plan to implement and communicate and engage the mobilisation of our over 1 billion members to action. Actually, even getting 10% of them would be a good start in raising more general awareness and building alternative economic

models and a genuine peace movement across nations. We need a Co-operative Messaging and Cultural output identifying the real causes of war and sectarian strife that are inflicting such awful pain and misery around the world. There is real urgency today as we are being pushed into war in Europe and the Pacific by a United States political elite trying to maintain its hegemony abroad and a libertarian capitalist system at home, and willing to condemn in public and support in private the very right-wing extremism that lies behind so many acts of terrorism and the murders of human rights and climate activists around the world.

Right-wing extremists are increasingly traveling overseas to meet and exchange views with likeminded individuals. In the spring of 2018, for example, several members of the Rise Above Movement (or RAM)—Robert Rundo, Ben Daley, and Michael Miselis—travelled to Germany, Ukraine, and Italy to celebrate Adolf Hitler’s birthday and to meet with members of European white supremacist groups. . . .In Ukraine, RAM members met with groups like the Azov Battalion, a paramilitary unit of the Ukrainian National Guard, which the FBI says is associated with neo-Nazi ideology. The Azov Battalion also is believed to be training and radicalizing white supremacist organizations based in the United States. These foreign connections provide U.S. based groups with an opportunity to improve their tactics, develop better counter-intelligence techniques, harden their extremist views, and broaden their global networks. (Jones, 2018)

NATO countries need to accept that Russia too has legitimate security concerns. The last invasion of Russia came across the Ukrainian heartlands and received considerable support from a large pro-NAZI movement amongst the population. That invasion cost 27 million Russian lives. Instead of encouraging Ukraine to believe it could be a NATO member, the West should have been negotiating its neutrality with Russia and assuring Russia it would not seek to bring NATO forces up to its borders. The myth that Russia is a threat to Eastern Europe is obvious once it is recalled that it was Russia that unilaterally withdrew in the first place. NATO did not need to roll forward after Russia withdrew. It would have been far better rather to negotiate a peace treaty guaranteeing Central European security and neutrality. It was also America during the Obama Presidency who first introduced tactical nuclear weapons into Europe. Considering the figures below, it might be legitimate to ask the question as to who is threatening whom?

Only NATO’s four biggest economies are represented here, but it is important to remember all the other members also contribute to NATO’s ‘defence’ capability.

United States	US\$857.9 billion
United Kingdom	US\$68.4 billion
Germany	US\$56 billion
France	US\$56.6 billion
Total	US\$1,039.5 billion
Russia	US\$65.9 billion
China	US\$293 billion

Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2021)

Assuming the USA only contributes 10% of its budget for war and ignoring all other NATO members, NATO, on this very conservative estimate, outspends Russia by about \$5 to \$1. The question is, where was and is the co-operative movement while all this has happened and opportunities for peace and an end to the cold war were being frittered away.

In addressing the urgent need for peaceful resolution of differences at the international level, the co-operative movement needs to recognise the political potential for division that the current narratives of inclusivity and the

right to choose identities are generating. Conflict resolution cannot ignore Identity Politics, individual rights, and the multiculturalism which informs the contemporary liberal narrative. As Yehuda Paz points out, "Of course, any programme of co-operation must take into account the legitimate concern of those involved for the preservation of their identity."

These concerns have been an important fuel for the rise of extreme right-wing activism and increasing electoral success in Europe which, as raised early on in this review article, are in large degree a response in the face of large-scale inward migration. The Brexit vote in the UK is one of the most important examples - itself a serious blow struck against Social Democracy in Europe. The left has ignored this concern for identity which, as in the Arab-Israeli conflict, is very much tied up with the idea of territory. Have nations a moral right to say no to inward migration? In the author's view the answer is yes. In the end open doors are no answer to global instability - it simply adds to it. International co-operation must reach out with peace and development initiatives that address the horrendous human rights and economic deprivations that afflict such a wide vista of human experience.

These two volumes are an inspiring starting point that shows what has been done in very difficult circumstances across a comprehensive range of different human societies, economies, geographies and cultures. The author recommends them to readers. The lessons they provide are also a real challenge to Co-operative Leaders across the movement to raise their game. In these grave times, the currently unfolding conflict in Europe and impending global conflict in the Pacific both distract attention from the coming global catastrophe of climate change. Climate change is already impacting the need for increased migration. The ICA have two options: Carry on as they are and be overwhelmed or listen to Raffi Goldberg's call to build an international strategy for peace and development. There are signs that this is beginning to happen at the level of conference agendas. But this cannot happen just on paper as MacPherson's documenting of the 1913 conference resolution shows. We don't need feel good resolutions we need leadership and commitment from all sections of Co-operative Enterprise building alliances with other progressive forces to demand an end to demonisation and the beginning of dialogue. The resolutions passed today must be transferred into the hearts and minds of co-operative, credit union and trade union management and membership with a clearly articulated programme of actions within their communities to influence and rally civil society in general.

A cease fire in Ukraine and the beginning of negotiations is the first priority. This needs to be followed by clear development goals for Ukraine and Russia *vis a vis* co-operation with the EU and a de-escalation of the arms race in Europe starting by NATO withdrawing tactical nuclear weapons and Russia not deploying them outside its own territory. Mobilising co-operative membership for peace and development requires a cultural and communication strategy and infrastructure to deliver it that can counter the brainwashing impact of a social media, culture industry and IT ecosystem controlled by our enemies. Aristotle's response to the sophists and sceptics of his day was that human understanding of nature was unproblematic as humans are a part of nature. This is the reality that needs to be at the heart of our co-operative communications strategy for peace and development aiming to turn deserts into gardens and swords into ploughs. But to reformulate Ian Macpherson's question: how are we to establish the leadership in co-operative enterprises to make this happen and make the co-operative voice for peace and development heard over the noisy clamour for war? Yehuda Paz has a chapter entitled 'Are Co-operatives relevant in the 21st Century' (pp. 51-66). The author's rhetorical response is 'Can we survive the 21st century without co-operation?' The answer to both questions is, I suspect, it's up to us as co-operative members. If we can find enough co-operative courageous, transformational, servant leaders, they will still need to find courageous, transformational, servant members to transform resolutions into actions.

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