

‘Co-operative Socialism: Theory and Practice’

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Synopsis

- 1) Consideration of a two dimensional political map (with Pro-capitalism/Not-capitalism on one axis, and with Authoritarian/Liberal on the other – see Appendix 1) suggests that the ‘Liberal/Not-capitalist’ quadrant is undergoing a renaissance of theory and action,
- 2) As a consequence, actual examples of a liberal, decentralized socialism (perhaps called ‘Co-operative Socialism’) becomes apparent (and, to a considerable degree existent),
- 3) It is therefore suggested that an evolving ethical values and principles structure (the Statement of the Co-operative Identity from the International Co-operative Alliance, see Appendix 2) can form a suitable basis for ensuring that such activities (organised as appropriate co-operatives) remain true to the socialist, not-capitalist aims of social equality and ecological care.
- 4) A ‘Sunflower Co-operative Corporate Model (see Appendix 3) has been designed with these ends in mind: such non-hierarchical co-operatives are proposed as corporate structures to ensure that social equality and ecological care are sustainably self-delivered.
(Synopsis word count: 148)

Commentary

The objective of (co-operative) socialists is a sustainable, nonviolent replacement for capitalism.

Since it is observed that capitalism uses five interlocking mechanisms (theft, rent, interest, dividend, and unequal pay for paid work) to impoverish people, and to trash the planet, it is proposed that, for the replacement of capitalism to occur, a complete set of integrated and holistic activities is necessary if we are to contest all five of these pernicious mechanisms.

The following Seven-point Action Plan to replace capitalism has therefore been developed.

At each action point, examples are given that start to illustrate contemporary activity that operates at that level.

Co-operative Socialism - A Seven Point Action Plan

1) ‘Co-operation not Coercion’

Convert competitive, market-based businesses into workplace co-operatives, and remodel monopoly activities as stakeholder co-operatives: each one having responsible stewardship of land and knowledge resources, with each co-op demonstrably working according to the Seven Co-operative Principles of The International Co-operative Alliance (see Appendix 2).

See points 2) and 5), below, for the funding mechanism for this;

(*Current examples:* ‘The Big Idea’, ‘Just Us’ fair Trade and Ethical Worker Co-op, ‘Daily Bread’ equal pay worker co-op, Scott Bader Commonwealth, John Lewis Partnership, Royal National Lifeboat Institution)

2) *‘Predistribution not Redistribution’*

Distribute the created wealth from these workplace co-ops through nationally collected, co-operative corporate taxation, distributed into local, democratically-controlled, Community Banks and, so, make money and credit available for responsible wealth creation and community development,

(*Current examples:* Co-operative Action grant and loan fund, JAK Banks, Time Banks, LETS schemes)

3) *‘Global stewardship for needs not private resources for profits’*

Maximise public service provision (health, life-long education, libraries, transport and so on) on a co-operative, free-at-the-point-of-use basis, thus only retaining money as a mechanism for access to discretionary purchases,

(*Current examples:* Public Libraries, Lowick Co-operative School, New Lanark Co-operative Education activity)

4) *‘Fair, guaranteed incomes for all’*

Introduce guaranteed fair income for all, within upper and lower limits, and with elements of automatic Citizens’ Income, and, so, do away with the need for direct and indirect personal taxation,

(*Current activities:* Basis Income lobbying, Food not Bombs – Food activism)

5) *‘Banking as public service - not as global warfare’*

Abolish money-lending and credit-creation for profit: operate banking as a community co-operative public service (see point two above),

(*Current examples:* Campaign for Interest-free Money, Christian Council for Monetary Justice, Forum for Stable Currencies, Early Day Motions, Committee on Monetary and Economic reform, Sovereignty Movement)

6) *‘End global exploitation through financial speculation’*

Reintroduce international exchange controls, a Tobin Tax, etc, as necessary,

(*Current Activities:* ATTAC, War on Want, Post-Autistic Economics)

7) *‘All our sisters are our brothers: and all our brothers are our sisters’*

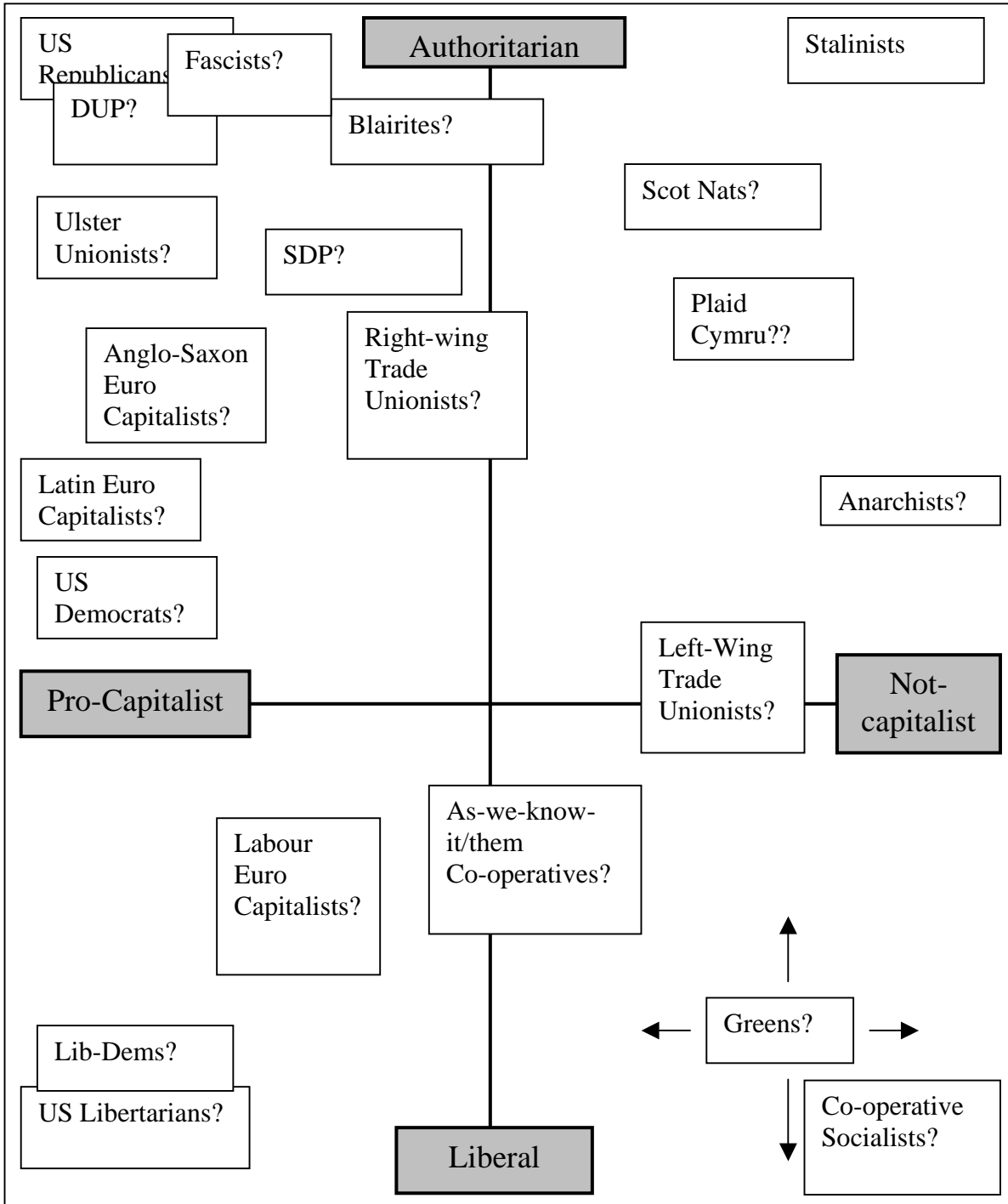
Make capital grants (not loans) to developing countries.

(*Current Activities:* Jubilee 2000, Jubilee Debt Coalition, Tsunami responses), Social Forum Movement, Halifax Co-operative Forum)

Appendix 1: A Possible Political Map

(See 'nonviolent action' Issue 46 September 2003 p7)

For other political / social mappings, see www.politicalcompass.org and www.environics.net (follow path to Social Values page for book 'Fire and Ice')



Appendix 2: Statement of the Co-operative Identity:

The International Co-operative Alliance (Manchester, UK 1995)

Definition:

A co-operative is 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.

Values:

Co-operatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

Principles

The co-operative principles are guidelines by which co-operatives put their values into practice.

1st Principle: Voluntary and Open Membership

Co-operatives are voluntary organisations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.

2nd Principle: Democratic Member Control

Co-operatives are democratic organisations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary co-operatives members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote) and co-operatives at other levels are also organised in a democratic manner.

3rd Principle: Member Economic Participation

Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their co-operative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the co-operative. Members usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing their co-operative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the co-operative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.

4th Principle: Autonomy and Independence

Co-operatives are autonomous, self-help organisations controlled by their members. If they enter to agreements with other organisations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their co-operative autonomy.

5th Principle: Education, Training and Information

Co-operatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their co-operatives. They inform the general public - particularly young people and opinion leaders - about the nature and benefits of co-operation.

6th Principle: Co-operation among Co-operatives

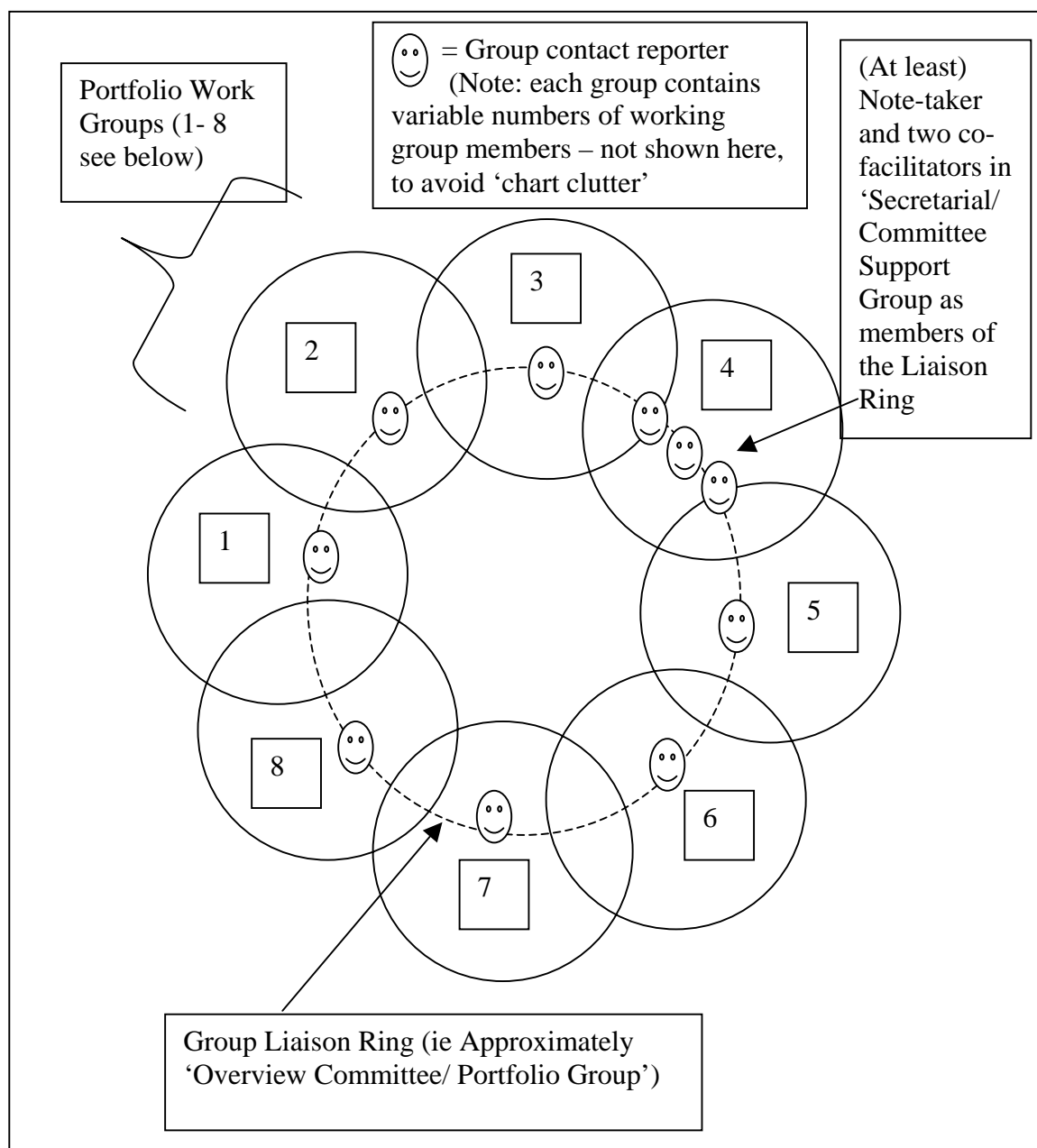
Co-operatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the co-operative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.

7th Principle: Concern for Community

Co-operatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.

Appendix 3: ‘Sunflower Co-operative’ Group Working Structure

A suggested non-hierarchical corporate working structure: incorporating co-operative values and principles, and aimed at preventing both ‘within-corporate’ and ‘outwith-corporate’ anti-social and anti-ecologic violence, and achieving the group’s self-identified aims and objectives.



For suggested group portfolio identities (1-8 in schematic above), task lists, corporate working values and principles, see following pages.

Example of Suggested Group Portfolio Identities

- (created for ‘Les Amis De - Friends of - De Le Monde Diplomatique’ UK: FLMD)

(The task list below is a suggested, illustrative allocation, organised into work-group portfolios)

1: Membership Support Group

2: Café Group

3: Outreach Group (Web, Kiosk, etc)

4: Secretarial / Committee Facilitation / Group Ring Liaison Support / Treasury Group

5: Paris and International FLMD Networking Group

6-8: Ad-hoc Project Work Groups, as needed/identified

1: Membership Support Group

Task	Who	comments
Newsletter	1	Deadline: 2-4 weeks
Membership – dbase, sorting, reports	1	
Membership – thanks, cards	1	
Signature sheets to dbase, email list	1	
Email- list of contacts and mail-outs	1	
Email queries	1	
Mail outs – copying, labels	1	
Members’ queries, relations, info.	1	

2: Café Group

Task	Who	
Programme leaflet	2	
Co-ordinating papers and documents for cafés	2	
Co-ordinate volunteers	2	
Relations Fr. Inst./technical/rooms	2	FI 6 weeks before -
Book Orders	2	
POB pickups	2	
Newspapers stock	2	
Tel. Queries and reservations	3 and 2	
Speakers – liaise, confirm	2	Co-ordinator, or person booking
Venue arrangement – programme, opening up, confirmation, facilities	2	FI liaison person – or technical, event, speaker co-ordinators
“front of house” cash, signature sheets, public, stock paper and books	2	Rotate
Chair cafes/conferences	2 + Each org.	or whoever has a special

		connection to speaker/subject

3: Outreach Group (Web, Kiosk, etc)

Task	Who	
Distribute, pin-up programme	3	Membership Sec. to co-opt volunteers
Press, radio, tv, email	3	Press & Publicity team
Distributors FT	3	
Inserts in other mail outs (others)	3	NGO contacts, Universities, etc.
Emails to target people	3	
Cross-link with other orgs. UK on website and newsletters	3	
Tel. Queries and reservations	3 and 2	
Website	3	
Website development	3	
Web links and monitor	3	check FT, LMD, GW, Les Amis Paris – other partners
Relations FT, Wendy, Granta, Fiona	3	
Target marketing	Group 3 + 4 people for conference.	special mailouts/emails for conferences
Target press	Group 3 + 4 people for conference.	special for conferences
Inserts in Websites, periodicals	3	
Targeted mailouts	3	
Develop literature	3	Printed Friends leaflet pending (4 years.)
Colleges, Students' Unions	3	
NGOs contacts	3	
Campaign groups (WTO, A19, Ch99 etc)	3	
Trade Unions	3	
Eng. Edition	3	
FT	3	

4: Secretarial / Committee Facilitation / Group Ring Liason Support / Treasury Group

Task	Who	
Committee – agenda, minutes	4	Chair/rotate
Accounts – bank, IR	4	

Legal liabilities viz.HQ and public	4	

5: Paris and International FLMD Networking Group

Task	Who	
Amis Fr – admin head office	5	Our leaflet mention in English.edition.
MD head office	5	
Amis Fr – admin head office	5	Our leaflet mention in English.edition.
MD head office	5	
Notify Paris for insert LMD	5	Before 15 th previous month

6-8: Ad-hoc Project Work Groups, as needed/identified

Task	Who	

Suggested Internal Self-governance Overview for 'Sunflower Co-operative Corporates'

(Based upon the Co-operative Co-working Values and Principles in the ICA Statement of the Co-operative Identity - *see below*)

Values and Principles

The ICA Statement of the Co-operative Identity surely forms the Values and Principles that a link our global movement to our individual actions as co-operators.

Accordingly, one can expect corporate co-operative institutions (in this case – ‘Sunflower Co-ops’) to adhere to, and annually audit, these Values and Principles.

Fractal like, the ICA Values and Principles can form co-operative distinctiveness – ‘Sunflower Co-ops’ ought therefore to produce their own Annual Co-operative Audits to demonstrate their fidelity to these Values and Principles.

Internal Structures

If we recreate the internal structures of hierarchies, then our outputs become dualised - the individuals involved have to relate to the fact of the hierarchical structure, while also trying to fulfil the 'sunflower co-ops' corporate aim.

Accordingly, 'Sunflower Co-ops' might consider Sunflower Structures as their organisational models.

More-over, hierarchies exist with job-titles as marks of hierarchy.

Perhaps, 'Sunflower Co-ops' might consider 'Portfolio Working' rather than 'Job Title Working'.

Finally

Use of the ICA Values and Principles as guides to good practice and good governance must face up to two dangers:

- Cherry picking the Values and Principles that are most amenable to our own, human ambitious natures, and, in consequence, avoiding those that are most valuable to us as co-operators.

- The danger of centralisation and hierarchy emerging unnoticed.

I'm strongly of the view, therefore, that a) terms of working be time limited, and b) with re-engagement with any work portfolio being seen as Project Based, rather than Career Based.

For referred Statement of the Co-operative Identity (The International Co-operative Alliance Manchester, UK 1995): see Appendix 2)