

**The Co-operative Party Annual Conference 2015 - the politics the party & the movement
19/20 October, 2015.**

Council Delegates: - Eileen Driver, Glen Barnham, Tanya Noon, Adrienne Lowe, Marlene Corbey
Dan Crowe - Vice President Jenny Barnes – NEC Representative from the Group Board. David Stanbury-ObsERVER

The co-operative party October 2015

Members of Parliament

Luciana Berger - Liverpool Wavertree **Shadow Minister for Public Health**

Stella Creasy - Walthamstow **Shadow Minister for Business, Innovation and Skills**

Chris Leslie - Nottingham East **Shadow Chancellor**

Lucy Powell - Manchester Central **Shadow Minister for Childcare**

Steve Reed - Croydon North **Shadow Minister for Local Government**

Jonathan Reynolds - Stalybridge & Hyde **Shadow Minister for Energy and Climate**

Stephen Twigg - Liverpool West Derby **Shadow Minister for Political and Constitutional Reform**

Stephen Doughty - Cardiff South and Penarth **Opposition Whip**

Louise Ellman - Liverpool Riverside **Chair of Transport Committee**

Jonathan Ashworth - Leicester South *Adrian Bailey* - West Bromwich West

Chris Evans - Islwyn

Mike Capes - Ilford South

Geraint Davies - Swansea West

Mark Hendrick - Preston

Rachael Maskell - York Central

Meg Hillier - Hackney South & Shoreditch

Kate Osamor - Edmonton

Seema Malhotra - Feltham & Heston

John Woodcock - Barrow and Furness

Barry Sheerman - Huddersfield

Anna Turley - Redcar

Gavin Shuker - Luton South **Chair of Co-operative Party Parliamentary Group**

Gareth Thomas - Harrow West **Chair of the Co-operative Party**

Members of the House of Lords

Lord McFall of Alcluith

Baroness Smith of Basildon

Lord Bassam of Brighton Lord Davies of Coity

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock

Lord Graham of Edmonton

Lord McAvoy

Lord Moonie

Lord Thomas of Macclesfield

Baroness Nicol

Lord Kennedy of Southwark

Baroness Thornton

Lord Tomlinson

Lord Touhig

Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town

Lord Knight of Weymouth

Members of the Scottish Parliament

Claudia Beamish

Kezia Dugdale

James Kelly

Welsh Assembly Members

Mick Antoniw

Christine Chapman

Alun Davies

Vaughan Gething

John Griffiths

Ann Jones

Huw Lewis

Sandy Mewies

London Assembly Members

Jennette Arnold

John Biggs

Andrew Dignmore

Len Duvall

Nicky Cavourn

Joanne McCartney

Murad Qureshi

Val Shawcross

Friday Evening – Welcome reception hosted by London Co-operative party

Gala dinner - keynote speakers Dame Pauline Green and Lord Maurice Glasman.

Plenary 1

Gareth Thomas, Chair of the Party - Newly elected Lab/Co-op Party MPs were welcomed and he lamented the loss of the previous ones, would we have had any co-op schools without Ed Balls? After 3 years service Karin will be very missed After 3 years of campaigning, a Military Credit Union to be launched in October which will hopefully become as successful as the terrific US Naval Federal. Our job is to spread the word about the Military Credit Union. Do we need a pay day military Union? – yes - we can get a loan from Ministry of Defence....remarkable for a co-operative'. We need to support Jeremy Corbyn to defend schools, hospitals and services against Osborne's cuts. Mutualisation of BBC will need our support - license fee payers should be able to vote for and oversee BBC trustees. We have a range of work to do with Post Office Union and the Fair Tax Mark campaign, also new policy thinking and campaigning. Labour's election defeat is already having an effect on the Co-op movement eg subsidies for co-op energy companies are being cut.

Stella Creasey MP - Politics are in flux. She took inspiration from Gradgrind and facts. Facts tell us that one third of all divorce petitions contain the word "Facebook " We are each other's best hope. How to put Ps and Values into the world today? Within a few years there will be more self employed people than employed. It is the time to tackle the loan sharks in the public sector - the Credit Union - we need to imitate Norwegian Sovereign. Co-ops offer a way forward in our current housing crisis. Some Co-op councils are radical such as Plymouth with its energy policy. We need to identify companies that are not creating equality eg where women are only the non executives on Boards so they have no power to make decisions...just making up numbers. Our movement needs to be more than a pamphlet, we need to play

an active part in the Action Network to promote campaigns. Many co-operatives being set up to fill gaps left by local authorities - music tuition, career advice, home care. Much work being done to shape services such as the Railways, NHS and Co-operative Councils. Let's challenge the fact many people don't know about us or co-operatives. Let's not leave it to someone else but let's put co-op principles and values at the front and centre of politics...."do the wise and kind thing".

Vision 2020 Taking Coop Party policy forward - feedback on the 2014 process to encourage more local party participation was positive with 60% member awareness. Recommendations to improve the process are:- reduction in policy subjects[3-4], a clearer timetable with earlier start and on-line process. Possible 2016 policy:- affordable housing, create more equal society, build shared economies, provision of local services. Consider new areas of co-operative provision:- Social care, housing, transport, energy. Biggest barrier-lack of public awareness. Lack of knowledge of good practice. Digital development. A very stimulating presentation with full participation, 21 contributions from floor including:- focus on now and future to be ready for EU elections in 2019, 2020 Gen Elec. Must work with Labour Party to present 'joined-up policy and avoid duplication. Talk to T&C Planning re 'land value' model. Green energy/sell back at risk. Need to highlight councils who act co-operatively but don't realise it. Need legal framework policy to present case to LA's - adult social care, agriculture, financial services.

How can members get involved and support the wider movement? John Boyle, Co-op Party staff, lead a lively session the only criticism being we ran out of time. John was very good involving this group and getting from the floor what they thought, as active co-operators, was their role and what they wanted in terms of activities. What is a co-op? - the list is impressive ranging from local pubs, clubs, football teams and of course the Co-op Group to name just a few. With the changes within the Group how are the Constituency and local Forums going to work and what do we as members want from them and what is our input. How can members get involved

The Power of Stories. The video link and documentation will be emailed to delegates as the sound was not appropriate. However, the session was about getting people to look into their stories as to why they are involved and therefore everyone knowing each other better in order to work more positively together.

Co-operative energy - Community energy in all parties GE manifestos but feed-in tariff changes and pre-accreditation are undermining schemes. On-shore wind cheaper than off-shore. Reduced cost = increased engagement = expansion. Urge all to respond to consultations - do not underestimate your influence. Community energy partnerships need to make massive progress on heating.

Co-operative Energy - now 240k customers all can choose where their personal energy is sourced 'User Chooser'- unique in UK. London now has toxic air, cold homes crisis, energy crunch [peak demand gap in winter of 1.2%]. Poor mayoral record of intervention, missed targets. Solar ratio Wales:3 London:1 Personal energy efficiency in homes and workplaces-if pushed from residents base might accelerate. Discussion from floor included problem of energy storage [big batteries], politics of community energy, fracking, Co-ops UK support of group start-ups.

Solidarity and the EU Movement Grampi Alhadeff -the enemies on the Right hate the EU. On the Left a number of people are worried that referenda are blunt instruments. The referendum is being used by Cameron to keep rebellious Tories in control. Grampi thought the 2 recent referenda is that you need a position story....difficult. The achievements of EU include Peace, a single market, social rights and open borders. All successes but now showing problems. The Trade Unions said to Cameron be careful because if you negotiate workers' rights away, Labour needs to commit to reinstating them. He asked the Co-op Party to be affiliated to the Labour Movement for Europe.

Claire McCarthy Head of Political Affairs for Co-op Party, She was also Special Adviser to Peter Hain when he was Minister for Europe. In other countries the Minister for Europe is a high position in Cabinet. Our Minister for Europe has a very small Secretariat in the Cabinet as agriculture is in Defra etc so our Minister goes around talking but hasn't much power. Another challenge is to deal with the Right wing Press. We need to make a positive case. We need to talk about our economy in terms of personal effects eg NOT EU has £billions benefit BUT the benefits to individuals. The Co-op Party needs to because 1)EU is consistent with our values ie if we work together we can do great things together. 2) practical difference that the EU makes eg EU work on co-op energy and EU work on Fair Tax. 3) in terms of procurement...the EU work means that new businesses have to have a % of co-op businesses or social enterprises.

Supporting sustainable credit union growth through employer partnerships and payroll deduction.

This highlighted the continued growth and the credit union for armed forces is fantastic. It raised a question as to how many colleagues of the Group had signed up to the co-operative credit union and how it was being promoted across the business. This would be a great way to encourage colleagues to take out an account but also would be good to match up with Funeral Pre-payment plans, electrical items through co-operative electrical, Christmas savings for food. A business case around this would be very beneficial.

The future of political parties, funding and structure - a well attended lively session with the Electoral Reform Society leading the discussion. It was very much how do we structure our politics in the 21st century when traditionally membership of political parties since the war has been a decline with blips along the way eg Tony Blair-LP membership shot up in 1997 and the same now with Jeremy Corbyn. The discussion from the top table and within the group was about how do we involve members what is their role, how are young people involved as at the last election record numbers not on the election register and not engaged. Should funding be from the public purse?-maybe unpopular with the public. Should parties have to rely on Hedge Funds (Tory) or in Labour's case the Trade Unions via the political levy? Also discussed was 'devolution' for England and making the regions responsible where at the moment the Govt have centralised power in Whitehall which most members thought negative and bad for the country. There was a lively contribution from Lord George Foulkes who gave us the Scottish dimension and who is warming to proportional representation having previously been a firm supporter of first past the post. There was general agreement the status quo is no longer acceptable.

Plenary 2 Westminster, Scottish and Youth Reports **Stephen Twigg** Lab/co-op MP - internationalism is a co-op core value. The context is v challenging with an anti politics climate. How far can Hope win the debate? How far can Fear win the debate? The complexity of British public's attitude to migration. Pro EU campaign will be cross Party in the UK. We need to say we want a Europe led more by citizens than the elite. We need facts about how EU money has been spent in our communities. We need stories and images about this. Please look at Richard CORBETT's App which is DoorstepEU it is best accessed thro his website. **Gavin Shuker** Lab/c-op MP - sad to lose several Lab/Co-op MPs and welcomed those newly elected. They have worked on the Housing Bill, developing Mutual Rail amendments; co-op schools, military credit union; the Co-operative and Social Enterprise bill; international development and fair trade; health and procurement. Community energy faces threats from the present government Co-op values are not of the past but of the future. Let's build it together. Now have 24 Lab/co-op MPs

The Party and the Movement Dame P Green/Hazel Blears/CoopEnergy/Coop College/CDS
1000 Housing coops in UK = 200k homes = 0.5m people = £530m pa = £10b assets = 1% of market.
Upsurge in community models Community Land Trusts, Garden Cities, Students, Wales Pioneer, Rochdale BH [mutual]
Some using Wikihouse & prefabs. **Challenges**- scarcity, ownership V rental, right to buy, welfare reforms, London&SE, Governance, VFM, Seen as 'closed', little understanding

Hazel Blears co-operation – agents for change, partnership Coop Party/Group/Labour Party. Historical misunderstanding of movement but now seems emotional desire to change the way we do business. Social Value Act ensures that social/environmental impact/VFM must be taken into account in all public procurement. Move agenda from margins to centre – 'better way of doing business' A number of questions raised regarding the Group which she dealt with very well. Fully participative with questions covering encouraging self employment/new business, price of milk, Fair Tax, Coop Bank, Coop Schools, redressing bonus culture, internships, fast-build houses in Reditch

Plenary 3 – Wales Report, Parliamentarians Panel, CWU - Wales Report-Vaughan Gething Deputy Minister for Health in Welsh Assembly- 1/5 are members of a coop - CU in every school - much pioneer housing - exciting time for Welsh Movement just launching Co-operative Agenda for Wales. Social care-a fertile ground to develop. **LG Panel, - Chris Herries/Steve Reed/Chris Penberthy** - a wide range of questions-Police Commissioners elections/Criminal justice – must give voice to the children in care/food poverty/ Social Enterprise Fund/attacks on community energy
Dave Ward CWU 200k members 25m delivery address in UK Challenges – 20-30 years of constant change=job losses. Open market during shrinking market because of technology. Sociological change BUT need to embrace changes. Despite 1990's opposition to privatisation the coalition govt sold off at below value price but CWU secured legally binding agreement NOT to break up company, not to franchise, not to outsource, not to introduce 2 tier employment conditions, no zero hours, a legal agreement for right of members to negotiate, no change in pensions provision – will it last? – subject to 2018 review but otherwise protected. CWU is strategically involved, sitting on boards [not main board]. Company Charter, to defend universal service, will go to shareholders at 2016 AGM. Strategies – to develop collective ownership of members shares, privatised but controlled by members, retention of public voice [50% Govt owned], drive new initiatives – Royal Mail Local [doorstop interaction], community involvement. An inspirational presentation!

Future of Co-operative Movement –if we want a future must enthuse, involve, retain. Historically delivered a trusted product/serving needs/working with grassroots – today providers are not respected and trusted. Strong sense of anger re monopoly/oligopoly power. Where can we now find success/gaps not being filled - potential sectors – energy and care? Many successes – Phone Coop, MidCounties –Energy, Childcare, student housing-2projects exploring Central Federation to purchase freeholds. Need to find new form to finance – venture capital/crowd sourcing/Shared Interest/Lend with Care? 34 attendees asking 12+ questions – need to have inspiration & imagination – future should be a replacement for capitalism.

Co-operative Innovations. – *chaired by Tanya Noon*

Fair for you – a CIC offering people an alternative to brighthouse and organisations offering very high rental agreements for electrical items; Co-operative News and encouraging members to join and sign up for the email newsletter; Co-operative College encouraging members to become members and the domain.coop offering organisations a yearly free subscription to have the domain name. Debates covered: Local Government Communities, Energy and Climate Change, Co-operative Development and Consumer Affairs, Women and equalities, International Development, & Health and Social Services

Co-operative Party Branch Support - branches will retain £4 per member as minimum funding. Branch Development Plan [template available] will replace Annual Reports. Simple A4 application for grant to support specific party activity. There will be Annual Conference Delegate entitlement. Better support & guidance for local elections. Database of all branches is now accessible to all branch secretaries. Individual members can access own account. Sponsorship of a youth member – Robin said this had happened in his area by creation of a ‘pool fund’. Any specific questions to Shane Brogan or John Doyle mail@party.coop

AGM – 2014 – 30% cut in funding, reputational damage, Strategy is branches/organisation/ membership [2015 retention increased to 90%] 12500 new sign-ups with 30% being under 30. 18 diverse questions covering ambiguity of Labour Coop candidates, TCG AGM & funding, affiliated societies, wider cooperative movement. Motion re subscriptions - NEC recommended no increase – was carried 12,249/627 ***Jenny spoke against any reduction as she considered this would send a dangerous message to TCG indicating a lack of acceptance of personal responsibility for party income.*** As this had not been considered by Council we, as delegates, felt unable to influence as we had no mandate to do so. Emergency Motion – re supporting Co-operative Women’s Guild .

Plenary 4 - Co-operative Campaigns for the Future – our values have never been more relevant should be mainstream not peripheral, mutualism should be model of choice. Coop Party in Lords should influence Boundary Review and Charity Review [sale of assets] – government is attempting to lock out Labour. CU’s not to be seen as ‘poor man’s bank’ but move to provide more diverse financial services – banking platform/visa – CU’s are regulated by FSA.

Marlene Corbey
6th October 2015