**Different Visions of English Co-operation in the Victorian Age: A Review**

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**Abstract**

While it is difficult to identify a point in time that co-operation was established in England, there is no doubt that the Victorian era constituted the greatest period of development, both in terms of the various philosophies of co-operation and its implementation. The development of the co-operative model of economic organisation in England, predominantly undertaken during the Victorian era, is often described in teleological terms—the movement commencing in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries as highly philosophical and utopian in nature and evolving into a very pragmatic commercial movement epitomised in the very successful Co-operative Wholesale Society with its origins in the Rochedale Pioneers. However, in reality the co-operative movement became much stronger during the nineteenth-century by building on both philosophical and pragmatic ideas, though the utopian extremities of thinking were singularly unsuccessful. The philosophical ideas where important in building the necessary social support amongst leading classes while the pragmatic ideas where important in building economic capacity and wealth for members. In this paper I survey the various strands of this complex development and show that, for the entire period of the nineteenth-century, co-operative sects struggled to promote their ideas in the face of extremely successful pragmatic co-operation.

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I. Introduction

It is now widely accepted that co-operation in England had a long history before Robert Owen, even though the latter is still misleadingly referred to as the father of English co-operation in some popular narratives on the subject. Tracing the birth and historical trajectory of cooperation is, however, highly contested historiographical terrain. The key turning points in the history of English cooperation, including the precise starting date, eludes us, in part, because there is no complete set of records of this movement prior to the advent of a centralized register of co-operatives well into the nineteenth-century. The accuracy of these registers when they did come into existence have also been called into question because cooperative promoters took advantage of the opportunity to incorporate their entities under differing enabling legislation, often out of ignorance (Ludlow and Jones 1867, pp. 145-146).

Tracing the historical trajectory of cooperatives is made even more problematic by the fundamentally changing nature of co-operation, the impact of other similar movements—such as that of the Friendly Societies—and the evolving and changing thinking of advocates. There is, in short, no one unchanging entity called cooperation through historical time. To handle this difficulty, it has often been convenient to describe the development of the cooperative movement in England as a teleology commencing with the creation of utopian ideas in the latter part of the eighteenth-century and ending with the victory of the very pragmatic Wholesale Co-operative Society in the late nineteenth-century. There is a certain logic to this description because the utopian socialists of the early part of this period, including such as Charles Fourier, Claude Henri de Rouvroy (better known as the Comte de Saint Simon) and Robert Owen, prescribed co-operative arrangements that were intended to fundamentally change the human experience, while the supporters of organisations such as the Wholesale Co-operative Society had no such intention.

This teleology, though largely correct, is itself deceiving if it induces the historian to glide over the numerous other ways that cooperation changed through time. The evolution from a utopian mission to a pragmatic mission was, in particular, buffeted by a range of changing points of emphasis in the debates amongst the cooperative promoters. These shifting points of contention included the place of religion in the cooperative enterprise, the extent to which man was mutable, the degree to which the prevailing industrial structure was a social evil, the appropriate role of government in supporting the cooperative movement, the degree to which members should enjoy the profits of co-operation immediately or use them to support desired social change, and the ultimate structure of the economy once a co-operative commonwealth had been entrenched. There were also evolving arguments relating to the nature of the co-operatives themselves in terms of whether they ought to be producer or consumer co-operatives and whether democratic government of these institutions ought to be prioritised. There was, then, an ever changing position amongst promoters, even within the utopian-pragmatic trajectory, on what co-operatives were intended to achieve and how best to establish them such that they are most likely to achieve the particular outcome sought.

Still another challenge confronting the mapping of English cooperation through time is the sometimes opaque and/or misleading rhetoric used by the cooperative promoters. References

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to the mutability of man, the need for religious leadership in the movement, or the need to displace the existing industrial system were invariably genuine and do indeed define the fault lines in co-operative thinking and practice. The cooperative promoters were not, however, always in full control of their ideas, nor did they always perceive their full implications, and hence there is always a possibility that they were expressing ideas in an instrumental fashion to achieve other ends. The co-operative promoters also had a history of drawing upon whatever was the prevailing philosophical system in a strategic fashion to support either utopian co-operation or pragmatic co-operation. The utopians naturally sought to rationalise their arguments for radical or creeping fundamental change by reference to a prevailing philosophy and would emphasise the benefits expected to flow from the implementation of their prescriptions. On the other hand, the pragmatists sought to utilise philosophically based arguments to gain support of the leading classes and to remain in step with the broad liberal ideas of the time. In this way, they sought to legitimise their prescriptions by joining them to the dominant economic thinking of the day.

In this paper I review the main fault lines in the history of English cooperation in the context of these traditional historiographical difficulties and do so by considering the ideas of a number of important participants in the debates. This paper has been divided into seven sections. In section two, I highlight the major areas of contention between the philosophers and the pragmatists to provide the general context and a framework for a review of each individual’s thinking and action. In section three, I examine the Owenite co-operative ideal in more detail. I do this because Owen’s philosophy formed the basis of the framework of the organisation of the Rochdale Pioneers (which subsequently formed the basis of the Co-operative Wholesale Society) and Owen himself enjoyed an increasingly respected reputation for community-building after his death in 1858. It was the reflected glory of Owen and the Rochdale Pioneers that many pragmatic co-operators sought to capture in order to legitimise their ideas.

In section four, I follow my examination of Owen by reviewing the philosophy of the Christian Socialists via the thinking of J. M. F. Ludlow; emphasising particularly the religious and non-democratic nature of the ideas of the Christian Socialists. In section five, I consider J. S. Mill’s reaction to Owen and his reaction to co-operation more generally. J. S. Mill’s Liberal Socialism is identified as somewhat of a middle ground between ideology and pragmatism and, so, this part of the discussion serves to highlight the nuances of the problems encountered in trying to categorise participants in terms of their thinking and to emphasise the difficulty in treating the discourse in a polarised fashion.

In section six, I review the role of J. T. W. Mitchell in emphasising pragmatic co-operation in the United Kingdom. In essence, this part of the discussion centres on the extent to which the successful co-operators in Britain were driven by the philosophical ideas of Owen and the somewhat more pragmatic though still millenarian Christian Socialists or were driven by pragmatic, commercial considerations in the fashion of J. T. W. Mitchell. In section seven, I have provided some concluding remarks.

II. The Fault Lines in Co-operative Thinking and Practice

It should be clear to the reader by this stage that the discourse regarding the nature of British co-operation is complex and varied. Some conceptual issues and categorising devices must therefore be outlined before considering the four case studies that follow. The first point to be made relates to the starting point and the trajectory from this point. Specifically, due to my
focus on cooperation in the Victorian period, and with full recognition that the cooperative movement pre-dates Owen, I have taken the commencement of Owen’s work (the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries) as my starting date. This is justified partly on the grounds that Owen’s vision of cooperation was increasingly accepted as the foundation template once the Victorian period got under way and partly on the grounds that it exemplifies the utopian end of the co-operative spectrum that characterized the early Victorian cooperative movement. This latter observation is particularly important since, as mentioned in the introduction, one of the most complex and enduring fault lines in the co-operative discourse is the extent to which the movement was driven by either idealism or pragmatism. The temporal swings in favour of either end of this dichotomy played themselves out within a longer term historical trajectory in which the majority of the cooperatives shifted from being idealistic in orientation to being pragmatic in orientation. This is seen in the way that the objectives of the community-building idealists in the first part of the nineteenth century, such as Owen and the Christian Socialists, were different from those of the practical men of business, such as J. T. W. Mitchell, who dominated the co-operation movement in the later the nineteenth-century.

The task of identifying this dichotomy and the associated historical trajectory, at least in broad terms, is relatively straightforward. It is, however, a far more challenging assignment to capture the nuanced intellectual positions of the cooperative promoters normally associated with either end of the idealist-pragmatic spectrum. This is because idealists had pragmatic dispositions in some domains, while similarly pragmatists took idealist stands on occasion. For instance, while the commercial or pragmatic co-operators sought to pursue commercial outcomes first and foremost, they also sought to contribute to social improvement in some way shape or form. Often they pursued such goals in other parts of their lives. Mitchell, for example, was very religious and pursued all sort of worthy causes through his life, but he did not emphasise that aspect of his personal life in his co-operative life. Laidlaw (2005) explains such attitudes by reference to the “different lives” of individuals—in Mitchell’s case, his religious and co-operative lives were very separate.

The pragmatic co-operators also appreciated the need to align their work with current economic and social thinking. An even more complicating issue, and one which will be returned to in detail later in this section, is the way promoters used idealistic language merely to achieve pragmatic ends, or pragmatic arguments to achieve idealistic ends. Thus, it is difficult to categorically separate one group from another solely on the grounds of their priorities in establishing and operating co-operatives. In short, in the case studies that follow, qualifications are repeatedly made and sharp edges to categories shaved when assigning co-operators to one end of the dichotomy or the other.

The difficulty of allocating particular promoters to either camp is also partly due to the difficulty of defining pragmatic and idealistic cooperation with sufficient precision to give the terms operational meaning. To some extent, in the following narrative, I allocate co-operators to either category on the basis of whether they perceived co-operation primarily as a vehicle for significant social change or primarily as a commercial vehicle to achieve immediate material advantage. Under this approach, even if a co-operator did perceive co-operation as an instrument to achieve social change in some way, he need not be categorised as an idealist co-operator proper if he prioritised commercial success over this social change? This approach also means that the pragmatic-idealistic divide does not necessarily turn on the extent to which the promoters pursued revolutionary or evolutionary change. This is, in any event, a moot issue, since the various sects of co-operators invariably sought to preserve the
new industrial productive capacity resultant from the Industrial Revolution, and, at most, wanted to re-organise it in a piecemeal fashion and in such a way that the populace would benefit from it in a more equitably and more holistically way. By and large, they were not radicals and did not pursue the revolutionary re-organisation of society. Instead, the more utopian of them sought to provide examples of this better life and presumed that, once the broader community had observed the effectiveness of these examples, they would naturally wish to participate.

A secondary and related defining feature that poses problems is gauging the extent to which a co-operator had a utopian vision for a future society, even if, as argued here, it was to be achieved in slow incremental social change. The actual spectrum of utopian visions articulated was wide ranging, but in essence, the utopian co-operative ideal was a community building one (Gurney 1996) and often utopian co-operators looked to forms of communitarianism as a basis for reorganizing society for the better. They also held opinions as to the extent to which individuals could and should make decisions pertaining to their future or whether a paternalist attitude ought to be adopted by elites to guide those not yet developed enough to know what was best for them. Each of the actors had a range of responses and articulated a range of prescriptions relating to the key elements above.

For instance, some participants in these discussions argued for an immediate extension of democratic control to the workers, some prescribed a gradual handing over of control as the workers’ apparent capacity for self-determination improved and, of course, some argued against any sort of worker control or form of democracy. Perhaps most importantly, each actor also had a nuanced view as to the extent that man was mutable. As a result of the adoption of a co-operative form of organisation based on their ideas, ideologues would either consider that mutable man would be raised to a new ideal or immutable man would enjoy more equitable outcomes. Often, their assessment of the extent to which man was mutable would also be reflected in their assessment as to the appropriateness of democratic governance and the timing of implementation.

Further difficulties relating to categorisation arise when the participants within each sect of co-operation are considered or the broader membership and its perceptions are taken into account. Even in relation to the same ideology shared between members of the same movement, differences occurred from one person’s perception to the next in relation to methods, objectives and strategies (Gilchrist and Moore 2007, pp. 2-3). As will be seen when I review the role of J. M. F. Ludlow below, the Christian Socialists were particularly vulnerable because of the dissonance in understanding and belief between even the core leadership. This dissonance goes some way to explaining the short existence of the sect. As such, the existence of a co-operative, the advertising of its specific objectives, philosophy and methods of operation, or the size of its membership roll did not necessarily indicate the relative success of that organisation or a wider acceptance of its particular philosophical or practical tenets.

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3 Communitarianism, as opposed to communism, was the practice of establishing communities in which co-operative arrangements could be pursued. In the case of Owen, these were called “Villages of co-operation” while in Fourier’s prescription, they were called “Phalanxes” (Beecher 1986).

4 For instance, Ludlow and Jones (1867, pp. 136-137) reported that, in 1865, Rochdale had about 5,326 members out of a possible 7,700 households (the head of a household was generally the member and so Ludlow and Jones took households numbers to equate to possible membership) while the Halifax Co-operative Store had 5,775 members. Notwithstanding the higher number of members in the Halifax Store, it only had sales of 148,000 pounds while that at Rochdale, with a smaller membership base, had profits of almost 250,000 pounds. Clearly, the members of Halifax were less likely to purchase form their store than the members of Rochdale and
Additionally, it should not be forgotten that there were numerous other debates, over and above the dispute over whether to pursue idealistic or pragmatic goals, and the strong positions taken by co-operators in these allied debates also defined their intellectual position and must be taken into account. These allied debates fed into the idealist-pragmatic debate, and in many ways they cannot be separated from this larger debate. Still, in the case-studies that follow, they are presented as exchanges that buffeted the main intellectual dispute that drove the shift from idealistic to pragmatic cooperation.

Specifically, the key and enduring elements around which arguments were developed by utopian co-operators and pragmatists alike as the nineteenth-century unfolded included: (1) identifying the appropriate form of voluntary Association; (2) identifying the extent to which man’s character is mutable and the effects a positive co-operative structure might have on that possibility, including in relation to religion; (3) the importance of the rejection of self-regard; (4) the importance of the rejection of competition; (5) the place of government and philanthropic involvement as a source of resources and other supports; (6) the most appropriate method of distribution of the rewards of production; (7) the extent to which industrial democracy was an important element; (8) the extent to which equality among men was a precondition to a better society; (9) the pursuit of a better outcome for society via education, better housing and social services as well as reform of working conditions for adults and children (Lambert 2011; Gilchrist and Moore 2007, p. 3; Gurney 1996); and (10) the pursuit of producer or consumer cooperation.

All of these allied disputes are important, but the debate over whether the promoters should form producer or consumer cooperatives was particularly important. This is because the idealistic-pragmatic dispute was often fought out indirectly via this debate, especially as the decades progressed, and so much so that, after some point, the teleological movement from idealism to pragmatism went almost in lock-step with the evolution of cooperation from being predominantly producer to consumer in form. Specifically, as co-operation matured through to the mid-century, there was an increasing focus directed toward whether consumer or producer co-operation ought to be prioritised (Backstrom 1974; Gurney 1996). The accepted teleological story seems to be one of the development of co-operation commencing with utopian socialism in the early decades of the nineteenth-century, moving through producer co-operation in the middle decades of the century and ending in the very pragmatic and successful consumer co-operative movement as represented by the trajectory of the very successful Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS).

This historical narrative is one that ends with the ultimate victory of a pragmatic form of consumer co-operation over the idealistic form of producer co-operation associated with John M. F. Ludlow, Edward Vansittart Neale and other idealist co-operators. It is a story in which these idealists effectively fight a valiant rear-guard action by promoting producer co-operation as a means to ensure that co-operative organisations did not follow the path of the increasingly dominant and commercial-oriented CWS, which lost the co-operative ideals relating to worker democracy and sought to increase the dividend made available to members rather than increase the rewards for those producing goods.

Although this traditional narrative of a movement from idealistic producer cooperatives to pragmatic cooperatives has much truth, it needs to be heavily qualified. Notwithstanding the

so, this example reinforces the fact that membership numbers do not assist the observer to assess the extent to which the co-operative store was accepted, trusted and utilized within a community.
idealists’ sense that producer co-operation would be more likely to preserve the ideological aims they shared, in fact producer co-operatives were capable of being as pragmatic as the consumer co-operatives. For that reason, I consider that it is more useful to dichotomise pragmatic co-operation into two forms—pragmatic co-operation and commercial co-operation. Pragmatic co-operation was present through the entire period covered by this discussion while commercial co-operation actually matured over the period to become the dominant form of co-operation in England.

This last issue—the need to qualify the traditional mapping of the idealism-pragmatic dichotomy on to the producer-consumer dichotomy—leads me back to the main debate and perhaps my main point; namely, that the idealistic-pragmatic dichotomy and associated trajectory towards a pragmatic cooperation is slightly overstated. Pragmatic sentiments were always obviously present amongst the cooperative ranks, but more so than is usually presumed if one takes into account (a) the way in which idealistic language and philosophies were drawn upon, either unconsciously or knowingly, to mobilise resources and public support to achieve pragmatic ends, and (b) the way in which the rank and file of any cooperative were often far more conservative and pragmatic than the promoters of the cooperative, and it was often the former who dictated the eventual path taken by an organization.

Often, pragmatic co-operation was more attractive to the working classes as it was far more easily understood and it conformed to their understanding of how the world operated. Further, it was often more politically and commercially sensitive in that pragmatists saw the need to enrol the leading classes to their interests and rarely saw the need to antagonise such institutions as religion (Mercer 1947). Dr William King’s movement in Brighton is an early example of this pragmatic co-operation.5 Education and the rhetoric of improving man were employed by these pragmatic co-operators but the focus was on the real-world development of their organisations with minimal political and social aggravation—they sought to slowly develop capital, undertake risk averse trading and were not generally concerned with focusing on issues and ideas beyond those relevant to their membership. King, for instance, was adept at recruiting the local Brighton elites to the cause through his reference to the

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5 King’s contribution to society and posterity lay less in the invention of new ways of thinking as in rendering practical the thoughts of others. He believed that self-help and voluntary association were cornerstones to successful co-operative activity and importantly was able to communicate the idea and practice of co-operation to the artisan and working classes that were less able to comprehend Owen’s written contribution much less accept Owen’s authoritarian drive toward setting up co-operative models in accordance with his plans. Indeed, Mercer (1947, p. 14) identified that Owen, amongst others, was inspired by a genuine desire to assist in the plight of the working poor “...but very few manual workers were at first able to understand how their fine philosophical principles could be reduced to daily practice.” King’s capacity for communication was best represented in his publishing of “The Co-operator”. This weekly only ran to 28 numbers but was instrumental in turning a philosophy into a practical science. The numbers addressed very important elements around the establishment and operation of a co-operative but also spelled out how co-operatives might respond to religious and social issues. These treatises had the tendency to empower the reader with the capacity to speak on the benefit co-operation and the importance of religion to the upper classes. Further contributions made included treatises on issues such as the value of labour, the provision of case studies as examples of good and bad practice and also the setting out very specific rules for the financial operations of the co-operative. Such rules included ensuring cash only transactions, properly constructed and accurate accounting systems and the importance of capital and knowledge in such endeavours. King helped establish institutions for educating workers and their families but he also involved the upper classes in the provision of patronage and insisted upon the Christian basis to co-operative endeavour. These measures helped ensure that King’s efforts in Brighton where he established the Brighton Co-operative Benevolent Fund Association in 1827 were successful (Mercer 1947).
popular idea of self-help, mutability of man and the Christian virtue inherent in co-operative efforts. Whereas, Owen, as will be seen below, irreparably damaged his cause by rejecting religion and discounting the importance of the elites in garnering support for his ideas.

It is clear that this pragmatism was always present, even as Owen was establishing himself and even though it became less idealistic over time. On the other hand, through time there was a gradual shift away from the community-building ideals, even of pragmatic co-operators of the ilk of King, toward commercial co-operation. In this form of commercial co-operation, the co-operative organisation and its operations were more reminiscent of a joint-stock company than of a community-changing, popularly managed organisation. The move toward commercial co-operation particularly gathered pace in the second half of the century (Gurney 1996). The trajectory of the Rochdale Pioneers is often used as an example of this teleology. The Pioneers considered themselves to be part of the world and were realists; they saw themselves as subject to the limitations placed on them by the real world (Gurney 1996). This form of commercial co-operation set the scene for a showdown between the CWS and utopian co-operators throughout the 1860s, 1870s and 1880s as producer co-operation gave way to consumer co-operation. It was a complex and extended process but Ludlow and Jones (1867, p. 142) considered that, by 1867, producer co-operation formed on the basis of profit sharing was giving way to consumer co-operation, which was major form of co-operation by that time.

The waters are muddied still further when it is considered that the leaders of these successful co-operatives, including the CWS, were proficient in developing and promulgating a rhetoric that implied community-building and social foci. For instance, Ludlow and Jones (1867, p. 136) identified that the Rochdale Pioneers established a corn-mill society, a cotton-mill, a sick burial society, a building society and even a Turkish bath. Again referring to Ludlow and Jones (1867), it is reported that the cornerstone of this form of co-operative organisation was that it focused on maintaining the quality of goods, ensuring correct weights and measures, and on developing products and services for the benefit of members both in terms of quality and in terms of price. However, these organisations also funded libraries, educational institutions and a vast number of other institutions that were not of a commercial nature.

Throughout nineteenth-century England, emerging philosophies exerted pressure on existing ideas, ensuring that the co-operative ideal was mutable while the class system served to ensure that the working classes, the intended beneficiaries of co-operation, often held an imperfect but much more pragmatic sense of the purpose and appropriate formation of co-operation. There was consequently an ongoing tension between the place of ideology and the practical commercial pressures to be faced; the opportunity for changing the world as compared to the opportunity for enhancing the material well-being of a few members of the local co-operative store.

Members did not necessarily understand or care about the millennial aspirations of the leadership of the co-operative; they may not even have understood them. The statistics regarding the numbers of co-operatives, numbers of members, turnover and profits are important but not definitive when considering the penetration of co-operation into the economic organisation of society and the effects of that penetration. As Gurney (1996, pp. 80-81) pointed out:

“…one might shop at the co-op, take a holiday in Blackpool, send one’s children to the co-op gala, buy a dress from a private outfitters…We must be
careful not to confuse the wish-images of national and local leaders with the complex historical reality.”

Co-operation may have also been instrumental in maintaining the status quo during periods of political upheaval or economic stress. While social improvement and moral benefit was discussed in leadership circles, the members themselves were more interested in the opportunity for material gain—or sometimes the opportunity for an alternative supplier. As Professor Calhoun (2012, p. 31) has identified, co-operation was attractive as an alternative to radicalism because:

“[i]t was easier for some, like factory workers, to become reformists rather than radicals because the new industrial capitalist order offered them a place, potential material gains, and a variety of reasonably satisfying fall-back positions if they did not get as much as they sought in their struggles.”

The working class were, in short, attracted by very practical elements of co-operation and not so much by the rhetoric (Mercer 1947). To conclude this section, during the first two thirds of the nineteenth-century, pragmatic co-operation was represented by, essentially, a recognition that utopian ideals needed to be placed on hold while the practical problems of establishing the institution and accepting the principle were dealt with. On the other hand, the utopians continued to prioritise their utopian ideals and to participate in the various national institutions established with a view to advancing co-operation as a pan-community solution to the various economic and moral problems of the day. By the end of the century, however, the utopian ideals had been lost almost entirely and commercial co-operation, while still emphasising the social importance of the movement, had retained the field. A focus on profits, conglomerate operation, and returns to members dominated. It was at this point that the likes of E. V. Neale and J. M. F. Ludlow accepted that utopian co-operation would not be successful in their lifetime and Neale particularly sought to separate himself from co-operation very late in life. This trajectory, however, should not preclude the possibility that pragmatic thinking within the cooperative ranks was less pronounced at the start compared to the end of the Victorian period, since many utopian promoters were realistic in their expectations while others simply used idealistic language and philosophies to mobilise resources to achieve their pragmatic ends.

III. Robert Owen (1771-1858) and the Co-operative Ideal

I have commenced with a review of the work of Robert Owen of New Lanark for three important reasons. Firstly, he was one of the most important founders of co-operation in a comprehensive sense - by which I mean that he exhaustively described the objectives and prescribed his sense of the appropriate formation of co-operation, its intended effects and its value to society. He expressed the enduring fundamental principles of co-operation, or at least defined the key elements around which debate revolved during the nineteenth-century

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6 His French contemporary counterparts, Charles Fourier and Claude Henri de Rouvroy, comte de Saint Simon (hereinafter referred to as Saint Simon), equally established comprehensive philosophies surrounding co-operation and where, in turn, very influential in the Francophone and Anglophone worlds, even beyond their community-building ideas. For instance, Fourier is credited with influencing economic thought, political thought, psychology, sociology and surrealism amongst other things (Beecher 1982, p. 2). However, the place of Owen and the Rochdale Pioneers is most important here as they are the models cited most during the period under review.
(White 2012; Calhoun 2012; Butt 1971, pp. 9-10). Secondly, his ideas addressed the key components of utopian co-operation. These explicit expressions of objectives, organisation and ideology provoke a clear contrast with the practical implementation of co-operation in the nineteenth-century in Britain. Thirdly, Owen, and the Rochdale Pioneers whom he influenced, are still cited by the major co-operative corporations when they seek to align their own establishment with the values of these ideologues in the middle and latter decades of the twentieth-century.

The life and work of Robert Owen was of considerable importance in the Anglophone World – particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom - as well as on the Continent. Indeed, Podmore (1905) reports that such was the impact of Owen’s thinking and activities that biographies of his life and work appeared in French and German over fifty years after his death. Of course, there has also been significant ongoing academic discussion pertaining to various aspects of Owen’s contribution as well as to his life throughout the period since his death. Therefore, Owen was recognised far and wide as a great socialist thinker and practitioner.

Owen’s practical and successful experience of business provided him with the confidence that he could implement the prescriptions that he devised. His business success also allowed him to experiment in co-operation in the Town of New Lanark. This drew considerable attention and allowed him to recruit many acolytes, before he had exhaustively committed his prescriptions to writing (Podmore, 1905; McLaren 1996; Lambert 2011). Up to this point, only his practical example of New Lanark, rather than his later prescriptions, was available for review and observers read into the venture the things they liked (Davidson 2010). However, when a full appreciation of Owen’s ideas dawned on the educated elite, his reputation began to wane (McLaren 1996, p. 223). Notwithstanding his apparent successes at New Lanark, Owen was ultimately singularly unsuccessful in his endeavours, as were many of his acolytes\(^7\) and he particularly failed as an institution builder (Harrison 1971, p. 1; Pollard 1971, p. viii).

Robert Owen was born in Wales in 1771. Therefore, his life spanned a considerable portion of the Industrial Revolution that formed his career and caused many of the various social and economic problems that he was determined to ameliorate. He sought to do this via his co-operative prescriptions and the comparative wealth that could be harnessed to resolve these problems (Pollard 1971, p. vii). He was apprenticed as a boy of only ten years, having already been in the workforce for a year, to a textile house in Lincolnshire. Over the next ten years he worked himself into a position where he was offered and accepted a position as manager of a mill in Lancashire. This new role saw him managing, at only 20 years of age, a mill employing over five hundred people (Lambert 2011; Cole, 1964). At 28 Owen became manager at the New Lanark Mills (in Scotland)—a new mill when he took over its management after marrying the daughter of its owner, Caroline Dale, in 1799 (Lambert


\(^8\) There were many acolytes of Owen that tried to implement his prescriptions in various forms. An interesting example is provided by Donnachie (1971) wherein he describes the Owenite Community at Orbiston just up the road from Lanark but it was a “strange mixture of paternalism, Owensism, religious and moral ideas, and reaction against urban industrialization” (Donnachie 1971, pp. 135-145). It was certainly not developed using Owen’s principles. The community was established in 1825 but had failed comprehensively by 1828.

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In 1800 he became a partner with his father-in-law. He remained at New Lanark for over 25 years, eventually becoming managing partner, and built both the business and his reputation as a social reformer and successful businessman (Davidson 2010). It was during his time at New Lanark that he developed ideas regarding the character of man that he carried and propounded for the remainder of his long life—he died in 1858 aged 82.

When he became a partner in the New Lanark mills, Owen experienced considerable difficulty. Initially, he spent considerable time and energy making technical upgrades in the mill. The population was drunken and ill-prepared to make a contribution to the mill. And so, Owen quickly attended to enhancing the life of the workers (Lambert 2011, p. 421). Perhaps a little ahead of his time, Owen said that people spent considerable money enhancing their machinery but little on their people. He determined that an investment in the people of New Lanark was needed for economic as well as social reasons.

While he was not well educated or well read, he was influenced by a number of philosophers, including the seventeenth-century socialist John Bellers (Podmore 1905, pp. 25-27 and p. 259) and it was the writings of this socialist that allowed Owen to form his ideas pertaining to his “Villages of Co-operation”—the central plank in his prescriptions for the re-organisation of society that was reflected in his mature thought.9 His reading and his experience led him to three ideas that were to remain central to his thinking for the rest of his life: (1) that man is governed by reason; (2) that society could be made and remade at pleasure; and, (3) that salvation for mankind was to be found in a return to nature (Podmore 1905, p. 257).

Robert Owen was one of that generation of Britons who came to maturity during the Napoleonic Wars and thereby placed more store in achieving economic security than political reform (Butt 1971, p. 10). Like many of his generation, he had a preference for controlled, economically focused action over the political advancement of the working classes. This predilection reinforced Owen’s reputation as an authoritarian. He did not, for example, have any confidence in democratic institutions and was therefore wary of any call for franchise reform. For instance, he considered that the United States was no better off for their experiment in democracy, arguing that the democratic arrangements in that country neither improved the political capacity of people nor their quality of life (Butt 1971, p. 12). Indeed, his antipathy towards democracy was so unbending that it may have been more deeply seated than a mere preference for economic priorities over political advancement. Speaking on universal suffrage, Owen was quoted in Butt (1971, p. 12) as saying that:

“…were you have to have a parliament chosen next year, by Universal Suffrage and the Vote by Ballot [meaning secret ballot], it would be probably the least efficient, most turbulent and worst public assembly that has yet ruled this country.”

Ultimately, however, he was prepared to tolerate democratic reforms if they led to his formulation of society being achieved (Harrera 2013, p. 346).

The central theme of his philosophy related to what Owen believed to be the mutable nature of man’s character. Popular thinking in the opening decades of the nineteenth century considered that man was personally responsible for his actions and his happiness. This

9 Other philosophers that are reputed to have influenced Owen include Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Claude Adrien Helvétius (Saville 1972) as well as John Locke (Lambert 2011).
thinking was reinforced by the followers of Adam Smith and the utilitarianism of the polymath Jeremy Bentham. Man’s character was settled naturally and he needed to manage his character, not succumb to his base desires, in response to the admonitions of his betters and accept the place given by God (Lambert 2010, p. 420). Owen, on the other hand, considered that man’s character is moulded by the environment in which he lives and works. He believed that the capitalist system, with its focus on competition, profit and the popular belief that it was appropriate for such profit to be achieved regardless of the human cost to the working classes, inhibited the capacity of working families to achieve happiness. Their characters would respond in kind to this environment, which encouraged vice, dishonesty and selfishness to the detriment of virtues such as mutual concern, honesty and healthy living (Pollard 1971; Bonner, 1961). Further, given the working man’s time and commitment to his profession, that his character was largely molded by the conditions he was subject to in his working environment.

Given the amount of time spent at work, Owen considered that the nature of the working environment was critical in forming a man’s nature. He believed that the evils that had developed out of raw capitalism were not inevitable but could be cured by changing the way workers were treated in the workplace. New Lanark became a working experiment used by Owen to demonstrate the inherent truth in his philosophy. He had made provision for his workers and their families for their health, education and leisure (Tawney 1964). Putting his ideas into practice at New Lanark, Owen was able to demonstrate that the payment of reasonable wages, provision of more humane conditions and the provision of education did not detrimentally effect the return of a handsome reward to investors who, as time progressed and Owen’s business capacity became more well known, were required to accept a fixed return on their capital and to allow Owen to invest increasing sums toward amenity for his workers and their families (Cole, 1964, Tawney, 1964, Bonner, 1961).

New Lanark was also the laboratory that made Owen’s reputation and it was the success of his experiments there that inspired him with a “persistent conviction” of the practicality of his

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10 By way of examples, Owen required shorter hours of his employees and made provision of education and housing of a suitable standard for the times (Cole 1964).
11 It was in the area of the education of children and the amelioration of the most evil of abuses carried out in the name of capitalism that Owen focused most attention. He believed that the “controlled environment was the formative influence on character” and, therefore, education was central to the development of that environment (Butt 1971). Education should have a practical purpose and special attention should be paid to the education of children in order for their behaviour to be changed for the better (Herrera 2013, pp. 343-344). Indeed, “...a rational system of education” including leisure opportunities, would transform the whole community by degrees (Davidson 2010, p. 233). In 1816, and after he had commenced committing his ideas to paper, Owen established the “Institute for the Formation of Character” at New Lanark. In this institution Owen established educational and leisure opportunities for the children of the community, including music and dance (Lambert 2011, p. 419). The curriculum was devised by Owen and schooling commenced with an infant school as he felt younger children’s minds were more plastic than adults. He considered these young children to be “compounds” – a combination of bodily and mental propensities and faculties and, as such, were ripe for modelling in ways of value to the community’s future (Lambert 2011, pp. 421-422).
12 By 1825, about 20,000 people had visited Owen’s factory and community. The opening of New Lanark to visitors was a marketing triumph. During the Napoleonic Wars, those people who could holiday holidayed in Scotland as the Continent was out of the question. New Lanark quickly became a stop off point on the standard itinerary. Owen built up strong support and admiration for his work from those visitors (Lambert 2011, p. 422).
13 In order to curb drunkenness, the community at New Lanark was provided with entertainment to enhance health and satisfaction. It was sold provisions at cost price and in unadulterated and properly measured forms. To educate and inform people, lectures on morality and other subjects were provided. In keeping with the idea of improving people’s lot in life, Owen also ensured that the workers of New Lanark were insured against sickness and old age.
scheme centred on communal villages that “outlived all demonstrations of its futility” (Podmore 1905, p. 258) and which drove him for the rest of his life. New Lanark was a community of around 1,300 working people and about 500 orphans and paupers – many were economic migrants from the Scottish Highlands (Davidson 2010, p. 234). Given Owen believed in the effects of circumstances molding character, he focused his attention at New Lanark on developing an environment that would change the character of his workers. As he later wrote, it was necessary to provide the right physical, moral and social environment to allow people’s characters to change. It took a few years to win over the New Lanark community but eventually his improvements were accepted and, in his “Address to the Inhabitants of New Lanark” in 1816, Owen was in a position to enumerate and commit to further improvements (Davidson 2010, pp. 235-236).  

It has been recognised that Owen’s relationship with the working class was based on paternalism and that he was “intellectually ill-equipped to compromise” (Butt 1971; Taylor 1995). He was, therefore, more successful in his personal relationships than in his political activities (Butt 1971, p. 14). He impressed many as being sincere but was unable to compromise and accept modest and slow change. As a part of the experiment at New Lanark, Owen worked for a while with a democratically elected Village Council but became a dictator establishing many rules. He was convinced that he needed to provide both a framework for, and the arrangements for maintaining discipline. He did this in an authoritarian way rather than a paternalistic way in the style of the Christian Socialist’s fifth form elite of mid-century (Moore and Gilchrist 2007).  

This authoritarian streak manifested itself to his contemporaries most obviously when he sought to paint on a bigger canvass and use his New Lanark credentials to change the world. In pursuing this goal, he demonstrated his fundamentally totalitarian frame of mind and incapacity to translate his ideas into a sound philosophy that could be taken up by an audience that was not personally attached to the man. His first attempt at communicating his ideas beyond his New Lanark “realm” was called A New View of Society or Essays on the Formation of the Human Character. After publishing New View in 1816, Owen drafted and presented a report to the parliament at Westminster entitled “Report to the Committee of the Association for the Relief of the Manufacturing and Labouring Poor”. This report was presented in March of 1817.  

In it Owen made prescriptions relating to the settlement of paupers into communistic “Villages of Co-operation”—this was the first written description of Owen’s utopian communities. This document also emphasised Owen’s belief that work was all important and the communitarian system of organisation would provide significant benefits to the working poor. The disappointment felt by Owen after publishing this report betrayed his political naiveté. He thought that, if the arguments were sufficiently sound, the political and elite classes would simply implement them. While he received verbal support from a number of significant personages, including the Duke of Kent, and while he had enjoyed praise and professions of support from the thousands of visitors examining New Lanark each year, he received virtually no parliamentary support for his ideas and certainly no action followed the publication of his report.  

14 For instance, contrary to common practice, Owen insisted on paying the workers’ full wages during the 1806 cotton embargo and this created considerable goodwill as can be imagined (Davidson 2010, pp. 234-235).  

15 A more specific example of his political naiveté is found in the work Owen undertook in developing and promoting a factory reform act. The proposed act included a number of the reforms which Owen had introduced in New Lanark. The work of convincing the legislature commenced in 1815 and he was able to gain some
Owen was difficult to dishearten though. He rationalised his failure by arguing that, without appropriate training, any efforts to move beyond the received wisdom would fail (Herrera 2013, p. 344). He continued to manage New Lanark and to develop his ideas further. By 1820, Owen had forwarded his “Report to the County of Lanark” (The Report) in which he outlined for the benefit of the local authorities his prescriptions for a better world. It was received almost with silence, confirming in the minds of many historians that Owen had reached the nadir of his power by 1816 and that Owen’s attempt to walk on a national stage, requiring a written exposition of his thinking, lead to increasing discomfort regarding his ideas. The Report represented a change in emphasis for Owen, in that the ultimate goal of the establishment of villages of co-operation was retained, but he forwarded a more comprehensive economic idea wherein the value of goods produced in these co-operative villages would be assessed by reference to the labour content (Treble 1971, pp.39-41).

As the 1820’s progressed, Owen’s detractors were becoming more vocal. For instance, William McGavin (1773-1832) published his “The Fundamental Principles of New Lanark Exposed” and his criticism focused on Owen’s authoritarian nature and emphasised this by speaking of Owen’s use of workers as machines or puppets (Lambert 2011, p. 427; Dictionary of National Biography 2014). He stood accused of being a man of a single and unoriginal idea (Pollard 1971, p. viii) and this accusation was reinforced as Owen would promulgate what Pollard referred to as his theory in its extreme form, that men’s characters are exclusively the products of their environment.

By 1824 it was Owen’s position regarding the place of religion that made most people uncomfortable. Owen rejected Christianity in a time when religion was a fundamental of society. He was, however, a deist rather than an atheist (Butt 1971, p. 10). He acknowledged the existence of God but rejected organised religion on the basis that it was contributing to the problem. His recognition of working men, women and children as full “human beings” who had the right to “full humanity” separated him from many of his contemporaries, including those closely aligned in wanting real change. His principles of education and social reform were developed out of a rejection of the “supernatural” (Herrera 2013, p. 343) and his “violent attacks on all religion” alienated many influential adherents and would-be adherents (Podmore 1905). Indeed, in his later years, Owen became a spiritualist and Podmore considers that this final “decline” ensured his reputation was irrevocably damaged (1905, p. 257). It was at this time that Owen decided that he needed to establish himself in a community that did not have the history and the ingrained social arrangements extant in England—so to the New World he went.

Feeling defeated and misunderstood at home, Robert Owen decided to test his theories in the United States and Mexico. He felt that these new countries would be free of the stultifying effects of the history and social organisation of England and would, therefore, be more predisposed toward successfully implementing his prescriptions. Owen arrived in the United
States in 1824 to find, as a pleasant surprise, his reputation to be very strong (Cole 1971, p. 209). He purchased land in Indiana in 1825 and established “New Harmony”, the first village of co-operation to be established to Owen’s formula (McLaren 1996, p. 223). It collapsed within a couple of years and Owen held that the experiment failed due to difficulties in raising capital and disagreements between the colonists. However, at around the same time, he was approached by a British born Mexican General, Goodall Wavell, with a view to seeking his involvement in a settlement in Texas. At that time Texas was still part of Mexico and Owen wasted no time in informing the Mexican President as to his requirements for a successful project.

In essence, Owen considered that the New Harmony experiment failed because of the national and cultural prejudices ingrained in the people. He therefore unsuccessfully requested that the Mexican government grant him Texas as an independent state and he petitioned the United States and the United Kingdom for their blessing (Herrera 2013, pp. 345-346). Without an independent Texas and like his experience in England, the ingrained nature of the present polity would “taint” his vision.\(^\text{16}\) Neither his experiment at New Harmony nor his designs on Texas worked to his satisfaction and, notwithstanding his blind faith in the wisdom of his own thinking, Owen returned to the United Kingdom in 1829 believing he had been let down by others (Robertson 1971, p. 160; McLaren 1996, p. 224; Herrera 2013, p. 356).

When he arrived home, Owen found that many co-operative organisations had come into being while he was away and, by 1830, 300 societies had been established. The first Co-operative Congress was held in May of that year (Podmore 1905, pp. 261-262 & 264-265) and this meeting was to be an annual event for the remainder of the century. Returning to great acclaim and with what must have been once more a feeling of very pleasant surprise, Owen placed himself at the head of the Co-operative Movement. He refined his thinking and promoted his scheme for the re-organisation of society into a “Commonwealth of Co-operation”. In 1842 he published the most substantial exposition of his thinking in his “The Book of the New Moral World”. This tome is divided into three parts which are arranged to best express Owen’s thinking and prescriptions. The parts are: (1) an explanation of human nature (which sets the scene for his following two parts); (2) an explanation of the conditions necessary for happiness; and (3) the arrangements necessary to improve the social condition.

Importantly, Owen is once again strident in his view that the external environment can have positive or negative effects on people:

> “That…the constitution of every infant, except in case of organic disease, is capable of being formed into a very inferior, or a very superior being, according to the qualities of the external circumstances allowed to influence that constitution form birth.”

Owen (1842, p. 20) (Italics in original)

He considers that everyone is different (p. 23) and that:

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\(^{16}\) Owen also argued that such an arrangement would prevent armed conflict between Mexico and the United States. In this he may have had something. Texas won its independence from Mexico in 1836 and became a state of the United States in 1845 a process that caused the Mexican – American War of 1846-47 (Herrera 2013; Johnson 1997).
“[e]ach individual comes into existence within certain external circumstances, which act upon his peculiar original organisation, more especially during the early period of his life, and, by impressing their general character upon him, form his local and national character.”

Owen (1842, p. 28)

As a result of this, individuals are irrational unless they are trained properly (p. 35). Each of the three sections of the book is, in turn, organised into discrete sub-sections dealing clinically with each proposition that is put. In reality there is relatively little that is new in terms of Owen’s thinking in the work. However, it is the first coherent exposition of his thinking set out in a comprehensive fashion. Importantly, the work also serves to express Owen’s response to what were apparently misconceptions in the broader community as to his meaning in certain areas and resulting from his previous publications.

For instance, Owen is careful to confirm that he is not interested in people achieving equality with each other. He is concerned to confirm that all will benefit from his prescriptions but he is not looking to level society (p. vii). Interestingly, he refines his prognostications, perhaps after having learnt a lesson along the way, and does not attack religion per se but, rather, explains that religious organisation, moral, political and commercial arrangements are all based on an error “respecting the nature of man” (p. xxi) and, so, the establishment of a New Moral World will see happiness created as the “necessary consequence” just as the maintenance of the current system “must produce misery” (pp. vii – ix). Indeed,

“…a new moral world, in which truth alone will govern all affairs of men, and in which knowledge, unchecked by superstition or prejudice, will make everlasting progress, - a world in which justice, for the first time, will be done to human nature, by every feeling, faculty and power, inherent in each child, being cultivated to its full extent, and cultivated, too, by the concentrated intelligence and goodness of the age.”

Owen (1842, p. xvii)

Owen was antipathetic toward capitalism because he believed human happiness was not achievable via a system that molded human character toward competition, dishonesty and deception, and which led to employers abusing their responsibility toward their workers using the false proposition that such abuse was required in order for adequate profit to be returned to the providers of capital. He recognised that improvement was possible because of the Industrial Revolution (Pollard 1971, p. x) and so was not antipathetic toward industrialisation. In fact, he taught the workers that industrialisation could be the driving force behind better conditions (Butt 1971, p. 14) but that it required a new approach to the organisation of society to deal better with the new conditions (Herrera 2013, p. 346). In support of this, Podmore (1905, p. 258) commented that Owen’s imagination was “entirely dominated” by the enormous multiplication of productive power brought about by the “mechanical inventions” of his generation. As such, Robert Owen was not trying to reverse the industrial age but, rather, redirect the resources developed out of it to ensure the establishment of a better community.
Even though Owen was careful to deny that his prescriptions were visionary (p. xviii), his apparent bent toward internationalism, his diatribes against money and what it causes in terms of making some “slavish producers” and others “wasteful consumers and destroyers” of wealth (p. xxiv), his enmity toward organised religion combined with the utopian nature of his ideas tended to reinforce the discomfort felt by society’s elites and also by many co-operators of a more practical bent. Over time, his reputation in terms of his co-operative credentials was repaired, but his ideas were never really adopted fully. However, Owen was a person of some contention and has excited interest in academics of the labour movement, socialism, education, music and many other disciplines as he had ideas pertaining to all of these areas but also because he had a pragmatic frame of mind – as demonstrated by his commercial success at New Lanark—at the same time as being an idealist and utopian (Claeys 1993).

While Marx dismissed Owen as a utopian socialist (Taylor 1995, p. 89), his influence was substantial and co-operation claimed Owen as its founder. Notwithstanding the fact that his various experiments all failed and his efforts to influence governments and a constituency would scarcely be taken seriously (Pollard 1971, p. viii), it was Robert Owen’s legacy and the need for an icon of co-operation that ensured that his reputation was rehabilitated in future years. Thus, over time, Owen’s place in the mythology of socialism was confirmed and romanticized by co-operators and other socialists who leant on his popular image for legitimacy of their ideas and objectives.

Harrison (1971, p. 1) reinforces this idea by identifying very early in his essay written to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Owen’s birth in 1971 that “…each generation discovers in its hero what it most wishes to find”. By 1996 a statue had been erected to Owen’s memory in Manchester, the home of British co-operation, and Taylor (1995, p. 88) described it as representing:

“…the Owen of popular memory within the co-operative movement and the image demonstrates the patina of nostalgia that the pioneer co-operators have stamped on his memory.”

Taylor (1995, p. 91) also explains that Owen was the “sacred totem” due to his longevity and his long devotion to progressive causes while Podmore (1905, p. 258), Butt (1971, p. 9) and Taylor (1995) are but a few examples of later historians that have recognised Owen as the founder of co-operation. His village of New Lanark is still visited today by many pilgrims from the Labor Movement. It was Owen’s thoughts pertaining to the mutability of man, competition, education, gradual change and community-building, rather than those pertaining to religion, democracy, equality and communitarianism, that were to last.

By any measure, Owen was an enigma both in the context of his times and in the view of subsequent generations. There is no doubt that his rise to leadership in industry and his subsequent thinking and activities have earned him a place in history - his early career showed much promise and he could have enjoyed a very comfortable life without the stress and reputational damage that his ideas caused him.

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17 Owen considered that the root of happiness was union and, as such, not only would the New Moral World effect reconciliation between man and man, but also between nation and nation. The adoption of his principles would see the cessation of individual or national advantages and, therefore, remove all opportunity for opposition or contention (p. xxi).
IV. The Christian Socialism of John Malcolm Forbes Ludlow (1821-1911)

Ludlow was a descendent of one of Oliver Cromwell’s major-generals and fellow regicides. He was born in India, where his father soldiered for the East India Company, and, following the death of his father, educated in France in the 1830s under the charge of his mother. He there absorbed French philosophical and sociological thinking and, like J. S. Mill, was particularly influenced by the utopian socialist writings of Charles Fourier. He moved to London in 1843 to study at the Inns of Court, where he came into contact with individuals with similar radical inclinations.

Here Ludlow met Tom Hughes, Charles Kingsley, Fredrick Denison Maurice, Edward Vansittart Neale and Frederick James Furnivall to promote what soon came to be known as Christian Socialism. This movement was initially very much based on this group at the Inns of Court. Maurice was the chaplain of Lincoln’s Inn, while Ludlow, Hughes and Furnivall effectively used their chambers at the Inns of Court as their headquarters. These individuals were pre-occupied with the spiritual and material poverty amongst the working classes that became apparent in the “Hungry Forties”.

Specifically, the desperate plight of the working classes that accompanied the industrialisation of this period was suddenly exacerbated, and highlighted for middle-class observation, by a series of seemingly unrelated events that unfortunately occured over a three or four year period. These events included the economic dislocation following the collapse of Railway Mania in 1844-6; the Great Irish Famine of 1845-8 at a time in which Ireland constituted over 30% of the population of the British Isles; the “monster” Chartist petitions and marches for franchise reform over the years 1846-8; the Continental revolutions of 1848 and, finally, the arrival of Cholera to London in 1849 at the very time when the threat of insurrection seemed to recede.

This grim and unstable environment created a sense of foreboding amongst the members of the professional classes about future class relations and forced some to doubt the wisdom of industrialisation within a laissez faire environment. It was a period that the French intellectuals of the day, whose publications Ludlow had read, called a critical rather than an organic period in history; a period in which conventions and institutions were called into question and change seemed imminent.

18 For the formation and central tenets of Victorian Christian Socialism see Hughes (1876); Seligman (1886), Dorfman (1941), Lewis (1951), Masterman (1963), Ludlow (1981) and Masterman (1984).

19 One should also not discount the cross fertilisation with movements, allied to the Christian Socialists, that sprang to life in this environment. Henry Mayhew’s Morning Chronicle letters of 1849-50 were particularly influential in spurring Ludlow, Kingsley and Hughes in their Christian Socialist endeavours (see Hughes 1876; Thomson 1971; Ludlow 1981, p. 156). They were more divided over Lord Ashley and Sydney Herbert’s scheme to fund mass migration via philanthropic donations.

20 The way in which these events influenced the Christian Socialists is reflected in the later accounts prepared by the participants, such as in Hughes’ (1876) memoir of Charles Kingsley: “In order to understand and judge the sayings and writings of Parson Lot [the nom de plume of Charles Kingsley at this time] fairly, it is necessary to recall the condition of the England of that day. Through the winter of 1847-8, amidst widespread distress, the cloud of discontent, of which Chartism was the most violent symptom, had been growing darker and more menacing, while Ireland was only held down by main force. The breaking-out of the revolution on the Continent in February increased the danger. In March there were riots in London, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Liverpool, and other large towns. On April 7th, ‘the Crown and Government Security Bill,’ commonly called ‘the Gagging Act,’ was introduced by the Government, the first reading carried by 265 to 24, and the second a few days later by 452 to 35. On the 10th of April the Government had to fill London with troops, and put the Duke of
The 1848 revolutions on the Continent were particularly important as a catalyst for the organisation of the Christian Socialists and for providing Ludlow and his colleagues with philosophical direction. Ludlow hurried to Paris on the outbreak of fighting there in 1848 to be with his sisters and he again returned to this city in 1849. On both occasions his attention was drawn to the Parisian co-operatives that had sprung up amongst the chaos, which he interpreted from the perspective of Fourier, or at least from the perspective of Fourier stripped of his eccentricities and manias (Ludlow 1981, p. 153). Ludlow recognised that the French cooperative-vision could provide the economic backbone both to Maurice’s fuzzy preaching about the need to engineer a Christian rebirth amongst the poor through political action—which was first articulated a decade before with the publication of his *The Kingdom of Christ* (1838)—and to Ludlow’s own deeply held conviction that it was his Christian duty to raise the poor to a higher level of spiritual wellbeing.

He believed that once workers were both bound together by brotherly love within cooperatives and driven by Christian ideals, class conflict would be resolved and the working classes would be raised to a more dignified and spiritually satisfying life. The political machinery required to implement this vision had already been partly put in place by the Inns-of-Court men. Ludlow solicited Maurice to “aid in a scheme for bringing the leisure and good feeling of the Inns of Court to bear upon the misery of the neighbourhood”, and Kingsley, Hughes and others were recruited to this cause soon after (Seligman 1886, p. 219). The Society for Promoting Working Men’s Associations had been formed by February 1850, and tracts, pamphlets, newspapers and periodicals were established either side of this date to promote this spiritual-cum-socialist rebirth.

The first journal was *Politics for the People* (from 1848 to 1849 and edited by Ludlow and Maurice), which was followed by the *Christian Socialist* (from 1850 to 1851 and edited by Ludlow) and the *Journal of Association* (established in January 1852 and edited by Hughes). A series of pamphlets was also published under the title of *Tracts on Christian Socialism* (under Maurice’s supervision) and novels were written to promote the cause, the most famous of which was Kingsley’s *Alton Locke* in 1850. Although the driving doctrines of Christian Socialism shifted even over this short period, not least because of differing visions held by the key Christian Socialists, these doctrines may be reduced to five key principles without doing too much violence to the complexity of the historical situation.

(1) The driving principle underlying Victorian Christian Socialism is the concept of the Christian co-operative. Ludlow and his colleagues wished to Christianise socialism and socialise capitalism by promoting worker co-operatives that would be guided by Christian

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21 The historian Alexander Gray (1946) captures the deranged fantasies of Fourier’s utopian framework. Take for example Gray’s (1946, p. 174) description of Fourier’s belief in the final historical stage of Harmony, in which his socialist schemes would become fully operational: “It is when we approach Harmony that things will begin to hum. A Northern Crown (after the manner of Saturn’s rings) will encircle the Pole, shedding a beneficent aromatic dew on the earth. The sea will cease to be briny, and, greatest of delights, will be transformed into lemonade, for which unsatisfying beverage Fourier seems to have had a marked partiality. Six moons of a new and superior quality will replace our present inefficient satellite. A new race of animals will emerge. In place of the lion, there will be the anti-lion, all that a lion is not, docile and serviceable; there will be anti-wolves and anti-bears, and a whole race of really nice beasts”…and so on. Fourier further believed that the planets are sentient beings that have sexual intercourse with one another. It could be said that he suffered from a certain want of mental ballast.
principles, or at least Christian principles as interpreted by a Victorian Anglican with a
dradical disposition. Each individual would voluntarily provide Christian service to his fellow
men within cooperatives that would effectively be Christian brotherhoods.

The traditional Christian predilection for self-sacrifice would be reinforced by the notion of
manly self-reliance that was central to the rising idea of muscular Christianity, which was
then being promoted by Kingsley and Hughes. The temperament of a Christian of this hue
would thereby prevent the adverse selection and moral hazard problems that typically plague
the co-operative mode of production and distribution. This focus on spiritual rebirth also set
Christian Socialism apart from the existing secular, if not anti-religious, co-operatives that
had earlier been inspired by Robert Owen and the Rochdale pioneers.

This is because the re-birth of man that is required for successful cooperation would come
about not just via a change in environment, as Owen naively envisaged, but also as a result of
a spiritual change brought on by working within a Christian brotherhood. The soul of
“socialist man” would, in short, be engineered within the Kingdom of Christ on earth. As
Kingsley put it, the equality of communism was “carnal” and without “brotherhood”, whereas
the Christian Socialist insisted that every man “be given an equal chance of developing and
using God’s gifts” (quoted in Hughes 1876). A Council of Promoters consisting of the
Christian Socialists was established to provide the funds for these co-operatives, but Neale, a
wealthy capitalist, provided (and eventually lost) most of the capital.

(2) This Christian-induced fraternal co-operation and self sacrifice would, moreover, become
the controlling motive of human existence through the leadership provided by an educated
and muscular elite—namely Ludlow and his colleagues. Specifically, the Christian Socialists
believed that society could be regenerated and transformed into the Kingdom of Christ
through the actions of a “sixth-form elite” that would use religion as an active, ethical force.

Not all of the Christian sects were acceptable credos though. For example, they opposed
Calvinism and all other religions in which individuals subscribed to resignation in the face of
prevailing conditions. Oriental fatalism and any secular philosophy that implied that
individuals were unable to prevent the un-Christian wickedness which daily paraded before
them we unacceptable philosophies. A. P. Stanley’s Life of Dr. Arnold (1844) was
particularly influential in shaping these beliefs (see Mack and Armytage 1952; Masterman
1984), and, in many ways, the influence of Stanley’s interpretation of Arnold’s teachings is
best reflected in (and projected by) Hughes’ Tom Brown’s Schooldays (1857).

Hughes wrote that Stanley’s rendering of Arnold’s life threw “a white light upon great
sections, both of the world which we have realised more or less through the classics, and the
world which was lying under our eyes, and all around us, and which we now began, for the
first time, to recognise as one and the same” (quoted in Mack and Armytage 1952, p. 43).
Hughes also believed that Arnold also intended for this sixth-form elite to have radical, but
not revolutionary, goals.

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22 In Ludlow’s words: “That Socialism without Christianity, on the one hand, is as lifeless as feathers without a
bird, however skilfully the stuffer may dress them up into an artificial semblance of life; and that therefore
every socialist system which has endeavoured to stand alone has hitherto in practice either blown up or
dissolved away; whilst almost every socialist system which has maintained itself for any time has endeavoured
to stand, or unconsciously to itself has stood, upon the moral grounds of righteousness, self sacrifice, mutual
affection and common brotherhood, which Christianity vindicates to itself for an everlasting heritage” (The
Christian Socialist, November 2nd 1850, p. 1).
In Arnold’s influential words: “If there is one truth short of the highest for which I would gladly die, it is democracy without Jacobinism” (ibid, p. 43). The Christian Socialists themselves did not believe that their political and social activism in any way constituted revolutionary behaviour. They presumed that the Kingdom of Christ was already latent in society—and indeed that Christ resided within each and every individual—and hence need only be resurrected. The Christian co-operatives that they were proposing certainly had all of the elements that appealed to individuals who sought compromise rather than violent Chartism, class warfare, militant trade unionism or revolution.

(3) The Christian Socialists denounced unlimited competition and contested the political economists’ claim that there were insurmountable natural laws that governed the actions of self-interested economic men operating within a competitive environment. The Christian Socialists saw political economy of this type as just another form of fatalism with which they, as Arnold’s sixth-form elite, would not brook. They believed that the play of Christian ethics and brotherly association within co-operatives—which was the best and only ethical means by which to conduct industry—would tame economic man’s selfish predispositions and override the natural laws of political economy.

Kingsley, for example, happily accepted the so-called natural laws of political economy, but believed one need not submit to them, since it was within a man’s power to rise above them by accentuating one aspect of his character rather than another:

“The being who merely obeys the laws of nature is ipso facto a brute beast.
The privilege of man is to counteract (not break) one law of nature by another”

(Kingsley to Buller, reprinted in Kingsley 1894, v.2, pp. 65-7).23

Ludlow, like Kingsley, believed that the individuals could rise above their current nature and thereby actively alter the laws of political economy. Ludlow, in particular, sought to challenge the fatalistic consequences of the wages-fund doctrine, and, later in life, claimed to have exploded this doctrine a good decade and a half before J. D. Longe and W. T. Thornton (see the correspondence in Seligman 1886; Dorfman 1941). He argued that there was already a human element in the demand for labour, since individuals seldom paid as much as they might for commodities, and all that needed to be done was to accentuate this human element in a particular direction.

Thus, for tailors to receive decent wages, it was simply a matter of inducing the nobleman to pay more for clothes. Ludlow was, in fact, better read than most of the Christian Socialists in

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23 Although Kingsley does not mention J. S. Mill’s name in this context, his argument nonetheless seems to resemble Mill’s vision of a parallelogram of competing natural laws, in which, as in Newtonian physics, the net result is determined by their relative power. Kingsley further illustrates his case with the following metaphors: “Just as if I were to say, you got the cholera by laws of nature, therefore you must submit to cholera; you walk on the ground by laws of nature, therefore you must never go up stairs”. Kingsley also claimed that political economy was not yet really a fully-fledged science. It was, he believed, merely in the analytic stage (which he defined as explaining the causes of phenomena that already existed) and had not moved to the synthetic stage (which he defined as “using the laws which it has already discovered, and counteracting them by others when necessary, to produce new forms of society”). He believed that the work of the political economists over the last 100 years had been invaluable, but it would become of great importance only when it considers laws that counteract self interest. The future, he believed, would be grounded on self-sacrifice (Kingsley to Buller reprinted in Kingsley 1894, v.2, pp. 65-7).
matters relating to political economy, and he even had the temerity to remodel this discipline along his own lines. Specifically, in a fashion later adopted by John Ruskin, he argued that the true end of the science of political economy was “the production of man”, not the “production of wealth”, and, further, that the political economists of his time made a “monstrous” error by arguing either that an economy progressed if material wealth grew while man’s spiritual nature declined, or, alternatively, that an economy was in a malaise if material wealth was stationary while man’s spiritual nature grew (see The Christian Socialist Jan. 18th 1850; Seligman 1886; Dorfman 1941).  

With the exception of Ludlow, most of the Christian Socialists had an unsophisticated understanding of political economy. Hughes, in particular, readily admitted that he did not know enough about the science to make a case before political economists. He related that Nassau Senior (a friend of Hughes’ father) asked Hughes to meet Archbishop Whately and “several eminent political economists” so that he could:

> explain what we were about”. “After a couple of hours of hard discussion, in which I have no doubt I talked much nonsense, I retired, beaten, but quite unconvinced”

(Hughes 1873, p. 112).

(4) The Christian Socialists rejected state socialism as a solution to society’s ills on the grounds that such an arrangement would induce moral hazard problems and, worse, intrude upon civil liberties. Maurice stated it bluntly: “The State cannot be communist, never will be, never ought to be” (1884, v.2, p. 8). Instead, as mentioned in the previous paragraphs of this chapter, socialism would spontaneously emerge when, in the shadow of the church and through the spiritual guidance offered by the sixth-form elite, workers voluntarily chose to share their produce within co-operatives.

Joseph Schumpeter has labelled this non-Marxist, anti-State form of socialism (of which Christian Socialism was just one strand) “associationist socialism” (1954, p, 454). In the

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24 Seligman (1886, pp. 236-7) argued that Ludlow was the most sophisticated of the Christian Socialists when it came to replying to those critics who used political economy against the Christian cooperative. According to Seligman, Ludlow showed an intimate acquaintance of economic literature, met the economists on their own ground (presumably by arguing that the human element can influence the laws of supply and demand), and refuted the wages fund doctrine. Ludlow was, in turn, amused that someone at last (i.e. Seligman in the 1880s) had discovered that he had exploded the wages fund doctrine well before F. D. Longe and W. T. Thornton. He could not understand how someone of Mill’s ability ever took up such theory in the first place, since no working man (who was presumably less able) was foolish enough to accept it (Ludlow to Seligman July 24 1886, reprinted in Dorfman 1941, p. 577). It also should be emphasised that Ludlow was not alone in attacking the wages-fund doctrine well before F. D. Longe and W. T. Thornton. He could not understand how someone of Mill’s ability ever took up such theory in the first place, since no working man (who was presumably less able) was foolish enough to accept it (Ludlow to Seligman July 24 1886, reprinted in Dorfman 1941, p. 577). It also should be emphasised that Ludlow was not alone in attacking the wages-fund doctrine in the late 1840s and early 1850s (which is not surprising given that it was a critical, rather than an organic, period in history), with Henry Mayhew also attacking the doctrine (see Yeo 1971). Strangely, however, neither Ludlow’s nor Mayhew’s criticisms are emphasised in the modern secondary literature that is devoted to this topic. It also should be emphasised that Ludlow was, in contrast to many of the other Christian Socialists, a free trader. “I never did share Kingsley’s and Hughes’ (originally) strong feeling against the ‘Cobden and Bright’ school. I had been a member of the Anti-Corn-Law league…and while widely opposed to the Manchester School in many respects, I knew the value of both men, and I remember standing up for them against Hughes in the early days of our acquaintance” (Ludlow to Seligman July 24 1886, reprinted in Dorfman 1941, 576). Finally, Ludlow also sought to refute the charge that if there are many Christian Socialist associations, there is still competition, and if there is one, there is monopoly. He argued that a monopoly would not be evil in this case (see Christian Socialist Feb 22 1851). Ludlow’s economic ideas were expressed, in particular, in “The Aims of Political Economy” The Christian Socialist Jan 18 1851 (see also Nov 2 1850, 1-5).

25 Schumpeter proceeds to argue that associationist socialism was “extra-scientific” because “it does not concern itself primarily with (critical) analysis—as does Marxism—but with definite plans and the means of carrying
case of the Christian Socialist version of associationism, the small savings mustered by the workers would be subsidised by both wealthy philanthropists (such as Neale) and existing co-operatives, but not by the State, and the sums so raised would eventually be such as to command the entire country’s capital. The economy would thereby be transformed into a string of co-operatives and *laissez faire* capitalism displaced in a peaceful manner.

At most a central board, to which the co-operatives would send representatives, would be (and eventually was) established to arbitrate between members. Finally, although the Englishman’s traditional commitment to freedom and self-help was by far the most important reason for the adoption of the voluntary and decentralist characteristics of associationism by the Christian Socialists, it must again be granted that the French example contributed to this vision.

The French socialist movements were at this stage predominantly associationist in character, and the Christian Socialists carefully noted that while the French national workshops of the 1848 revolution failed disastrously, a number of the private associations thrived (Hughes 1873, p. 110). Seligman (1886, p. 245) sums up the Christian Socialist’s associationist position well:

“But they desired no undue compulsion; they foresaw that the habit of calling upon the state in every emergency would sap the foundations of manly initiative; they preferred to regenerate society from within, not from without, and to put their trust in the spontaneous action of groups voluntarily and earnestly working for a common end.”

(5) In addition to sponsoring and overseeing co-operatives, the Christian Socialists’ main activist strategy was to lobby for legislation that would provide legal protection for bodies with a co-operative element. The priority given to this strategy is not surprising given the legal background of many of these Inns-of-Court socialists. Ludlow, in particular, not only lobbied for, but also drafted many of, the legislative acts. He had trained under Charles Henry Bellenden Kerr, who had gained fame for promoting the limited liability joint-stock legislation, and he harnessed Kerr’s ideas relating to corporations to protect co-operatives.

One immediate, and indeed perhaps the most important, success of Christian Socialism was the Industrial and Providential Act of 1852, which provided legal recognition for industrial and providential societies. This Act was the key outcome of Robert A. Slaney’s Committee on the Savings of the Middle and Working Classes (1850), but it was actually drawn up by Ludlow, Neale and Hughes with the aid of the Select Committee of the House of Commons.
Seligman has called this 1852 Act the *magna charta* of the co-operative trade, since it was “the first law in the civilized world that recognized and protected the co-operative societies as separate entities” (Seligman 1886, p. 238; Holyoake 1906; Dorfman 1941, p. 572; Mack and Arnytage 1952, p. 67; Halevy 1961). Specifically, it gave co-operative societies legal status and protected them from dishonest trustees. Previously, if a co-operative numbered more than 25, it had to take advantage of the limited liability joint-stock act of 1844 to incorporate as a public company at a costly charge.

The initial means by which to circumnavigate this costly incorporation was to register the co-operative as a Friendly Society under the Friendly Societies Act of 1846 and by virtue of this legislation, take advantage of the Frugal Investment Clause, which permitted the investment of member savings for the purpose of enabling members to afford necessities (Halevy 1961, p. 267). The existence and utility inherent in this loophole explains why the Christian Socialists fought hard to prevent the Frugal Investment Clause from being dropped from the 1850 Statute that consolidated the Friendly Society Acts. But unfortunately the Frugal Investment Clause covered purchases, not sales, and hence fictitious transactions still needed to be undertaken to disguise the daily trading operations of the co-operatives.

It was with some relief, then, when the 1852 legislation finally gave the co-operatives the legal status to both buy and sell. This use of the law relating to Friendly Societies to promote the Christian co-operatives not only reflect the close alignment between the two movements, but also may be interpreted as Ludlow’s first step in his later realisation that the Friendly Societies were perhaps the means by which to achieve the Christian co-operatives.

Christian Socialism as an organised political movement, as opposed to an ideological movement, began to lose steam in the early 1850s and effectively ended by 1854-5. The primary reason for the falling away of the Christian Socialist movement was the sudden realisation on the part of its key members that a co-operative paradise would not instantaneously appear. Initially, they were carried forth by their innocent enthusiasm and belief of swift, if not immediate, success. Hughes later marvelled at their naïve innocence, recalling that, at the time, they believed that what was needed was to announce the plan to “usher in the millennium at once” (1873, p. 111).

The loss of confidence was palpable in the face of the ensuing checks and rebuffs, which were many and varied. The inherent problems of adverse selection and moral hazard that characterise the co-operative form of production and distribution quickly began to manifest themselves. Adverse selection problems immediately arose when the Christian Socialists advertised that they would provide working capital to parties willing to participate in co-operatives, but then did not adequately vet applicants (Ludlow 1981, p. 207). Moral hazard problems manifested themselves in several forms. For instance, managers and workers acted incompetently, often drank too much on the job, purloined funds and refused to distribute funds equally (Ludlow 1981, p. 208).

Those co-operatives that did not either immediately fail or languish transformed themselves into joint-stock companies so as to distribute the profits to the participants via dividends. The associated quarrels over strategies led to schisms, with some Christian Socialists wishing to distribution of the products of this labour—two matters commonly confused by political economists, who treat the results of human selfishness, intensified by competition, as if they were unalterable laws of the universe” (quoted in Holyoake 1906).
adopt more radical actions while others, particularly Kingsley, taking a naturally conservative turn. Many of the dominant figures became preoccupied, in particular, with achieving their ends via education rather than through experimental co-operatives. Maurice’s involvement in the Working Men’s College, which was founded in 1854, was the prime illustration of this turn of events.

Finally, the Christian Socialists simply failed to recruit sufficient numbers to their flag. There was an occasional valuable addition to their number, such as when the publisher Alexander Macmillan joined their brotherhood in the early 1850s, but good recruits with leadership qualities were rare. Hughes ascribed this falling off in recruitment to the low esteem with which socialism was then held, no doubt due to the more outlandish proposals associated with the aforementioned French socialists, but also, according to Hughes himself (1873, pp, 114-115), because of the fanaticism, earnestness and eccentricities of the Christian Socialists:

“In a generation when beards and wide-awakes were looked upon as insults to decent society, some of us wore both, with a most heroic indifference to public opinion. In the same way, there was often a trenchant, and almost truculent, tone about us, which was well calculated to keep men of my brother’s temperament at a distance.”

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28 Kingsley was a keen follower of Owen in his early years, but lived long enough to mock him within his Water Babies (Ludlow 1981, p. 127). His political economy also became less uniformly anti-market when it came to dealing with the demands of the working classes. Hughes (1876) recalled that, during the Crimean War, he responded to a question at a public meeting about how to deal with bread riots in a way that would have made Milton Friedman proud: “‘There never were but two ways’, he said, ‘since the beginning of the world of dealing with a corn famine. One is to let the merchants buy it up and hold it as long as they can, as we do. And this answers the purpose best in the long run, for they will be selling corn six months hence when we shall want it more than we do now, and makes us provident against our wills. The other is Joseph's plan.’ Here the manager broke in, ‘Why didn't our Government step in then, and buy largely, and store in public granaries?’ ‘Yes,’ said Kingsley, ‘and why ain't you and I flying about with wings and dewdrops hanging to our tails. Joseph's plan won't do for us. What minister would we trust with money enough to buy corn for the people, or power to buy where he chose.’ And he went on to give his questioner a lecture in political economy, which the most orthodox opponent of the popular notions about Socialism would have applauded to the echo”. Kingsley eventually fell into line with the High-Tory prophets and fell out with Ludlow by supporting the South in the American Civil War and joining John Ruskin and Thomas Carlyle in defending Governor Eyre.

29 As already mentioned, the French associations, such as Fourier, articulated such unalloyed nonsense at times, that many Englishmen could not take socialism seriously. Marx possibly adopted the term communism to distance himself from the tarnished term socialism (Schumpeter 1954, p. 455).

30 The Christian Socialists were indeed an eccentric, and to some extent ineffective, group. They were prone to feline squabbles and chasing crotchets, such as vegetarianism or a revolution in phonetics, unrelated to the main prize. Kingsley stammered (“I am a Ch-Ch-Church of England parson and Ch-Ch-Chartist!”) and was a public speaker; Ludlow was shy and confined to providing the intellectual backbone to the movement; Maurice was a powerful preacher, but had a brilliant ability to effectively say nothing of any meaning; Charles Mansfield had “a strange sad life” with “moral complications”; Furnivall was a vegetarian with an explosive temper; A. M. Campbell had ambitious schemes to reform the English language through his phonetic fads; and so on (see Mack and Armytage 1952, p. 57). The bohemian element also drove some of the more stable members to distraction. Hughes recalled the consternation by the aristocratic Kingsley, who was overly sensitive about social propriety, in the face of beards at a time when the “beard movement was in its infancy” and “any man except a dragoon who wore hair on his face was regarded as a dangerous character, with whom it was compromising to be seen in any public place—a person in sympathy with-sans culottes, and who would dispense with trousers but for his fear of the police”. Kingsley is said to have fallen into a depression for days following the presence of a bearded man in a straw hat with blue plush gloves (Hughes 1876). Many of the Christian Socialists eventually realised that they had to be more temperate. Hughes learnt that it was correct to denounce unlimited competition but “quite unnecessary, and therefore unwise, to speak of the whole system of
At the end of the day many accepted, such as Hughes’ brother, that the present capitalist system was somehow un-Christian, but it worked on some level, was the best that could be done in an unjust world, and the co-operatives had yet to prove themselves (1873, 116).

V. J. S. Mill (1806-1873) and Co-operation

John Stuart Mill developed a great interest in socialism and co-operative organisation during his very long career as an economist. This aspect of his career has been well documented and discussed, not least because it carries an element of controversy amongst historians of economic thought, political thought and philosophy try to neatly categorise Mill’s work by reference to one of the major sects of political economy. Particularly of interest to those who participate in the debate has been the extent to which Mill, at certain points in his life, was either a socialist or liberal. This debate has arisen to a significant degree because it has been observed that Mill matured his ideas pertaining to socialism over his lifetime. While the French Revolution of 1848 and its aftermath were critical in the formation of his mature thinking, Mill held various positions throughout his life from essentially being anti-socialist in his early years (Sarvasy 1984) to a “carefully agnostic” position where he seeks experimentation (Stafford 1998), to becoming a supporter of socialistic co-operation in his later years (Sarvasy 1985). Mill describes this process in his “Autobiography” (Mill 1873, p. 198. He began his philosophical career as a Philosophical Radical and ended it as, what would now be called, a New Liberal.

Overall, my aim here is not to reiterate the elements of this debate or to seek to allocate Mill to a sect. Equally, I have not traced the development of his thinking over his lifetime. I wish to examine Mill’s thinking in relation to co-operative socialism in so far as it assists me in disentangling the myriad of ideas and intentions of co-operative actors.

Mill is difficult to categorise. There is little doubt that he felt a considerable attraction to the idea of co-operation for many of the same reasons that J. T. W. Mitchell did. Mill’s thinking was practically orientated, although it did have a utopian element, was focused on long run economic improvement and was in no way radical. Like Mitchell, Mill was always keen to preserve the political and economic status quo while gradually improving it, via experimentation and practice, rather than prescribing the wholesale removal of one system in order to replace it with another (Sarvasy 1985, p. 325).

In order to continue my comparative approach, in examining Mill’s thinking surrounding socialism generally and co-operation specifically, I have focused upon his consideration of trade as ‘the disgusting vice of shop-keeping’”, and they also began to call themselves co-operators rather than socialist (Hughes 1873, pp. 114-5). The horse had, unfortunately, already bolted.

31 Additionally, the attempt to place Mill into categories of economic thought established in later periods adds to the debate and its complexity.

32 For discussions relating to the category most appropriate for describing Mill’s thinking in this area see, for example, Abbey and Spinnere-Halev (2013), Baun (2007), Miller (2003), Stafford (1998), Claeyys (1987), Sarvasy (1984 & 1985), Berlin (1969) and Friedman (1966). Examples of published writings that seek to develop theories pertaining to aspects of Mill’s socialist thinking include: Medearis (2005) in relation to Mill’s thoughts on private property, Ashcraft (1988) regarding Mill’s thinking on democracy and socialism and Sarvasy (1984) in relation to Mill’s utopian thinking. These are only a selection of such writings.

33 Some have asserted that Mill’s socialism actually resulted from the influence of his wife and his “softness of heart” (Sarvasy 1985, p. 312).

34 Mill did not use this term though.
the mutability of man, (2) the place of capital and competition, (3) industrial democracy and, (4) his thought regarding distributive policy. However, I have also considered his thinking regarding freedom as it relates to socialism, as this was an enduring and principal theme of Mill’s thinking throughout his life.\(^{35}\) In short, if Mill had socialist sentiments, it was always a liberal form of socialism.

Mill’s greatest objective was to see the extension of personal freedom as far as possible within a framework that, essentially, meant that the only limiting factor was the extent to which one man’s free actions would affect another’s (Baum 2007; Dale 2003). However, Mill saw a difference between what he termed “negative freedom” and “positive freedom”. In the case of the former, negative freedom comprises the simple withdrawal of constraints or impediments to man’s actions (Baum 2007, p. 5). To Mill’s mind, simply removing impediments to freedom was not favourable to achieving freedom for most people. There were two aspects to freedom that he felt were necessary to be dealt with before a man could be free to the fullest practical extent, these were that a man should also have a developed character and that certain enabling conditions were required to be present (Baum 2007, p. 5).

A developed character would help to ensure man made rational choices when he was actually in a position to make them. The enabling conditions included rights, resources and opportunities without any burdensome constraints. Without these, the so called free man was little better than in a state of slavery as he must accept the rules, prescriptions and arrangements set by another – usually the employer (Medearis 2005, p. 140). The mature ability to reflectively decide upon his goals and objectives in a rational way was essential otherwise men made decisions that were not thoughtful of their interests in the longer term or those of the community. Such a state of man did not then exist. So, in order to achieve it, both autonomy and the changing of man in order that he made rational decisions was required as:

> “According to Mill, individuals are free with respect to their choices only to the extent that they reflectively cultivate individuality of character and preferences so that their choices and actions are really their own” \[^{[emphasis in original]}\]

Baum (2007, pp. 5-6)

The development of character and personal preferences are as important in the context of personal decision making as the working man’s participation in democratic processes, including in industrial democracy.\(^{36}\) He reported in his “Autobiography” that he was influenced in this thinking by Saint Simon to whose writings Mill arrived via Aguste Comte (1873). Therefore, Mill also tended to take a futuristic view of socialism when analysing it. He saw the society in which he lived as one that was simply a point on a trajectory of change (Sarvasy 1985, p. 312). He considered that workers would only tolerate the current conditions for so long and then they would seek to effect change themselves (Sarvasy 1985, p. 319). It

\(^{35}\) Citation required – Mill’s relevant works.

\(^{36}\) For instance, Mill held that, while things like universal adult franchise were all very well, poverty still restricted freedom. Man needed tools and resources to be free (Baum 2007, p. 11). Sarvasy (1984, p. 572) claims that Mill’s observations of the 1848 French Revolution and its aftermath, especially in relation to the ultimate popular election of Napoleon III as autocrat of France, indicated to Mill that man needed to be changed before a system of true democratic freedom could be successful, whether in the shape of co-operative socialism or in the shape of capitalism.
was critical to Mill’s mind that gradual social improvement was undertaken in order to maintain an ordered and effective trajectory of change.

He saw capitalism as “deeply flawed” but he did not see socialism as the only answer (Miller 2003, p. 218). He held instead “…that it should be possible to reform the capitalist system so as to remove the gross injustice…”. Socialism is proposed as the order of society that may be chosen at some future time but only once a working model can be identified as a result of experimentation (Stafford 1998, p. 326). Additionally, the experiment should not be to compare ideal socialism with current capitalism but, rather, ideal socialism with the best that capitalism could be and which Mill considered that it had yet to become (Miller 2003, p. 222). As such, Mill considered socialism in the context of reforming capitalism.

In examining the ills of capitalism of his day, Mill focused on a number of areas which are germane to this thesis. He used his conception of freedom discussed above to evaluate the various economic systems that were in theory available. He ultimately advanced a “…form of co-operative liberal democratic market socialism” (Baum 2007, p. 9). Using his definition of freedom as the litmus test, Mill developed a dichotomy between the appropriate treatment of personal property and the treatment of the factors of production or capital. He also dichotomized competition into good and bad. Finally, he issued prescriptions regarding the distribution of the produce of the worker’s efforts. In essence, J. S. Mill held that decisions about the means of production must be collectively taken because they affected all, while those pertaining to consumption (and therefore private property) must be taken privately and individually (Sarvasy 1985, p. 326). He considered that private property was truly private and should be held by individuals without recourse to any democratic or other processes.

On the other hand, the factors of production and the product of labour where treated differently as they were not true private property. These components, which included land, capital and incentives for workers as part of the distribution process, allowed the capitalist to hold power over labour and so he saw the rights pertaining to this type of property as being mutable (Baum 2007, p. 9). Mill considered that collective ownership of the means of production and the collective determination of the distribution of the profits from labour would enhance personal freedom as the redistribution of land and capital, say on the death of a capitalist, would see opportunities for advancement arise for workers and that workers would be more efficient and work harder if they had “a personal interest in the matter” (Sarvasy 1985, pp. 313 & 317).

In relation to land, Mill also saw a need for death duties, taxes and other means of redistribution in order to prevent the handing down of such assets from one generation to the next. In this way, he saw that the class of people who live off the work of others is reduced over time. He believed that to avoid the possibility of a revolution, change had to be made gradually by making land capital and, therefore, opportunity available to all (Miller 2003, pp. 219-221). However, in order to be truly free, man must be able to make rational decisions in his true interests and those of the community.

Therefore, Mill considered that education was essential in order to improve labour’s ability to make rational choices, that all restrictions on women’s employment ought to be lifted, and that the partnership and co-operative laws ought to be amended to support the creation of more worker co-operatives (Miller 2003, pp. 219-221). Further, Mill saw in co-operative arrangements an opportunity for workers to own land and capital, and believed that it would result in more efficient and effective production due to it being in their interest, and would
provide a mechanism for the interests of the capitalist and the worker to be united (Baum 2007, p. 3).

Mill sought to reconcile liberalism and socialism rather than create a situation where it was to be one or the other. He did not wish to extirpate capitalism but, rather, create an opportunity for capitalism to evolve beyond its current form and, thereby, for the negative aspects of it to be reformed (Baum 2007, p. 3; Miller 2003, p. 218). Additionally, once labour is better educated and more mature, that is, once it has undergone a “moral and intellectual improvement”, workers will demand a partnership with capitalists who will also find such an arrangement satisfactory (Miller 2003, p. 221). In order to facilitate this metamorphosis, the continued existence of a market and economic competition is essential. However, it needs to be reformed of its worst elements.

Mill saw a reformed market as an essential element in the effective operation of an economy wherein everybody enjoys the maximum amount of freedom possible. Particularly, Mill objects to communism with its prescriptions of revolution and the sweeping away of capitalism and the establishment of state controlled economies with the concomitant reduction in freedom such systems suggest (Baum 2007, p. 4; Miller 2003, p. 222). Communism would, he believed, reduce opportunities for innovation and actually reduce the satisfaction of labour rather than enhance it. He considers that the evils of the market could be reformed particularly if competition was considered in a different way. Sarvasy (1985, p.313) suggests that Mill made a major contribution when he argued that the successful separation of the wage-labour relationship from competition combined with co-operative entities would make socialism less utopian, more efficient and innovative.

Mill dichotomised competition into healthy and unhealthy forms. The former being competition between organisations; the latter being competition between individuals, notably between workers. Mill saw co-operation as an opportunity for reforming competition because the co-operative corporation could be interposed between the co-operating workers and the competitive market (Baum 2007, pp. 12-13 & 20). Re-setting the unjust aspects of capitalism relating to the present situation where the “fruits of labour” were enjoyed by those who did not exert themselves in creating them, and for creating democratic organisations wherein the members would enjoy incentives to work hard and efficiently, participating in the decision with regard to the distribution of rewards (Baum 2007, p. 13 & p. 17; Miller 2003, pp. 223-224; Sarvasy 1985, p. 323).

The competition between co-operatives and capitalists would be a very healthy aspect of the system as it would ensure managers of co-operatives are effective in their decisions and ensure the workers continued to be efficient.\(^{37}\) While Mill considered that co-operation may ultimately drive capitalists out of the market, he saw this eventuation as some future issue of little consequence in the proximal arguments (Baum 2007, pp. 21-22). Finally, this form of organisation had the added advantage that it could be the place of experimentation in relation to the various forms of co-operation and would allow for gradual adoption of those forms that proved of value to a tutored working class.

In terms of the various co-operative models that Mill considered, he was most persuaded by those of Fourier and the experience of the Rochdale Pioneers. Nonetheless, Mill considered

\(^{37}\) While Mill considered that capitalists were more likely to take risks and be more innovative, he considered that their loss was a small price in the context of the advantages of a democratic socialistic co-operative economy being put in capitalism’s place (Baum 2007, Miller 1998).
that Fourier had overestimated the readiness of the ordinary people for such a change and failed to see the benefits of market competition. It was also true that Mill disliked the inflexibility of Fourier’s system and the lack of democracy in his prescriptions. Nonetheless, Mill did see great potential in the Fourierist phalansteries (Baum 2007, p. 12). For instance, he saw the distribution of the rewards of labour according to the effort and type of work to be extremely positive.

Even unattractive labour was to be favourably rewarded, thereby increasing the happiness of those performing it. Additionally, he saw as a positive the capacity of the model to form an experiment. Like Mill, Fourier did not excite revolution but, rather, believed that the model would speak for itself and change would come about as a result of increasing support for the establishment of phalansteries by philanthropists. Mill liked the idea of considering the results of various experiments without the necessity of potentially impacting the lot of the working class. Only those undertaking the experiment were at risk (Baum 2007; Miller 2003; Sarvasy 1995). Mill seems to assume that, upon the successful demonstration of a co-operative model, labour will adopt it if it presents a better option than the status quo.

Mill is concerned that the ability of man to change is restricted to a timeline encompassing multiple generations. Once again, he favours Fourier over Owen because Owen requires people to be more public spirited, while Fourier simply seeks to establish a system that exploits peoples’ natural tendencies (Miller 2003, p. 225). In the medium term, government aid was acceptable to Mill in order to provide education, to change the law to promote co-operative organisation and to spend public money on encouraging co-operation as well as establishing co-operative agriculture by way of purchasing farms that were already for sale (Sarvasy 1985, p. 323).

He was also accepting of state-owned monopolies in such areas as the railways and the gradual nationalisation of land for the reasons cited above. However, co-operation must be voluntary in nature, so the government could not be used to compel the creation of co-operative efforts, only encourage (Sarvasy 1985, p. 323 & p. 325). These views were partly commensurate with those espoused by the pragmatic and commercial co-operators and partly commensurate with those of the ideologists, it is to the conflict between these two groups that I now turn.

VI. J. T. W. Mitchell (1828-1895) and the Ascendency of Consumer Co-operation

Throughout the history of co-operation in England there is a pattern of co-operative idealists seeking to prevent their movements from being derailed once consumer co-operative organisations became established. Owen and the Christian Socialists attempted to prevent this stalling of their ideals through various means. However, by and large, they were unsuccessful in doing so (Gilchrist and Moore 2007, Beecher 1986, Backstrom 1974, Gosden 1961). It would seem that the capitalist system became very attractive once those bent on replacing it had a taste of what their economic superiors enjoyed. By the turn of the twentieth century,

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38 Fourier’s prescriptions regarding the distribution of the produce of the workers did not rest with the effort put in but was extended to recognise that some work was less attractive than other work. Fourier seems to have taken this to extremes when he suggested that, in his communities, there would be added incentive to people who were prepared to enter into sexual relations with the ugly, deformed or otherwise unappealing partners. This incentive would be provided as even those people who are not attractive are deserving of sexual gratification. Many of these types of prescriptions have dogged Fourier’s reputation since his death (Beecher 1987).
successful co-operative associations, such as the Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS), were shining examples of co-operative and commercial success, enjoying very large membership bases as well as reputations as community-minded self-help mutuals.

Based on capitalist management arrangements, utilising controlled and disciplined labour, and maintaining a strong focus on profitability and returns to members, these organisations resembled modern day public companies far more than the idealistic, social change agents they were originally conceived to be. Importantly, and as discussed briefly in section two above, the lines of battle were not clearly drawn and there were never clear distinctions between participants in the debates. Equally, the battles themselves were extended and often undertaken by individuals with significant stamina and personal drive.

The engagements were not short, sharp and decisive in nature, and instead often lasted the lifetime of the participants. Additionally, it is sometimes difficult to discern the nature of the relationships between the various local, national and international organisations led by people like Edward Vansittart Neale and John Thomas Whitehead Mitchell, two lifelong antagonists. The former championing the ideals of utopian producer co-operation, the latter those of consumer co-operation. As Backstrom (1974, p. 218) has noted, all differences were ultimately “resolved by death” – the very commercial consumer co-operatives had become dominant and very significant organisations by the end of the century while the likes of Neale did not realise until very late in the piece that he had lost his hand.

The lengthy struggle between E. V. Neale and J. T. W. Mitchell was particularly important for the future of the co-operative movement and has particular relevance to the issue of the degree to which propaganda shaped the movement. Neale was a Christian Socialist, a great national co-operative administrator and an idealist seeking national and international co-operation as a path to socialism (Backstrom 1974). Mitchell, on the other hand, was the chairman and leader of the CWS for over twenty years. Ultimately, the CWS became one of the most successful consumer co-operatives in Britain (Redfern 1923). Both made a considerable personal contribution to the movement, but, both were essentially opposed to the other’s fundamental principles.

Four important points of difference between Neale and Mitchell are particularly important in developing an understanding of the development of co-operative ideas in the middle to late part of the nineteenth-century. These are: (1) community building versus member recruitment; (2) consumer co-operation (and ultimately commercial co-operation) versus producer co-operation; (3) the place of religion as opposed to secularism; and (4) democracy in co-operation: the reality and the rhetoric. These elements are discussed together below, as they are not separate ideas, but, rather, intertwined objectives within both actors’ life work.

Born in Bath to a very wealthy family, Edward Vansittart Neale (1810-1892) inherited a fortune and squandered it on Christian Socialist and co-operative ventures, undertaking experiments and funding organisations. He was acknowledged as a leading Christian Socialist primarily, as Ludlow saw it, because he had the financial capacity to bankroll much of that organisation’s activities (Gilchrist and Moore 2007). For almost his entire adult life, he sought to defend the socialist ideal in co-operative activity. Ultimately though, Neale sought to remove himself from the movement as, very late in life, his defeat against the commercial co-operators of the ilk of Mitchell became obvious and irreversible (Backstrom 1974, p. 6).
Mitchell (1828–1895), on the other hand, was born in Rochdale and was not of the elite classes. Raised a bastard child in a very poor neighbourhood of Rochdale, being a “…child of the slums and mud…” (Redfern 1923, p. 24), Mitchell early developed a very pragmatic and commercial frame of mind. He was a committed Christian and taught Sunday School within the Congregationalist sect (Gurney 1996, p. 37). However, for Mitchell, religion was not relevant to the practicalities of running a business, while Neale, as a Christian Socialist, was concerned that the movement be centrally managed by an educated, Christian elite and saw Christianity as the chief bulwark against the moral hazards that would tempt workers trying to manage their own organisations (Gurney 1996; Gilchrist and Moore 2007). Their positions, however, were very different.

Both Neale and Mitchell believed strongly in education as an important part of the co-operative movement. However, Mitchell insisted that it should be of a practical nature and that it should be provided by the co-operative movement for members of the co-operative movement (Gurney 1996, p. 4 & p. 37). Mitchell saw ideas as important, believed they were of little use if they were not based in grounded practice. The commercial co-operatives had their own reading rooms that served to provide, amongst other topics, literature on the co-operative movement itself – often this was the only place where such literature was available, as public libraries would not include it in their collections.

Mitchell saw the availability of such material as essential in order to recruit people to the movement and to ensure the movement pursued the right path (Gurney 1996). This predilection for the practical seemed to meet with the approval of the members themselves when the attendance of co-operative education courses is considered. About two thirds of participants attended practical courses on topics like bookkeeping and legal studies, while the remaining third attended classes on subjects such as economics, history and so on (Gurney 1996, p. 43). Mitchell essentially drove the CWS to become the most successful consumer co-operative in the United Kingdom. Neale, on the other hand, was a great supporter of education within the movement but as an aid to community building. He saw producer co-operation as an important aspect of community-building.

The Christian Socialists launched 12 co-operative workshops in London (Masterman 1963, p. 95) during their short period of existence from 1848 to 1854. At this time, Ludlow had warned the Christian Socialists that the consumer stores would become dangerous if they were allowed to challenge the primacy of the producer co-operative which is ultimately what they did do (Backstrom 1974, p. 34). Neale saw the growth of the co-operative stores in the North and compared that growth with the poor record of producer co-operation in the London area. He believed that central control and a uniform application of constitutions was necessary for the ideological achievement of his objectives.

Unification would allow for consumer and producer co-operation to work together to develop capital and realise the fundamental change sought in terms of his community-building objectives (Backstrom 1974, p. 3). In pursuing that goal twenty years later in 1873, Neale became general secretary of the Co-operative Union and held various other national posts during his career. He saw the establishment of a leadership group made up of members of the educated Christian elite to be critical in the success of the movement – an elite that understood the community-building program and that was Christian in order to recognise and avoid the moral hazards associated with co-operation (Masterman 1963, p. 97). Mitchell, and indeed the consumer co-operative movement at large, on the other hand, merely employed the rhetoric of democratic governance. In reality, the average members of the co-operatives
did not care too much about the national leadership and Mitchell and his associates effectively had free reign over the CWS – their ambitions remained largely unchecked (Backstrom 1974, p. 7).

Neale did not appreciate the power and the success of the consumer co-operative movement in the context of recruiting members to co-operatives or the fundamental separation between the thinking and manipulating co-operative leadership and the broad, working class membership base. He also misread Mitchell’s apparent agreement for the establishment of national co-operative bodies to be used to pursue ideological outcomes, when, in fact, Mitchell was wise enough to let the likes of Neale to burn up his energy running these “industry bodies” while he himself simply continued to build the CWS. The annual conferences, industry meetings and the national institutions were never really able to influence corporations like the CWS and men like Mitchell (Backstrom 1974).

For instance, the first Co-operative Conference of 1869 was dominated by the “old” Christian Socialists of the 1850s and it sought to establish a national Central Board of Co-operation in order to re-establish central control over the apparently haphazard and commercial development of large parts of the movement up to that time. This was approved at the Conference and established the following year with an apparent mandate to develop central policy and provide national leadership (Backstrom 1974, pp. 91-92). In reality it was unsuccessful in this regard as co-operative organisations, like the CWS under the leadership of Mitchell, developed and implemented their own policy much more along the lines of commercial organisations notwithstanding their cries of unity and apparent deference to the Board. Central to this pragmatic approach and to consumer co-operation’s membership success was the place of the annual “Divi” or annual share of co-operative profits in the minds of the members of consumer co-operative organisations. 39

Neale was keen to establish producer co-operatives in order to generate capital to be used in establishing consumer shops and expanding producer capacity and lines of production. In this way Neale and his supporters were pursuing the community-building objectives of the co-operative ideology – not looking to change the industrial economy but looking to change the organisation of society with regard to it. They sought to reconstruct industrial society in a way that meant that all classes enjoyed a better standard of living (Gurney 1996). Mitchell and those of his persuasion, on the other hand, used rhetoric to retain the unity of their membership and the support of their betters by reference to popular ideas, particularly the idea of self-help so important in nineteenth-century Britain (Roberts 1979).

The CWS was the catalyst for the subordination of the ideals of co-operation for those of commercial success. Its success was an example to all – especially those people from the working classes who were keen to improve their economic prospects. The payment of the Divi, in pursuit of gains, has been recognised as the fatal breach with Owenism (Gurney 1996, p.4). Ultimately the co-operative ideal was abandoned by many pragmatic co-operators who were inclined toward the development of consumer co-operatives with a view to enhancing their members’ wealth via the “Divi”.

39 The Divi was usually calculated with reference to the amount of money spent by each member of the co-operative during the year. The profit made by the co-operative was then distributed (after subtracting amounts for capital replenishment, education and other services to members) to the members based on the level of their patronage in proportion to their fellow members. Members looked forward to the Divi, as it often meant they could afford a holiday, buy new suits of clothes or even reinvest it in the co-op so that they increased the value of their holding and their returns. Naturally, this was also a good source of capital for the co-operative itself.
Backstrom (1974, pp. 6-7) considers that this “burgeoning wealth” created an indifference to change within the consumer membership of these co-operatives. Neale was antagonistic to this activity because he thought the profit split should be made with labour, not the consumer. The idea of profit sharing was used by co-operatives and by individual capitalists with varying results. Ludlow and Jones (1867, pp.142-143) argued that profit sharing had a significant effect on improving worker discipline within producer co-operatives: they contended that it stopped drunkenness, open disorder and removed the necessity for the workers to perpetrate “the small tricks and dishonesties” to which they felt entitled due to their antagonism to their employer.

At one point, Ludlow had in fact warned Neale that, once the middle men had been removed, the interests of the consumer and the producer would be at odds (Backstrom 1974, p.7). By 1867, it appeared that this hypothesis had been verified when Ludlow and Jones (1867, p. 142) reported that most co-operatives were operating such that they were looking to increase their consumer membership and the Divi was central to that recruitment. Indeed, they reported that the Divi was used by the Rochdale Pioneers to build capital and to secure customers (1867, pp. 133-134).

The idea of profit sharing within the co-operative movement did not really survive Neale’s death. It was formally abandoned by the CWS in the 1880s (Gurney 1996, p. 149) and Mitchell drove this point continuously throughout the two decades he was chairman of the CWS. He said that profit was made by the consumption of the people and so the consumers ought to have it (Gurney 1996, p. 43). Employees of the CWS were treated no differently than the employees of any other employer and the CWS was as likely to purchase goods from private capitalist organisations as from other co-operatives. In the expansion of the CWS under Mitchell, Ludlow’s warning appeared to be realized. The CWS became:

“…a self-perpetuating bureaucratic machine which was economically conservative and ideologically inflexible, and, within the shadow of its narrowly materialistic influence the entire co-operative movement was gradually transformed into a great impersonal business enterprise.”

Backstrom (1974, p. 7)

The CWS even had a booking agency with 170 musical acts on its books (Gurney 1996, p. 71). Co-operators abandoned community-building for shop keeping, wholesaling and banking, “…impatient with the slow movement towards some future utopia”, they settled comfortably for immediate gain (Backstrom 1974, p. 62). Importantly, it was seen that the death of Neale was also the final act in the displacement of the old Owenite ideals in favour of the practical, capitalistic nostrums popular during the second half of his life (Backstrom 1974, p. 219).

VII. Concluding Remarks

Calhoun (2012 pp. 34-35), when discussing radicalism, counsels that we should appreciate how misleading it is to consider that there was a single historical trend in the nineteenth-century and co-operation should be thought of in the same light. The spectrum of ideas and

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40 The concepts of profit sharing and the Divi should not be confused. The Divi was paid to consumers based on their purchases while profit sharing was offered to workers on the basis of the profits of the entity for which they worked.
the actions that resulted from those ideas was broad and not necessarily lineal. While many respected the work of Owen and Neale, the various actors also learned from their lack of success and sought to rationalise their thinking in this context.

Some co-operators modified their utopian ideas in order to remove the more extreme and often ridiculed elements of their thought similarly to the work of Fourier’s adherents in France (Beecher 1984). Others also sought to modify their pragmatic ideas in order to soften the strong economic focus of their thinking and to at least appear to accommodate the prevailing thought of the leading classes. Ideas pertaining to issues such as the prospects for improvement in man—both physically and spiritually—were leant on by both those at the utopian end of the spectrum and those at the pragmatic end. The former sought to actually improve the lot of man while the latter sought to create a social value to their work in order to maintain the support of the political and social elites.

There is no doubt that, in England, the ultimate outcome fell in favour of the Co-operative Wholesale Society and the reinforcement of the consumer co-operative as a viable and successful model. This model is extant today in the operations of such organisations as the John Lewis Partnership and, while there remain co-operative reading libraries and national bodies supporting and enhancing the movement, the focus remains the Divi and the development of very commercial organisations to the benefit of the members.
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