

DOCUMENT

PROGRAMME OF RESEARCH AND ACTIONS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LABOUR MARKET

Forms of organization, type of employment,
working conditions and industrial relations in
cooperatives, any collectiveness or other
self-managing structures of the EEC



COMMISSION
OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

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Commission of the European Communities

**Programme of Research and Actions on the Development
of the Labour Market**

**FORMS OF ORGANISATION, TYPE OF EMPLOYMENT,
WORKING CONDITIONS AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS
IN CO-OPERATIVES, ANY COLLECTIVENESS OR
OTHER SELF-MANAGING STRUCTURES OF THE EEC**

Document

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This document is the result of a study conducted by a research team from Britain, France and Italy.

Members of the research team are :

Jean-Louis Laville	(FRANCE)	CRIDA, Paris
Richard Macfarlane	(UNITED KINGDOM)	Tavistock Institute, London
Isabelle Mahiou	(FRANCE)	CRIDA, Paris
Elliot Stern	(UNITED KINGDOM)	Tavistock Institute, London
Stefano Zan	(ITALY)	A.R.O.C. Bologna

The study was co-ordinated by Elliott Stern, from the Tavistock Institute, London. Riccardo Peccei and Jean-Michel Vieillard acted as consultants. Helen Cockett was project administrator. The study was conducted between October 1984 and September 1985.

The study comprises the following parts :

Part I : Main Report

Part II : National Study Reports

- France
- United Kingdom
- Italy

PART I

MAIN REPORT

By

Elliot STERN

Tavistock Institute
London

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SUMMARY

This study considered employment characteristics; organisation and management; membership participation; pay and working conditions; industrial relations and trade union roles in worker co-operatives in France, Italy and the United Kingdom. It reviewed existing research and information and conducted four original case studies in each country.

The study identified five different types of worker co-operative: established; emergent; marginalised; rescue; and alternative; and considered the different circumstances and responses of each within the terms of the study brief. The worker co-operative movements in each country are also described because their organisation was considered to shape the internal organisation of co-operative enterprises.

Among the issues given particular attention are: contemporary expectations of co-operatives and how far these are being fulfilled; the similarities and differences between co-operatives and small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs); the outcomes of effective co-operative organisation; and the strategies of trade unions towards co-operation.

Recommendations are made concerning: co-operative organisation at a European level; the role of trade unions; support for co-operatives, with particular reference to employment initiatives; and for future research and development activities.

1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The brief for this study as laid down by the European Commission concerns:

'Forms of organisation, types of employment, working conditions and industrial relations in co-operatives, collectives or other self-managing structures that seek to be economically viable'.

In trying to operationalise the brief it proved useful to consider first how the study came about. A short restatement of our understanding of the background to the study may also serve as an introduction to this report and go some way to explaining the ground we chose to cover within a potentially vast field. This was also the way a framework was prepared (see Annexe 1) as a guide for members of the study team.

This study was instigated by the European Commission following a request from the European Parliament. A report on the European co-operative movement known as the Mihr Report, after its rapporteur, was drawn up for the Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee in 1982. (European Parliament, Working Document: 1-849/82). The Mihr Report requested the Commission to carry out an investigation into various aspects of co-operatives, including their organisational structure, their sectoral strength and their general working conditions. The Mihr Report is essentially concerned with the role of the European co-operative movement in employment policy. It suggests for example that the European Community should consult with the co-operative movement on 'job creation and the quality of worklife' and that to this end: 'the co-operative associations are themselves called upon to co-ordinate their views and put them forward collectively'. For these reasons we have extended the notion of organisational structure to include the organisation of the co-operative movement as well as the internal organisation of co-operative enterprises.

Whilst the Mihr Report is the point of departure for this study there are a number of other concerns which appear to lie behind the study brief.

On the political left and among trade unionists where support for industrial democracy might be assumed, co-operatives arouse profound uncertainties. Co-operatives disturb the customary relations of labour and capital and posit a very different model of worker involvement from the collective bargaining framework with which most European trade unions are familiar. More specifically, the employment crisis gathering momentum since the early 1970s has subjected the European labour movement to two contradictory pressures. On the one hand anxiety over job losses has made the co-operative option ever more difficult to dismiss. On the other hand the unions have had to confront the fraught

experience of co-operation mobilized to re-launch failing or bankrupt companies in so called rescue co-operatives. The study therefore also attempts to address these concerns, ie the experience of trade unions in co-operatives, their relationships with co-operative movements, and their particular role in rescue situations.

A third set of concerns derives from widespread interest in local economic initiatives (ILE), many of which take a co-operative or collective form. European employment policies are increasingly focussed at the local level in the search for new enterprise, new employment and new instruments of regional and manpower policy. This interest is not confined to Europe but is also the focus of OECDs joint programme of action, in which th EEC and member States participate alongside Canada, the United States, Austria, Sweden, Turkey and Australia. The OECD's ILE programme (Initiative Locale de Creation d'Emplois) is practically oriented. An interest in implementation and practice, a common feature of most local economic programmes, raises different kinds of questions about co-operative organisation. The failure of new and small scale enterprises can sometimes be attributed to organisational as well as economic problems. Practitioners want to know how to minimise failure and indeed how to offer support and technical assistance that improve the chances of success. The study brief has therefore been interpreted as having practical intent and whilst description and analysis take up the bulk of this report there is also space devoted to recommendations for policy and practice.

1.2 The Scope of this Study

In the twelve months available for this study it was not possible to undertake much original research. It was therefore decided.

- to review existing research and information in fields related to the study brief;
- to undertake a limited number of case studies to complement existing material.

Even so, choices had to be made in order to restrict the study to a manageable scale. Two further decisions were therefore made, in consultation with the Commission:

- to concentrate on three member States: Italy, France and the United Kingdom; and
- to restrict the study in the main to worker co-operatives.

The three countries chosen were seen as representative of different stages in co-operative development and likely to generate enough material to stimulate informal discussion in other member States. Worker co-operatives are a widespread form of 'self-management'. As such more material is available on them

than on alternative collectives or other associations. Nonetheless some material, where relevant and available, has been included from other forms of collective experience, eg French associations under the 1901 Law.

1.3 Definition of Self-Management in this Study

An initial problem for the study team was how to define self-management, a term used in the study brief and one that can take on many meanings. For some it specifically refers to a theory of workers management and workers control development in Yugoslavia (See Vanek 1975). For others it is a term coterminous with industrial democracy, workers participation, new forms of work organisation and the humanization of work (see Blumberg 1968, ILO, 1981*). We can identify a number of elements present in most of this literature and in associated public debates, ie:

- democratic institutions within the enterprise in which employees participate;
- control over an enterprise's economic resources by its workforce;
- significant influence over management decision-making by the workforce;
- an opportunity to challenge the conventional division of labour and develop alternative ways of organising work.

There are of course enormous differences in emphasis between those who advocate social ownership of capital versus individual ownership; those who are interested in developments at the level of enterprise management and those more concerned with day to day work relations; and those who advocate a greater stake by workers for instrumental reasons such as efficiency, and those who are interested in redistributing power for ideological reasons.

Worker co-operatives, as we shall see, contain expressions of all these tendencies and it is not possible to take a narrow view for the purposes of this study. Rather than try to define self-management or confine the study to particular forms we have adopted a pragmatic approach. The term **participation** was chosen to express in neutral language the potential range of arrangements that worker co-operatives may devise. Each national team was asked to consider a number of questions:

*Note: Only references not cited in the national reports (Volumes 2, 3 and 4) are included in the main report.

1. What is the location of participation, eg to what extent is it at a micro-level of work organisation, at the level of the enterprise, or at a broader level including umbrella organisations?
2. What are the methods of participation? Are they formal or informal, collective or representative, what structures are used?
3. What are the areas through which members of a co-operative exercise influence and control, eg financial, day-to-day decisions, strategic decisions such as investment or new products?
4. How do workers and members participate economically in the enterprise, is this collective or individualised, are bonuses distributed, what happens when members leave the co-operative?
5. What are the outcomes in terms of levels of control exercised by members of a co-operative, ie is there control, only of a token kind, is there a power of veto, is there a very high level of control even if only over certain areas?

1.4 Problems of Comparison and Generalisation

The national studies on which this final report is based (see companion Volumes 2, 3 and 4), describe in detail particular circumstances in France, Italy and the United Kingdom. This is an attempt to draw together the national strands into a single report. It involves highlighting similarities and pointing-up the European dimension of our findings. There undoubtedly are such similarities; for example in the European-wide resurgence of co-operative formation between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s; in the initial suspicion and developing understanding by trade unions of co-operatives and their aspirations; in the conflicts between member participation and workforce professionalisation in co-operatives; and in the importance of European community funding, particularly for co-operative training initiatives.

It would be wrong, however, to ignore the important differences we have found: differences that have come into sharper focus as a result of the common framework that has been used by all the national research teams. Worker co-operatives have a long and diverse history in each of the member states; they operate in different legislative frameworks; and are associated with different national policies and political structures. Strict comparisons fall apart when we try to compare the strong and highly organised Italian movement, for example, with the fledgling and often fragmented UK co-operative movement. Even within a single country and even within the relatively restrictive category of worker co-operatives, generalisations that we might wish to make have constantly to be qualified. Like

any Small or Medium Sized Enterprise (SME), co-operatives differ in their size, structure, markets, technology and employment mix. The co-operative form superimposes on this diversity a further experimental quality which encourages quite unusual approaches to problems and their solution. As a result, we cannot always give unequivocal answers to apparently straight-forward questions even within a particular national context, let alone at a European level.

It is also important to note one other reason why we have to be circumspect in generalising and drawing conclusions. This study began by collating existing research and information available on worker co-operatives within each member State. On examination such research proved to be at best patchy and inconsistent, and at worst non-existent or even unsound. This partly reflects the relative 'youth' of the new co-operative movement in Europe: there has not yet been time for a considered and thorough examination of its forms, problems and experiences. Studies, once located, sometimes proved to be nothing more than propaganda or wishful thinking by critics or advocates of the co-operative approach. Even national statistics on co-operative employment, economic performance, co-operative creation and failure, and levels of State support proved difficult to find or rely upon.

One reason for this is that in each State the definition of what is a co-operative differs. Phenomena that ought to be comparable are scattered among limited companies, associations and community businesses as well as under the heading 'worker co-operatives'. A second reason is that there is little agreement on what information to collect and for what reasons. Given the diverse policy objectives co-operatives are seen to fulfil and given the sometimes quite different objectives of co-operatives themselves, this lack of agreement is understandable. Hopefully this and other studies now underway will provide the basis for more systematic information strategies in the future.

2. THE CONTEXT OF WORKER CO-OPERATION

2.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the context in which worker co-operatives operate and the main economic, political and social processes which support their renewed strength. The exercise is also intended to set a context for the study. In order to evaluate information on the co-operative movement or on the organisation of co-operative enterprises we need criteria. We need to know what are the intentions and values of those involved with co-operatives before making judgements about the success or failure of co-operative organisations.

Those who have supported or taken part in the recent rebirth of Europe's worker co-operative movements have done so for diverse reasons. Citizens, political groupings, States and European institutions attach their own aspirations and priorities to the co-operative ideal. One of the undoubted strengths of co-operatives, as we shall see, is that they are able to relate to so many of these apparently conflicting expectations. They occupy political and economic territory not yet claimed or even charted by any one of the main power blocs in Western society. On the contrary worker co-operatives have the capacity to make most established interests uneasy. The labour movement sees in them the spectre of worker capitalism; those who wish to live differently fear that they will be incorporated into the mainstream; and economic policymakers are confronted by the new dilemmas of decentralisation.

Worker co-operatives are not unique in their potential for ambiguity. A similar discussion could have been constructed around local economic initiatives, voluntary action and self-help, and even many small and medium size enterprises (SMEs). The debate around co-operatives has been particularly active over recent years, however, and it illuminates the broader aspects of economic and social policy with surprising clarity.

2.2 New Co-operatives in the Mid-1980s

A high proportion of worker co-operatives registered in all three countries did not exist ten years ago. From the mid-1970s onwards there has been an explosion of growth in co-operative numbers, though not in employment to anything like the same extent. Although there may be disputes about precise numbers we know that the Italian worker co-operative movement is by far the largest and strongest of the three we have considered. It has approximately 14,000 co-operatives, at least ten times the size of the French movement with about 1,200 co-operatives and more than twenty times the size of its UK equivalent, with about 670 co-operatives.

Employment figures follow a similar pattern with estimates of 430,000, 36,000 and 7,500 jobs respectively in Italy, France and the UK. It is worth noting, however, that employment figures are

disproportionately more unequal than numbers of co-operatives. The implication being that the average size of co-operatives is greatest in Italy and smaller in France, and still smaller in the UK.

Within the expanded co-operative movements of the mid-1980s there are many different types of enterprise even within the single category of worker co-operatives. For a preliminary scan of the field in France, Italy and the UK, we can identify the following:

i. Traditional Co-operatives

These are established enterprises which began life in an earlier period of co-operative formation. These enterprises may have been endowed to employees by their owners - particularly common in the UK; formed by workers excluded from employment because of their trade union activities as reported in the Italian and French studies; or the successors to failed private companies.

ii. Rescue Co-operatives

These are ailing or bankrupt companies that have been re-launched as co-operatives, usually by workers concerned to protect their jobs. They have been most evident since the early 1980s in France but also significant in Italy. In the UK the main experience of co-operative rescue was in the mid-1970s though small scale examples have been created more recently.

iii. Emergent Co-operatives

These newly formed co-operatives are in 'emergent' or 'professional' sectors such as computer software, leisure services, environmental activities, architecture, language translation and vocational training. They tend to be formed by young people who choose co-operation for ideological reasons, rather than having it thrust upon them. They exist in all the countries included in the study but are perhaps strongest in Northern Italy and urban areas of France.

iv. Marginalised Co-operatives

These are set up, usually with public assistance, to help marginalised or so called 'special' groups, ie the young, women, ethnic minorities, inhabitants of peripheral regions, gain access to the labour market. They tend to be found in the major cities, or in priority areas for regional policy such as the South of Italy.

v. **Alternative Co-operatives**

These aim to express an alternative set of values to those dominant in Western Europe. They are often influenced by libertarian, socialist or ecological beliefs. Members usually try to combine a different way of living with a different way of working. Whilst the most widely known examples of these alternative or life-style groups are to be found in West Germany, they also exist in all the countries included in this study.

This categorisation is biased towards new types of worker co-operative: it is essentially a typology of co-operative formation. History shows that yesterday's 'new' co-operatives, provided they survive, can evolve in very different ways, taking on new priorities and moving into new sectors. It is also worth noting that very similar enterprises or groups can be found that are not co-operatives - perhaps organised as private companies, voluntary organisations or associations. Nonetheless this categorisation does reflect the current strands within the new co-operative movement in particular. As such, examples have been included in the case studies undertaken by each national research group. The five types are also frequently referred to in the remainder of this report as they offer a convenient way of distinguishing different co-operative tendencies.

2.3 **What is Expected of Co-operatives?**

The expectations and priorities listed below have been culled from various sources: the national reports for this study; government policy statements in States included in the study; the declared aspirations of co-operatives and their associations; other EEC studies. They do not constitute an inclusive list, nor are they exclusively attached to co-operatives, but they do convey an impression of the diversity of values co-operatives are seen to represent and which certainly shape the context in which they operate.

These expectations include:

- **Preserving Jobs**, ie resisting closures and redundancies, a concern of workers and trade unions and often expressed through the vehicle of 'rescue' co-operatives.
- **Managing Labour Markets**, ie assisting the disadvantaged or special groups, often seen by public authorities as the reason for supporting what we have called 'marginalised' co-operatives.
- **Economic Regeneration**, ie promoting new entrepreneurial activity particularly in 'emergent' sectors, and greater efficiency and competitiveness in traditional industrial sectors.

- **Regional Policy**, ie trying to prevent even greater regional disparities of employment and income between 'core' and 'peripheral' regions. Regional authorities, development agencies lie behind most of such initiatives.
- **Increasing autonomy at work**, ie supporting forms of work organisation with which working people are able to identify, exercise some control and contribute to and benefit from economic production.
- **Restructuring traditional sectors**, ie encouraging changes in corporate structure in sectors in decline, facing technical change or more intensive market competition. As well as public authorities private companies have seen co-operatives as useful to this end.
- **Transforming social relations**, ie demonstrating within the co-operative movement that there are alternative ways of living, producing and organising. This aim is evident among the 'alternative' protagonists of socially useful production, as it is among socialists and communists in the and successful Italian co-operatives.

The extent to which worker co-operatives fulfil the various expectations vested in them, and evidence that they in fact contribute to objectives identified above, is largely addressed elsewhere in this report. For example, the contribution of worker co-operatives to employment creation is covered in Chapter 3; co-operative restructuring and rescues are discussed in several places, particularly in Chapter 6 ; and questions of economic performance and economic participation in Chapter 7.

There are particular questions, however, that are not covered elsewhere because they are not strictly part of the brief of this study but which are important nonetheless in understanding the context of worker co-operation. In particular we need to describe what we can about:

- the sectors in which worker co-operatives are to be found and their economic structure;
- the regional and geographic dispersal of such co-operative activity; and
- the role of the State in co-operative development and growth.

2.4 Economic Sectors and their Structure

The sectoral strength of co-operatives often reflects the period of their foundation. Older, well-established co-operatives are likely to be found in traditional sectors : building and construction, printing, agriculture (particularly in Italy), glassware, engineering and metalwork. Rescue co-operatives are likely to be found in newer sectors: services in general, including professional services, leisure, environment-related activities, and information technology, particularly software production and distribution. Among those co-operatives set up as a direct result of State support there is also a tendency for co-operatives to be found with a social or community purpose: ie, providing for needs of local people, in particular the disadvantaged. Such co-operatives can be found, for example, in the South of Italy, in urban areas of France, and in the Greater London area. (See Italian Case Study of Nuova Professionalita and French Case Study of CAES.)

It is also important to recognise the structure of co-operatives within their sectors. Co-operatives in the UK, France and Italy appear to follow each other in an ascending scale of relative size. The Italian picture follows partly from a more mature co-operative movement as well as from a deliberate policy of 'mergers' and consolidation within Italian co-operatives in the late 1970s. Old established and rescue co-operatives, where they occur, tend consistently to be larger than new start-ups. Because the UK has a high proportion of new co-operatives they tend to be particularly small.

The structural position of co-operatives within a sector can take a number of forms, partly depending on the size of enterprises and their economic strength:

- Small co-operatives like other SMEs are often dependent on market niches vacated by larger enterprises as part of a process of corporate rationalisation. Once established they continue to be dependent on subcontracted activity. Other small co-operatives may serve a limited market more directly.
- Larger established co-operatives may themselves behave like other corporations. They would then pursue vertical integration offering their markets a full range of products or services. Alternatively they may themselves subcontract to smaller firms or co-operatives.
- A more common form of integration among small and medium sized co-operatives is sector-wide federations between separate units. In this way market penetration is achieved by co-operation between independent units which are able to combine and recombine in different configurations to meet different market needs.

In the UK where worker co-operatives are generally small, they serve quite limited local markets. About 70% of co-operatives, according to a recent survey, sell to individual consumers and a similar proportion to customers in their immediate locality. There are no established co-operative federations. In the retail wholefood trade, federations were formed in the mid-1970s but these did not survive. A London Co-operative Printers Association has recently been set up with support from the Greater London Enterprise Board. This federation aims to promote joint marketing and related training between co-operatives. A few of the larger established UK co-operatives have also taken over other failing companies in a related sector.

In France, co-operative federations exist in the building, metallurgical, graphics and communication industries. New groupings are currently being formed in information processing and furniture. Although occasionally examples can be found where such federations have cooperated in commercial contracts these are rare. Most exchange information only rather than trade together. New small co-operatives in France are usually highly dependent on other non-co-operative firms for their markets, though this is not always so. One of the French case studies cites a larger co-operative (VET) which merged with another failing co-operative to which it had previously subcontracted part of its production.

In Italy the structure is more complex and differentiated. Larger co-operatives, especially in construction, have sometimes gone down the path of vertical integration. Some large Northern co-operatives subcontract to Southern marginalised co-operatives or even to conventional firms. There are also federations in most sectors and regions. But the outstanding feature of Italian co-operative structure are consortia which allow even new and small co-operatives access to markets, research and development, finance and expertise. Consortia also exist in most sectors and in most regions. In extreme cases they are so strong that they have begun to behave as holding companies, with smaller participating co-operatives effectively becoming subsidiaries, though in general this does not happen. The experience of Italian co-operatives is not unique. Studies of small and medium sized enterprises in Italy (see Sabel 1982) identify a consistent tendency for inter-firm cooperation which is one factor seen as contributing to the innovativeness and strength of that country's small firms sector.

The isolated co-operative may be normal in the UK, still common in France but is rare in Italy. For isolated co-operatives their organisational world is bounded by that of the enterprise. When we talk about membership participation in Italy we will need to include a complex set of institutional relationships - with Consortia, Central Federations, political parties and local and national government - in which members can participate. This also provides a quite different meaning to co-operative membership than an isolated co-operative with few trading or political links with a wider co-operative movement.

2.5 Regional and Geographical Dispersal of Co-operatives

Traditional worker co-operatives in France, Italy and the UK have been concentrated in urban centres. It is only quite recently that co-operatives have begun to spread more widely. This is partly in response to regional policy and partly a result of the spontaneous creation of co-operatives in peripheral regions.

The geographical distribution of co-operatives in the UK is heavily biased towards urban areas - 28% of all co-operatives are in the London region. Outside of London significant co-operative growth has been recorded in the West Midlands, in the North, in South Wales and in Scotland - ie areas of industrial crisis and decline. Because of the small scale of the British co-operative movement there are next to no geographical concentrations in particular sectors. In France whilst traditional co-operatives were also concentrated in urban industrial areas such as Paris and Lyon, recent growth of new start-ups has spread co-operatives to Provence, the South West and the North of France. France, more than Britain, has strong 'mono-industrial' regional economies; and 'rescues' in the textiles and furniture sectors in the East of France have led to the beginnings of a regional presence in these sectors.

Traditionally co-operatives in Italy are a North or North-Central phenomena. Italy also has by far the strongest 'mono-industrial' regional economy among all the three member States included in this study. In Tuscany, for example, the Prato basin has thousands of firms involved in some stage of textile design, manufacture, finance and distribution. Engineering firms are clustered in Imola as are ceramic producers near Modena. Many of Italy's mono-industrial regions and sub-regions are to be found in Emilia Romagna where the Italian Co-operative movement is at its strongest (see Brusco 1982). It is suggested in the Italian national report that in Emilia co-operatives account for 60% of the value-added produced by firms with more than twenty employees (1983 figures).

Since the 1970s Italian co-operatives have begun to assume greater significance in the South of Italy. Initially this took the form of an unsuccessful attempt to replicate large Northern co-operatives in the less developed South. Youth co-operatives, under Law 285 (1977) were mainly a Southern phenomena as were the 'reconstruction' co-operatives following the earthquake at the end of 1980. Such co-operatives have become socially significant; but the economic weight of Italian co-operatives remains overwhelmingly in the North and Centre, ie Tuscany, Trentino, Lombardy and Emilia.

The spread of co-operatives from their old base in the industrial heartlands to peripheral regions is quite recent. It is therefore difficult to judge how far they will take root and flourish. Italian co-operative extensions into the South appeared to fail quite dramatically in the late 1970s - both when pioneered by Northern co-operatives moving south and when promoted by the

State and by regional governments - ie the so called 'youth co-operatives' (see Tomasone 1980). Yet five years later it would appear that co-operatives in the South of Italy are beginning to prosper. Similar questions are now being raised about regional initiatives in the UK and the likely effects of de-centralization in France. At this stage it is only possible to say that worker co-operatives are being seen in all three countries included in this study as a potential vehicle for regional policy.

2.6 National Policies Towards Worker Co-operatives

Contemporary policies towards co-operatives in Italy, France and the UK have been shaped by very different cultural, political and economic processes. The co-operative ideal emerged (or some would argue, re-emerged) throughout Europe in the mid-19th century as a response by working people to industrialisation and unfettered capitalism. Yet with the growth of large-scale factories, trade unionism and socialist political parties, the co-operative approach was soon eclipsed. Ironically given the birthplace of the Rochdale Pioneers, the rejection of co-operatives was most complete in the UK. To this day there is no specific national legislation that provides for the registration of co-operatives in the UK, except within the framework of the Companies Acts or Registrar of Friendly Societies.

The Italian and French State have supported co-operatives to a greater degree, if intermittently, throughout the 20th Century. Opening up of credit facilities and of access to public markets to co-operatives in France with State support was associated with an active period of co-operative expansion between 1900-1910. The foundations for the expansion of Italian co-operatives in the 1950s were laid in the 1945 Constitutional Charter. This not only recognised their importance in the reconstruction of Italy but gave co-operatives specific fiscal advantages and access to national co-operatives funding. The range of policy objectives to which co-operatives have been seen as a relevant response by central governments is considerable. These have included not only national reconstruction after 1945, but more recently regional development in the South of Italy and peripheral regions of France, and earthquake reconstruction in Italy in the 1980s. Notwithstanding this diversity of policies it was the employment crisis that began in the mid-1970s that rekindled European central government's interest in co-operatives. Employment related policies have taken a variety of forms, ie general job-creation measures to promote new enterprises; and policies targetted at particular labour-market groups.

In France and Italy co-operatives have received particular consideration even in measures that have broader intentions - such as containing youth unemployment in Italy or promoting the 'Social Economy' in France. The 1983 laws in France on the Social Economy, for example, give special recognition to the financial needs of co-operatives for assistance and for

loan-guarantees. The 1985 MARCORA Acts in Italy provide for a 'revolving' fund to develop co-operatives, and funds to help workers set up co-operatives when their firms are in crisis. In the UK, on the other hand, central government support occurs only as part of general policies for small business generation such as the Enterprise Allowance Scheme, which has on occasions been made available to co-operatives, or alternatively as part of inner-city programmes to counter deprivation. It is worth noting, however, that all the UK's political parties now include support for co-operatives as part of their party programmes though with different emphases.

Co-operatives have also benefitted from local and regional government support in all three countries included in this study. Regional government in Italy which has substantial autonomy can, as in Emilia Romagna and Tuscany, give additional support to their co-operative movements over and above State funding. In the UK also the growth of co-operatives in the 1980s has been largely supported by Labour controlled local government. Central government scrutiny and control of local government expenditure in the UK - culminating in 'rate-capping' in 1984 and the abolition of the Metropolitan Counties in 1986 has begun to reduce this local support. In contrast, decentralisation in France has been accompanied by new powers at regional level to gather and spend additional revenues; whilst laws introduced in 1978 already allowed local authorities to participate in the capital of co-operatives. This has tended to increase support for co-operatives at a local level.

3. EMPLOYMENT IN WORKER CO-OPERATIVES

3.1. Introduction

In debates about co-operatives, questions are often posed about the employment they offer. How many new jobs are being created? Who works in co-operatives? What kinds of jobs are co-operators doing? These questions are important for several reasons:

- First, given that a central policy justification for supporting worker co-operatives is their contribution to employment, it is important to know about the quantity and quality of co-operative employment and the socio-economic profiles of co-operators compared with others in the labour force.
- Second, it gives us initial clues about the practical consequences of co-operative working: are they, for example, enhancing skills more or less than conventional firms?
- Third, at a more general level we may even learn something about the structure of national labour markets by examining the employment offered by co-operatives and how this is changing.

3.2 Co-operative Job Creation

The present extent of co-operative employment in the countries included in the study have already been noted, ie approximately 430,000 in Italy, 36,000 in France and 7,500 in the United Kingdom. The average size of co-operatives is also greatest in Italy, smaller in France and still smaller in the UK.

A high proportion of worker co-operatives registered in all three countries did not exist ten years ago. From the mid-1970s onwards there has been an explosion of growth in co-operative numbers, though not in employment to anything like the same extent. In France for example, for which figures appear to be among the most reliable, the numbers employed in worker co-operatives increased from 32,000 to about 40,000 between 1978 and 1983, but this was in a period in which the number of co-operatives more than doubled from 571 to 1269. Indeed between 1983 and 1984 numbers employed in co-operatives fell from about 40,000 to 36,000. In the UK there was an even greater rate of growth in numbers of co-operatives from about 20 to nearly 700 between 1975 and 1985. In Italy, although the growth is less dramatic, it would appear that worker co-operatives nearly doubled in numbers between 1978 and 1983. What some of the more crude estimates tend to ignore in both the UK and Italy is the number of 'failures' as well as the number of start-ups. In Italy, for example, we know that many 'youth co-operatives' were recorded at their creation but not at their demise. In the UK, similarly, adjustments have to be made to commonly available figures to take account of known closedowns. In

the UK the increase in full-time employment in co-operatives between 1980 and 1984 runs into hundreds not thousands and most of the reported increases are in part-time jobs.

There are a number of explanations of this phenomena, i.e. the discrepancy between growth in numbers of co-operatives and growth in levels of employment, ie:

- Co-operatives have not been untouched by the general economic recession in Europe and older well-established co-operatives have experienced pressures on costs, overheads and margins like all other enterprises. Well-established co-operatives have, almost by definition, existed in traditional sectors, among the most vulnerable during the recession. They have constantly shed labour or at the very least ceased to recruit new workers. In the UK job losses can largely be accounted for by these older well-established co-operatives. One of our case studies offers an Italian example of this same process.
- Co-operatives that are new start-ups, fail at a higher rate than established enterprises - though interestingly enough there is consistent evidence that co-ops fare no worse and often fare better than conventional new starts. As a consequence net employment increases will largely depend on a surplus of enterprise creation over enterprise failure. This will be particularly so at certain stages in the cycle of co-operative creation i.e. when the rate of increase of start-ups slows down. One interpretation of the latest figures available in the UK report is that the next stage of the co-operative creation cycle has been reached i.e. when sufficient new co-operatives have survived their initial crises, to begin to recruit more members in addition to their founders.
- Co-operatives have been widely used as a means of reducing job-losses during the economic recession. So called 'rescue co-operatives' have been a feature of co-operative formation throughout Europe. In such cases bankrupt private companies are re-launched as co-operatives. One characteristic of 'rescues' as both our national reports and case studies show, is their tendency, paradoxically given their job-preservation intentions, to lose jobs. This can happen in two ways either, at worst, because the whole co-operative fails and everyone loses their jobs or, in less severe cases, a slimming down of employee numbers is part of the bitter medicine of recovery following co-operative formation. In France in particular the widespread use of co-operatives as a vehicle for rescues has meant

that rescues now account for a high proportion of all co-operative jobs. At the same time the well publicised problems of French rescues also account for a high proportion of job losses among French co-operators in recent years. The other two countries have undergone similar experiences in the past. In the UK the pre-1979 Labour government supported the rescue of failed enterprises through co-operatives. In Italy many existing co-operatives began their lives as rescues and there is now renewed interest in the rescue 'strategy' (see below Chapter 6).

3.3 Old and New Co-operators

The traditional worker in an established co-operative reflects the strengths and distinctive history of the national co-operative movement. In France where skilled workers formed the core of the traditional co-operative movement, those in established co-operatives have tended to be skilled craftsmen with an urban working-class background. In Italy where co-operatives were set up for the least privileged members of society - the disinherited as the Italian national report puts it - traditional co-operative workers were often semi-skilled or even unskilled labourers. They were also often rurally based as in agricultural co-operatives. In the UK where manufacturing co-operatives were the core of the old co-operative movement that survived until the 1960s, workers' backgrounds tended to be as expected for their particular sectors i.e. textiles, engineering, chemicals and retail. There is some evidence in the U.K. that the educational attainment of those in established co-operatives is higher than might be expected - pointing to a more skilled and less underprivileged social position of those in such co-operatives. Women workers were generally under-represented among traditional co-operators except in those jobs traditionally segregated on gender lines and reserved for female labour, e.g. shop-work, light assembly-work and office jobs. The age of those employed in traditional co-operatives also tends to be older than average: often a feature of enterprises which have not grown recently and where labour-turnover has been low.

Market pressures are also re-shaping the employment structure of established co-operatives. In an effort to improve competitiveness, they are becoming more specialised. This can lead (as the Italian case studies describe) to the employment of higher proportions of white collar, technical and specialist staff at the expense of unskilled or craft-based workers. In this regard established co-operatives are subject to the same pressures for 'rationalisation' and professionalisation as other enterprises.

Of the 'new' co-operators, those that most resemble the traditional co-operative profile, are from 'rescue' co-operatives. Rescues also tend to be in traditional sectors,

with substantial skilled and semi-skilled workforces. They are mostly males except in sectors such as textiles that traditionally employ females and are mainly working class. Other 'new' co-operators come from far more varied backgrounds.

'Emergent' co-operatives tend to employ young, professional or intellectual workers. They are generally well educated, with post-school diplomas or even degrees. Their class backgrounds appear to be mixed. Some are undoubtedly middle-class and have been attracted to co-operatives rather than to conventional business for ideological reasons. For example, many will espouse libertarian or left-wing values. Others come from working-class backgrounds but have, through educational opportunity, been able to pursue technical or professional careers. In Italy, for example, there is some evidence that such 'emergent' co-operatives are sometimes formed by the sons and daughters of the old working-class who are now looking for better jobs than their parents.

Marginalised co-operatives include those who, for one reason or another, have been made marginal in their national or local labour markets. With rising unemployment more and more European citizens have been marginalised in recent years. Marginalised groups include:

- the unskilled or those with redundant skills often made unemployed by technical innovation and the ability of employers to select more able and well qualified workers at a time of high unemployment;
- the young unemployed, who leave school with few qualifications and who are particularly disadvantaged in the labour-market because of their lack of work experience;
- ethnic minorities, who suffer the double disadvantage of employer discrimination and low skill, and whose position has recently been particularly at risk when facing 'competition' for unskilled jobs from other unemployed groups.

It is worth noting some of the most obvious differences between our three countries in the extent to which different marginalised groups have been involved in co-operative formation. Ethnic minorities have been a particular focus in the UK and to a lesser extent in France. Young people have been a consistent employment priority group throughout the EEC over the last decade, but substantial policy support for co-operatives as a response to youth unemployment has been strongest in Italy and France. This only exists at local level or in particular examples in the UK.

'Alternative' co-operatives tend to be peopled by those who choose to work in a way that expresses their values. As with all our types, no categories are entirely exclusive. Some

members of the alternative movement were 'marginalised' by exclusion from the labour market rather than opting out voluntarily, though this is perhaps more obvious in the Federal Republic of Germany than elsewhere. Alternative co-operatives exist in France, the UK and Italy as well as in Germany. Those employed in the 'alternative' movements' co-operatives are even more difficult to pigeonhole than other co-operators. They tend not to be associated with national federations such as the Confederation General des SCOP or the Lega, and information on them is not therefore systematically available. The evidence that is available suggests that 'alternative' co-operators tend to come from middle-class rather than working-class backgrounds. Their level of educational attainment is also very high. In one survey of alternative co-operatives in the UK 92% were found to have 'A' levels (cf. Baccaleariat), and 59% had university degrees - though not in subjects that qualified them for their current occupations.

Women have been involved with co-operatives in all countries sometimes because the new co-operatives have offered women workers traditional female jobs. A more interesting phenomena, especially in the UK, has been the growth of a significant number of 'women only' co-operatives. These have opened up professional and technical jobs - eg in printing, publishing and architecture, which have been difficult for women to either enter or progress in in the past. Women-only enterprises also exist in France (often as associations not co-operatives) though here they tend to serve the feminist movement - for example with publications, bookshops and medical advice, rather than service a wider market. It is worth noting that some of the women's only co-operatives in the UK and France tend to be on the boundary between the 'emergent/intellectual' and the 'marginalised' category. Thus the women who work in them may come from relatively advantaged social positions. This is of course not always the case, though quantification, as always, is very difficult.

In Italy there is a particular 'expression' of marginalisation which is different from that encountered in either France or the UK. In the South of Italy where many 'new' co-operatives have been created, those involved tend to include high proportions of the young and of women. Most of these are unskilled. Until the early 1970s most skilled and educated people emigrated from the South, in particular from the countryside. Now there are significant numbers of rurally based village or small town co-operatives in the South of Italy. Furthermore, there is a phenomenon noted in the Italian case study of well-educated young people from the South of Italy staying on or returning to their villages after a period away as part of a commitment to combat underdevelopment. Such young people are often involved in social service types of employment as well as more conventional business enterprises.

In conclusion we can note that those employed in co-operatives come from very varied backgrounds. Tentatively it would appear that the majority of new co-operators do seem different in each country. Thus in France the major new growth of employment appears to be among 'rescue' co-operatives, which probably means that craft and semi-skilled male workers constitute the majority of new jobs created. In Italy, in contrast, the majority of new co-operative jobs are to be found among marginalised groups - in particular young people and women in the rural South though there are also significant numbers of young professionals in 'emergent' or 'intellectual' co-operatives in the urban North. In the UK the major expansion in co-operative employment over the last decade has been from marginalised urban communities, though 'alternative' movement members and 'rescues' have also contributed to new jobs, albeit to a lesser extent.

3.4 Skills : Knowledge and Ability in Co-operative Work

In order to work effectively in any enterprise people need certain knowledge and ability. This is what we commonly label as 'skill' though the label does little justice to the complex set of meanings often attached to that word. We could, for example, be talking about **personal characteristics** such as personal values, the ability to get on with workmates, and self-confidence. We could also be talking about **previous experience** such as educational attainment and general experience of the world of work. Often skill is used to refer to specific **technical competences** such as metal-work, marketing, computer programming or social work. But equally often the term encompasses more vague **organisational abilities** such as supervision and management, communications, keeping to deadlines and resolving conflicts.

In this report we take a broad view of skill because this seems particularly necessary in co-operatives. Co-operators, as we shall see, often have to engage more of their personal resources in work than employees in other enterprises - their commitments and feelings as well as their specific competences. Furthermore, in some emergent co-operatives the division of labour with its consequences for narrow specialisation is questioned. To that extent co-operators may all have to know something about finance, marketing, materials purchasing and product design whatever their own jobs may be. This is even more striking in alternative and other co-operatives where the notion of a job is itself unconventional and tasks are rotated or shared. Finally, a broad definition of skills is called for when considering worker co-operatives, because in an effective co-operative knowledge has to be carried by institutions, cultures and ideologies as much as by individuals. Skill tends to assume **individualised** knowledge and performance, whereas some of the most important determinants of effectiveness in co-operatives are often embedded in the **organisation** rather than carried by individuals.

Workers in established and rescue co-operatives are usually skilled and experienced. There is likely to be a bias towards traditional skills such as craft and engineering but there will also be a broad mix of other managerial and technical staff. The organisation is established in terms of its procedures so that new members will fit into a pattern of activity, and the enterprise itself has established relationships with its suppliers and customers. In comparison, workers in emergent co-operatives, are technically competent, often in up-to-date areas such as informatics and communications technology, and have previous work experience. They are learning about new work and new markets whilst at the same time establishing a new business. These organisations are not established and have no established relationships or ways of doing things. Workers in marginalised co-operatives face even more severe problems. They need to acquire technical skills and work experience at the same time that they are trying to establish a new organisation and break into an often competitive market. Workers in marginalised and emergent co-ops also need to be able to demonstrate personal flexibility and innovativeness at work far more than those in established co-operatives.

Each of these categories of co-operative calls for different mixes of previous experience, technical competence, personal characteristics and organisational ability. This has important implications when we look at how co-operatives develop or acquire the skills they need to operate effectively. It is no use, for example, trying to address problems of organisational culture and practice entirely by trying to improve the technical competences of individuals. At the same time it is worth asking whether there is anything distinctive about co-operatives per se in the kinds of skills knowledge and experience they demand of their members.

Many of the learning needs of co-operators are common to other small and medium sized enterprises - they have to maintain and update skills, for example, whilst continuing to run a viable business. Other capacities would be easily recognised by anyone involved in new enterprises, such as how to set up an organisation whilst at the same time acquiring relevant job knowledge. One distinctive requirement in co-operatives that makes them different from other businesses derives from their democratic and participative form of organisation. Thus co-operators have to learn how to share information, discuss issues such as day-to day production and longer-term budgetting, and to participate in decisions that effect their own economic future. These kinds of competences can derive from personal values i.e. a belief in democracy as much as from that which is learned. But it is undoubtedly true that all co-operators need skills in order to participate that are different from those required in ordinary employment. Furthermore, there are particular skill groups within worker co-operatives who have specific skill needs of this kind. Managers and administrators have to combine their normal

functions with an additional ability to communicate and to implement decisions in democratic ways. Representatives on councils and committees have to be able to represent the concerns of members and to feedback information and decisions whilst grappling also with the needs of the enterprise.

We have already noted the trend in larger co-operatives to workforce **professionalisation** i.e. employing more specialist and technical staff and more sophisticated management. These moves in established (and rescue) co-operatives are part of a broader industrial trend, but pose specific problems for co-operators:

- it makes it difficult to sustain a policy of internal promotion;
- it threatens to create a split between technocratic management and other socio-economic groups in a co-operative; and
- it reduces the numbers of jobs that can be made available to relatively unskilled workers - which was among the original objectives of many co-operatives, particularly in Italy.

In overall terms the shift in Italian and French co-operatives towards more technical and professional employment opportunities comes about because of two different but consistent tendencies: it partly derives from the 're-structuring' of existing co-operatives, and partly from the formation of new professional and intellectual co-operatives. Both tendencies have implications not only for the kinds of employment available in co-operatives, but also (as we see below) social relationships between the co-operative movements and working class interests, for example, as expressed by trade unions.

3.5 Training, Learning and Development

We have seen that the skills, knowledge and experience people need to work in co-operatives is varied and extensive. How can such work place know-how be acquired? In established co-operatives it may only be a question of replacing, renewing and updating existing competences. In other newer co-operatives basic technical skills may be lacking and have to be built up quickly if the enterprise is to survive. From the material gathered in France, the UK and Italy we can identify four main manpower 'strategies' used by co-operatives:

- Learning on the job;
 - Recruitment;
 - Formal Training; and
 - Organisational Development.
- Learning on the job is the single most common

manpower strategy in co-operatives as it is for most companies. In traditional kinds of employment this has always been the way skills are passed on, for example, by apprenticing a younger person to a more experienced worker. Newer co-operatives may have to adopt this strategy of necessity - being unable to spare people away from their jobs, even for a short time. The practice in newer co-operatives of job rotation and flexible work arrangements has as one of its consequences the possibility of acquiring competence in a wider range of jobs than would normally be the case. Certain kinds of firm-specific competences can only be learned on the job - for example learning about markets or forming relationships with customers and fellow co-operators. Other more technical or higher level skills cannot be learned in this way and require formal training and education.

- **Recruitment and De-recruitment** is very common, (and contentious) within co-operatives. When co-operatives reach a certain level of sophistication they can no longer develop all their skills internally certainly not in the short-term. Alternatively new expertise may be required, because of changes in technologies or markets. In either case recruiting-in new members or employees is the usual response. The consequence of such recruitment unless it is carefully handled can be to create social divisions in the co-operative, especially if newcomers are from a different social background. To some extent members of co-operatives also 'vote with their feet'. From the limited information we have (see UK national study) it appears that a high level of 'labour turnover' is common in the early stages of the co-operative life-cycle. One reason for this is that some members of newer co-ops who test out their ideals in practice find them wanting, and move on. This can take on a harsher form in 'rescue' co-operatives where those with obsolete skills may face redundancy.

- **Formal Training** can take place in-house, especially in larger co-operatives but usually involves the importation of training expertise, or the sending of co-operators on courses. Sophisticated skills of the kind necessary in the emergent/intellectual type of co-operative may well need regular updating. (See French case study of the INFO Co-op, and Italian case-study of Delta). For marginalised co-operatives on the other hand training at formation, or when new members are recruited is most vital. For example many existing co-operatives run 'induction' training in-house to introduce new members to the co-operative and to

existing members. Start-up training is the main training available to marginalised co-operatives in the UK, a reflection of the relative youth of most co-operatives in that country.

- **Organisation Development**, as the term is used here, refers to a planned set of activities that simultaneously tries to change organisation, including structures, cultures and decision-making processes, and tries to develop people employed in line with these planned changes. Both the French and Italian case studies of traditional co-operatives illustrate this process. Committees are set up to consider such topics as quality, work organisation, health and safety, and communication. Members of the co-operative are actively involved in these committees and in implementing the changes that follow from them. There is a strong resemblance between these kinds of interventions and some of the contemporary management fashions for consultation and 'quality circles'. In both cases the concern is to improve the innovativeness of the enterprise in response to a more demanding market situation. A very different kind of organisational development is common in the much smaller UK co-operatives. Here advisors and consultants often with 'group-dynamic' skills have been used to resolve difficulties between co-operators and to help with specific business and technical problems. The 'Large Co-ops Training Programme' recently set up in Italy, France, the Netherlands and the UK by the European Social Fund is an unusual example of an attempt to marry organisational development and formal training as part of a coherent manpower strategy.

3.6 The Organisation and Delivery of Training and Development

How training and development activities are organised depends on each national situation. In Italy the provision of training and consultancy is a major role of the Co-operative Centrali as it is for the Confederation Generale des SCOP in France. In both cases most co-operative training is on-the-job and does not use external expertise. The co-operative movements' own resources tend to concentrate on co-operative-specific training e.g. co-operative management and communication and representation skills for members of key committees. In Italy and France it is interesting to note there is a trend to send managers of the large co-operatives to business school courses where they are trained alongside managers of conventional business.

The National Co-operative Development Agency, a government sponsored body, has a far more limited role in the UK. Its main direct training activities (with EEC funding) are in Northern Ireland and other UK assisted areas, ie a limited

number of areas with high rates of unemployment. Local Co-operative Development Agencies provide the bulk of training and advice to co-operatives particularly in their early stages. Other institutions such as ICOM, local authorities as well as local CDAs, sponsor colleges to put on short courses for new co-operators. Most training in the UK focusses on start-up problems of new co-operators, though sometimes, as with ICOM's 'Women's Link Up' they may be a more specific target population. One interesting development in the UK is the commissioning of the Open University, by the Greater London Council to prepare 'open learning' material for co-operators. Such training material will be used at a distance either at work or at home and is likely to meet an important need of new co-operatives, which cannot spare people for long periods from their daily work.

Training in more technical or craft areas is largely left to national or local authorities rather than the co-operative movements. In this context we need to register considerable differences between the French and UK situations. In the former the State has ensured since 1971 that all firms spend a fixed proportion of their wage bill on training and more recently has funded a major expansion in adult and youth training provision. This has included State support for CG des SCOP training; and the extension of adult training levies to very small enterprises, ie less than 10 employees, which includes many co-operatives. In the UK whilst youth training has expanded, the move has been in the opposite direction for adult training. Most sector-based training boards have been closed down since 1982 and there has been a redirection in the resources available via local education authorities for vocational training away from traditional skills towards higher technical levels. The shutdown of many skill centres in which adult re-training has traditionally taken place is also now underway.

The Italian situation is less clear. Since 1978 responsibility for vocational training has been shared more explicitly between the State and regional governments. Implementation of these reforms has been uneven, however, and there exists considerable local variation in levels of training resource available.

What is consistent in all the three countries studied is that by excluding technical skills from the direct responsibility of co-operative movements, the possibilities of collective work, and learning within the workplace, have not been exploited or reinforced by training and other manpower strategies. This contrasts, for example, with the experimental approaches of the French work-communities in the immediate post-war years. It is, however, as we shall see, consistent with the way 'participation' is understood in most worker co-operatives

4. THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENTS AND THEIR ORGANISATION

4.1 Introduction

Worker co-operatives, like all organisations, exist in an environment that shapes their opportunities and constrains their choices. The co-operative movement in the broader sense, gives co-operators their identity and legitimacy. The term 'movement' is used here in several ways, ie to describe:

- the structures into which individual co-operatives are organised together, for example its federations, networks and local associations;
- the resources available to a co-operative in terms, for example, of funding, expertise and specialist services;
- the way these wider organisations operate, for example the extent of mutual influence or control and the quality of relationships between the parts, and their political orientation.

Individual co-operatives, as can be seen from the case studies (eg Delta in Italy, CARTO and VET in France) are active in promoting and supporting other co-operatives in their own regions or areas quite apart from the formal organs of the co-operative movement. This chapter, however, is mainly concerned with these more formalised activities.

4.2 Local and National Structures

Both France and Italy have co-operative federations at a national, regional and local level. The UK has no such structures though more limited links between co-operatives are beginning to emerge. In France the national federation, the Confederation General des SCOP, is exclusively for worker co-operatives. It is France's only national federation and about 90% of worker co-operatives are affiliated. The CG des SCOP is also organised on regional lines but there has traditionally been relatively little sector-based organisation. Although a construction sector grouping was formed in 1946 most others are only beginning to develop. In Italy there are four national associations or Centrali, each also having a regional structure. The four associations are divided on political lines between the socialists and communists, organised into the Lega Nazionale delle Co-operative e Mutue; the Catholics, organised into the Confederazione delle Co-operative Italiane; the Social Democrats organised into the Associazione Generale delle Co-operative Italiane; and a split off from the Catholic grouping, the Unione Nazionale de Cooperative Italiane (UNCI). The Italian associations do not exclusively contain worker co-ops; for example they include housing co-operatives and various 'mutual' activities that in France would be identified with the wider 'social economy'.

Only a half of Italy's registered co-operatives are affiliated with any of these associations, though it is generally thought that all the economically significant co-operatives are. All the Italian associations have extensive sector-based organisations at both regional and national level.

In the UK whilst there are no parallel bodies, there are various organisations that represent different co-operative models: eg the Industrial Common Ownership Movement (ICOM) for the newer common-ownership co-operatives, Job Ownership Ltd., for worker-owned businesses, and the Co-operative Union, which although mainly concerned with consumer co-operatives, has recently incorporated some of the older established 'CPF' worker co-operatives. There are also bodies active in the promotion of co-operatives either nationally or locally but these are either appointed by government as with the National Co-operative Development Agency, or run by professionals and co-operative activists as with local CDAs.

A crucial difference between the UK and the other two countries in the study, is that in France and Italy co-operatives directly elect representatives, functionaries and managers at both regional and national levels. In the UK there is no body chosen and ultimately controlled by co-operatives themselves.

Given the scale of the federations in Italy and France the way co-operatives participate is relatively complex. In both countries delegates to a national congress that meets every three or four years choose a council or assembly that then chooses managers or directors which then chooses a General Secretary or President. These processes of participation are not without their difficulty. Levels of participation are uneven, and newer co-operatives are reported to have particular problems of integration. This is evidenced by the debates between small and large, and northern versus southern co-operatives in Italy; and by the difficulties of more flexible and democratic co-operatives in the CG des SCOP. These have recently set up their own more activist and informal 'network'.

The Italian associations in which political considerations figure most strongly build in political representation into their structures. Thus although co-operatives' own delegates vote at higher levels the nominees for whom they vote will come from the trade unions and political parties in agreed proportions. This is not the case in France's CG des SCOP. On the other hand the political differences in strategy with regard to co-operatives in particular between the Communist and Socialist trade unions in France has posed CG des SCOP with problems difficult to resolve.

In Italy, and to a lesser extent in France, participation in the co-operative movement also constitutes participation in wider party political or trade union activity. This is important because the ideologies and values on which many

successful co-operatives are founded are hammered out and reinforced in the political arenas of national and regional congresses. In the discussion of the internal organisation of co-operatives for example, we will see (Chapter 5) the importance of thought out values and ideals in maintaining momentum in the continuous search for effective participation. In the UK this process of 'ideological socialisation' does occur in small ways. For example, the commitment of local Co-operative Development Agency Networks to anti-sexist and anti-racist practice, or the way percentages of funds may be reserved by the London Co-operative Enterprise Board for women's and ethnic initiatives both expresses the values of activists and legitimates the same values among others hitherto less fully committed even though sympathetic.

4.3 Resources, Support and Technical Assistance

Many of the activities that the national federations undertake in France and Italy provide the affiliated co-operative with a wide range of resources and services important for its functioning. Much of the recent growth at regional level in CG des SCOP has been in 'technical delegations' which register co-operatives, help their formation and offer continuing support. CG des SCOP organises training, especially, as we have noted earlier, management and representative training. It offers continuing consultancy and development work; and even runs a promotions and exports office to market co-operative products and services more effectively. In Italy there are active territorial associations within all the Centrali which offer financial advice, undertake feasibility studies, train and give industrial relations and legal assistance. There are also many specialist co-operatives which, for a fee, provide services such as accountancy, marketing, computing and recruitment assistance specifically for other co-operatives.

In Italy the consortia are a distinctive and important economic structure. They exist at local, regional and national levels. They provide services supposedly at cost - though this is sometimes disputed by co-operatives, which question the wealth and power of the 'consorzi'. They aim to achieve economies of scale on behalf of co-operatives by providing them with specialist functions they could not afford singly such as export marketing, research and development, training. They negotiate collectively on behalf of co-operatives for contracts, and for the purchase of supplies and raw materials. Larger co-operatives, as in the construction industry, are often able to perform these functions on their own, and there has been a recent trend towards reincorporating consortia functions into the single enterprise in such cases.

Consortia do have considerable economic power in certain sectors and regions. They usually take a percentage of contracts they conclude as well as charge for their services. Consortia directors are elected by co-operatives though even here nominations will often be political, reflecting the objectives

and politics of the particular 'Centrali' to which they are affiliated. Consortia are an important means through which the Italian co-operative movement can invest resources according to priorities both economic and political.

In the UK, various of the functions offered within the French and Italian federations exist, if only in a skeletal form, but they are diffused into many different organisations. ICOM, the National Co-operative Agency and Job Ownership Limited will help with new registrations. Local CDAs are the main vehicle for development work for new co-operative start-ups. Local authorities and regional agencies such as the Scottish and Welsh Development Agencies have been the mainstay of the major expansion since 1980 in UK co-operative assistance. Enterprise Boards such as the Greater London Enterprise Board (GLEB) and the West Midlands Enterprise Board have invested in co-operatives offering loans at low rates of interest, funding feasibility studies and giving funds to local CDAs to enable them to offer small grants to local co-operatives. Such enterprise boards and similar 'employment departments' exist in most cities with high unemployment and many also set certain conditions of an ideological kind, eg insisting on 100% workforce membership of a co-operative and on trade union rights. They can also open up local authority markets to co-operatives though this does not appear to have made much impact as yet.

Local co-operative development bodies are the most important source of support for co-operatives in the UK. The first was established in Scotland in 1976 and there are now over eighty of them. Whilst they often began as voluntary bodies offering general support they tend now to provide specific expertise in areas as varied as accountancy, marketing, group dynamics and the law. In addition to training activities, already discussed, CDAs can sometimes help with loans and finance - introducing co-operatives to banks or local authority sources; and they have been responsible for shared premises or more ambitiously co-operative 'industrial parks' where co-operatives can share common services and develop a shared identity.

In France Boutique de Gestion offer a similar network of advisory and support services. Although these are not part of the co-operative movement they include co-operatives along with associations and other small enterprises in their remit, which has a specific orientation to the social economy. The Boutique de Gestion network began in 1981 and now has about one hundred local centres. Whilst most UK support and assistance focusses on emergent or marginalised co-operatives, there is some evidence for a shift towards support for established enterprises. An example of this is marketing initiatives, ie supporting trade fairs, co-operative participation in trade exhibitions overseas, and training for expansion. In France the bulk of support activity within the co-operative sector is for established enterprises rather than new start-ups.

4.4 Participation, Influence and Constraint

Worker co-operatives in Italy and France participate as we have seen in national, economic and political life. This participation gives the co-operative movement influence in wider economic and political spheres. At a national level this can be expressed in representative bodies, ie the Conseil Superieur de la Co-operation in France which includes representatives of co-operatives, of the government and of parliament though this tends to have a very limited advisory role.

More concretely, co-operatives are consulted extensively at a local and regional level in Italy regarding social policies such as housing, training, childcare and over the provision of other public facilities. In France there is now a Ministry for the Social Economy which maintains a dialogue with French co-operatives as well as the mutual and voluntary sector. Co-operatives have been given tax and contract advantages under both French and Italian law. They are seen both as an instrument and a partner for policies of regional development and to counter unemployment. This has been the case in Italy progressively since 1945 and since the mid-1970s in France with additional impetus since the 1981 change in government.

The broader movement can also be seen as acting as a constraint on the individual co-operative in France and Italy. Access to State funds (such as the Banca Nazionale del Lavoro in Italy) as well as the funds available to the movement itself (such as the Fonds d'expansion Confederal in France) requires affiliation. Audits of co-operatives are carried out by the national federations on behalf of the State, every two years in Italy and annually in France. In France these constraints are limited as the CG des SCOP still operates largely as a support and representative body, and lacks the ideological unity of the Italian associations. Prior to the advent of the socialist government in France, predisposed as it is towards co-operation, this lack of internal unity was important in preventing the French movement attaining greater national influence. It remains unclear how far if the French regime changes, the co-operative movement will be able to sustain its influence in broader national and regional affairs. In Italy, in comparison, a quid pro quo of significant national, regional and local influence is that the movement within the ambit of each association, actually manages the co-operative sector. It develops strategies for investment and support; it encourages and funds mergers; it directs potential co-operators into particular market sectors; it gives priority to co-operatives with significant export potential; it structures distribution and sales so as to minimize inter-co-operative competition; it negotiates national agreements with trade unions to set co-operative pay rates; and it helps administer State funds to capitalize 'rescue' co-operatives under the 1985 MARCORA legislation.

In the UK, resources, expertise and power lie outside the co-

operative movement to a far greater extent. Local authorities promote rather than co-operate with the movement. Umbrella bodies able to represent co-operatives have yet to be formed. Reciprocally, the State has offered co-operatives relatively little support. The 'rescue' co-operatives strategy of the pre-1979 Labour government was an unhappy experience. More recently State aid has been confined to 'peripheral' regions such as Scotland and Wales. Local authorities have now begun to invest significantly in co-operatives but only since 1980. With the abolition of the Great London Council and the Metropolitan authorities in 1986 and with new restrictions on local government financial autonomy, the current level of support available to co-operatives in the UK is unlikely to be sustained.

4.5 Conclusion : Three Stages in Co-operative Development

It is possible to regard the Italian, French and UK movements as representing three stages in the development of a co-operative system. At the first stage, as in the UK, co-operatives are few and isolated. They are not organised into any form that offers them either support or representation. The movement has very few of its own resources and no capacity for self-regulation. The State does not regard co-operatives as important and both excludes them from policy making and sees no benefit in providing funds.

In France co-operatives are more numerous and beginning to develop denser networks and links within sectors and regions. There is a national federation but one that still lacks internal coherence or worked out economic strategies. Thus whilst the movement possesses considerable internal financial resources and expertise, it monitors co-operatives and represents them rather than exercises significant control. The State in a paternalistic fashion now offers the movement considerable financial and political support and sees it as an important arm of employment and regional policy. This is associated with serious debate within the movement as to its own role, organisation and strategy. The movement is probably still dependent on external support for the bulk of its continued growth. But the base for this support, ie concern for unemployment is strong. The continuance of this support will depend in part on evidence of co-operative success in job creation.

In Italy far more numerous co-operatives are organised into large, if separate, associations. These associations have at their disposal extensive resources of finance and expertise. Sectoral and regional concentration allows co-operatives to co-operate with each other within their associations at a regional as well as a national level. The national movements are also relatively ideologically coherent and have as a consequence been able to develop social, economic and political strategies. State support is largely institutionalized and not dependent on a particular government. Regional support is also significant.

But the quality of the relationship between the local and national State and the co-operative movement has greater reciprocity than in France or the UK. The movement has demonstrated its ability to generate its own wealth, act as a vehicle for national policies and to formulate policies of its own. Individual co-operatives may sometimes be constrained and managed by their associations but they are also collectively and singly more powerful because of their affiliation.

The implications of these national differences and their development will be taken up further in the final chapter of this report.

5. ORGANISATION, PARTICIPATION & MANAGEMENT

5.1 Introduction

The basis of co-operatives organisation is well-known. According to International Co-operative Alliance principles, membership must be open, with no political, religious or racial restrictions; control is democratic and vested in the members; each member has one vote irrespective of capital invested; and profits are distributed to members. In France and Italy there is legislation that specifies the minimum number of members in a co-operative; the way in which representatives are chosen; the frequency of members' assembly meetings; and the capital entitlements of members. In the UK model rules, that have to be approved by the Registrar of Friendly Societies, fulfil a similar function. Yet worker co-operatives can modify their formal rules in many ways. This chapter is about the internal organisation of co-operatives including the way they are managed and the way in which members participate.

It addresses such issues as:

- the extent that co-operative members participate in practice;
- the relationship between co-operative democracy and enterprise management; and
- the ways that the organisation of production differs in a worker co-operative from other enterprises.

5.2 Collective Organisation : A Pure Type

In a collective, control by the membership extends evenly across all the spheres of enterprise activity : how work is organised, how foremen supervise, how new members are recruited, how pay is set, how investments are made - all these activities and more, are subject to membership scrutiny and democratic control. Typically in the small and relatively new co-operative an 'assembly' of members meets frequently both formally and informally. Most, if not all decisions, that would be called management decisions in conventional firms, are taken by members. Members work flexibly interchanging or sharing their jobs. Legal equality is matched by few power differences between members, relatively homogeneous skills, no hierarchy, and a shared commitment to democratic control. This pure form of collective organisation rarely continues beyond the early stages of co-operative life. It is not however unknown for strongly motivated groups to retain the basic form whilst adapting it to the greater complexity that enterprises face when they increase in size and in diversity, and acquire a history. The French and Italian national reports both describe cases of such persistent collectives and the UK case studies document one such example in greater detail.

The dynamic that even new and small co-operatives soon face is of multiple differentiations of power between members. In part this arises because of the knowledge and experience of the founders when compared with newcomers; in part it is reinforced by growing specialisation of work in the face of economic competition; in part it comes from the internal consequences of the way that co-operative members are regarded by outsiders such as suppliers, customers, and bankers. Information is no longer equally accessible to all members. Leaders emerge; differential skills develop; meetings become formalised. It becomes impossible for all members to meet in one place because of work demands, dispersed locations or perhaps because of sheer numbers of employees. This process is well documented in a number of French research studies but occurs also in the UK and in Italy among rescue, emergent and marginalised co-operatives.

What appears to be crucial if the collective form of organisation is to survive is a shared commitment to a common ideology. Believing in collective control makes it possible to sustain it, and not believing in it makes its demise inevitable. The committed collective invents devices and mechanisms that express the values of democratic control. For example, jobs are rotated between shop-floor and office; quotas of male and female recruitment are instituted; the frequency of meetings is maintained; new members are inducted in a thorough fashion; pay differentials are resisted; autonomy and democratic control are pushed down into work groups and department. (See UK case study of Suma for an example of this.)

Though quantification is not possible, we do know that co-operatives such as these are unusual. **Rescue** co-operatives are rarely collective except perhaps in the heady days when the struggle to defend jobs is at its height. Their motivation is to defend jobs, not to run collectives: in any case they lack many of the pre-requisites in terms of equality of skill, small size, and democratic tradition. **Emergent** co-operatives are more likely to favour a collective form, at least in their early days. Among **alternative** co-operatives, collective forms of organisation are also common. For example, they can be found in co-operatives in France, influenced by the spirit of 1968, and in some of the newer Southern Italian co-operatives whose members have chosen the co-operative path even though their education would have opened up more secure and well paid jobs in the North. **Marginalised** co-operators drawn from the unemployed or ethnic minorities in the UK (see UK case study, WICC) choose co-operatives almost as a last resort: their interest is in paid employment not in democratic or collective organisation. The rate of failure of such co-operatives can be explained both by a lack of commitment to the co-operative ideal, as well as a lack of experience and skills. They may also fail in the sense that they cease to be co-operatives and are transformed into conventional businesses.

5.3 Representation and Management

It is most common in larger worker co-operatives to formally separate the representation of members from the management of the enterprise. Direct democracy, a characteristic of the collective form, is undermined by numbers of members, inequalities of knowledge, and growing specialisation. An identifiable management group emerges, perhaps made up of the founding members or composed of outside expertise bought in. The 'assembly' can no longer hope to maintain scrutiny of all co-operative affairs and chooses representatives answerable to the members but who carry responsibility for democratic control on their behalf.

It is worth noting from the outset that size of itself is not an automatic predictor of indirect democracy nor of more limited membership control. As in the discussion of collective organisation, many variations are possible and have in some instances successfully maintained high levels of participation in larger co-operatives. However it is also worth noting that the issue of size is one of the questions that has for years divided the Italian co-operative movement. The Lega, one of the main 'Centrali' or national associations, favours larger units whereas another, the Confederazione, believes that worker democracy is only possible in small enterprises.

Relationships between co-operative members, representatives and management once they become differentiated, can take at least two different forms:

- In the first there will be a narrowing of member influence most often to what would be considered in other enterprises to be personnel type functions: ie working conditions, training, careers, health and safety. Members have far less influence over commercial decisions. Representatives may find themselves increasingly estranged from the membership who see few pay-offs in attending occasional and formalised meetings. Members come to assemblies less frequently and have too little information in any case to participate in them effectively. Meetings become a talking-shop whose function is at best to consult members and more usually to ratify management decisions.

Even in co-operatives that generally accord with this stereotype, members continue to exert influence. For example in times of crisis - as when one of managements strategies fails dramatically, or when employment is threatened, the members assembly can re-activate itself. In some co-operatives representatives take on the role of trade unions, opposing the 'logic of management' as the French national report describes it. In others (see CMB case

in Italian case studies) members' interest in participation can be re-mobilized by a perceived threat to their economic security.

- In the second type, far more serious efforts are made to build and maintain a co-operative culture. Representatives meet with members more frequently than is strictly required by statute. A wide range of issues will be discussed by members including the social and economic objectives of the enterprise. Management, for example, may take note of the aspirations of members and provide technical assessments and costed appraisals of their implications. Sub-committees and working parties of the assembly can be set up to prepare policies more thoroughly than is possible in open meeting (see French case of VET and UK case of Suma). Departmental meetings can be organised to examine events in specific work units. In Italian co-operatives, where there is often a strong 'workerist' ideology, foremen may be held accountable to their workgroups in this way. Representatives will be sent on training courses so that they can better understand budgets and technical decisions. Management will be trained to present information in the most comprehensible ways. All new members of the co-operative will undergo induction programmes that emphasise their rights and obligations to participate. Representatives for their part will regularly stand for re-election, and positions on the administrative council are rotated rather than held continuously by the same members.

Both types of indirect control can be found in all the countries in the study, though there are of course different tendencies. In the UK older, larger co-operatives endowed to workers by their owners tend to have a constitution that reinforces limited participation and managerial independence. In newer co-operatives this is not so, though marginalised UK co-operatives may move quickly to a more limited form of participation because their members lack commitment to democratic values. In Italy the tendency to limit participation in larger co-operatives is partly balanced by a stronger ideological commitment among members to democratic control and management accountability. On the other hand the so-called 'workerist' values of traditional Italian co-operatives, whilst bridging the gap between members and their representatives, can increase the gap between management and members. Indeed in Italian production co-operatives, 'white-collar' and managerial staff are often not permitted to be members of the co-operative, rather they retain the role of employees of the membership.

5.4 Management in Co-operatives

The role of management in co-operatives epitomises the ambiguities of democratic organisation. Expectations of efficiency live side by side with expectations of membership control. Management carries responsibility but also has to persuade members or their representatives that their decisions are correct. Some of the main differences in the role of managers in co-operatives are that they :

- are subject to scrutiny and sometimes removal by those they manage;
- need to conduct their day-to-day business by carrying the workforce with them;
- have limited residual powers of coercion;
- have to develop additional competences in handling information, consultation and mobilisation;
- need to be aware of the social as well as the technical or economic consequences of their actions.

In the circumstances the satisfaction that studies of co-operative managers have reported might appear surprising. According to studies in France and Italy, they appear to prefer the relaxed atmosphere of work, find their work interesting, see promotion prospects as excellent and may also value the opportunity to live in a locality rather than follow the usual path of managerial mobility. A high proportion of managers in established co-operatives are 'home-grown' and have been brought up with expectations shaped by a co-operative career. Members and managers will then have many values in common. This is different for example in rescue co-operatives where the leaders of resistance to closure often found it difficult to make the transition to management position following the rescue. It is also different in co-operatives where because of technical change or rapid growth, outside management skills have to be recruited. In such cases not only do managers lack a co-operative tradition but differences in orientation may be further underlined by unusually high pay differentials by co-operative standards.

The Italian movement has given these problems particular attention and has, for example in the Lega, experimented with the role of 'Operational President' which seeks to integrate representative and managerial authority. The Confederazione tends to make its managers co-operative members so that they too can, if necessary, carry out the roles of both President and Director General. At more humble levels of line supervision the apparent constraints are equally severe. A common response which appears to be effective is to emphasise the importance of adherence to co-operative work practices as a criterion when new management and supervision are recruited. In this context

also, the priority that has been given to the training and development of co-operative management in France and Italy becomes more understandable. Such training is not so common in the UK probably reflecting the small size of most UK co-operatives.

5.5 The Organisation of Work and Production

In any enterprise work is organised into more or less coherent sets of tasks that we call jobs. How much discretion and autonomy people have in their jobs, how tasks are grouped together, and how co-ordination is achieved both between tasks and people constitutes the essentials of work organisation. Whatever the wider organisational possibilities of participation and influence directly or through representatives, the day-to-day experience of workers derives from the way production is organised. Research in work places confirms that the sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction most likely to be reported by workers, are related to their own jobs.

As with many aspects of co-operative organisation, systematic information is hard to come by. The broad conclusion of case studies in all three countries is that there is little distinctive about the way co-operatives organise production. Participation and members influence is not to be found at job level. There is certainly no evidence of the widespread involvement of co-operative members in unusual working arrangements. It would appear, for example, that within the limits of technologies and skills, the discretion available to workers is no greater in co-operatives than that in conventional firms. Where there are particularly high levels of autonomy (see INFO, Delta and Lake case studies) these arise from the nature of professional work. As such their work organisation derives from their sector and its activities, than from the consequences of a co-operative constitution.

Jobs may be deliberately shared or rotated in smaller collectives in order to prevent the emergence of inequalities but this changes in subtle ways when the co-operative grows. Flexibility, the absence of demarcations, and job enrichment are reported in both the French and the UK national reports. For example in 46 UK metal-working co-operatives, 60% appeared to have more flexible work of this kind as opposed to only 2.3% in the rest of the sector. This occurs less because of the conscious design of an alternative work-system but rather follows from the relatively high trust and solidarity that exists in many co-operatives (cf. Fox 19). In rescue co-operatives these flexibilities are less common though not unknown. Less surveillance is also necessary by supervision in such co-operatives and members are able to manage their own work and time more autonomously. In some collectives, particularly those associated with the women's movement and the alternative movements such flexibility is consciously planned.

In most co-operatives where similar if less fully developed forms of autonomous work have been noted, this has apparently followed from the general work-atmosphere within the co-operative.

5.6 Social and Economic Outcomes

These manifestations of flexibility and high-trust have important outcomes. The national reports speak of greater satisfaction with work - a sense of not being oppressed; of reduced absenteeism and fewer accidents; and of greater quality consciousness by workers. Although no quantitative studies are available, the case material referred to is consistent in the story it tells. One important outcome then of effective and participative co-operative organisation is that work for co-operative employees can be a positive social and personal experience.

There is also evidence of significant economic benefit. Two of our case studies, one French and one Italian, report on co-operatives which have recently reverted to a more democratic form - either in response to workers fears for their jobs or in response to the need to respond to market competition. This shift in orientation is open to different interpretations.

On the one hand the members of the co-operative can be seen as taking back powers delegated to management because of fears for their own economic futures. On the other hand management can be seen as evolving a new strategy for countering worker dissatisfaction by an intensive programme of education and 'consultation' designed to incorporate workers into management's thinking. Perhaps a third interpretation is also appropriate. It has been argued, particularly in Italy, that there are similarities between the principles of co-operative organisation and contemporary management theories: of total management, of 'theory Z organisations', and of quality circles. All of these argue that higher productivity, competitiveness and innovativeness can be enhanced by involving workers more fully in the enterprise, by extending consultation, by utilising the expertise and resource of workers to solve problems, and by re-integrating tasks of execution and management that are usually separated. The workers' argument against such approaches to management in conventional firms is well-known. If the employment relationship is essentially exploitative then co-operation with management is likely to rebound unfavourably on workers. They will find their jobs at risk, the pace of work increased and in any case will not share in the economic benefits that follows. In co-operatives these counter arguments do not hold, because workers do benefit from improved business performance, and because relationships at work are characterised by high degrees of trust and supportive rather than surveillance management. If this interpretation has any validity then co-operatives possess the potential for unexpected competitive advantage as a result of their organisational form, advantages that puts them in a position

many ordinary businesses are now striving for in the competitive markets of Western Europe. This view is consistent, as we shall see below, with the evidence that is available on the economic performance of co-operatives

6. INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND THE POSITION OF TRADE UNIONS

6.1 Introduction

The traditional context for industrial relations in Western Europe is an enterprise in which workers and the representatives of labour i.e. trade unions, confront management, themselves representing shareholders and their capital stake. Wages, conditions, discipline, work organisations, training and qualifications, are approached by these two parties from a different and adversarial position. Management strives to convince, incorporate or even coerce workers into giving priority to the logic of efficiency and profits. Workers for their part try to sell their labour for a fair price and to obtain the most favourable conditions of employment that are possible, ultimately by the threats of withdrawing their labour. Management does not see its position as representing the interests of employees, and trade unions do not see themselves as having responsibilities for managing the enterprise.

Worker co-operatives make quite different assumptions. The worker/member is also an owner. Management is expected to represent employees and indeed can in theory at least be removed by them. Workers for their part have a personal and collective stake in the economic success of the enterprise. These differences between co-operatives and other enterprises dramatically changes the ground rules for industrial relations and the activities of trade unions.

Problems for trade unions in dealing with co-operatives are not limited to the internal affairs of co-operative enterprises. Their national policies and strategies are shaped by their traditional experience of enterprise industrial relations. Improving the conditions of labour is seen in the context of collective bargaining and a market economy. It has not been seen by trade unions as their responsibility to help manage an economic crisis, rather the traditional post-war position has been to respond defensively to corporate initiatives. At the same time the State is encouraged by workers' organisations variously to introduce counter-cyclical policies to regulate demand; to protect employees at risk via the social security system; and in extremis to nationalise failing enterprises. The severity of unemployment since the mid-1970s, combined with the retreat of the State from its post-war interventionist role, has posed trade unions with new dilemmas. Nowhere have these dilemmas been more clearly stated than in the circumstance of enterprise failure and the possibility of transforming such enterprises into a co-operative form.

This chapter is concerned with both these aspects of industrial relations : with the stance that workers' organisations take towards the co-operative option, and with the way what is conventionally described as industrial relations, expresses

itself within worker co-operatives.

6.2 Trade Union Approaches to the Co-operative Movement

In France, Italy and the UK trade unions have traditionally viewed co-operatives with suspicion. Co-operatives have been regarded as marginal to the main concerns of trade unionists, as encouraging self-exploitation, diverting efforts from more traditional union strategies, as undermining bargaining power by fragmenting workers and the labour movement and as being based on the questionable assumption of workers' entrepreneurial capabilities. Unemployment in the 1970s and early 1980s has forced a re-assessment of these long-held convictions.

In France trade union involvement in co-operatives has different emphases. The CGT has pursued a policy of co-operative rescue and transformation of failing enterprises since the early eighties. It has its own machinery for initiating rescues and has tended to involve the CG des SCOP only after such transformations are complete. Co-operatives have been seen as part of a response to the economic crisis but with a recognition nonetheless that the union must not become involved in managing that crisis. The CFDT has no independent machinery. It has been more oriented towards new co-operatives or building on the employment potential of existing smaller co-operatives.

Whilst employment is a central concern, the CFDT has also tended to see co-operatives in the context of extending industrial democracy and autogestion, particularly direct participation or 'expression' as encouraged by the Auroux Acts of 1982. Both CGT and CFDT have been concerned with the isolation of co-operatives and co-operators from the wider labour movement. Their involvement has partly been with this in mind: to ensure the integration of worker co-operatives into both the social economy and the labour movement.

The CGT rescue strategy has been extremely problematic for the French co-operative movement. The transformation of large and often unviable enterprises such as MANUFRANCE into co-operatives, followed by their much publicised failure has rebounded on the movement as a whole. It had however by 1984 led to greater consultation between the trade unions and the CG des SCOP in efforts to limit similar problems in future.

In the UK the follow-up to failed rescues under Labour governments in the 1970s has also been negative. Trade unions as organisations showed little interest in co-operatives per se by the beginning of the 1980s. At the end of the 19th century a series of similar failures, sometimes of rescues funded by trade unions themselves, laid the foundation for the initial trade union rejection of co-operatives. This is not dissimilar from the experience of French unions and anarcho-syndicalists at approximately the same time. Promoting co-operatives has

remained part of UK trade union tradition or at least has remained enshrined in their constitutions and rulebooks. Individual trade union officers have continued to support co-operatives, particularly when persuaded by union members anxious about employment. Serious commitment to co-operatives has re-emerged in the UK during the 1980s from two sources. First, municipal initiatives in the major cities have been taken by supporters of trade unionism. This has re-engaged the attention of trade union officials in the possibilities of co-operatives. Second, there have been regional trade union initiatives particularly in Wales and Scotland. The most publicised of these regional initiatives has come from the Welsh TUC which with support from the Welsh Office, the ESF and local authorities has set up a Co-operative Development and Training Centre in South Wales (see UK case studies: McKenzie and Brown, for one example of these initiatives). The most recent TUC and Labour Party policy document has come out more firmly in favour of co-operatives as part of future employment strategy.

In the 1980s trade unions in the UK have faced a very different political environment from that of France or Italy. Government policy, for example, has not favoured industrial democracy via trade unionism. Employers have been encouraged to by-pass unions, consulting or informing workers directly. Policies towards the public sector including 'de-regulation' and privatisation have also made it difficult for trade unions. Co-operatives have sometimes been put forward as one way of workers responding to 'privatisation', ie the replacement of public services by private business activity. This, together with other moves to limit trade union rights, has pre-occupied members and officers of trade unions encouraging defensive strategies to a far greater extent than have those implied by worker co-operation.

In Italy up to the late 1970s whilst co-operatives were favourably disposed towards trade unions - offering formal support to them, for example, particularly in the course of industrial disputes - this was not generally reciprocated by trade unions themselves. In the case of failed enterprises, for example, rescues would be regarded only as a last resort option. Although contact with trade unions within the Co-operative 'Centrali' was regular and close, but given the political and trade union nature of these Strutture Politico Sindicali, it tended to focus around political and economic agendas other than the relationship of co-operatives to workers' organisations. It was only in 1977 that the first formal meetings between trade unions and the Co-operative Centrali took place. In the late seventies and early eighties there were a series of moves that brought the two movements closer: eg the formation of COOPSIND by the Lega and CGIL to promote education and training, especially in the South and in co-operatives for young people; the resuscitation of the CISL's own agency CENESCA as a co-operative association; the establishment by the Confederazione and CISL of COOPERLAVORO to undertake training of its own

officials and generate new employment through co-operatives. Probably the two most important developments were the signing of specific national agreements between the co-operative movements and trade unions in certain sectors, ie construction, engineering and chemicals. These agreements responded to criticisms that trade unions did not take account of the distinctive qualities of co-operative worklife. The agreements not only recognised the position of worker/member but also introduced some of the flexibility that co-operatives felt they needed in allowing local agreements and greater pay differentials for middle management. The more recent innovation has been the passing of the MARCORA laws in January 1985 after prolonged debate and delay. This law provides State funding to multiply workers' own redundancy payments and capitalise new rescue co-operatives. This development was felt by many trade union leaders to go some way towards reforming abuse in the 'Cassa Integrazione' a national lay-off fund available to companies in difficulties as well as meeting its overt intention - the rescue and transformation of ailing enterprises. One part of the delay in implementing this reform talked about since the early eighties, hinged around the extent to which trade unions would take an active role in administering the new fund.

It was possible for the Italian trade union movement to reach these accommodations with co-operation partly because of the political and trade union nature of the Centrali but also because of the broad view that Italian trade unions have always taken of their role in society. Despite these factors that predisposed Italian trade unions to favour co-operatives, there have been differences in view. The CISL has for example been more active in rescue activity than the CGIL. The latter has taken a more sceptical view of the business viability of ailing enterprises and does not favour putting money and commitment into 'lame ducks'. The CISL influenced perhaps more by principles of Catholic solidarity appears to be more concerned to preserve employment even if the commercial risks are high. Parts of the CGIL also take the view that co-operators in rescues have to demonstrate considerable commitment and determination if they are to turn around firms close to bankruptcy. A period of struggle and mobilization at the time of formation is seen as an important pre-condition of subsequent success, as is a significant personal financial stake. There has therefore been opposition in some quarters to high levels of State support for co-operative rescues.

6.3 Industrial Relations Within Co-operatives

Union membership in France is lower in national terms than in either Italy or the UK. In the UK the higher levels of membership have been sustained by closed-shop agreements even though these have been weakened by recent employment legislation. In Italy, however, high levels have been achieved on a more voluntaristic basis. Within such national differences levels of trade union membership in co-

operatives resemble that of many SMEs. Membership appears highest in larger enterprises, especially in recently rescued enterprises. It is lowest in smaller and newly established co-operatives. There are also sector based variations given that some sectors, like construction in Italy and printing in France and the UK, have stronger union traditions than say personal social services in Italy or the retail sector in the UK.

Rescue co-operatives face the greatest difficulties. They have a tradition of adversarial relations in the workplace and come to co-operation under inauspicious circumstances. Frequently the leaders of the fight for the rescue option are trade union leaders. In both France and the UK this has led to considerable role confusion as managing the enterprise becomes the main concern of union leaders once a co-operative has been established. This has been the case in recent rescues in France and was also the experience of UK rescues a decade ago. (See also Mckenzie and Brown - UK case studies; and Nuova Reguitti - Italian case studies, for examples of similar processes.) One consequence of such confusion - between the role of representative and manager - can be effectively to disenfranchise a workforce, one of the longstanding fears of trade union movements. For this reason, for example, the CGT in France advocates the recruitment of management from outside. A similar strategy to that favoured traditionally, if not recently by the Lega, ie for managers not to be members of co-operatives. This allows for a continued separation of powers between members, management and trade unions.

It does seem important to ensure some such separation of powers, if industrial relations are to be well managed within co-operatives. In smaller collectives in the UK this is often not the case though the UK case studies indicate how this can sometimes be achieved, ie by separating out industrial relations type issues into particular parts of the assembly agenda. In France the Enterprise Committee, endorsed by trade unions in unionized co-operatives, may have rights of representation in larger co-operatives. In Italy Factory Councils are encouraged to keep a similar role distinction between themselves and the members' own co-operative structures.

Although firm figures are hard to come by it would appear that levels of unionization are higher in affiliated Italian co-operatives when compared with the UK or France. This is partly a reflection of the size of the average Italian worker co-operative. Levels of membership are probably also higher in France than the UK, which reflects the lower proportion of recent rescues in the UK, and larger numbers of old co-operatives in France.

Industrial relations issues have to be managed whether or not trade unions are present. **Pay and basic conditions** are the most likely to be effected by trade union agreements (see next Chapter) irrespective of trade union membership. They set legal guidelines for pay even in non-unionized firms. Another

important function of an industrial relations system is protecting the individual whether by taking up individual grievances or preventing 'self-exploitation'. This seems to be a role trade unions properly fulfil where present, and one which can be difficult to achieve unless an independent element is introduced into co-operative machinery. This is a position advocated for example by the CG des SCOP in France and by the Transport and General Workers Union in the UK. Where trade unions are present they also fulfil some of their normal functions of legal services and advice, education and training of workers and disseminating information.

In many larger co-operatives where trade union membership is high, as is often the case in Italy and France, membership is seen as an expression of solidarity with the wider labour movement. Workers, for example, symbolically associate themselves with national strikes by sending delegations to demonstrations or contributing some of their pay into a solidarity fund. They also participate in discussions about union strategy irrespective of their own workplace circumstances. In the UK, however, trade unions even when present in co-operatives are often inactive and uncertain about their role.

In general it would appear that in a well-functioning co-operative disputes are handled largely through the members own mechanisms whether of representation or collective control. The pressure for consensus in co-operatives is very strong and although this can face co-operators with dangers, ie maintaining the power of an inner management group or preventing individual grievances being voiced, it is usually an accurate expression of high solidarity and trust. As with participation itself, the quality of 'trust' can be over-strained and it is not unknown for traditional adversarial trade union activity to re-appear. This was the case, for example, in some UK rescue co-operatives in the 70s; in French rescues in the 1980s; and in some Italian co-operatives facing rationalisation and job-shedding. In 1984 in Bologna, for example, a co-operative in financial difficulties faced closure and was the subject of strong union action including a factory occupation.

In more favourable circumstances even when trade unions have an important role in co-operatives, the logic of their involvement is very different. It is increasingly recognised by trade unions, for example, that co-operatives are different, that management does seek as best it can to respect members' wishes and that the basis for consensus often exists.

6.4 The Emerging Shape of Trade Union Involvement in Co-operatives

It would appear from the national reports that the French and Italian trade union movements are, despite reservations and understandable scepticism, reaching an accommodation with their respective co-operative movements. They are doing so by

engaging more actively than hitherto with the co-operative movements and influencing co-operative development as a consequence. Differences in national context and the stage of development of their respective co-operative movements make for uneven progress. Notwithstanding this, the practical experience of engaging with co-operatives has allowed for mutual learning at both national and enterprise levels. In the UK it is noticeable that trade unions with certain well publicised exceptions have not generally funded or promoted co-operatives as an option as has happened in France and Italy.

The co-operative model strikes at the heart of the trade union conception of its role. It offers opportunities for transforming relations at work, though as we have seen this can never be taken for granted. It can be a way of extending industrial democracy and of giving working people a far greater stake in regulating their economic lives. Where this happens extensively, as it has in Italy, it poses a challenge to trade unions which is fraught with dangers - of undermining their own bargaining strength and of getting caught up in the management of unviable enterprises. Yet with a clear view of what is viable, with re-training and the re-orientation of officials and members it appears that these dangers can be limited.

Rescue co-operatives are most problematic. It does seem that even here trade unions have begun to develop expertise in assessing the viability of enterprises; in helping members to develop new practices; and in understanding the new role of trade unionists. Rescues provide the purest statement of the dilemmas that trade unionists face. But in other co-operatives the advantages of an independent representative element being maintained within the structures of consensus and participation have been well proven.

At a broader level an important role for trade unions appears to be to link co-operatives to their wider environment. Co-operatives, perhaps because of their democratic structures and aspirations, can become inward-looking. Maintaining an open connection between co-operatives and the social economy in France in particular and the labour movements in France, and Italy is an important consequence of the new relationships now being established. This is a much weaker trend in the UK.

7. ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION AND CONDITIONS OF WORK

7.1 Introduction

The economic participation of workers in co-operatives is different from that of employees in other enterprises. Being both employees and owners they can potentially share in profits as well as draw salaries, though the extent to which this happens in practice as we shall see is dependent on many factors : institutional, legal and ideological as well as economic.

Opposition to workers' co-operatives is also often interwoven with economic considerations. Critics ask whether worker co-operatives are economically efficient; whether they can afford to offer their workers basic pay comparable with private enterprise or the public sector; and whether they represent a marginal economy characterised by low wages, long hours and inferior working conditions. Advocates of co-operatives argue for their economic advantages and for the improvement in conditions that become possible when workers are not simply regarded as a factor of production.

This chapter reviews the evidence on pay structures; other financial rewards; hours of work, and working conditions in general. We have already touched upon the argument that co-operatives can have important economic advantages because of their internal organisation (Chapter 5). In this chapter we return to this theme though a full assessment of the evidence is not within the scope of this study.

7.2 Wage Levels and Pay Structures in Co-operatives

In all enterprises pay levels for different categories of workers are influenced by wider labour markets. Many co-operatives explicitly link themselves into such markets and adhere to national or sector-based norms. At a general level this would appear to be true for larger and well established co-operatives in France, Italy and the UK.

In Italy such larger co-operatives have tended to pay at the upper end of the nationally negotiated rates, at least for blue-collar workers. Single agreements have been common for both white-collar and blue-collar employees. Under these agreements skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers are better paid than their private enterprise equivalents, but management, supervisory and technical staff are often relatively worse-off. In Italy the size of the co-operative movement has in certain sectors eg food, construction, printing and metalwork, led to specific national and sometimes regional agreements for co-operatives. Given the generally favourable disposition of the Co-operative Centrali to the labour movement, trade unions have sometimes used co-operatives to obtain exemplary agreements that they may hope subsequently to extend to other enterprises.

Traditionally in France, when the movement was composed mainly of skilled workers, those employed in co-operatives tended to be better paid than other workers. This is no longer the case both because of the encroachment of co-operatives into new sectors and because of growing market competition. However, in established co-operatives, workers can expect to be paid average salaries for their trade or occupation though managers are often underpaid. A similar situation exists in the UK in larger established co-operatives. In some sectors which are strongly unionised, such as printing, union agreements will tend to be adhered to also in newly established co-operatives. However, in the UK and elsewhere, pay levels in newer co-operatives do not compare favourably with private and public sector employment, at least in the early years following their formation.

In newly established **emergent** co-operatives the early years are ones of struggle to survive. For example, a recent UK study (Harris 1985) shows that low pay and long hours are a characteristic of new co-operatives, with few members and with low turnover. Low wages and unpaid overtime are used as a means of accumulating capital and keeping costs down. (See also Delta, Suma and INFO in case studies.) It is at this stage that the accusation that co-operatives exploit their members can have some validity, though this will vary depending on sectors and markets. Where initial investment requirements are low there will be less need to accumulate capital, though low entry costs, as in the building industry, are often associated with sector-wide low wages. Workers in what we have called **emergent** co-operatives are more likely to be found in sectors where professional expertise is at a premium. In **marginalised** co-operatives, on the other hand, wages are low to begin with, and even when they compare favourably with the sector, the sector is itself likely to be one of poor pay. Alternative co-operatives (see French CAES case study) may compensate to some extent by non-monetary rewards, eg payments in kind and informal exchanges. Some co-operatives (see UK WICC case study) even began with a period of no payment at all: members work for nothing. **Rescue** co-operatives are also likely to be associated with low wages, at least in their early stages. Cases of pay reductions and unpaid overtime are described in the national reports, though this is less common in Italy, where co-operatives and other enterprises have access to a national lay-off fund. It is also noted that this cannot be sustained for too long without workers looking for other employment, losing their enthusiasm or becoming exhausted by long hours. Beyond an initial period either the enterprise fails or the co-operative tends to adopt higher levels of pay. There are cases in the UK, for example, where the members of previously non-unionized printing co-operatives joined unions in order to end an initial period of 'self-exploitation'.

Pay differences between the highest and lowest paid in co-operatives tend to be less than in other enterprises. Democratic

ideals are reflected here, at least in the aspirations and constitutions of many co-operatives, even though external and internal pressures tend to undermine them. Although the workers in established co-operatives choose their type of employment, they are not immune to the enticements of higher pay. This is crucial for managers and specialists in particular. Co-operatives have to attract people of sufficient calibre in competition with other businesses. The underpayment of managers is a problem in both France and Italy. In the latter specific agreements have been made at least on a regional level to increase differentials in recent years. The base-line for such an increase is worth noting : ratios in the mid-1970s were about 1:1.5; they are now estimated as nearer 1:3. In France an opposite trend can be observed but from a base-line of higher pay differentials in the economy as a whole. Estimated differentials in the early 1970s were 1:8 in larger co-operatives, 1:6 in medium sized and 1:4 in small co-operatives. Recent indications are that the advent of new co-operatives committed to egalitarian principles has reduced differentials in France - perhaps 1:5 would now be expected in an average French co-operative. On the other hand the problem of competing for skill in the market-place continues and represent a counter tendency to reduced differentials.

Co-operatives have been known to try various experimental approaches to determining pay. Some have tried to determine the value of a job, and not just the skill of its incumbent. Others have tried to assess individual needs, perhaps on the basis of numbers of dependents. The most common variant is a commitment to equal pay which is reported in new 'committed' co-operatives in both the UK and France. When most jobs are undertaken by most people, as is common in new small co-operatives, this equality of pay can be sustained. However, pressures to erode equal pay policies are strong, arising from differences in experience between founders and followers; and growing specialisation among workers. Changes in technology can also undermine equal pay as in some French print co-operatives when new technologies broke up previously homogenous skill groups. Nonetheless, equal pay can continue (as the UK case studies show) where the commitment is strong. In France equal pay is a particular characteristic of co-operatives influenced by alternative values, where different life-styles reinforce unconventional patterns of pay and work organisation.

7.3 Distributing Surpluses

On the assumption a co-operative trades successfully it will have surpluses to distribute. The nature of the financial stake that members have in their co-operative will determine the nature of this distribution. In part this is prescribed by law and in part by choices available within the law.

In Italy, for example, members' capital stakes are strictly limited by law as are the loans members can make to their co-

operative. Surpluses are therefore not for the most part distributed to capital holders or to repay loans, but rather fall under the category of bonuses to workers payable usually on the basis of hours worked. Policies within the SPSs do not however favour large bonus payments because they would distinguish the successful from the unsuccessful co-operative and bolster the materialistic motivations of members. Legally at least 20% of profits have to be taken into reserves, but in many co-operatives all profits are reinvested in this way and members only receive a symbolic sum, perhaps at Christmas time. This is not consistently so, however, and in some engineering co-operatives in Italy annual bonuses are substantial.

In France, members must have a minimum of one share though it is common for the co-operative rules to increase this. Members often pay for these additional shares out of salary with a limit say of 5% for such deductions. This may vary when the co-operative faces a crisis. A minimum of 25% of profits are payable to employees and dividends on capital which can only offer an average rate of debenture stock interest. In France there are substantial tax advantages if members leave their bonuses in 'blocked accounts' in the co-operative for at least five years. Effectively this provides a major boost to the 15% of profits that co-operatives must put into reserve fund.

In the UK most newer co-operatives subscribe to ICOM model rules which stipulate a **maximum** of one £1.00 share per worker member. Such co-operatives are highly dependent on loans from members and a high proportion of surpluses are distributed as 'loan repayments'. There is however no legal limit in the UK on return on shares, and co-operatives which subscribe to other 'model rules' may distribute substantially to shareholders. In the older CPF co-operatives these would often include outside shareholders, eg other co-operatives and trade unions.

In all countries included in this study there are rules to prevent the distribution of residual assets should the co-operative be disbanded. There are also usually restrictions on the extent to which members can realise their assets when they leave. In France, members are reimbursed on face value only and this would be true also of most newer UK co-operatives. In Italy a co-operator gets his or her own share back at face value plus legally agreed rates of interest.

Bonuses paid to workers, in whatever form, offer an additional remuneration to 'regular wages' or salaries. Theoretically the occasional payment (yearly or quarterly) of a bonus has great value as an incentive: it is visible and clearly connected to performance. Yet for one reason or another it is often not paid:

- because members reinvest their bonuses voluntarily or to take advantage of tax concessions;
- because collectively the membership may decide to put all bonuses into co-operative reserves;

- because no surplus is generated as the co-operative is not trading profitably; or
- because of ideological reasons.

What the bonus system does offer is great flexibility to the co-operative in managing its labour costs. Periods of wage reduction in crises can be compensated for afterwards by bonus distribution, and to some extent shortfalls in capital can be remedied by workers choosing to reinvest their dividends or wages in the co-operative.

7.4 Other Working Conditions

In general, working conditions in established and rescue co-operatives are governed by national norms whether these be the outcome of negotiated agreements or legal prescriptions. Newer and smaller co-operatives can be subject to similar criticism as other small enterprises: they are too busy trying to survive to be able to support good work conditions. This is unlikely to last longer than a start-up period.

We know remarkably little about working conditions in co-operatives in general, eg workers health and safety, accidents, environmental hygiene, noise pollution, maternity and paternity benefits, etc. The same is true of conventional small and medium sized enterprises - most systematic research concerns large enterprises. For the most part, however, we can say that co-operatives appear to be consistently committed to better than minimum conditions.

In France, sick pay, pensions and other insurance elements were available to co-operators before they became legally required of other enterprises, even though such 'differentials' have now been eroded by improved national benefits and because of expenditure now required of the Comite d'entreprise. Established co-operatives in France, the UK and Italy generally offer unusually good social benefits for small enterprises, eg loans for houses, recreation and holiday facilities, educational scholarships for members' families. It is reported from all countries that job security is one of the consistent attributes of co-operative employment.

At the level of day to day work, co-operatives are as varied as the sectors they represent and their age and orientation. Co-operatives in Italy appear to place a high value on skills training but this is not always so. In some co-operatives the rigours of work-study and the conveyor belt are common even though relieved by open discussion and freedom of expression. One of the most consistent features of co-operatives is the relaxed relationships with supervision. Higher trust, the absence of petty rules, are associated with unusual flexibility in the workplace. This flexible character of the co-operative 'working atmosphere' probably constitutes its most distinctive

attribute. This benefits the member but it also benefits the co-operative which is able to respond both to crises and to market opportunities in ways not possible in many private firms.

Co-operative members do participate in decisions that effect their economic rewards and other conditions of work. This is likely to include the distribution of profits; investment in social facilities and other personnel or welfare type benefits; and the shaping of occupational careers within the co-operative. This process of participation is probably as important as its outcomes in the sense of the ownership it can reinforce and the way it allows members to learn about the enterprise's functioning.

7.5 Evidence of Economic Performance

There is little evidence to support those who oppose co-operatives on the grounds of bad pay and conditions. There is a lack of systematic information but case material and other studies show if anything that co-operatives offer better pay conditions than many other comparable small enterprises. Problems of long hours and low pay when they occur are a characteristic:

- of the early life cycle stage of emergent and marginalised co-operatives;
- of particular sectors where conditions are as a whole below national averages;
- of rescue co-operatives beginning a process of economic readjustment following economic failure.

Economic participation surprisingly enough is not expressed in high returns on share capital or even in large bonus payments though these do occur. More often however economic participation results in better conditions of a personnel or social welfare character and in job security. The process of participation is also associated with greater flexibility for individuals and for enterprises.

Evidence as to the aggregate economic effectiveness of contemporary co-operatives is sparse. The most substantial work available that compares co-operative with non-co-operative enterprises comes from outside Europe, from the North American plywood sector (Berman 1976). This showed that important productivity benefits occurred in co-operatives as a result of such factors as lower supervisory costs and flexible work roles. The only cross-national study available in Europe relates to pre-1980 experience and uses simple measures of participation (Estrin, Jones and Svejnar, 1984). Despite its limitations this study also shows that economic participation has positive benefits for productivity and performance. Studies of the Mondragon co-operative system (Thomas & Logan 1982) suggest that these co-operatives are not only capable of being efficient but

they are particularly able to perform under conditions of high market uncertainty and dependence. There are other studies (see review by Hopwood 1979) that although concerned with 'new forms of work organisation' rather than co-operation per se, reaches remarkably consistent results: that increasing participation and involvement can make a positive contribution to economic performance. If these findings were to be replicated by more up-to-date comparative research it would have far reaching implications both for co-operatives and the management of non-co-operative enterprises.

8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Introduction

The last seven chapters have assembled together information gathered by three national research teams from France, Italy and the United Kingdom. As anticipated it has not proved possible to give definitive answers to all the questions raised or implied by the study brief. All the teams found themselves constrained by the lack of available and reliable information, the short time-span of the study and limitations of resources. Nonetheless, it has been possible to address the questions and issues raised in the **General Introduction**.

At a general level we can say that, in certain circumstances co-operatives have been associated with job creation; marginalised groups re-entering the labour market; regional policy being enhanced; new social relations being established; and increased autonomy at work. There is nothing that has come out of this study to suggest that support for co-operatives as part of a broader employment strategy is misplaced.

However, it is not proposed to re-summarise the study's findings by way of conclusion, as throughout the text conclusions have been drawn together and summarised. The reader is commended to refer to the national reports for a fuller understanding of what has already been highly condensed in this volume.

The concern to understand how European co-operatives might best speak with one voice; how trade unions and their roles relate to the co-operative movement; and how to enhance local employment initiatives are addressed in the final section of the report (see **Recommendations**). Suffice it to say at this stage that these still appear reasonable aspirations after having reviewed the evidence from the current study.

The conclusions that follow are concerned more with two questions that cut across the particular topics covered in this report, ie:

- How far should co-operatives be considered as different from other SMEs?
- What is distinctive about co-operatives from the evidence we have available?

8.2 Co-operatives and Other SMEs

Co-operators and students of the co-operative movement appear sometimes to live in a self-contained world. Yet the evidence from this study suggests that it is unhelpful to look for understanding of co-operative phenomena only within the realm of co-operatives. Co-operatives share many of the pre-occupations of other SMEs. In seeking economic viability they have to survive within competitive markets; they have to manage and co-

ordinate their commercial activities; they have to find capital to start-up and expand; they have to recruit and train people; and they have to adopt and implement new technologies. Many economic and organisational ground rules are no different for co-operatives than those faced by other enterprises. For example, explanations we have resorted to in the course of this report include:

- size of enterprise, which takes into account conventional notions of optimum and sub-optimum scale under different market circumstances;
- sector-determined conditions of work, which draws on labour market theory as might be applied to any small firm;
- ideas about corporate structure, including sub-contracting strategies which have been widely applied as an explanation of small firm growth; and
- theories of management and organisation, that are taught in colleges and business schools throughout Europe.

Because co-operatives are subject to the same pressures as other enterprises, it is important not to attribute to them effects unconnected with their co-operative status. It appears, for example, that small co-operatives have low levels of unionization. This does not imply that co-operatives are anti-trade union given what we know about levels of unionization in other small enterprises. It may of course raise other questions about trade union orientation towards the small firm sector. Similarly low rates of pay in construction co-operatives have to be seen in the context of that sector's average wage rates and not as indicative of co-operatives under-paying their members. Though this may also raise questions about what can be done to enable new co-operators to enter markets where costs of entry are **not** so low.

Another characteristic of co-operatives that they share with other enterprises, is that they are not all the same. This report began by identifying five types of worker co-operative, distinguished on the basis of their origins and aspirations. Broad brush statements about 'co-operatives' are likely to be as untrue as similar generalisations about conventional firms. Marginalised co-operatives offering employment to unskilled members of an ethnic community cannot be regarded in the same light for all purposes as emergent co-operatives employing highly educated professional workers. Furthermore, legal and cultural differences mean that what will be a co-operative in one national context could as easily be an association, a company not for profit, or a conventional registered company in another setting. For example, comparisons to some Italian co-operatives may have to be sought in French associations, under the Law of 1901. A major difference among co-operatives is that some are effective

and well run, which in this context includes giving attention to important social as well as economic aspects of organisation, whilst others are ineffective and badly run. Making judgements about co-operatives on the basis of a bad example of their kind is no wiser than prejudging business performance on the basis of a recently bankrupt enterprise. Acknowledging that co-operatives are at the same time different from each other and also similar to other enterprises has practical implications for policy and action which are explored further below.

8.3 Distinctive Characteristics of Co-operatives

It emerges from this study that co-operatives can be very different from conventional enterprises, for example:

- in the reported job satisfaction of both workers and managers;
- in the job security they offer employees in comparison with other firms in their sector;
- in their limited hierarchies and high levels of trust between employees;
- in their commitment to consensus management and good conditions of employment; and
- in their capacity to innovate and respond flexibly to uncertain market conditions.

These characteristics of well functioning co-operatives are rooted in the **social integration** that co-operatives achieve through quite different means. Effective mechanisms developed in large co-operatives are different from those in small collectively organised co-operatives. In some co-operatives welfare, cultural, personnel and recreational expressions of integration predominate. In others the enterprise and its management is a focus for consensus building within both formal and informal structures. In some instances social integration is based on shared ideologies, in others it is reinforced by distribution of surpluses, though as we have seen this is less common than might have been expected.

It is possible to interpret some developments in co-operation as converging with developments in other SMEs. New organisational designs, extensions of profit-sharing and participative management have all been advocated in larger European arenas than those of the co-operative movement. Whether these measures would be as effective transposed to enterprises without a high degree of social integration, must remain an open question.

In addition to social integration within the enterprise, co-operatives show high levels of **social solidarity** in relation to their wider environment. This may have a political basis; it may be based on shared experience of marginalisation; or it may

be supported by regional cultural or ethnic identities. This also has different expressions, for example:

- active participation in national, regional or sector-based activities within the co-operative movement;
- direct action by individual co-operatives to encourage the formation of other co-operatives; and
- links via trade unions and other groups into the labour movement or the social economy.

It is probably this combination of **social integration** at the level of the enterprise and **social solidarity** in relation to wider society that gives the co-operative movement some of its distinctive strengths. Three examples will suffice:

- Successful co-operative rescues are probably as common as examples of failures. In successful examples enterprises set up after resistance to job losses and changes in working practices, appear after crises to accept changes which they were apparently created to avoid. Yet there are differences in terms of how crises such as reductions in employment are managed. These responses will be founded on a sense of common purpose as well as an understanding of the enterprises problems by employees. It may also, as in the Italian context, occur within a movement that will try seriously to find members alternative employment; the process of rationalisation takes on a co-operative dimension.
- In France and in Italy we have seen examples of how co-operatives faced with competitive pressures re-activate co-operative machinery in part to incorporate workers into commercial and management logics. But in the context of a high level of social integration, whatever the intentions, co-operative dynamics have their own logic. Once re-activated the process of membership, participation and the 'solutions' developed do not necessarily lead in the same directions as in conventional firms.
- Large co-operatives, as we have seen, are subject to pressures to nationalize production and professionalise their workforce. New managers are recruited in from outside the co-operative movement and co-operatives may relocate away from their workers. In Italy, in particular, there is concern that the jobs locally available to workers in the future will no longer match the traditional unskilled profile of many Italian co-operatives. Yet there is evidence from Italy representative of another dynamic. With improvements in State direction and training the children of unskilled workers are no longer themselves unskilled and are

looking for better qualified work. They may come to be employed in new emergent co-operatives or they may come to work in the newly professionalized jobs available in existing co-operatives.

Of course these examples and arguments do not always hold true. In some cases co-operators lose their jobs like any other employees; in some cases participation has no more than instrumental value for the enterprise; and in others the professionalisation of the workforce does reduce employment opportunities for local people. What can be argued, however, from the national studies and case studies on which this report is based, is that when co-operative enterprises and co-operative movements are highly developed they can demonstrate distinctive ways of transforming social and economic processes even though they can never isolate themselves from these processes.

8.4 Recommendations for Policy and Practice

This study has been concerned to describe and occasionally to explain aspects of employment, organisation and participation in worker co-operatives. Hopefully it will have given definition to features of the co-operative movements in France, Italy and the United Kingdom that can often seem obscure to outsiders. The report has been interwoven with practical threads from which different parties, if they are in agreement with the judgements made, will be able to draw implications for themselves. In this final section practical recommendations for policy and action are drawn together under four headings:

- the possibilities of the co-operative movement speaking with one voice at a European level;
- the role of trade unions and how this can best be expressed in the context of worker co-operatives;
- the need for support systems for co-operatives, particularly in relation to employment initiatives; and
- implications for future research and development.

Before making any recommendations a caveat is in order. There have been many reports and studies on European co-operatives over the last five years, sponsored by European institutions. These reports have often made recommendations, many of which have not been implemented. (For example, the Mihr Report from which this study originates recommended the setting up of a European Co-operative Development Fund in 1982.) In part this experience dulls enthusiasm for making more recommendations. In part it raises far more important questions about how to connect European policy-makers more effectively with the grassroots of Europe's co-operative movements, without the repeated intercession of a new generation of researchers and study groups. This is one of the implicit problems we feel it necessary to address in the

recommendations that follow.

8.5 A European Movement with a Single Voice

The Mihr Report's plea that Europe's co-operative associations should "co-ordinate their views and put them forward collectively" is an understandable one. Devising new policies and relating existing policies to the capacities of worker co-operatives at a European level is a difficult task without partners for the dialogue. On the other hand an underlying assumption in the proposal is that such a level of coherence and co-ordination is possible. There are two grounds for doubt:

- First, this study has reaffirmed the diverse and sometimes fragmented nature of co-operative movements - both within and between the three member States included in the study. The Italian, French and UK Co-operative movements, as we have seen, are at very different stages in their development. With appropriate long-term support and investment much more could be expected of the UK movement (choosing as an example the least developed of the three). On the other hand there are features of these three co-operative movements that are the product of specific historical, economic and social processes. Italy's co-operative experience cannot be separated from the particular position that the Catholic Church and the Communist Party occupy in that country. These cultural and economic forms are difficult to transplant and difficult to see as being of a piece with very different national experiences.
- Second, the philosophy of worker co-operation is decentralised and autonomous. The notion of centralised multi-national institutions or forums stands in contradistinction to this philosophy. Such institutions can collate information and act as channels of communication but they are unlikely to be able to inform practical action of the kind necessary in employment initiatives. The Mihr Report notes that the chief task of most existing organisations at a European level is co-ordination. It is difficult to see how European-level links can function in anything other than a general advisory role unless they are connected to other more specific and decentralised networks and activities.

The recommendations that follow from this analysis are at national and cross-national levels. First, at the level of member States there needs to be an infrastructure that allows representation, communication and exchange of experience. In this study, for example, it is clear that no such infrastructure

yet exists in the UK though it does in the associations and federations of both France and Italy. This then leads to the recommendation that:

Investment should be made both institutional and financial to create the necessary co-operative infrastructure at a national level in those member States where none exists.
(R.1)

Resources that exist at a national level are currently dispersed and one justification for infrastructure investment is to bring these resources together. There are also resources of experience within different member States that could be made available to others. European financial support for national co-operative activities could perhaps be made conditional on some resources being devoted to institution building. Although this might appear a harsh condition it may also have sound economic advantages in the medium-term (see R.5 below).

A second recommendation concerns links between co-operative movements and associations. Many such links as we have noted, function at a general level. They bring representatives and spokespersons together rather than practitioners and activists. One way in which an infrastructure could be encouraged to develop across different member States is if more links were created that had a practitioner bias. In this way over-arching bodies at a European level that might emerge or be strengthened in the future could have a reservoir of comparative experience to draw on. This leads to the recommendation that:

Networks be set up, some long-term and some ad-hoc, to bring together co-operators, co-operative promoters and other professionals, in small groups engaged in specific tasks that should be expected to impart their conclusions and experience to European as well as national institutions.
(R.2)

The specific nature of such networks should be decided in consultation with co-operative associations and other implicated groups. It is specifically suggested that networks be expected to undertake specific tasks rather than just express a view. This is intended to create settings in which learning can take place and one which is compatible with the philosophy of co-operative practice: ie generating policy out of action and experience.

By encouraging the development of coherent national federations or associations and by linking together practitioners as well as representatives it is likely that the foundations would be created that might support a European movement able to speak for itself - because it had also acquired the capacity to speak with itself.

8.6 Trade Unions and the Co-operative Movements

This study leads us to assert positively that trade unions can have an important role in relation to worker co-operatives. Many of the fears that have been expressed by trade unionists are not born out by the three national reports. Worker co-operatives do not necessarily reduce working conditions or lower rates of pay. The rescue process, whilst difficult, is made more credible if the leaders of the rescue-attempt, who are often trade unionists, understand co-operation or can call upon co-operative and commercial expertise. At the rescue stage assessments have to be made of business viability and management resources. Trade unions can provide an independent channel to protect members' interests in all types of co-operatives. They can also provide a link between the co-operative enterprise and the wider society, which, for example, allows co-operative experience and resources to be made available to other parts of the labour movement. This leads to the **recommendation** that:

Trade unions at national, industrial and regional levels should inform themselves about worker co-operatives, set up joint working groups with co-operators and examine their own structures and practices to see how co-operatives might best be supported. (R.3)

Given the disparities of experience between trade unions in different member States, direct exchange between trade unions would be of value in this instance. This leads to the **recommendation** that;

Bilateral and multi-lateral exchanges be initiated by the different trade union confederations and between major trade unions themselves to increase their understanding of worker co-operatives and the potential role of trade unionists in relation to co-operative movements. (R.4)

The justification for trade unions to take these initiatives may need to be seen in a wider context than co-operatives alone. We noted at the beginning of this report that worker co-operatives pose uncomfortable questions as to the role of trade unions. It would be reasonable to suggest that many similar uncertainties abound for trade unions in Europe today as those raised by co-operative practice. The value, then, of trade unions investing in the expansion of their base and expertise to encompass worker co-operatives may well extend well beyond the co-operative domain. It may help them evolve strategies that could also be valuable in a host of small and medium sized enterprises and in exercising informed influence in the general context of local economic initiatives.

8.7 Support Systems for Co-operatives

There are other projects underway at a European level that concern support structures, co-operative development and related training initiatives. This report can only hope to complement

these other activities which have the theme of support as their primary focus. First, to hark back briefly to the earlier discussion of national federations and associations. It is important to decide in what framework co-operative support structures should be located. They can, for example, be tied into local government as in the UK, or be run by the co-operative movement itself. The latter, we would suggest, has clear advantages. First, it is consistent with the self-governing character of co-operative organisation. Second, it would become integrated into the activities of federations and associations and so strengthen them. Third, it would be the responsibility of the co-operative movement which could be expected to carry some financial responsibility for sustaining its own support system as it became stronger. This leads to the **recommendation** that:

Support systems where possible be located in the orbit of national, regional and sectoral federations and be seen as an essential part of strengthening their position and expertise. (R.5)

Because worker co-operatives are at such different stages in their development, some recommendations will have specific application in different countries. For example, in France most training and support by the co-operative movement is for established enterprises, start-ups are relatively under-provided for. In the UK, however, there is a reverse emphasis on start-ups with only the beginnings of attention being paid to established or expanding enterprises. This leads to the **recommendation** that:

Assessments should be made of the current support structures in different States and efforts should be made to ensure that these match the different stages of co-operative development. (R.6)

As we have seen, co-operative enterprises have quite different support needs at different stages in their development. Formation, expansion, differentiation and even closedown all call on specific skills and expertise. Even the experience of co-operative failure, ie closedown, can be positively mobilized if it is well-handled. For the co-operative movement learning about why enterprises fail is important. It has also been striking in the national reports and case studies to see how often successful co-operatives are started by people who had previously experienced co-operative failure. Thus, for the individual co-operator how failure is handled can determine whether or not he or she will learn from the experience and try again.

There are some recommendations which appear to apply across the board, at least to the countries included in the study. The lack of significant developments in organising work differently is striking. Some co-operatives appear to adhere to methods of work organisation that would be considered too restrictive of worker autonomy in many non-co-operative enterprises. This leads to the **recommendation** that:

Local networks that include co-operators and other SMEs should be encouraged to study and promote developments that would support greater worker autonomy where possible within the organisation of work and production. (R.7)

Consistent with the conclusion reached at the beginning of this section, it would also seem appropriate that co-operative and other SMEs are encouraged to work together and learn from each other, particularly in the context of employment initiatives. Under some market conditions competitive pressures will make this difficult, but we have also noted in this report that co-operation between small firms appears to be an important element in their success. Given that in many regions of the community co-operatives are thinly distributed, it may only be in collaboration with other SMEs that worker co-operatives can achieve an optimum scale of operations. This leads to the recommendation that:

Local networks and practical collaboration should be encouraged between co-operatives and other SMEs both to learn from each other about organisational and commercial matters and to co-operate in the marketplace, particularly where this might be of benefit to the local economy. (R.8)

8.8 Implications for Research and Development

It is tempting for researchers to suggest the need for further research. There have been many general reviews of co-operative experience in Europe and over the last two years there has been a welcome shift of emphasis to specific studies on topic, such as organisation, finance and support structures. There has also been intensive efforts made in local consultations about employment problems and initiatives. At a completely different level, pilot actions and projects have been instigated. One conclusion that follows from reading this material in the context of this study is that these various strands - of research, consultation and action - would benefit if they were in some way combined within an integrated framework. This leads to the recommendation that:

Future research in relation to co-operatives should be integrated with consultation at local levels and with pilot projects so that practical actions can benefit from research and vice versa. (R.9)

In this study, for example, it would have been useful if we had been able to consult with more co-operators, trade unionists, and small business groups in the course of the exercise. This would have both consolidated our conclusions and opened up the research process to the participation of those potentially implicated by its recommendations.

At the beginning of the report we commented on the absence of reliable data to allow comparison across member States. This and

other studies commissioned by the EEC probably provides the basis for a more coherent information strategy. This leads to the recommendation that:

An effort should be made to devise a minimum number of comparative measures of co-operative development, growth, employment and economic performance. These measures should be collated on a standard basis across the European Community. (R.10)

Finally, given the overlaps of purpose and circumstance that co-operatives share with many other SMEs it would be wise to initiate more research that compared both types of enterprise. This is obviously needed in such areas as economic performance, industrial relations and the organisation of work and production. This leads to the **recommendatiun** that:

Future research initiatives in the area of co-operatives should also take into account the wider SME context and where possible comparative studies should be considered - for example, of economic performance, work organisation and industrial relations. (R.11)

One outcome of such research might be to allow the far newer European SMEs' sector to benefit from the experience of co-operatives which have faced not dissimilar problems for many years. One reason why this has **not** happened is because of demarcation problems within the institutions that initiate research and policy initiatives. SMEs are often the responsibility of different sections from those responsible for co-operatives; and employment initiatives are often considered quite separate from industrial relations. One conclusion that this study supports is that the contribution of co-operatives to policy and practice might be precisely located at the intersection of concerns that are usually considered in isolation from each other.

4. PHASE TWO ACTIVITIES

The framework of the review of existing material and research covers the following broad headings:

- General Introduction
- Self-Managing Forms of Organisation
- Types of Employment
- Pay and Working Conditions
- Industrial Relations

The main questions to be asked under each heading are as follows:

i. General Introduction

- what is the strength and diversity of cooperatives in this particular society?
- how central or marginal are cooperatives to the economy as a whole or to parts of it, eg at a regional level?
- have there been waves of cooperative formation, eg late 19th century, post World War II, early 1970s, and did these waves have different characteristics?
- where are cooperatives located in the markets, do they have, for example, a bias towards the whole economy, towards declining sectors, socially useful products, new technologies or services, or any other sectors?

- what is the role of umbrella organisations and how do they relate to individual cooperatives?
- what are the political and trade union supports and policies regarding cooperatives?
- how do cooperatives provision of 'social insurance' (sick pay etc) compare with or complement nationally available provision?
- current contentions and debates regarding cooperatives and their organisation.

(Note: As this is only an introduction to the central concerns of this study it does not need to be extensive - probably no more than 15% of total national report.)

ii. Self-Managing Forms of Organisation

- is there a significant amount of participation or self-management in cooperatives?
- do most rely entirely on indirect forms of participation such as representation?
- are there serious efforts to improve or remedy the level of participation currently found?
- are there other forms of organisation, such as associations and small businesses in which participation, self-management and industrial democracy are more important than in the formal cooperative sector?
- can we say anything about the conditions in which self-management survives?
- are new forms of management and technology affecting the role of the manager and member?
- is size of cooperative or age (ie life cycle stage) an issue in the development of participation?

- how important is participation for those who are involved in cooperatives? (ie members own criteria for success)
- what evidence is there that participation and self-management have any consequences such as improved performance or greater work satisfaction among those employed?
- are there different levels of participation, ie over what issues (investment, discipline, pay levels, product choice)? with what degree of control (consultation, plan-making, veto power etc.)?
- to what extent are there examples of participation at the level of the work-group or unit; the enterprise as a whole; or in a wider sector (eg through consortia or umbrella organisations)?

iii. Types of Employment

- who are the people who are part of established cooperatives and who are the people who are forming new cooperatives?
- what is their social class, economic, gender, ethnic background? how far are marginalised groups involved and how far 'new' social groups?
- are skills generally at a high or low level?
- are there serious efforts to enhance skills through training? If so, what types of training predominate - business/commercial; technical; cooperative organisation and communication?
- is training used to allocate skills in a conventional way or distribute skills more widely than in a conventional organisation? (eg job rotation, flexible work systems)
- how are individual 'employment' contracts affected by the legal structure in which cooperatives operate?
- do individual contracts include part-time working, temporary working, job-sharing, distinct classes of cooperators, eg members, employees, etc?

- at an enterprise level, are new contractual relationships evident, such as sub-contracting between cooperatives and other enterprises?
- is there any evidence of a "dual economy", of a symbiotic relationship between cooperative and non-cooperative sectors?

iv. Pay and Working Conditions

- are cooperatives paying people more or less than they would get in similar work in other kinds of enterprise?
- how is pay negotiated and set?
- how are differentials set and are they under any pressure, eg from the need for technocratic management?
- are other sources of 'incentive' utilised in cooperatives, eg non-monetary incentives, quality of work-life, quality circles, etc?
- to what extent are other conditions, such as work environment, child-care, male and female work, sick-pay, health and safety, and accident insurance handled in ways common to any conventional enterprise or to what extent is there evidence of a different logic?
- how far do people in cooperatives exploit themselves, eg by working long hours at pay levels normal for shorter hours?
- is time managed in particular or distinctive ways regarding working hours, part-time and full-time work, holiday arrangements, leave of absence, retirement, etc?

v. Industrial Relations

- to what extent and in what ways have trade unions taken a positive and active role in cooperatives?

- is their role primarily political, eg expressing social solidarity, or does it extend to formal trade union bargaining?
- are there new or different methods evolving in cooperatives to deal with issues that are normally regarded as part of industrial relations?
- in what ways are the rights of individuals guaranteed?
- how is discipline, redundancies and conflict managed?
- how do trade union structures relate to cooperatives, eg through a special section, as part of normal national/ industrial bargaining?
- to what extent do the structure and culture of 'democracy' and 'participation' in trade unions conflict with cooperatives' own conception of democracy and participation (eg the view that its management's responsibility to manage)?

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PART II

National Study Reports

FRENCH NATIONAL STUDY

By

Isabelle MAHIOU
Jean-Louis LAVILLE

Centre de Recherche et d'Intervention
sur le Développement et l'Autonomie
(CRIDA)

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1. - INTRODUCTION

Comme dans de nombreux pays occidentaux, la réalité mouvante et multiforme d'initiatives économiques visant la reconquête d'une forme d'autonomie, sous-tendue par la mise à l'écart du marché du travail d'un nombre croissant d'individus, a servi d'appui, à la fin des années soixante dix en France, à des politiques expérimentales cherchant à régénérer des dynamiques locales de création d'emplois.

L'idée d'un "troisième secteur" (1), souvent confondue avec celle de "tiers-secteur" -secteur qui se distingue de l'économie "publique" comme de l'économie "privée"-, tentait de cerner ces mutations dans une approche plus globale s'inscrivant dans une perspective de changement sociétal. Il veut désigner un champ d'activités économiques et sociales occupé par de nouvelles petites unités de production, "créées par des individus ou des groupes de base qui souhaiteraient expérimenter de nouvelles formes de travail en commun et combler des vides en matière de besoins quantitatifs et qualitatifs à satisfaire", dans un univers largement décentralisé.

Avec le changement de majorité gouvernementale intervenu en 1981, ces mêmes thèmes se sont vus amplifiés par le discours politique dans le cadre d'une reconnaissance institutionnelle de l'économie sociale.

Au sens institutionnel, l'économie sociale recouvre un ensemble d'organisations, coopératives, mutuelles et associations, qui ont redécouvert cette expression pour mettre en évidence leurs traits communs et distinctifs, se reconnaître et se faire reconnaître par les pouvoirs publics (2). Mais elle est également employée par des groupes qui, sans s'inscrire dans le champ de ces institutions, se réclament plutôt d'une mouvance alternative.

"Secteur" hybride traversé de contradictions, l'économie sociale est présentée dans le discours du gouvernement actuel comme pouvant créer des emplois fondés sur l'initiative locale et l'utilité collective, être un facteur d'insertion sociale et professionnelle, satisfaire des besoins nouveaux ou non couverts, transformer les modes de relation de travail, modifier les rapports entre usagers et producteurs (3). Dans cette perspective dynamique, l'économie sociale devient un terrain privilégié d'initiatives locales et d'expérimentations sociales, le terrain d'émergence d'un troisième secteur.

(1) Enoncée par J. Delors et J. Gaudin, "Pour la création d'un troisième secteur", Comment créer des emplois, Groupe de travail et société, Université Paris IX Dauphine.

(2) Les principes qu'elles partagent sont énoncés dans une charte qui reprend ceux qu'élabora le théoricien Ch. Gide à la fin du XIXe siècle : liberté d'adhésion et de retrait, gestion démocratique, solidarité à l'intérieur du groupe et vis-à-vis de l'extérieur, non lucrativité individuelle, formation des hommes. Le point de départ du rapprochement actuel peut être situé à la création, en 1970, du Comité national de liaison des activités mutualistes, coopératives et associatives.

(3) Voir notamment le discours de M. Rocard, alors ministre du Plan, à la rencontre nationale du Crédit Coopératif (23.09.81).

Frontières mal définies, confusion entre les aspects économiques, juridiques et idéologiques... les différentes notions qui ont cours pour saisir cette réalité se définissent prioritairement par des références différentielles par rapport au système environnant et recouvrent une mosaïque d'organisations. Mais, indépendamment de leurs aspects culturels et idéologiques, ces dernières ont en commun de constituer des modalités de restructuration par les acteurs eux-mêmes d'activités nécessaires mais "perturbées" ou délaissées (sauvegarde de l'emploi par une coopérative, par exemple). Sous cet aspect, l'économie sociale s'inscrit bien dans une "procédure" post-keynésienne de régulation de sortie de crise" (1).

La réhabilitation de l'entreprise et de l'esprit d'entreprendre, de la productivité marchande, sont au centre de cette valorisation de la création d'activités tout azimut. Cette dernière déborde le cadre des pratiques autogestionnaires axées sur le travail -"travailler autrement et collectivement"- pour toucher des domaines d'action qui relèvent traditionnellement de la politique sociale et économique et s'exprimer en direction de populations cibles (jeunes, femmes...), de "besoins" spécifiques, de micro-régions en déclin... Si l'emploi constitue l'élément prévalent, le critère décisif, l'enjeu dans ce cas est moins de transformer le travail dans l'entreprise que de créer de nouvelles formes d'emploi adaptées -adaptables- à l'évolution du rapport salarial, à travers un déplacement des frontières entre le marchand et le non-marchand, entre temps de travail et temps de non-travail (2)...

C'est dans ce contexte général que se situe l'intérêt que portent les pouvoirs publics aux SCOP comme secteur de l'économie sociale, dans une assimilation implicite à un tiers ou un troisième secteur qui se caractérise par ses potentialités d'innovation en réponse à des "besoins" plutôt que par une forme d'organisation.

Quelques limites sont à souligner. Instrument de maintien et de création d'emplois, de (re)conquête d'une identité professionnelle en période de crise, la coopération de production se diversifie -dans les "motivations", les activités, les populations et les pratiques à l'oeuvre- dans le renouveau qu'elle connaît depuis la fin des années soixante-dix. Mais en même temps, elle montre des permanences qui soulignent les limites des possibilités d'appropriation de ce statut par des entreprises qui se situeraient à la marge d'une logique marchande. Si les coopératives mettent en oeuvre de nouvelles formes de travail, c'est davantage dans l'exercice d'une démocratie centrée sur l'unité de production que dans une remise en cause radicale de la conception même du travail et de l'emploi s'insérant dans une "autre" logique sociale de mobilisation des capacités de travail.

(1) C. VIENNEY, Les activités, les acteurs et les règles de l'économie sociale, B.T.I., Université Paris I, nov. 1983, ronéo, 38 p.

(2) A cet égard, les débats que suscitait la perspective d'une société duale sont aujourd'hui moins vifs. N'est-ce pas plutôt la gestion du dualisme qui se construit à présent à travers la définition d'une nouvelle logique de mobilisation des capacités de travail dans la perspective d'un "troisième secteur" ?

A l'inverse, parmi les entreprises du tiers-secteur, celles qui se définissent par une finalité d'utilité sociale ou collective mettent souvent au second plan la dimension autogestionnaire ; celles qui, au contraire, sans adopter la forme coopérative, la mettent au premier plan, s'assimilent aux SCOP sur de nombreux aspects de fonctionnement dès lors qu'elles cherchent à être des entreprises économiquement viables.

Il est significatif, à cet égard, que les études portant sur le tiers-secteur s'intéressent peu au fonctionnement des entreprises mais l'abordent sous des angles spécifiques : contribution à la création locale d'emplois ou à l'insertion sociale et professionnelle, dynamique locale... ; et que celles qui s'intéressent aux formes d'organisation se polarisent sur les SCOP, sauf à considérer (comme en sociologie des organisations) le fonctionnement collectif d'une façon relativement indépendante du cadre dans lequel il s'inscrit. Par ailleurs, si les discours sur les projets et les récits d'expériences foisonnent, ils donnent rarement la dimension de la réalisation et sont peu émaillés d'informations précises. La problématique de l'organisation interne comme le recueil des données disponibles impliquent un resserrement sur le champ des coopératives, élargi quand cela est possible à d'autres formes d'entreprises.

2. - PRESENTATION GENERALE

2-1. REPERES HISTORIQUES - PHASES D'ESSOR ET DE DECLIN

Les SCOP sont nées au XIXe siècle -dans les années 1830 sous la forme d'associations ouvrières- de la réaction d'ouvriers urbains qualifiés à l'implantation des manufactures capitalistes et du salariat qui détruisaient le travail par métiers. Phénomènes de résistance d'ouvriers "libres" qui opposent au travail salarié le travail associé, l'histoire de la coopération de production est liée à la fois aux mutations du capitalisme et aux mouvements sociaux.

- A ses débuts, l'association ouvrière s'appuyait sur et s'intégrait dans l'ensemble du mouvement associationniste. Les liens étroits entre la coopération, le mouvement ouvrier et le socialisme se manifestèrent particulièrement dans les périodes de révolution ouvrière : 1848 vit plusieurs centaines d'associations ouvrières se créer, puis la Commune de Paris, 1871, essaya de remettre les ateliers abandonnés par leurs propriétaires aux mains des ouvriers organisés en ateliers collectifs.

- Après les vagues de répression qui s'abattirent sur toute forme d'association, un tournant fut pris à la fin du XIXe siècle- années 1880 avec la reconnaissance des groupements de travailleurs dans le cadre d'une division sociale du travail bien établie. Le syndicalisme naissant divisait la classe ouvrière sur la question du rôle de l'association dans son émancipation. Les forces socialistes, syndicales et politiques s'écartèrent globalement de la coopération, si ce n'est des coopératives -car sur le terrain, la rupture ne fut jamais totalement consommée.

Parallèlement, le mouvement coopératif s'institutionnalisait : en constituant un organe fédératif (1884), ancêtre de l'actuelle Confédération Générale des SCOP (CG SCOP), et bénéficiant de l'appui d'une partie de la bourgeoisie et des pouvoirs publics (ouverture de marchés et de crédits publics, Banque coopérative). Ce contexte favorable permit un accroissement rapide du nombre

de coopératives (environ 250 en 1900, 500 en 1910) essentiellement dans le bâtiment, le livre et la transformation des métaux. Dans cette période qui consacre la place prépondérante de l'industrie par rapport aux "métiers" se détermine en effet la spécialisation sectorielle des SCOP dans des activités où : la qualification professionnelle domine sur l'intensité capitaliste, l'acte de produire sur celui de commercialiser, l'investissement de promotion professionnelle sur celui de productivité (1).

- Entre la première guerre mondiale et les années 1960 suivit une relative stagnation du mouvement, favorable cependant à un processus d'accumulation interne dans de nombreuses coopératives, et à la consolidation du mouvement : transformation de la Chambre en CG SCOP (1937), création de la Caisse Centrale du Crédit Coopératif (1938) pour gérer des fonds de dotation aux coopératives - toutes branches confondues - alimentés par les pouvoirs publics. Quelques poussées ont marqué cette période : 1919-1920, 1937 et surtout la libération qui, dans la fin des années 1940, donna naissance au mouvement des communautés de travail, dont les survivantes ont par la suite intégré le statut SCOP (2).

- Les changements qui caractérisent l'évolution du système productif dans les années 1960 - accélération de la concentration du capital, ouverture des frontières, augmentations de productivité, croissance, d'abord lente, du chômage à partir de 1965 - ont une double conséquence sur le mouvement coopératif : ils remettent partiellement en cause la pénétration coopérative dans certains secteurs, ils réactivent le développement externe du mouvement (créations de SCOP). D'abord timide de 1965 à 1978, l'essor du mouvement a ensuite pris de l'ampleur, la crise et le contexte de restructuration ouvrant de nouvelles perspectives à la coopération de production : nouveaux secteurs à forte qualification professionnelle ; nouvelles catégories socio-professionnelles affectées par le chômage ; nouveaux champs d'intervention en direction d'entreprises capitalistes en difficulté et de micro-régions en voie de désertification.

Le développement fut amplifié par la loi de juillet 1978, définissant un statut unique de la coopération de production (3), qui a facilité les créations de coopératives : en ouvrant la possibilité de créer une SCOP-SARL avec quatre salariés et un montant de capital initial très faible (2.000 F), en simplifiant la transformation d'entreprises patronales, en autorisant le soutien financier de l'Etat et des collectivités locales.

Parallèlement, les courants de pensée qui ont traversé les mouvements sociaux depuis 1968 ont indéniablement alimenté l'essor de la coopération, mais ils ne peuvent être considérés que dans leur interdépendance avec deux autres éléments majeurs de l'émergence des SCOP : les restructurations opérées par le capitalisme et les transformations touchant la condition des travailleurs (sinon comment expliquer le peu d'attrait pour la coopération face à l'amélioration des autres statuts, salarié ou indépendant, en période de croissance ?).

(1) Voir C. VIENNEY, Socio-économie des organisations coopératives, Paris CIEM, 1980 et 1982, 2 volumes.

(2) Voir annexe 1, le mouvement des communautés de travail.

(3) Voir annexe 2, statut et principes coopératifs.

Sans exclure la dimension d'une revendication autogestionnaire, et aujourd'hui une nouvelle sensibilité pour la démocratie dans l'entreprise, c'est davantage "la prise en charge du droit au travail par les travailleurs eux-mêmes" (1) qu'exprime à présent la coopération de production, et qui interpelle les attitudes politiques et syndicales depuis l'aggravation de la crise économique.

2-2. CARACTERISTIQUES DU SECTEUR COOPERATIF

Ce n'est pas en terme quantitatifs que peut être appréciée la place des SCOP dans le système productif français. Même si certaines affrontent la concurrence de grands groupes français et figurent dans le palmarès des "mille premières entreprises françaises" présenté par le périodique L'Expansion, le poids économique global de la coopération de production reste marginal - à la différence de celui de la coopération agricole.

Avec 1.263 entreprises et 36.114 emplois en 1984 (2), les SCOP ne franchissaient pas la barre des 0,5 % des sociétés commerciales et de la population active. Très peu implantées dans les activités très capitalistiques, certaines "y sont néanmoins intégrées par le biais de la sous-traitance, dans le travail des métaux notamment" comme le souligne D. Demoustier (3) qui, précisant que les SCOP "opèrent sur des marchés où 85 à 90 % des entreprises emploient moins de vingt personnes" donne aussi une indication de leur pénétration sectorielle en terme d'emploi. Les SCOP recourent 1,5 % des effectifs de l'industrie du verre, 1,12 % dans le bâtiment travaux publics ; 1 % dans la presse et l'édition ; 0,4 % dans l'industrie du bois-ameublement et dans le textile-cuir ; 0,3 % dans le travail des métaux ; 0,15 % dans les services marchands.

Ces données ne rendent pas compte du dynamisme dont les SCOP ont globalement fait preuve ces dernières années dans le maintien et la création d'emplois et d'entreprises, qui s'est traduit par une diversité croissante des activités, des effectifs et des lieux d'implantation.

2.2.1. L'essor des dernières années

Les chiffres jamais atteints auparavant traduisent un essor remarquable: le nombre de SCOP a plus que doublé en cinq ans, passant de 571 en 1978 à 1.269 en 1983 ; le nombre d'emplois accusait dans le même temps une progression plus faible, de 27 %, passant de 31.708 à 40.438.

(1) Selon l'expression employée par D. DEMOUSTIER, Les coopératives de production, Paris, La Découverte, 1984, 126 p., p. 33.

(2) Données établies par la CG SCOP ne portant que sur les adhésions officiellement enregistrées à la mi-décembre 1984. Elles ne tiennent pas compte des SCOP créées en 1984 et en instance d'adhésion (soit 71 identifiées par la CG SCOP), ni de celles qui n'adhèrent pas, dont les estimations varient de 100 à 200.

(3) In "Les SCOP dans l'économie française", Revue d'économie sociale, n° 3, janvier-mars 1985, pp. 67-72.

Mais, d'une part, le rythme des créations s'est ralenti sur cette période : après des accélérations significatives en 1979 et 1981, le taux de progression s'est retourné en 1983 ; d'autre part, l'année 1984 accuse une accentuation très nette de cette tendance qui, se doublant d'augmentation du nombre de disparitions, se traduit pour la première fois depuis six ans par un solde net négatif (créations - radiations). Les chiffres provisoires de la fin 1984 marquaient une légère diminution du nombre total de coopératives, 1.263 contre 1.269 en 1983 - les créations et les disparitions s'équilibrant autour de 200 - et une baisse très sensible du volume d'emplois, 36.114 pour 40.438 en 1983 - soit une perte d'environ 6.400 pour une création un peu supérieure à 2.000.

Tableau 2.1.

Evolution du nombre de SCOP et d'emplois
créés annuellement depuis 1978

Année de création	créations totales		créations nettes	
	SCOP	emplois	SCOP	emplois
1978	97	1.474	49	99
1979	137	1.765	92	1.028
1980	159	2.780	98	1.851
1981	257	3.538	165	1.279
1982	311	4.887	210	3.446
1983	245	4.008	113	1.706

Source : CG SCOP. Division administrative, financière et statistique.
"Les SCOP à mi-décembre 1984".

Après avoir connu un essor sans précédent où les SCOP ont sauvé ou créé 9.500 emplois dans une période particulièrement difficile, le mouvement semble donc s'essouffler. Renversement de tendance ou simple pause ? Selon la CG SCOP, les disparitions se jouent à trois niveaux : des SCOP anciennes, pour la plupart de taille relativement importante ; des SCOP "issues de la crise" sans véritables projets économiques et sociaux ; des SCOP petites et récentes qui ne sont pas parvenues aux niveaux d'équilibre économique et financier nécessaires (leur taux de mortalité reste semble-t-il inférieur à celui des PME dans leur ensemble). Cependant, en 1984, la perte d'emplois porte essentiellement sur les coopératives de plus de cinquante salariés,

indiquant qu'elle est attribuable à des SCOP anciennes ou à des "reprises" qui démarrent avec des effectifs plus importants que les coopératives de création spontanée (ou "ex nihilo").

Or, si parmi les différents types d'origines des SCOP, les créations spontanées sont restées dominantes sur la période, ce sont les réanimations d'entreprises qui ont connu la progression la plus remarquable, prenant une place prépondérante dans la création d'emplois coopératifs. Les emplois issus des mutations, trois quarts des "emplois coopératifs" sont des emplois maintenus plutôt que créés.

Tableau 2.2.

Origine des créations. Evolution en pourcentage (1)

Année	SCOP			EMPLOIS		
	ex nihilo	mutation	réanimation	ex nihilo	mutation	réanimation
1978	59	14	27	35	28	37
1979	70	9	21	47	14	39
1980	66	13	21	25	22	53
1981	62	9	29	34	12	54
1982	55	10	35	25	16	59
1983	53	9	39	23	16	61

Source : CG SCOP. Division administrative, financière, statistique.
"Les SCOP à mi-décembre 1984".

2.2.2. Diversité des coopératives

Elargissement et rajeunissement du mouvement coopératif se traduisent par une plus grande diversité.

(1) Prises dans leur ensemble, en 1982, les SCOP se répartissaient par origine de la façon suivante : 64 % ex nihilo, 11 % mutation, 25 % réanimation.

- En termes d'âge et de taille, tout d'abord.

En 1984, les SCOP créées représentaient encore 9,5 % des coopératives existantes mais 28 % des emplois ; celles qui sont nées entre 1944 et 1977, 21 % des entreprises et 30 % des effectifs ; celles de la "nouvelle génération" près de 70 % des entreprises et 42 % des effectifs - ce qui correspond à des tailles moyennes respectives de 85, 40, 17 salariées.

Cet abaissement de la taille moyenne des SCOP - pour l'ensemble, 29 salariés - recouvre une large disparité :

- . moins de 10 salariés : 45 % des SCOP, 9 % des emplois ;
- . 10 à 50 salariés : 45 % des SCOP, 36 % des emplois ;
- . plus de 50 salariés : 10 % des SCOP, 55 % des emplois ;
- . aux extrêmes : 16 % des SCOP comptaient moins de 5 salariés et 6 SCOP, plus de 500.

- En termes d'activités.

Traditionnellement concentrée dans des secteurs très professionnalisés comme le bâtiment et l'imprimerie, la coopération de production s'est ouverte aux services intellectuels et culturels (bureaux d'étude ou de conseil, théâtres ...), aux services matériels (manutention, nettoyage, transport ...), et a étendu son implantation industrielle par les "reprises" d'entreprises (en particulier, transformation des métaux, cuir-textile, électrique-électronique).

Si depuis 1978, le bâtiment et le livre sont demeurés porteurs de créations de SCOP - respectivement + 104 % et + 57 % entre 1978 et 1982 (1) -, cela s'est produit avec une certaine stabilité de l'emploi dans ces activités. Et la progression a été beaucoup plus vive dans certaines industries - + 200 % pour les industries de transformation des métaux, + 284 % pour le cuir-textile - ou dans les prestations de services intellectuels et culturels : + 362 %. En 1984, l'activité du bâtiment restait néanmoins prépondérante, avec 35,8 % des SCOP et 43,4 % des emplois.

Comme le montre le tableau suivant, les disparités entre les différents secteurs d'activités concernant aussi le taux de sociétariat, premier indicateur, relatif, de la participation des salariés. La jeunesse des SCOP est un facteur favorable, mais non déterminant en la matière ; elle se conjugue avec d'autres facteurs comme le niveau des qualifications, le degré d'organisation des travailleurs dans la branche ou dans l'entreprise.

(1) Chiffres établis par D. Demoustier, voir les Coopératives de production, op. cit.

Tableau 2.3.

Activités des SCOP (décembre 1984)

Activités	Nombre de SCOP		Nombre total de travailleurs		Taille moyenne	Nombre d'associés	Taux moyen de sociétariat(1)
		en %		en %			
Bâtiment et T.publics	453	35,8	15.657	43,4	34,5	7.691	49,1
Industrie du livre	113	9	2.616	7,3	23,1	2.024	77,4
Transf. des métaux, élect. tél.	170	13,5	5.576	15,4	32,8	4.300	77,1
ameublement carton, verre céramique	50	4	2.926	8,1	58,5	2.351	80,3
Aliment. horticulture, épicerie	45	3,5	558	1,5	12,4	392	70,2
Cuir-text.	59	4,7	3.134	8,7	53	1.812	58
prest.serv. int., cult.	229	18,1	2.365	6,5	10,3	1.487	62,9
prest.serv. matériels	114	9	2.872	8	25,2	1.372	47,8
Activités diverses	30	2,4	410	1,1	13,6	295	71,9
Ensemble	1263	100	36.114	100	28,6	21.724	60,1

(1) Nombre d'associés sur nombre de salariés en %.

Source : CG SCOP. Division administrative, financière et statistique, Les SCOP à mi-décembre 1984.

- Répartition géographique.

La diversification du mouvement s'inscrit également dans son étalement géographique : les coopératives de production ne sont plus le seul fait des grands centres industriels (Paris, Lyon principalement), ni exclues des régions de mono-industries ou des régions à dominante rurale. Bien implantées dans la Région Parisienne (27,7 % des SCOP) qui compte 40 % des plus importantes, dans l'Ouest (16,4 %) et en Rhône-Alpes (13,7 %), elles connaissent un essor récent dans le Nord, en Provence et dans le Sud-Ouest, ailleurs plus timide mais réel. Cet essor est marqué par les spécificités économiques régionales : ainsi la Provence a vu se multiplier les Jeunes SCOP de petite taille, nombreuses dans les services, tandis que dans l'Est (4 % des SCOP), la taille moyenne est l'une des plus élevées en raison de quelques entreprises transformées dans le meuble et le textile.

Le tableau des activités dans lesquelles les SCOP sont implantées souligne leur caractère peu capitalistique (1), étroitement lié au mode spécifique de formation de leur capital qui repose en premier lieu sur les apports des travailleurs. Les "reprises" d'entreprises les conduisent par ailleurs vers certains secteurs en déclin. Les SCOP ne restent pas pour autant à l'écart des mutations techniques, ou en dehors des secteurs "nouveaux" sur un plan technologique ou social. Trois exemples l'illustrent.

. Dans l'imprimerie, dont l'ancienne Fédération du livre s'est rebaptisée Fédération des industries graphiques et de la communication pour traduire son évolution, plusieurs coopératives ont saisi l'enjeu des mutations pour se hisser à la pointe de la technologie dans leur créneau (photo-composition, photogravure, presse-communication, en particulier).

. Les "prestations de service intellectuels" recouvrent une diversité de SCOP qui, outre les bureaux d'études techniques, d'architectes ou d'urbanistes, de conseil en organisation ou en gestion, les collectifs de formation ..., se trouvent aussi dans les secteurs "nouveaux" de l'informatique ou des énergies nouvelles.

. Parmi les SCOP de "services matériels", un certain nombre se créent sur des projets qui, s'ils ne sont pas toujours innovants au sens technique, sont autant d'utilité sociale que de travail collectif : réinsertion sociale (souvent dans le bâtiment); services susceptibles de valoriser les ressources locales et/ou de protéger l'environnement (activités de récupération par exemple) ; promotion de nouvelles relations entre producteurs et usagers (tel un garage coopératif mettant à la disposition des usagers installations, conseils, formation).

Situées dans des activités traditionnelles, nouvelles ou en déclin, confrontées à des problèmes différents de concurrence ou de fonctionnement interne, beaucoup de coopératives, jeunes ou anciennes, cherchent dans leur regroupement au sein d'une confédération des moyens de se consolider.

(1) Sauf pour celles qui ont pu accumuler sur une longue période.

2.2.3. Structure et rôle de la confédération (1)

La constitution dès la fin du XIXe siècle d'un regroupement des coopératives de production fut sans aucun doute un élément favorable à la permanence du mouvement et à son amplification à certains moments. Sa structuration s'est faite sur un mode fédératif au plan national, régional et professionnel.

— La Confédération générale des sociétés coopératives ouvrières de production, CG SCOP, qui regroupe la majorité des SCOP existantes - l'adhésion n'est pas obligatoire, mais elle ouvre l'accès au "quart coopératif" des marchés publics - a une mission de rassemblement, de représentation, de diffusion et d'appui au développement interne et externe des coopératives. Elle conjugue :

- . une organisation représentative classique : un congrès national réunit tous les trois ans les SCOP qui votent les orientations et élisent les membres du conseil national qui, à leur tour, élisent le Bureau confédéral et désignent le secrétaire général de la confédération ;

- . des services nationaux et régionaux coordonnés par ce dernier, avec mission de diffusion d'information, d'assistance technique, d'organisation d'actions de formation. S'y ajoutent, plus spécialisés : le Fonds d'expansion confédéral (FEC créé en 1975) qui intervient financièrement dans les opérations de création, de développement ou de redressement de SCOP (alimenté par un tiers des cotisations versées par les coopératives à la confédération) ; plus récent (1981), le cabinet de développement - appui se charge de missions d'expertise spécifiques et de la mise à disposition de "dirigeants-relais" ; enfin un bureau de promotion des exportations.

— Au niveau régional, la mise en place progressive, depuis 1975, de délégations régionales "techniques" dotées de salariés à côté des unions régionales "politiques" - notamment elles désignent les candidats des SCOP au Conseil national - répond au développement local des SCOP et participe à son extension. Comme au niveau national, les délégués ont une grande part de leur action tournée vers l'accompagnement des créateurs de SCOP et le suivi technique de celles qui existent.

Au niveau local, des SCOP tentent de former des réseaux d'échanges ; la démarche est rendue difficile par la diversité des activités et des préoccupations.

— Par contre, la profession a constitué une base de regroupement dans les

(1) L'annexe 3 présente des organigrammes des structures électives et de l'organisation technique des services de la CG SCOP, ainsi que quelques repères de la structuration du mouvement au cours des trente dernières années.

activités traditionnelles ou en croissance des SCOP : fédérations du bâtiment, des industries graphiques, des SCOP transformatrices des métaux - sont en gestation des groupements dans l'informatique et dans l'ameublement. Ce sont surtout le développement des capacités commerciales et techniques des coopératives, la réflexion sur l'évolution de la profession qui forment la base de cette intercoopération.

Les moyens de soutien apportés par le mouvement se sont renforcés depuis quelques années - avec l'appui non négligeable des pouvoirs publics depuis 1982 - mais ils restent encore insuffisants au regard de l'ampleur du mouvement et de la diversité des coopératives.

Sur un plan plus idéologique, le renouveau de la coopération suscite des interrogations et des débats qu'illustre la constitution très récente d'un réseau de petites coopératives affiliées à la confédération : face à l'institutionnalisation d'un mouvement faiblement mobilisé sur son projet démocratique et d'une structure trop pyramidale inadaptée à leurs besoins, ces coopératives préconisent un militantisme coopératif qui prenne ses sources dans des pratiques coopératives réelles (information, formation, animation ...), et une organisation plus horizontale, décentralisée, s'appuyant sur l'animation de groupes locaux, la multiplication des échanges intercoopératifs, l'ouverture des SCOP vers leur environnement ...

Dans le domaine des relations entre les coopératives de production et les autres familles de la coopération (agriculture, consommation ...), l'intercoopération est restée embryonnaire ; le développement coopératif s'étant réalisé en France essentiellement à travers les secteurs d'activité. L'intercoopération s'exprime surtout au niveau politique à travers le Groupement national de la coopération et le conseil supérieur de la coopération, structure mixte avec les pouvoirs publics - ce qui n'exclut pas au niveau des coopératives elles-mêmes des relations privilégiées de clientèle ou de soutien, de même que plus largement avec l'économie sociale.

Quant aux organismes bancaires du secteur coopératif, ils semblent ne reconnaître qu'accessoirement la spécificité des SCOP en ne prenant pas plus de risques que les autres banques.

2-3. LES PARTENAIRES EXTERIEURS

2.3.1. L'action des pouvoirs publics

La politique des pouvoirs publics vis-à-vis des coopératives de production a historiquement pris plusieurs formes, révélant un niveau de reconnaissance variable de ce secteur. Au plan commercial, l'ouverture des marchés publics dès la fin du XIXe siècle a largement profité aux SCOP du bâtiment et de l'imprimerie. Au plan financier, la possibilité pour les collectivités locales d'intervenir dans les fonds propres des SCOP (loi de 1978, voir supra), s'ajoutant à d'autres formes indirectes de soutien (achat ou location de terrains et de bâtiments, prêts, cautions bancaires ...), a dans un premier temps surtout stimulé leur intervention dans les relances d'entreprises en difficulté. Au plan fiscal, les exonérations sont réelles : l'exonération de la taxe professionnelle versée aux communes d'une part, le bénéfice de la loi sur la participation qui peut ouvrir aux SCOP une quasi exo-

nération de l'impôt sur les bénéfices, d'autre part, ont suscité les critiques des autres entreprises. Favorables à l'essor des SCOP, ces interventions traduisaient cependant une politique en demi-teinte vis-à-vis du secteur coopératif.

A la fin des années soixante dix, de jeunes SCOP ont aussi figuré parmi les bénéficiaires des programmes expérimentaux de création d'emploi -emplois d'utilité collective - au sein de la nébuleuse du "tiers-secteur", champ des micro-initiatives créatrices d'activités poursuivant des finalités sociales et/ou la recherche de nouvelles formes d'emploi et de travail.

Avec l'arrivée en 1981 d'un gouvernement de gauche au pouvoir s'est exprimée une volonté politique de considérer l'économie sociale -au sens institutionnel : coopératives, mutuelles, associations - comme un secteur à part entière, entre le secteur public et les entreprises privées.

Cette reconnaissance de l'économie sociale s'est traduite par la création d'une Délégation interministérielle à l'économie sociale puis d'un Secrétariat d'Etat à l'économie sociale. Outre leur politique d'encouragement et de soutien, ces outils ministériels ont lancé plusieurs pistes de travail aux plans législatif, fiscal et financier. La réalisation la plus significative pour les SCOP réside dans la création (juin 1983) de l'Institut de développement de l'économie sociale, IDES, outil d'intermédiation financière spécifique collectant des fonds de l'Etat, des institutions et des banques de l'économie sociale pour accorder des prêts et des garanties et effectuer des dotations participatives. L'émission de titres participatifs spécifiques permettant un appel à l'épargne complète le dispositif. D'autres pistes sont explorées : création de sociétés d'investissement et de fonds commun de placement, système de caution mutuelle ...

Une amélioration sensible des capacités de financement de nombreuses SCOP peut en être attendue, mais l'émission de titres participatifs comme l'octroi de prêts reste sélective car elle demande une assise financière préalablement affirmée.

Les petites coopératives en création doivent davantage compter sur des appuis ponctuels ou indirects - accrus il est vrai - tels que : dispositifs de subvention à la création d'emplois - comme les emplois d'initiative locale particulièrement ouverts à l'économie sociale -, assistance technique soutenue par les pouvoirs publics à travers divers réseaux tel celui des boutiques de gestion ; ou encore sous des formes diverses, largement dépendantes des orientations politiques et des dynamiques locales, sur les soutiens à la création d'activités et d'emplois que les collectivités locales sont amenées à développer avec la responsabilité économique accrue que leur donne la réforme de la décentralisation intervenue en 1982.

2.3.2. Coopératives et syndicats

Le problème de l'emploi pousse à l'évidence le mouvement coopératif et les organisations syndicales à une reconnaissance mutuelle. Les principales centrales ouvrières expriment une identité de vue sur l'intérêt de la coopération comme lieu d'exercice d'une vie démocratique dans l'entreprise et réaffirment le rôle du syndicat comme moyen d'expression, de revendication

et de négociation, facteur de progression de la démocratie en son sein. Des différences sensibles d'analyse apparaissent toutefois (1).

Pour la CGT, la complémentarité du syndicalisme et de la coopération se situe dans l'enjeu spécifique de la transformation sociale qui s'opère dans la crise. Sur le fond de pensée et d'action "être partie prenante d'une alternative à la crise", les deux mouvements "peuvent ne pas se trouver dans une position antagonique de classe", à condition que le mouvement coopératif se définisse plus franchement comme une force politique autonome du CNPF (patronat), capable de définir une pensée et une pratique sur les questions de stratégie et de choix industriel. La convergence des deux mouvements reviendrait à réaliser l'alliance du micro et du macro.

Au sein de l'entreprise coopérative, une nette séparation des pouvoirs entre direction, conseil d'administration et représentants du personnel doit permettre à chacun de jouer son rôle.

Sur le terrain des créations de coopératives, la CGT est la seule centrale à avoir adopté une politique clairement définie : elle a mis sur pieds ses propres moyens d'intervention pour le redémarrage d'entreprises défailtantes, la CG SCOP n'intervenant le plus souvent qu'après "mise en orbite".

Pour la CFDT, les adaptations que la crise actuelle rend nécessaires concernent tout autant le syndicalisme que la coopération. Compte tenu des mutations qui touchent ce dernier (s'écarter du modèle culturel du syndicalisme industriel, construire un syndicalisme pluraliste, réhabiliter l'entreprise et prendre sa part dans la modernisation de celle-ci ...), la centrale affirme la nécessité d'élargir le caractère novateur des SCOP et définit les bases d'une collaboration : faire progresser la démocratie, en faisant vivre dans les SCOP les droits nouveaux des travailleurs (droit d'expression ... défini par les lois Auroux de 1982) et, là, le syndicat a un rôle à jouer ; ouvrir largement le mouvement coopératif aux "nouveaux entrepreneurs" qui réhabilitent l'entreprise et veulent "entreprendre autrement" - l'économie sociale ne doit pas rester fermée. Dès lors, la lutte pour l'emploi et "l'avenir des SCOP se trouve(nt) d'abord dans la création de nouvelles SCOP se lançant dans de nouveaux produits ou de nouveaux services, dans la poursuite d'entreprises sans successeur (...), dans le développement des coopératives existantes" plutôt que dans les réanimations d'entreprises.

La CGT-FO, quant à elle, souligne la complémentarité des rôles des deux mouvements dans l'émancipation des travailleurs, et leur caractère réformiste commun. Elle affirme une position "réaliste" de "respect mutuel" : un rôle classique de défense et d'amélioration de la situation des salariés par le syndicat, tenant compte des particularismes du mouvement coopératif et de la diversité des situations rencontrées, sans pour autant déroger au droit commun. Dans une perspective plus globale, il faut éviter à ses yeux l'écueil d'une représentation de la coopération, et plus largement de l'économie sociale, comme voie de sortie de crise qui les amènerait à terme à être considérées comme un mythe ou un échec.

(1) Pour un développement des éléments qui suivent, voir notamment Revue de l'économie sociale, op. cit., pp. 153-178 ; les citations en sont issues.

Seule la CGT a adopté une politique volontariste vis-à-vis des SCOP comme outil de maintien de l'emploi (1). Mais si les pratiques des différents syndicats varient sur le terrain, elles rencontrent cependant des problèmes similaires de définition de leur rôle dans l'entreprise coopérative (voir infra, la partie relations industrielles).

3. - FORMES D'EMPLOI DANS LES SCOP

3-1. COOPERATIVES ET COOPERATEURS

Conformément à ses origines historiques, la figure dominante du coopérateur fut longtemps celle d'un ouvrier urbain, masculin, qualifié, attaché à la maîtrise et à la qualité de son travail. La SCOP naissait de l'union de ces ouvriers pour résister à la dépossession et à la déqualification que signifiaient pour eux la division capitaliste du travail et l'extension du salariat. La coopération a trouvé un terrain privilégié à la fois dans des secteurs où prédominaient l'entreprise individuelle et la faible syndicalisation et dans les secteurs où l'anarcho-syndicalisme a alimenté les luttes ouvrières. Les travailleurs y reproduisaient des traits caractéristiques définis par Claude Vienney (2) comme : un rapport entre qualification professionnelle et capital favorable à la qualification, entre conditions de production et de commercialisation favorable à la production, une dynamique privilégiant la formation professionnelle par rapport aux investissements déqualifiants.

Ces professionnels qualifiés - élite ouvrière - sont toujours présents dans le mouvement coopératif même si leur condition s'est transformée devant les changements techniques et les mouvements de concentration qui ont touché leurs activités, ou si, dans le mouvement de croissance de leur unité de production, ils se sont adjoints des salariés non qualifiés, générant par là une diversification des coopérateurs au sein même des SCOP existantes. Mais il y a à la fois permanence et renouvellement des professionnels : de nouveaux groupements de travailleurs qualifiés reproduisent les mêmes caractéristiques, dans des métiers traditionnels ou dans de nouvelles activités qui se développent aussi dans le champ des services intellectuels.

Parallèlement, le mouvement récent de création de SCOP a débordé ce monde restreint des travailleurs très qualifiés, manuels ou intellectuels, pour s'ouvrir à d'autres catégories : travailleurs moins qualifiés mais aussi

(1) Mais comme le soulignait le rapport d'activité du Conseil national de la CG SCOP en 1984, un rapprochement des points de vue s'est opéré avec la Centrale "sur la nécessité d'une plus grande rigueur dans les conditions du redémarrage (...) pour éviter des sinistres qui affectent également l'image de l'organisation syndicale et celle de la coopération ouvrière".

(2) Socio-économie des organisations coopératives, op.cit.

patrons et cadres désireux de maintenir leur outil de travail ou leur emploi, de "vivre et travailler au pays", populations rejetées du marché du travail qui cherchent à échapper à la précarité et à l'assistance, décideurs et animateurs locaux préoccupés par la disparition d'activités et d'emplois dans leurs micro-régions ...

3.1.1. Différentes formes d'initiatives

Selon Danièle Demoustier, on peut ainsi relever parmi les créations de SCOP "six formes d'initiatives issues de groupes différents" (1). Outre les travailleurs manuels qualifiés qui marquent encore fortement l'image du mouvement coopératif :

- "Des travailleurs "intellectuels" coopèrent" : mouvement apparu depuis les années 60, amplifié par l'accroissement du chômage des diplômés et la loi de 1978, où l'on retrouve techniciens et diplômés du supérieur, la plupart motivés par un fonctionnement collectif égalitaire.
- "Des chômeurs créent collectivement leurs emplois" : le besoin de créer son emploi assorti le plus souvent d'une volonté de mieux maîtriser son activité productive et d'échapper à l'autorité d'un patron touche diverses catégories de population. C'est dans ce cas de figure que l'on trouve une frange de travailleurs sans qualification et sans capital relevant du "marché secondaire" du travail : notamment jeunes et femmes, français ou immigrés, en difficulté d'insertion sociale et professionnelle, issus des milieux les plus marginalisés. On peut emprunter à Denise Barbeyer (2) cette définition par la négative : "le portrait-robot du "normal" (...) c'est un homme, adulte, français, blanc, bien constitué, pourvu d'un emploi stable dans une entreprise repérable, à revenus identifiables, n'ayant jamais eu de démêlés avec la police. Au marginal, il manque, en permanence ou non, un ou plusieurs de ces traits".

Ces structures, qui adoptent aussi d'autres formes juridiques que la SCOP, nécessitent généralement l'appui des pouvoirs publics et du mouvement associatif. Et quand ce ne sont pas des regroupements spontanés, on retrouve souvent à leur origine des travailleurs sociaux ou des militants créant alors des structures "pour" des travailleurs marginalisés.

(1) Danièle Demoustier, Les coopératives de production, Paris, La Découverte, 1984, 127 p. . Ce qui suit reprend les catégories qu'elle présente pp. 47-58.

(2) Denise Barbeyer, Contribution de la SCOP à l'insertion des travailleurs marginalisés, non publié, 1984, 56 p. et annexes.

- "Des ouvriers reprennent ensemble leur outil de travail" : les salariés sont alors confrontés non plus individuellement à la perte de leur emploi mais collectivement à la perte de leur outil de travail. Ces collectifs déjà organisés recouvrent une hiérarchie et une structuration en catégories socio-professionnelles "classique", dont une proportion non négligeable d'O.S.. L'attitude des syndicats y joue un rôle déterminant. Outre les problèmes financiers, toute la difficulté réside dans le passage d'une motivation pour la SCOP "solution de la dernière chance" à un processus de réflexion collective sur la nouvelle entreprise qui parvienne à prolonger le dynamisme de la lutte.
- "Des patrons et des cadres prennent eux-mêmes l'initiative" : patrons confrontés à une absence de successeur ou d'acheteur, cadres défendant leur entreprise menacée ou la quittant par désaccord avec les actionnaires ou encore pour accéder à de nouvelles responsabilités. Leurs motivations économiques sont souvent mêlées d'aspirations sociales - patronat social ou de tradition humaniste notamment - ou du moins de la conviction que la "participation" des salariés est un facteur de performance économique. Mais dans ces coopératives octroyées, le bouleversement opéré sur le plan juridique trouve sa limite principale dans la reproduction de la division technique et sociale du travail.
- "Des organismes locaux promoteurs de la coopérative" : amenés à intervenir fréquemment dans les différents scénarios de création de SCOP, interpellés par le processus de la décentralisation, certains d'entre eux (collectivités territoriales, comités d'expansion économique, missions locales pour l'insertion des jeunes, associations de développement ...) adoptent une attitude plus volontariste vis-à-vis de la mise en valeur des ressources locales et du maintien ou de la création d'emploi. Il s'agit plus ici de démarche de développement local largement relayées par des "élites techniciennes" pour lesquelles la coopération de production, et plus largement l'économie sociale, apparaît comme l'une des voies possibles parmi d'autres.

A noter, enfin, que sur les caractéristiques des salariés de SCOP en terme de démographie comme en terme de qualification, peu de données statistiques sont disponibles. D'après les chiffres fournis par la confédération, on sait que près de 50 % des salariés avaient en 1983 moins de 35 ans et que les femmes, qui ne représentent que 20 % du total, sont globalement plus jeunes (1). Quant aux dirigeants élus des SCOP (les administrateurs), 51 % avaient moins de 40 ans (âge moyen 40,6), ce qui marque un certain rajeunissement par rapport à l'année 1980 : ils étaient alors 48 % (âge moyen 42,3) (2).

(1) Source : Les SCOP à mi-décembre 1984, CG SCOP. La consolidation générale des données démographiques 1983 portait sur 816 sociétés : sur les effectifs employés depuis plus d'un an, 47 % avaient moins de 35 ans, 45 % des hommes et 56 % des femmes ; 62 % avaient moins de 40 ans, 60 % des hommes, 68 % des femmes.

(2) Source : Les SCOP à mi-décembre 1981.

3.1.2. Femmes et coopératives

Compte tenu de ses origines historiques et des secteurs dans lesquels il s'est prioritairement implanté, le mouvement coopératif de production est dans son ensemble relativement féminisé.

A l'image de son environnement, le secteur coopératif traditionnel emploie des femmes :

- dans les industries traditionnellement utilisatrices de main d'oeuvre féminine peu qualifiée, notamment dans le textile et la confection, dans certaines activités du travail des métaux et de l'électronique ;
- et, toutes activités confondues, à des postes tertiaires habituellement considérés comme féminins ; le secrétariat et la comptabilité, par exemple.

Il faut signaler, toutefois, que l'emploi coopératif s'est féminisé durant ces dix dernières années (1) sous l'effet, principalement, de réanimations d'entreprises défailtantes sous forme coopérative, et de l'évolution générale du marché du travail et des technologies - un secteur comme l'imprimerie s'est ouvert au travail des femmes avec l'introduction de la photocomposition.

Quant aux initiatives collectives de création d'entreprises coopératives par les femmes, elles ne sont pas légion. Les collectifs qui se créent préfèrent d'ailleurs souvent à la coopérative un statut juridique plus souple. De plus, ils ne sont pas soutenus par des structures d'appui spécifiques.

Reprenant les conclusions d'une étude menée par le Centre de Recherche sur les femmes européennes, on peut affirmer qu'en France si le mouvement féministe a analysé la position des femmes sur le marché de l'emploi et essayé la réalisation d'initiatives comprenant des relations de travail souples à l'intérieur du mouvement lui-même, il n'a pas pu, jusqu'à présent, les replacer dans un contexte plus large. Le mouvement ne s'est pas non plus intéressé à la direction d'entreprises pouvant être compétitives sur le marché. Elles ne se considèrent pas comme appartenant à d'autres mouvements, tel que le mouvement coopératif. Le plus souvent, les femmes choisissent la forme d'une société à responsabilité limitée (S.A.R.L.) et ont un système d'auto-gestion interne collective, ou bien elles forment une association dans l'esprit de la Loi de 1901. (2)

De fait, hormis quelques exceptions, les collectifs de femmes se sont plutôt implantés dans des secteurs "féministes" (librairie, vidéo, cafés, restaurants ...) et, plus récemment, dans des activités qui valorisent et professionnalisent des savoir-faire relevant d'un rôle traditionnellement féminin (confection artisanale, services d'assistance particulièrement auprès des jeunes enfants ou de personnes âgées ...).

(1) En l'absence de données statistiques et d'étude en la matière, on ne peut préciser dans quelle proportion.

(2) Nouveaux types d'initiatives pour l'emploi concernant spécialement les femmes, Commission des Communautés Européennes, Luxembourg, 1984, p. 2.3.

3.1.3. La permanence de certaines valeurs

Au total, si les origines sociales des coopérateurs se sont fortement diversifiées, la permanence d'une référence aux valeurs de la petite bourgeoisie n'est pas à exclure. D. Barbeyer relève comment dès 1848 l'élite associationniste ouvrière se montrait proche par ses idées et ses besoins de la moyenne bourgeoisie républicaine avec laquelle elle établit une alliance "ni solide ni durable, mais (qui) révèle l'indétermination politique de la petite "bourgeoisie laborieuse" (1) pénétrée par le christianisme social et la franc-maçonnerie. Dans la fin des années 1970 et le début des années 1980, une majorité de "nouveaux entrepreneurs" - ceux, coopérateurs ou non, dont la revue *Autrement* s'est fait l'écho - est "issue de classes moyennes et possède un bagage intellectuel et technique au-dessus de la moyenne" (2). Une évaluation portant sur les subventions accordées au titre des emplois d'utilité collective montre également que 59 % des bénéficiaires parmi les 2.500 premiers emplois créés ont un niveau égal ou supérieur au baccalauréat (contre 15 % pour l'ensemble de la population active) (3). Autre piste enfin, le résultat d'une enquête menée par le Centre de Communication Avancée et le quotidien *Le Matin*. Seraient favorables aux coopératives et aux mutuelles, les "recentrés" définis comme suit : "Les recentrés digèrent les discours des minorités agissantes (...). Ceux-là retrouvent les valeurs de la petite bourgeoisie du 19ème siècle. Ils rêvent d'une société égalitaire, protectrice, conviviale. Ils sont socialistes version chrétien de gauche, retrouvent le foyer, la famille élargie, la vie de famille élargie aux copains (...). Leurs tendances micro-sociales, vaguement corporatistes, les amènent à soutenir tout ce qui peut s'apparenter au monde coopératif ou mutualiste". (4).

La référence à ce courant de "sensibilité coopérative" ne doit pas cependant occulter la diversité des populations concernées par la coopération de production dans la mesure où cette dernière naît essentiellement en réponse à des besoins issus de situations de rupture sur le marché du travail - que ceux-ci s'expriment en termes de qualification, d'autonomie ... ou tout simplement d'emploi.

(1) D. Barbeyer, SCOP et Autogestion, Thèse 3ème cycle, PARIS VIII, 1983, 371 p., p. 73.

(2) B. Eme, Y. Laplume, "Les nouveaux entrepreneurs en France", Futuribles, 49, 1981.

(3) J. Gaudin, Initiatives locales et création d'emplois, Paris, Documentations Française, 1982, 126 p.

(4) Le Matin Magazine du 30.04.82, cité par Pia Imbs, Utopies et réalités des SCOP dans la Crise, mémoire DEA, Paris I, sept. 1984, 149 p., p. 66-67.

3-2. QUALIFICATION ET FORMATION

En matière de qualification, on ne peut qu'approcher le phénomène à travers plusieurs constats.

- Au plan global, s'il y a permanence et renouvellement des qualifications professionnelles, la diversification des secteurs d'activités des SCOP se répercute sur les qualifications selon un double processus en ciseaux :
 - augmentation de la part des qualifications les plus faibles sous l'effet des reprises et mutations d'entreprises et des créations de petites SCOP de services matériels ;
 - et, à l'autre extrême, accroissement de la part des qualifications très élevées sous l'effet des coopératives de services intellectuels.

A partir d'une enquête sur l'emploi des cadres dans l'économie sociale, Jocelyne Gaudin remarque que, entre 1974 et 1980, dans les SCOP "la forte progression du taux d'encadrement résulte moins d'une prise de conscience de la faiblesse de l'encadrement dans le secteur et, donc, d'embauches massives que de la création d'un certain nombre de sociétés de services (études, conseils ...) composées majoritairement, si ce n'est exclusivement, de cadres" (1).

- Au niveau de l'entreprise coopérative, la question des qualifications ne renvoie pas seulement à celle de son secteur d'activité et à l'évolution de celui-ci, mais aussi à celle du stade de développement et de la taille atteinte par la SCOP.

Comme pour les autres formes d'entreprises, le facteur taille favorise l'apparition de modes d'organisation qui ont un effet déqualifiant sur le travail des salariés ; il en est de même de la plupart des évolutions techniques qui affectent les secteurs traditionnels.

A l'inverse, les phases de démarrage et de croissance soutenue sont, sans doute plus que dans les autres entreprises, favorables à la promotion des travailleurs, tout au moins d'une partie d'entre eux. Les fondateurs de SCOP tendent à former progressivement un groupe hiérarchiquement dominant et la qualité de sociétaire se rattache à des possibilités de promotion plus ouvertes.

La promotion professionnelle et humaine des membres reste un principe profondément ancré dans le mouvement coopératif, en cohérence avec la vocation affirmée des SCOP de mettre le capital au service du travail.

(1) Jocelyne Gaudin, L'économie sociale, spécificités et perspectives d'emploi des cadres, Paris, Centre de recherche travail et Société, janvier 1982, 137 p., pp. 47-48.

3.2.1. La place de la formation dans le mouvement

Tant que les SCOP touchaient majoritairement des activités de métier reposant sur des groupes de producteurs assez homogènes, n'exigeant pas une division du travail très poussée, l'apprentissage professionnel et la formation "sur le tas", y compris pour les fonctions commerciales et gestionnaires, constituaient la pierre angulaire de cette promotion. Une bonne partie des actuels dirigeants de SCOP est issue de cette élite ouvrière autodidacte s'appuyant sur l'expérience directe.

Dès 1917, cependant, la SCOP AOIP (Association des ouvriers en instrument de précision) ouvrait une école professionnelle tandis que dans les années 20, les coopératives du bâtiment offraient des cours du soir de perfectionnement et de promotion sociale. Après la deuxième guerre mondiale, les communautés de travail - qui rejoindront ensuite les SCOP - réaffirmaient un ambitieux projet culturel : "la poursuite d'un but éducatif, c'est-à-dire tendre réellement à l'épanouissement humain complet des membres de la Communauté" (1). La formation générale fut introduite sur les lieux de travail avant d'être progressivement abandonnée au profit d'une formation gestionnaire et professionnelle. L'Entente Communautaire, organisme fédérateur des communautés de travail, tenta ensuite plusieurs expériences : formation sur les rouages internes et l'insertion économique et sociale des communautés fondée sur l'enseignement mutuel, bilans institutionnels à partir de l'analyse collective des problèmes ...

C'est en 1961, dix ans avant la loi sur la formation permanente, que la CG SCOP, reconnaissant que la formation "sur le tas" ne suffisait plus, s'est dotée d'un service de formation pour mobiliser les coopérateurs, former des administrateurs responsables, des gestionnaires compétents... Puis, en dépit des résolutions répétées des Congrès, "l'application de la loi sur la formation continue de 1971, saluée avec un certain enthousiasme par des coopérateurs qui y voient "la deuxième chance de la coopération de production", n'a pas répondu à une telle espérance. Pressentie comme une nouvelle contrainte par certaines SCOP, le budget obligatoirement consacré à la formation a été entièrement consacré à la formation technique dans d'autres (...). Les SCOP ont elles-mêmes été beaucoup plus préoccupées, pendant cette période, d'adaptation technologique, de recherche de marchés que d'association des travailleurs ou de formation des administrateurs" (2). Depuis les années 80, devant les nouveaux problèmes posés par l'extension de mouvement, la CG SCOP a donné - avec un appui des pouvoirs publics - une nouvelle impulsion à la formation coopérative et gestionnaire, tout en mettant un accent particulier sur la formation des dirigeants

Mais ce faisant, elle reproduisait le clivage qui depuis 1971 s'était opéré entre formation professionnelle et formation coopérative, écartant la possibilité de mettre en oeuvre une politique spécifique de formation professionnelle dans les SCOP. Ce désinvestissement du champ de la formation

(1) Charte des Communautés de travail.

(2) Danièle Demoustier, Les Coopératives ouvrières de production en France : pratique économique, pratique éducative, Grenoble, thèse de doctorat de 3ème cycle, décembre 1979, 347 p.

professionnelle par le mouvement coopératif aboutit "en quelque sorte (à) nier les implications collectives de la promotion professionnelle et les processus d'appropriation dont tout collectif de travail est maître" (1).

3.2.2. La place de la formation dans les SCOP

Ces constats généraux masquent toutefois une diversité de pratiques que des monographies de SCOP éclairent. Si la formation est souvent considérée comme une fonction souhaitable mais coûteuse et qu'il faut rentabiliser, il est dans la vie des SCOP des "moments" privilégiés pour la formation :

- Le démarrage de l'entreprise où professionnellement les fonctions ne sont pas encore figées et où existe un souci de former les fondateurs à la coopération. Plus largement, dans les phases d'expansion rapides, la préférence pour la promotion interne peut se conjuguer avec des possibilités réelles de promotion, et la nécessité d'intégrer de nouveaux salariés pousse à un regain de formation coopérative. Certaines SCOP imposent d'ailleurs une formation coopérative à tout nouvel embauché.
- Les "situations de crise" qui touchent une catégorie professionnelle et/ou menacent l'ensemble de la SCOP : face à des changements techniques d'ampleur, dans l'imprimerie par exemple, un gros effort de conversion est déployé pour protéger l'emploi des membres ; quand la cohésion de la SCOP est menacée par la désaffection d'une partie de ses membres, la formation peut appuyer l'instauration d'un processus plus participatif.

En dehors de ces "moments", quand la structure se stabilise, la tendance dominante est à la formation technique en fonction des besoins imposés par les transformations de la branche et de l'entreprise. Les programmes suivis se spécialisent. La formation coopérative elle-même est plus souvent axée sur la compréhension des comptes et des structures que sur la réflexion et la discussion d'objectifs. Les SCOP qui se situent dans des métiers nouveaux, en évolution rapide, offrent cependant des possibilités de formation et de progression rapide des qualifications car le métier, autant que le projet des coopérateurs, implique un processus d'éducation permanente et un fonctionnement reposant sur l'apprentissage mutuel.

3.2.3. Pratiques de formation

Les pratiques mises en oeuvre en matière de formation sont en effet difficilement séparables des formes d'organisation du travail et de pouvoir au sein des SCOP.

(1) J.F. Marchat, "Proposition d'intervention pour une politique spécifique de formation professionnelle dans les SCOP" in Cicra, Interactions économiques et sociales..., op. cit., p. 168, Le concept d'appropriation du travail renvoie ici à la volonté du salarié de "se créer une identité" en se définissant comme "acteur autonome", et à la conquête identitaire qui s'effectue par "identification collective à l'outil de production, liant ainsi la Communauté" ; développé par Ph. Bernoux, Un travail à soi, Ed. Privat, 1981, 255 p.

Ainsi les procédures d'élaboration de plans de formation sont-elles plus ou moins participatives et complexes : décision collective sur la base des demandes individuelles et des besoins de l'entreprise ; organisation d'un vaste programme de consultation et de décisions en chaîne ; élaboration par le C.A. ou la direction discutée avec un petit nombre d'interlocuteurs (comité d'entreprise, par exemple) ou simplement ratifiée par ceux-ci.

Les enveloppes financières consacrées à la formation sont également variables. Si de nombreuses SCOP se contentent du minimum légal, d'autres y consacrent des sommes importantes à certains moments de leur histoire. Mais toute la formation n'est pas quantifiable ; cela dépend aussi des modalités adoptées pour celle-ci.

La plupart des SCOP s'appuient sur des organismes extérieurs pour répondre à leurs besoins : structures du mouvement pour la formation coopérative (avec différents niveaux selon qu'elle concerne de nouveaux coopérateurs ou des administrateurs) et pour la formation des dirigeants (gestion, commercial ...), organismes du marché, écoles professionnelles, syndicales ... pour la formation technique.

Moins répandues, des formes d'expérimentation coexistent avec ces modalités classiques. Dans les petits collectifs de travail qui intègrent dans leurs choix une réflexion sur un autre mode de travail moins parcellisé et hiérarchisé, le découplage des tâches et des fonctions permet des formes d'apprentissage mutuel qui sont complétées selon les besoins par de la formation externe. Elles s'appuient sur des procédures de tutorat, les anciens encadrant les nouveaux, sur les relations avec les clients et avec d'autres coopératives (échanges de stagiaires, par exemple), sur la rotation de certaines activités et responsabilités, sur l'ouverture des structures de décision ...

Une étude menée par l'Aldea sur 50 "entreprises alternatives" (1) rejoint ces conclusions : "Il est à constater que formellement l'entreprise alternative distribue peu de formation : la formation technique est bien souvent un apprentissage sur le tas lié au processus de production directe. La formation générale est souvent absente, et l'envoi des participants à des modules de formation le plus souvent inexistant. C'est ailleurs qu'il faut chercher l'originalité de l'alternative quant à la formation (...) plus au niveau d'un changement de mentalité" (2).

Dans des collectifs importants soumis à des normes classiques d'organisation du travail, certains dirigeants (CA et/ou direction) cherchent à stimuler la participation des travailleurs en allant au-delà des actions de formation coopérative extérieures. Certaines SCOP ont ainsi cherché à expérimenter des formes d'animation différentes telles que la formation d'informateurs ou d'animateurs internes, sans grand succès. D'autres adoptent des méthodes qui s'apparentent à celles d'un management moderniste : petits groupes d'expression ou modules de formation sur des problèmes assez directement liés au vécu quotidien du travail (conditions de travail, vie d'équipe, gestion de la production ...)

(1) ALDEA, L'économie alternative, une réponse à la crise?, Paris, juillet 1984, 241 p.

Sur les 50 entreprises, la moitié a un statut d'association 1901 ; les autres se répartissent en : 2 sociétés anonymes, 3 sociétés à responsabilité limitée, 3 artisans-commerçants, 14 SCOP, 3 coopératives de consommation.

(2) Ibid., pp. 89-90.

Reste que dans ces entreprises consolidées d'une part, les possibilités de promotion interne ne sont pas illimitées compte tenu de la stabilité des salariés ; d'autre part, si l'idéal reste le recours à la promotion interne, le recrutement de cadres gagne du terrain en particulier dans les emplois les plus récents tels que l'informatique ou les postes les plus directement fonctions du niveau de l'activité, production et commercial (1).

3-3. RELATIONS CONTRACTUELLES

Relevant à la fois du droit des sociétés commerciales, du statut général de la coopération et d'une législation spécifique, les SCOP sont tenues de respecter différentes dispositions législatives.

3.3.1. Sociétariat et Salariat.

En matière de droit du travail en particulier, elles sont soumises aux mêmes règles que les autres entreprises. Toutefois, la loi de 1978 a reconnu la spécificité des SCOP en liant plus précisément le contrat de travail et le contrat d'association. Si les SCOP peuvent employer des personnes qui n'ont pas qualité d'associé et inversement admettre comme associé des personnes physiques ou morales non employées, la démission du sociétariat entraîne la rupture du contrat de travail.

La loi tentait parallèlement d'encourager l'accès au sociétariat en offrant aux SCOP le choix entre trois modes d'accès plus ou moins contraignants :

- la candidature obligatoire après une période d'essai mentionnée dans le contrat de travail, le refus étant synonyme de démission du salarié ;
- la candidature libre donnant droit à l'accès automatique ;
- la candidature soumise à l'A.G. des sociétaires.

La liaison entre salariat et association est donc tout à fait variable ; mais, stimulé par ces incitations législatives et coopératives -émanant du mouvement-, le taux moyen de sociétariat qui recouvre de grandes disparités selon l'activité, la taille et la date de création, est passé de 32 % en 1976 à 60 % en 1984, mettant ainsi un frein à une tendance réelle à la division du collectif de travail entre un "patronat collectif" susceptible de se fermer et de s'accorder certains privilèges et un groupe de salariés démunis de tout pouvoir.

Dans la période de crise économique actuelle, les avantages du sociétariat sont moins liés à des rentrées financières - la part des résultats affectée au travail étant dans de nombreuses SCOP distribuée à l'ensemble des salariés - qu'à une sécurité de l'emploi et à des possibilités de promo-

(1) cf. J. Gaudin, op.cit. p. 87.

tion supérieures. Mais cette différence peut n'être que temporaire, compte tenu des dispositions statutaires adoptées pour le sociétariat.

3.3.2. Sociétariat et politique d'emploi.

Outre ce cadre général, les facteurs extérieurs aux SCOP pèsent lourdement sur les politiques d'emploi menées : les coopératives n'échappent pas à leur environnement et encore moins aux pratiques en vigueur dans leur secteur d'activité. Ainsi dans le bâtiment, traditionnellement caractérisé par une forte mobilité de la main-d'oeuvre, une faible représentation syndicale et une proportion importante de travailleurs immigrés, la mobilité et la précarité de statut d'un volant de la main-d'oeuvre (1) s'opposent aux qualités liées au sociétariat, mais elles sont en même temps considérablement contenues par le statut même de la société et par le consensus qui s'établit autour de la protection de l'emploi. Et si la proportion de sociétaires reste dans le secteur l'une des plus faibles, elle a fortement progressé en peu d'années : 49 % pour l'ensemble bâtiment - activités connexes, 42 % pour le seul gros-oeuvre en 1984, mais respectivement 39 % et 33 % en 1981.

Les SCOP répercutent partiellement les pratiques du marché sur lequel elles opèrent. Mais dans une conjoncture de développement des formes précaires d'emploi, la défense d'emplois susceptibles de procurer un revenu stable est mieux assurée par le statut coopératif ; ceci pour une proportion croissante des salariés de SCOP (progression du sociétariat).

Sous cet aspect des formes d'emploi, l'hypothèse d'un dualisme entre secteur coopératif et non coopératif ne paraît pas pouvoir être retenue dès lors que les SCOP ont dépassé une phase de démarrage lourde d'incertitudes.

3-4. TROISIEME SECTEUR, SCOP ET FORMES D'EMPLOI

Le problème se pose différemment dans les autres formes d'entreprise qui, débordant le champ coopératif, s'inscrivent dans la réalité sociale en tant que réalisation d'une "alternative", renvoyant plus ou moins à l'idée de "troisième secteur" (voir introduction).

La comparaison est difficile compte tenu du peu d'informations disponibles et de leur dispersion. Celles que fournit l'étude de l'ALDEA (2) - seule étude un peu systématique menée sur le terrain - appellent une remarque préalable. Le champ défini comme "alternatif" recouvre des "lieux de production de valeur d'échange" cherchant à "adapter ou à créer des nouvelles normes", s'attachant au "développement des relations humaines et à la promotion de l'utilité sociale de l'activité". On peut supposer que, parmi ces expériences, certaines mettent plutôt l'accent sur l'utilité sociale de l'activité - c'est aussi le cas des entreprises intermédiaires et de cer-

(1) Les modes de gestion de la main-d'oeuvre axés sur la souplesse des coûts de la force de travail sont une constante du secteur.

(2) ALDEA, op. cit., les citations sont extraites de l'introduction, p. 24.

taines des structures qualifiées par D. Barbeyer de "structures de production pour des travailleurs marginalisés" (1) - tout en présentant des éléments de fonctionnement collectif ; d'autres donnent la priorité au caractère auto-gestionnaire de l'expérience productive. Il y a de fortes probabilités que les SCOP se retrouvent en majorité parmi ces dernières, le choix du statut offrant une traduction concrète de cette priorité.

Autre réserve liée au statut SCOP, celui-ci suppose une certaine assise de l'activité et des acteurs (notamment le minimum légal de quatre salariés) et une rigidité de fonctionnement qui pousse à l'adoption d'une démarche entrepreneuriale et d'une rationalité comptable "classique", limite l'accès des petits groupes à cette forme d'entreprise et s'oppose à une forte mobilité des salariés.

Il existe ainsi toute une série d'éléments qui, nous semble-t-il, "tient" les SCOP vers des formes d'emploi qui se démarquent peu du modèle dominant - compte tenu toutefois de la spécificité que la propriété coopérative des moyens de production donne au rapport salarial -, ce qui n'exclut pas l'existence marginale ou éphémère de SCOP qui relèvent de formes plus radicalement communautaires, rompant avec cette logique et expérimentant d'"autres" règles de gestion.

Aussi, en dehors de toute analyse plus fine en terme de statut, il faut considérer avec prudence les conclusions apportées par l'Aldea qui, relevant l'étroite imbrication du marchand et du non-marchand dans les "entreprises alternatives", mettent l'accent sur une logique de "l'économie du don et de l'échange non marchand" (2) pour expliquer la "performance" des "entreprises alternatives".

"Ce sont d'autres ressorts que ceux de l'homo economicus qui rendent possible le développement de ces entreprises" (3) constate l'Aldea, notamment en matière de salaires. Mais là, "il s'agit pour l'essentiel des entreprises de type "orthogénique" dont la particularité est précisément de prendre en compte la vie de l'homme dans son intégralité et non seulement au travail ... Ce registre de l'économie du don se manifeste aussi par l'importance financière pour l'entreprise de l'environnement convivial" (4) (prêts ou dons pour former le capital de départ ou pour passer un cap difficile).

(1) D. Barbeyer, op.cit.. Par "entreprise intermédiaire" on désigne des entreprises qui ajoutent à leur activité productive une mission d'insertion sociale et professionnelle de publics marginalisés qu'elles emploient pendant une durée limitée. L'emploi dans ces entreprises est considéré comme une étape qui est qualifiée d'"insertion par l'économie". Démarches initiées par des travailleurs sociaux, ces entreprises jouissent à présent d'un soutien accru des pouvoirs publics sous la forme d'une subvention spécifique (entrant en application à partir de juillet 1985).

(2) Aldea, op.cit., p. 115.

(3) Ibid., p. 115.

(4) Ibid. p. 116. Le terme d'"orthogénique" renvoie à une typologie empruntée à H. Desroches sur les approches alternatives en matière de gestion : l'approche "orthogénique" correspond à un retour à l'autosubsistance et à l'économie non marchande ; l'approche "initiatique" renvoie à l'économie sociale et à des critères courants de rationalité économique, de nouvelles règles de gestion.

Sans autre précision sur les formes d'emploi dans ces entreprises, on ne peut conclure qu'à une étroite imbrication de travail bénévole et salarié, d'"auto-exploitation" et de temps choisi, d'apport productif et d'avantages conviviaux"...

Un autre éclairage partiel est fourni par les études menées sur l'emploi dans les associations - mais là encore il faut être très circonspect car celles-ci recouvrent des réalités très diversifiées et des fonctionnements qui s'ils sont loin de la norme de l'entreprise traditionnelle ne rapprochent pas nécessairement de formes autogestionnaires. Elles montrent que, d'une façon générale, les formes d'emploi se démarquent nettement du modèle salarial dominant. E. Marchal souligne ainsi que "la plupart, voire la totalité, des emplois du secteur associatif peuvent être considérées comme des formes particulières d'emploi (...) qui apparaissent intermédiaire entre le travail salarié et le travail non-marchand" (1).

Quant aux entreprises créées "pour" des marginalisés qu'étudie D. Barbey (2), elles répondent à un besoin qui est à la fois d'emploi et de validation sociale ; elles opposent une garantie collective par l'association à des situations précaires. Pour l'essentiel les emplois qu'elles offrent sont des emplois provisoires conçus comme un relais pour l'insertion (ou ré-insertion) sur le marché du travail.

Certaines ont tenté, avec difficulté, d'aller plus loin : cherchant à "moraliser" le marché du travail temporaire pour ces exclus, en conciliant la mobilité dans les travaux, la formation et la sécurité du revenu. Ce n'est d'ailleurs pas un hasard si, en dépit des problèmes juridiques, des difficultés de fonctionnement et de réticences des instances coopératives, ces dernières ont opté pour le statut coopératif ; il correspondait mieux, aux yeux de ses promoteurs, à la recherche d'une certaine stabilité de la structure et au projet d'une insertion qui ne passe pas uniquement par l'accès à un emploi mais par l'association aux décisions de l'entreprise.

On doit constater qu'à chacun des deux statuts particulièrement privilégiés par les entreprises du "troisième secteur" - les statuts associatif et coopératif - semble être associée une tendance dominante en terme de forme d'emploi. Pour caricaturer : la norme du modèle salarial pour les SCOP ; une multiplicité de formes particulières pour les associations. Il n'est pas étonnant qu'entre les deux - et quelques autres moins répandus, sociétés commerciales, coopératives de consommation ... - le courant protéiforme de ces entreprises hésite (3), surtout s'il s'agit précisément pour elles de déplacer les clivages traditionnels entre temps de travail et temps de non travail, d'associer de nouvelles formes de travail à de nouveaux modes de consommation, d'opérer de nouveaux arbitrages entre temps libre et pouvoir d'achat ...

(1) E. Marchal, L'emploi dans le secteur associatif, du salariat permanent au bénévolat, Paris, Centre d'Etudes de l'Emploi, dossier de recherche n° 11, déc. 1984, 113 p.

(2) D. Barbey, Contribution de la SCOP à l'insertion..., op.cit.

(3) Il semble bien que la discussion sur l'invention de nouvelles formes juridiques plus appropriées, dont le relais fut pris par l'officielle Délégation Interministérielle à l'Economie Sociale, ait tourné court. Elle cherchait notamment à élaborer un statut de "société de travailleurs associés" et un statut de "société sans but lucratif" qui pourrait concilier l'économique et le social, deux dimensions contradictoires en droit français.

Si l'hypothèse duale ne peut être niée face à des créations d'emplois alternatifs en termes d'activité, de statut, de durée d'exercice, de précarité ..., elle est cependant toute relative face aux évolutions réelles du marché du travail (développement des formes particulières d'emploi) et du débat social sur les conditions d'emploi (problème de la flexibilité, par exemple).

4. - REVENU ET CONDITION DE TRAVAIL

4-1. LES REVENUS EN SCOP

La distribution des revenus dans une coopérative procède d'un arbitrage entre les attentes des différentes catégories de travailleurs et la capacité de l'entreprise entre le court et le long terme. La diversité est donc la règle d'autant qu'aucune disposition statutaire ni aucune orientation doctrinale ne viennent uniformiser les revenus distribués par les SCOP (si ce n'est certaines limites apportées à la distribution des excédents). Les processus d'affectation des ressources sont élaborés dans chacune en fonction de son activité, de ses performances et de son mode de fonctionnement.

4.1.1. Niveau et hiérarchie des salaires

Faire démarrer une SCOP suppose une forme de mobilisation spécifique, un effort collectif important qui n'est pas toujours, dans un premier temps, rémunéré. Mais l'"auto-exploitation" qui peut en résulter - travail gratuit, heures supplémentaires non payées ... - se heurte à des limites physiques, financières et psychologiques qui risquent d'entraîner l'éclatement du collectif. La poursuite de l'entreprise suppose à court terme l'instauration d'un montant et d'une régularité minimum de revenu, à moins que ses membres ne disposent de ressources propres et/ou d'un réseau de soutien solide. Passé ce seuil, la tendance générale dans les SCOP est à l'alignement sur les salaires de la profession et au respect des conventions collectives.

Si les SCOP ont semblé jusque dans les années soixante pouvoir procurer à leurs salariés des avantages supérieurs à ceux qu'offraient les entreprises concurrentes, les salaires moyens sont aujourd'hui sensiblement les mêmes. Leur originalité se trouve plutôt dans le resserrement de l'échelle salariale: tendance à valoriser les salaires des "productifs" et à sous-rémunérer, par rapport au marché, ceux des cadres supérieurs. Dans son enquête sur les cadres de l'économie sociale, J. Gaudin souligne pour les SCOP que "dans tous les cas (les cadres dirigeants) peuvent apparaître comme "sous-payés si l'on tient compte des responsabilités qui sont les leurs" (1). et que ce

(1) J. Gaudin, op. cit., p. 59

qui peut être "plus facilement accepté dans le cadre d'une promotion interne peut bloquer le recrutement (et le maintien dans l'entreprise) de cadres très qualifiés" (1).

Cette pression du marché du travail conduit des SCOP à déroger à leur principe initial de limitation des écarts, tout particulièrement les plus importantes dont l'échelle de salaires se rapproche de celle des entreprises concurrentes comparables. A titre indicatif, une estimation déjà ancienne (2) donnait selon la taille des entreprises les ordres de grandeur suivants : 1 à 8 dans les grandes SCOP, 1 à 6 dans les moyennes, 1 à 4 dans les petites. Il est très probable qu'en 1984, sous la poussée d'une nouvelle génération de SCOP, l'écart estimé pour les petites soit plus réduit compte tenu d'une proportion non négligeable de SCOP qui, dans une première phase, supprime totalement la hiérarchie. Une autre indication partielle est fournie par l'étude effectuée par le CICRA auprès de douze coopératives ayant cinq à dix années d'existence (3). La moitié d'entre elles présentait une échelle de salaires contenue entre les rapports 1 à 2 et 1 à 3. Pour un quart des SCOP, la hiérarchie était presque inexistante. La plupart des SCOP de ces deux groupes comptaient moins de 30 salariés. Pour un autre quart - trois entreprises comptant respectivement 30, 65 et 175 salariés -, l'échelle des salaires s'établissait entre les rapports 1 à 4 et 1 à 5.

Par ailleurs, les "reprises" d'entreprises, qui proportionnellement créent le plus d'emploi, sont souvent l'occasion d'un resserrement important de l'échelle des salaires : à Manuest, par exemple, celle-ci est passée de 1 à 15 avant sa transformation en SCOP en 1975 à un écart de 1 à 4,2 en 1983.

4.1.2. Salariés et sociétaires

Des exemples historiques ont mis en évidence les tendances d'une élite ouvrière à se constituer peu à peu en une caste de sociétaires.

A propos de l'A0IP (fondée en 1896), D. Linhart rappelle combien, dans les années quarante, ces sociétaires "qui n'étaient auparavant qu'un groupe d'ouvriers solidaires déterminés par la pureté de leurs principes coopérateurs devenaient peu à peu une oligarchie aux allures de mafia" (4). Mais cette résistance en forme de fermeture face à l'évolution du métier et à la perte d'homogénéité socio-professionnelle du collectif de travail - tendance qui caractérise l'évolution du mouvement coopératif dans son ensemble mais qui se retrouve aussi dans l'histoire particulière de chaque SCOP - a fini par être remise en cause sous les pressions conjuguées de l'environnement et de

(1) Ibid., p. 58

(2) Effectuée sur l'année 1971 ; citée par D. Demoustier, in Les coopératives de production, op.cit., p. 105.

(3) J.L. Laville, I. Mahiou, op.cit. Précisons que ces SCOP n'ont pas été choisies pour leur exemplarité en matière d'innovation sociale ou de fonctionnement coopératif, mais tirées au hasard en fonction d'un critère a priori de croissance.

(4) D. Linhart, L'organisation et le vécu du travail dans les Sociétés Coopératives ouvrières de production à partir de quatre monographies, Paris, CÉREBE, 1975, 155 p., p. 121.

l'évolution interne des SCOP. De fait, les différences entre salariés sociétaires et salariés "auxiliaires" se sont largement estompées. A la reconnaissance d'une diversification - à l'intérieur des SCOP comme au sein du mouvement - des catégories socio-professionnelles composant les coopératives, répond à présent une homogénéisation par le statut de sociétaire (cf. l'augmentation du taux de sociétariat). Les différences de rémunérations entre travailleurs sont dès lors moins fondées sur le statut que sur la grille des qualifications - classifications.

Il n'en reste pas moins vrai, toutefois, que les taux de sociétariat les plus faibles se retrouvent chez les travailleurs les moins qualifiés, et que, dans certaines SCOP, le passage à une classification supérieure constitue une sorte de prime au sociétariat. Cette politique incitative prend aussi pour argument l'acquis de qualification du travailleur dans l'entreprise - car généralement, on ne devient pas sociétaire dès l'embauche - et la responsabilisation qu'on peut en attendre en tant que sociétaire. Mais la persistance des débats qui apparaissent dans ces SCOP sur la question des classifications montre que la correspondance entre classification salariale et qualification du travailleur n'est pas toujours effective. Cette contradiction constitue dans ce cas une source de conflit potentiel, d'autant plus que le contexte coopératif tend précisément à valoriser le travail productif par rapport au capital, stimulant sans doute les attentes des travailleurs dans ce sens.

Sous une forme non déguisée, le sur-salaire versé aux sociétaires est pratique courante en SCOP, mais il a une autre fonction : il vise à compenser la retenue mensuelle opérée sur leurs salaires pour payer les parts sociales qui alimentent le capital de la coopérative - bien que celles-ci constituent un patrimoine réalisable à terme - et ainsi à rétablir l'égalité de salaire, à classification égale, entre sociétaires et autres salariés (1).

4.1.3. Grille de classifications et système de rémunération

Alignement sur la profession, hiérarchie écrasée, voire supprimée, derrière ces tendances majeures, la diversité des SCOP ne recouvre pas une politique commune en matière d'évaluation des qualifications et de système de rémunération.

Beaucoup se contentent de reproduire la grille définie par la convention collective de la branche d'activité (élaborée par négociations entre syndicats de salariés et organismes patronaux) en rapprochant les extrêmes. Certaines mêlent à la qualification des critères tentant d'apprécier d'autres qualités du salarié ; ce qui n'est pas sans rappeler les pratiques des communautés de travail qui calculaient les salaires sur la "valeur humaine" et pas seulement sur la contribution productive. D'autres cherchent à élaborer des modalités propres, tout en maintenant des niveaux comparables à ceux de l'environnement.

(1) D'autres SCOP préfèrent à cette retenue une utilisation des mécanismes de répartition des bénéfices pour constituer les parts sociales individuelles ; système qui a l'avantage d'éviter une différenciation des salaires entre travailleurs, mais qui suppose que l'entreprise dégage suffisamment d'excédents.

- Dans une coopérative industrielle de 350 salariés par exemple, une grille spécifique a été élaborée par un groupe de travail réunissant hiérarchie et ouvriers à partir d'une analyse des postes de travail : elle considère la valeur du poste de travail, non la qualification initiale, et cherche à ménager à chacun la possibilité d'effectuer une trajectoire personnelle au sein de l'usine. L'avantage principal de ce système réside dans la transparence pour les salariés en matière de postes de travail, de rémunération et de perspectives d'évolution (1).
- Dans une petite coopérative du bâtiment, la recherche d'un système de rémunération réaliste et motivant, en accord avec les options idéologiques de ses membres, est l'objet d'expérimentations successives. Après l'échec du salaire égalitaire, a été adopté un mode de calcul qui lie directement le salaire à la production du chantier : le paiement s'effectue au prorata du temps de travail sur la base d'un prix horaire qui est variable, car il est défini par la production totale du chantier. Système qui cherche à concilier efficacité économique, responsabilisation des équipes et liberté individuelle (possibilité de faire varier son rythme de travail suivant les périodes) mais pose d'autres problèmes : type de rapport à l'argent, qualité du travail, inégalité de salaire (2).

Au croisement de l'engagement individuel des membres et de leur stimulation par des gains financiers, la question des salaires n'est jamais close. Mais, en la matière, il n'y a pas véritablement de modèle, elle reste une "affaire" interne aux coopératives. Parmi les débats qu'elle suscite, celui sur l'égalitarisme traverse l'histoire des SCOP ; il est réactualisé par la nouvelle vague de petites coopératives créées depuis les années soixante-dix.

4.1.4. Le débat sur l'égalitarisme.

Faut-il donner une traduction financière aux inégalités réelles de qualifications, de responsabilités, de temps de travail... qui, en dépit de la recherche de polyvalence et de partage de pouvoir, ressurgissent au sein du collectif ? Ou bien refuser de figer dans les salaires la hiérarchie qui s'instaure de fait dans l'organisation du travail, afin de ne pas fermer aux moins qualifiés et aux moins anciens, l'accès à des responsabilités professionnelles et gestionnaires, quitte à entretenir une égalité fictive ?

Parmi les coopératives créées ces dix dernières années sur des projets autogestionnaires, beaucoup sont amenées à plus ou moins long terme à remettre en cause le choix égalitaire. C'est, tout d'abord, l'évolution propre de l'entreprise qui modifie la politique salariale : accentuation de la division du travail, accroissement de l'effectif, contradictions entre nouveaux embauchés

(1) G.A. Chataignier, M. Fabian, M.F. Lefilleul, Les SCOP un lieu pour des pratiques sociales innovantes, Paris, FRENE, juin 1984, 226 p. monographie pp. 155-178. Voir aussi, des mêmes auteurs, Portraits de SCOP, Paris, Frene-Syros, 1984, 190 p.

(2) Ibid. pp. 56-87.

et fondateurs ... Pour ces derniers, l'adhésion idéologique ou affective ne peut fonder à long terme leur contribution personnelle à la coopérative.

Cette évolution interne n'est pas indépendante des pressions externes comme celles du marché du travail - quand il faut embaucher un "cadre" - et plus largement des transformations du secteur d'activité : évolution des technologies et des modes dominants d'organisation du travail notamment. A cet égard, il est significatif d'observer comment l'égalité des salaires instaurée pendant plusieurs dizaines d'années dans des imprimeries coopératives a éclaté avec l'introduction des changements techniques qui mettaient en cause l'homogénéité socio-professionnelle du groupe.

Mais cette homogénéité, si elle est essentielle dans la capacité d'un groupe à maintenir une égalité de salaires, n'est pas une condition suffisante. Il n'est pas rare que des collectifs d'intellectuels - type bureaux d'études- de qualifications équivalentes évoluent d'un système égalitaire vers une rémunération au contrat fonction du volume de travail négocié et effectué, se rapprochant ainsi d'un modèle d'association de travailleurs indépendants plus en accord avec leurs façons de travailler et avec l'exercice libéral de leur profession.

4.1.5. Revenus non salariaux : l'affectation des excédents.

En matière d'affectation des excédents de gestion, les SCOP sont soumises à des règles communes qui visent :

- à assurer une capacité d'expansion minimale à l'unité de production (15 % vont obligatoirement à un fonds de réserve) ;
- à limiter la part de la rémunération du capital par rapport au travail (au minimum 25 % pour la "part travail" qui ne peut être inférieure à la "part capital") ;
- à limiter l'intérêt versé aux parts sociales (au plus égal au taux de rendement moyen des obligations).

Compte tenu de ces contraintes, les SCOP prennent des options statutaires qui constituent des choix économiques : possibilité d'accroître les réserves par la création d'un fonds de développement, d'accroître la "part travail", de l'attribuer aux seuls sociétaires ou à l'ensemble des salariés, de la répartir de façon égalitaire ou de reproduire la hiérarchie salariale, de créer un fonds de solidarité ... Dans le cadre de ces options, l'assemblée générale annuelle peut aussi préférer l'augmentation du capital à la disponibilité immédiate des revenus du travail ou du capital. Avec les dispositions fiscales liées aux accords de participation (1), les modes de répartition ont cependant tendance à s'homogénéiser entre les SCOP.

(1) La signature d'un tel accord qui concerne l'ensemble des salariés de la SCOP est particulièrement favorable aux coopératives ; il leur ouvre d'importants allègements fiscaux. Son principe est d'égaliser au plus haut niveau la "part travail" (bloquée pendant cinq ans avec un taux d'intérêt du choix de la SCOP) et les réserver.

Reste que ces entreprises ont la particularité de disposer pour leurs membres et pour leurs salariés de deux modes de revenus dans les limites de leurs performances économiques et de leur politiques d'investissement. La priorité va au salaire, mais à la rigidité de celui-ci peut parfois être opposée la souplesse de la participation aux bénéfices variable avec l'activité de l'entreprise. Une marge de manoeuvre existe donc qui peut permettre de limiter les hausses de salaire immédiates en reportant le manque à gagner sur la distribution de bénéfices.

Par ailleurs, la participation aux bénéfices peut représenter un enjeu non négligeable : "stimulant matériel", elle est une façon de matérialiser la relation entre l'effort productif et le revenu. Elle peut ainsi être un moyen de maintenir un consensus, tout particulièrement dans les SCOP où les autres formes de participation sont limitées - surtout quand cette situation est cumulée avec des qualifications et des rémunérations peu élevées. Ainsi, dans une entreprise coopérative textile de 175 salariés, employant une main-d'oeuvre féminine au bas de l'échelle des qualifications (O.S.), payée partiellement au rendement et sans perspectives de promotion, il est clair que la motivation des ouvrières vis-à-vis de la coopérative est essentiellement financière, la distribution des bénéfices leur permettant d'accroître leur rémunération annuelle de l'équivalent d'un mois et demi de salaire. Remettre en cause ce revenu ne pourrait - la direction en est consciente - qu'avoir des conséquences sur l'intégration des ouvrières aux choix de l'entreprise. D'autres exemples montrent à l'évidence que la distribution des excédents - quand la possibilité existe - est, dans certains cas, un outil de gestion des relations sociales dans l'entreprise. Dans une entreprise du bâtiment (65 salariés) par exemple, à l'issue d'une initiative économique malheureuse de son président directeur général qui avait fait naître certaines tensions, le choix de distribuer des excédents est apparu tout autant lié à la nécessité de rétablir un climat de confiance qu'à une stricte évaluation des contraintes financières de la coopérative (1).

Enfin, quand l'intérêt est versé aux parts sociales, cela a pour effet de maintenir une distinction entre salariés associés et simples salariés, alors que le mécanisme de la participation banalise la répartition de la "part travail" des bénéfices.

En termes quantitatifs, l'association des travailleurs aux bénéfices, fruit d'un arbitrage entre court et long terme, entre politique de l'entreprise et attentes des travailleurs, ne peut qu'être très variable selon les SCOP et selon les périodes : elle peut être nulle si la SCOP dégage peu d'excédents, différée à long terme si elle est entièrement capitalisée ... mais elle peut aussi être une source supplémentaire de revenu importante (2).

(1) Pour les deux exemples rapportés ici, voir l'étude du CICRA, op. cit.

(2) Parmi les douze SCOP étudiées par le Cicra pour la recherche Interactions économiques et sociales dans les SCOP, deux distribuaient respectivement l'équivalent de 1,5 mois et 3 mois de salaire par an.

4.1.6. Modes de décision.

A la différence des décisions concernant les salaires, celles qui touchent à l'affectation des excédents relèvent obligatoirement de l'assemblée générale statutaire. Formellement, il existe une possibilité de débat, mais les propositions présentées relèvent d'arbitrages plus ou moins explicites préalablement effectués au sein des structures de décision si bien que les choix sont plus souvent entérinés que contestés. Car, même si se cristallisent à l'occasion certaines tensions, le souci domine en dernière instance de préserver la coopérative et le maximum d'emploi.

Rien n'oblige à l'inverse les SCOP à soumettre la question des salaires au débat collectif (sauf celui du P.D.G. discuté en C.A.). Chacune élabore donc en son sein des processus propres à l'image de son mode de fonctionnement.

Aux deux extrêmes, la politique salariale peut être un domaine réservé du P.D.G. ou de la hiérarchie comme dans n'importe quelle entreprise, ou bien au contraire relever de l'assemblée du collectif. La première attitude correspond plutôt - mais pas exclusivement - aux pratiques en vigueur dans les coopératives "bien établies", la seconde plutôt à celles des petites SCOP à la recherche d'un fonctionnement collectif autogestionnaire.

Entre les deux, il existe des procédures de négociation plus ou moins formalisées telle que des "commissions salaires" - mêlant hiérarchie et représentant du personnel - qui examinent les augmentations de salaire et les promotions individuelles ; ou encore c'est par un aller-retour entre comité d'entreprise ou section syndicale et Conseil d'Administration que s'établit la discussion. L'essentiel du débat, une fois établi le système de rémunération, porte sur les augmentations et leur répartition : application automatique des hausses qui interviennent dans la branche ou compromis entre celles-ci et les possibilités immédiates de la SCOP, répartition fixe ou proportionnelle aux salaires, augmentations individualisées ...

Outre ces procédures "normales" d'examen des rémunérations, les "situations de crise" en suscitent d'autres : quand il faut décider un blocage ou même, rarement, une diminution temporaire des salaires, suspendre le paiement des heures supplémentaires, ou accroître la retenue sur le salaire des sociétaires pour remplacer le capital social de la SCOP, une assemblée exceptionnelle des sociétaires ou de l'ensemble des salariés est jugée nécessaire dans la plupart des contextes pour, au moins, expliquer une situation qui présente alors rarement une solution alternative.

Face au pouvoir des gestionnaires qui fixent les limites des choix en matière de revenus, l'intervention des autres membres de la SCOP peut paraître minime. La possibilité de négocier, sous des formes plus ou moins accomplies, se présente comme un facteur d'équilibre qui permet de désamorcer une radicalisation des conflits sur l'enjeu du salaire. Au total, du strict point de vue de la gestion, il y a là dans la SCOP une capacité de souplesse qu'envieraient bien des patrons de P.M.E. (petites et moyennes entreprises).

4-2 "AVANTAGES SOCIAUX" ET CONDITIONS DE TRAVAIL

4.2.1. "Avantages sociaux"

L'histoire des SCOP de l'entre-deux-guerres est émaillée d'exemples d'"avancées sociales" allant au-delà des pratiques des autres entreprises. Il n'est pas rare que les SCOP aient mis en place des mutuelles, des caisses de retraite et de solidarité "maison" alimentées par une partie des bénéficiaires, ou institué des "congés payés" avant que ce droit soit reconnu aux autres salariés. Sous les aspects formation professionnelle, culture générale et loisirs de la consommation collective, la question a été ensuite profondément réactualisée par les communautés de travail à la fin des années quarante.

S'il reste des traces de ces acquis dans de vieilles coopératives, si d'autres récentes tentent des innovations, ces avancées ont cependant "été peu à peu "grignotées" par leur extension à l'ensemble des entreprises, coopératives ou non" (1). Dans ce domaine comme en matière de salaire les SCOP se réfèrent de plus en plus au régime commun de leur branche (ce qui explique des disparités importantes entre SCOP) en essayant de les appliquer au plus haut niveau - comme par exemple la couverture, pour une période définie, à 100 % des congés pour maladie, ou l'adhésion à une mutuelle.

4.2.2. SCOP et conditions de travail.

Même tendance globale en ce qui concerne les conditions de travail : on ne note pas d'innovations majeures. Mais sans doute est-ce aussi parce que : d'une part, concrètement, la majorité des SCOP relevant encore d'un système professionnel plus proche du "gros artisanat" que de l'industrie, la question des conditions de travail y est moins prégnante ; d'autre part, si cela n'est plus vrai pour une partie d'entre elles, culturellement ce système constitue encore la référence majeure.

Dans les coopératives où a pénétré l'organisation scientifique du travail, non sans résistance (2), celle-ci s'est grosso-modo alignée sur celle qui prévalait chez les concurrents. Le souci d'améliorer les conditions de travail et/ou de mettre en place des outils de réflexion et de participation dans ce sens n'a fait que suivre de loin les avancées opérées dans certaines entreprises capitalistes, comme si la démocratie industrielle exercée dans la sphère de la gestion coopérative devait compenser les effets de la parcelisation et des conditions de travail dans l'industrie. Bureaux, méthodes, cadences, chaînes, travail au rendement ... ne sont donc pas exclus des plus grandes coopératives. Ces éléments ont fini par être intégrés comme des maux nécessaires mais des méthodes éprouvées. La réflexion sur ces questions accuse plutôt un retard par rapport aux expérimentations menées ailleurs par des directions modernistes d'entreprises privées ou nationalisées ; surtout, elle ne présente pas de spécificité coopérative.

Quant aux SCOP qui sont des "reprises" ou des "mutations" d'entreprises, il est rare qu'elles s'écartent de façon significative du modèle antérieur. A Manuest (industrie du meuble, 350 salariés), par exemple si la longue chaîne d'origine a été découpée en plusieurs plus courtes, la pointeuse a été rétablie, les anciens horaires et le travail en équipe conservés après le démarrage en SCOP, et les problèmes de rendement ont suscité par la suite la

(1) D. Demoustier, Les Coopératives de production, op.cit., p. 29.

(2) L'A.O.I.P. s'est vu imposer pour sa survie une transformation radicale de l'organisation du travail par les pouvoirs publics, en 1948.

création d'un Bureau des Méthodes, d'un chronométrage généralisé et de primes de rendement. Par contre, c'est dans le domaine de l'appréciation des qualifications, des salaires et des promotions que s'est, dans ce cas, instauré un processus participatif qui vise l'objectivité et la transparence.

Pas de spécificité coopérative donc en termes de démarche et de moyens vis-à-vis des conditions de travail dans l'industrie, mais bien plutôt une réaction au coup par coup quand apparaissent des signes de désaffection des travailleurs et la nécessité de renforcer leur adhésion aux objectifs de l'entreprise. Certes, dans ce domaine les SCOP disposent, du moins théoriquement, d'autres atouts - la "démocratie coopérative" est par excellence le champ où doit s'exercer le pouvoir des travailleurs - mais on peut se demander dans quelle mesure d'autres facteurs du vécu du travail ne viennent pas atténuer les rigueurs de l'OST, contribuant à faire reculer les limites que ce système atteint ailleurs (voir infra sur le "climat de travail").

4.2.3. Durée et horaires de travail.

Sur le point particulier de la durée du travail, il est peu de SCOP qui, à partir du moment où elles opèrent sur un marché concurrencé et où elles procurent à leurs membres un salaire correspondant à la norme dominante de consommation, opèrent des réductions importantes par rapport à leur secteur, à moins qu'elles jouissent d'une réussite économique spécifique. C'est bien plutôt leur capacité de souplesse qui caractérise ici encore les SCOP : souplesse qui s'exprime lorsque la situation nécessite un effort collectif soutenu, évidente quand l'activité débute ou fait face à des difficultés particulières. Hors de ces "moments", il est impossible d'affirmer que la durée du travail serait en SCOP en moyenne supérieure à celle qu'elle est dans d'autres entreprises ou que le travail gratuit serait une de leurs caractéristiques (1), sauf en ce qui concerne les "responsabilités coopératives".

Quelques remarques peuvent cependant être avancées :

- Dans les petits collectifs où l'intérêt du travail est un fort facteur de mobilisation (créneaux innovants dont l'évolution rapide implique un processus permanent de formation, par exemple), la durée du travail est extensible, mais pas plus que dans certaines équipes de cadres d'entreprises, dans les professions libérales ou dans des PME innovantes.
- Dans les collectifs où la "satisfaction au travail" n'est pas un phénomène partagé, les tensions ou les conflits qui peuvent apparaître ponctuellement autour des heures supplémentaires et de leurs rémunérations marquent les limites de l'"auto-exploitation" à laquelle sont disposés les membres, même si les dirigeants ont tendance à exercer une pression "dans l'intérêt de l'entreprise".

(1) Ou alors, c'est qu'elles relèvent d'une autre logique dans laquelle le clivage entre temps de travail et temps de non travail se déplaçant, la mesure même de la durée du travail perd de son sens.

- Si certaines SCOP font de la disponibilité de leurs travailleurs un argument commercial, elles le font dans le respect des pratiques de la profession.
- Dans les groupes qui recherchent un fonctionnement collectif égalitaire, la durée du travail devient un des points révélateurs des inégalités d'investissement personnel dans le projet. Elle fait l'objet de nombreux débats qui débouchent rarement sur une prise en compte des disponibilités et des capacités propres des membres de la SCOP, mais plutôt sur la reconnaissance d'une hiérarchie de fait dont les premières exclues sont les femmes, compte tenu des charges qui majoritairement leur incombent en dehors de leur temps de travail professionnel.
- Le problème se pose aussi dans tous les contextes en matière de "responsabilités coopératives" (conseil d'administration, assemblées et réunions diverses) car celles-ci l'exercent essentiellement hors de ce temps de travail "productif".

Absente de la politique du mouvement coopératif, la question des inégalités de disponibilité entre hommes et femmes est rarement prise en compte dans les SCOP. Devant les exigences de la production, le problème de la participation des femmes aux instances coopératives (conseil d'administration en particulier), est la plupart du temps ramené à une question de choix individuel plutôt que considéré dans une perspective collective.

D'une façon générale, la capacité de souplesse des SCOP en terme de question du temps de travail doit être mise en regard de la souplesse qui caractérise leur fonctionnement quotidien. A des degrés plus ou moins institués se retrouvent fréquemment des horaires variables, la possibilité de s'absenter pour convenance personnelle, de réguler ses moments de pauses ..., tous éléments qui participent d'un "climat" qui apparaît comme un fondement important de l'attachement des salariés à la coopérative - qu'attestent des taux d'absentéisme et de rotation du personnel généralement faibles.

4.2.4. Climat de travail.

Même si elle est variable suivant les contextes et les périodes, l'affirmation d'une ambiance de travail décontractée constitue sans doute la caractéristique la mieux partagée par les SCOP. Cette "atmosphère de liberté", liberté de parole, de communication, de déplacement ..., n'est pas l'exclusive des petits groupes peu ou non hiérarchisés. Elle est aussi affirmée par des travailleurs de coopératives dont l'organisation du travail ne se distingue pas apparemment de celle des autres formes d'entreprises.

Comme le rappelle J. Gray (1) en dressant un bilan de la pratique des coopératives communautaires - initialement communautés de travail -,

(1) J. Gray, "La coopérative ouvrière, cellule de formation ?", revue Pour, n° 37, Les Coopératives, lieux de formation et de participation ?, Paris, 1974, pp. 47-58.

"l'entreprise communautaire, on peut dire maintenant coopérative, ressemble par la division et l'organisation du travail, par la structure autoritaire et hiérarchique et par les conséquences qui en découlent, à une entreprise ordinaire où règnerait encore un reste de camaraderie et de libre expression".

De son côté, D. Linhart (1), étudiant le vécu du travail en SCOP, a noté une certaine satisfaction des salariés quant à l'ambiance de travail et à leur vécu des relations hiérarchiques. Le mode décontracté des relations avec les supérieurs, qui ne sont pas marquées par une discipline ou une surveillance pointilleuse, sont à leurs yeux un témoignage de confiance qui, en retour, favorise une attitude loyale et une certaine conscience professionnelle chez les salariés. Mais en même temps, ce milieu sécurisant et humain ne suffit pas à transformer la relation de l'individu à son travail quand celle-ci est vraiment mauvaise.

Ces données sont partiellement confirmées par celles fournies par une enquête effectuée dans la Région Bourgogne par Y. Chevalier (2). Les salariés de SCOP donnaient pour principales raisons de leur attachement à l'entreprise : "travail intéressant", "bonne ambiance de travail", "bons rapports avec la direction", "bon esprit d'équipe", "salaire convenable".

Outre ces éléments, l'ensemble des observations qui ressortent des différentes monographies disponibles sur les coopératives soulignent qu'un facteur déterminant de ce climat réside précisément dans les relations qui s'instaurent avec la hiérarchie de production. Pas de contrôle tatillon du travail, mais à l'inverse, un rejet ou une résistance passive à l'égard de celui-ci s'il tente de l'exercer. La maîtrise, en particulier, a un rôle qui tient du soutien et de l'animation, souvent doublé d'un rôle de relais de l'information coopérative, plutôt que de la sanction.

Cette dimension des relations dans l'entreprise est indissociable du sentiment partagé de reconnaissance individuelle et de respect de la personne que sans doute la détention individuelle de parts sociales et la règle d'égalité "un homme, une voix" contribuent à inscrire dans le fonctionnement de la coopérative, mettant symboliquement tous les sociétaires sur un pied d'égalité.

Le climat plus humain et l'absence de formalisme de relations - opposés à la contrainte et à la discipline - constituent à l'évidence des éléments de valorisation du statut de travailleur.

Mais il n'y a pas de véritable exigence sur la discipline, c'est aussi que le respect va de pair avec une intériorisation de l'exigence de productivité qui s'affirme comme la seule réelle (3), et que, pour une bonne part, le pouvoir de sanction s'exerce ailleurs, "au niveau des travailleurs eux-mêmes avec un auto-contrôle mutuel de la tâche et une sanction par le groupe des pairs" (4).

(1) D. Linhart, L'organisation et le vécu du travail dans les Sociétés coopératives ouvrières de production à partir de quatre monographies, Paris, CEREBE, 1975, 155 p. + monographies.

(2) Y. Chevalier, "Les coopératives ouvrières de production", revue Archives internationales de sociologie de la coopération, Paris, janv-juin 1974.

(3) D. Linhart, op.cit.

(4) P.E. Tixier, "Les effets de la gestion collective", Paris, Revue Française de gestion, 34, janv-fév. 1982, p. 37.

4- 3. AU-DELA DU SECTEUR COOPERATIF

C'est essentiellement sur les aspects "climat de travail" et souplesse de fonctionnement quotidien, valorisation du travail productif et resserrement de l'échelle des salaires, participation des salariés aux bénéfices de l'entreprise, que les SCOP dans leur ensemble - avec des variations notables - présentant des traits spécifiques en matière de revenus et de conditions de travail. Qu'en est-il dans les unités relevant peu ou prou du "troisième secteur" ?

Compte tenu des remarques et des réserves exprimées dans le chapitre précédent (1), quelques tendances ressortent des informations recueillies par l'Aldea (2). Niveau de revenus : les constats se démarquent sensiblement de ceux effectués sur un champ strictement coopératif. Pour les cinquante entreprises de l'échantillon, le revenu moyen mensuel est relativement bas (4.800 F par mois en 1983), mais "recouvre de très gros écarts : on va en effet de 1.000 F/mois pour les entreprises de type "orthogénique" à 13.000 F/mois dans des entreprises coopératives d'informatique et de conseil. En réalité, 60 % des travailleurs de ces entreprises touchent au plus le SMIC" (3). De plus, "ce faible niveau de salaire, d'une part, n'est en général pas compensé par des primes liées au rendement de l'entreprise, seules les "PME initiatives" (4) donnent des primes à leur personnel, d'ailleurs déjà bien payé), mais d'autre part, peut même se voir amputé lorsque l'entreprise a des problèmes de trésorerie : un quart des entreprises utilise cette faculté. Si compensation il y a, elle se fait d'une toute autre manière, en particulier par un certain nombre d'avantages financiers non marchands : un quart des entreprises procurent à leurs membres un revenu non marchand compris entre 1.000 et 3.000 F/mois" (5).

La convivialité qui caractérise aussi bien le fonctionnement des entreprises que leurs relations avec l'environnement serait en la matière un élément déterminant et, pour l'Aldea, "il est évident que les avantages conviviaux sont aussi, dans une certaine mesure, la contrepartie des apports faits par l'entreprise à son personnel, à son environnement, à la collectivité" (6). Ces avantages pour les salariés peuvent être retracés à partir d'une "esquisse de bilan social" à laquelle se livrent les auteurs :

- l'organisation polyvalente enrichit le travail et la formation des salariés (pour 40 % des entreprises) ;

(1) Dans la partie "Troisième secteur, SCOP et formes d'emploi".

(2) Op. cit.

(3) Ibid, p. 112. Un léger biais est cependant introduit par le fait que 15 % des entreprises de l'échantillon ont moins de 3 ans d'existence.

(4) C'est-à-dire principalement des SCOP.

(5) Aldea, op.cit., p. 115.

(6) Ibid, p. 116.

- Une part du temps du travail est consacrée à l'information et à la discussion (3/4 des entreprises), outre la libre expression sur le lieu de travail ;
- L'ouverture de l'éventail des salaires est faible (1 à 4 au maximum) ou nulle (dans deux entreprises sur trois) ;
- L'importance du temps choisi : 2/3 des entreprises pratiquent des formules d'horaires variables et de travail à temps partiel.

A partir de ces données limitées, il apparaît que le mode de fonctionnement et de gestion qui caractérise ces entreprises renvoie à l'imbrication étroite des aspects qualitatifs et quantitatifs du travail. La relation au travail est modifiée dans le sens d'une liberté (re)trouvée mais cela s'accompagne d'un temps de travail qui s'il est flexible est souvent long, et d'une nouvelle valorisation de l'effort - une réhabilitation de la valeur du travail paradoxalement. L'amélioration de la qualité de la vie vient compenser dans de nombreux cas une baisse délibérée du niveau de vie. Là encore l'hypothèse duale ne peut être écartée, mais elle ne peut non plus être généralisée.

Les expériences ne sont pas identiques. Leurs différences mettent en évidence - toutes choses égales par ailleurs - que le rapport entre modes de consommation et modes de travail constitue une articulation centrale. Deux grandes logiques sont à l'oeuvre : "travailler autrement, collectivement", la non remise en cause des modes dominant de consommation conduit à un rapprochement de la norme du rapport salarial ; changer plus radicalement le rapport au travail en intégrant l'entreprise dans un projet plus global de "vivre autrement", et la notion même de salaire peut être mise en cause.

5. - FORMES D'ORGANISATION

INTRODUCTION : RESUME DE LA DEMARCHE

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Parmi les questions que soulève l'expérience des coopératives ouvrières de production, celle des formes d'organisation est sans doute la plus complexe. C'est un constat majeur qui ressort des monographies disponibles.

Pour éviter d'en dresser un tableau trop formel, ou d'établir un répertoire de constats, nous nous proposons d'aborder la question selon le canevas suivant.

1 - Les SCOP françaises se réfèrent toutes à des principes et à des règles qui définissent un cadre juridique commun à l'exercice de la gestion de l'entreprise par les travailleurs associés.

Mais la spécificité de la SCOP - par rapport à d'autres formes coopéra-

tives - c'est que les coopérateurs y exercent en commun une activité salariée.

Les formes d'organisation et les rapports de pouvoir, la participation des travailleurs au sein des SCOP concernent non seulement la gestion coopérative - telle qu'elle est mise en pratique à partir du statut - mais aussi l'organisation du travail - telle qu'elle résulte de l'activité exercée et de la volonté des coopérateurs.

2 - Vision statique : selon la démarche participative adoptée dans ces deux sphères de pouvoir - gestion coopérative et organisation du travail -, les pratiques coopératives observées peuvent être ramenées à trois modèles que nous avons qualifiés de : "auto-gestion pratiqués", "démocratie coopérative", "participation dépendante".

3 - Vision dynamique : les SCOP sont cependant soumises à des tendances communes au cours de leur évolution, surtout si elles connaissent un développement rapide. Elles n'échappent pas à un processus d'accentuation de la division du travail qui a des effets réducteurs sur la participation des coopérateurs à la gestion, et nécessite des formes d'adaptation spécifiques.

4 - Les structures de démocratie représentative qui définissent le cadre minimum de la participation des travailleurs à la gestion coopérative induisent l'existence de zones d'intervention spécifiques où se reproduisent les inégalités de pouvoir nées dans la pratique du travail et de la décision.

5 - Face à ces limites ou pour s'en prémunir, des SCOP mettent en oeuvre des pratiques participatives selon des modalités diverses et sur des domaines plus ou moins étendus.

6 - Il n'en reste pas moins que, quels que soient les efforts faits pour réduire les différences de pouvoir, on observe une participation différenciée des acteurs.

5-1. ORGANISATION DU TRAVAIL ET GESTION COOPERATIVE

5.1.1. L'imbrication de deux structures de pouvoir.

La coopération de production n'est pas la seule voie d'une recherche de "fonctionnement collectif" (1) en entreprise, mais elle est un système institutionnel à travers lequel les travailleurs sont censés exercer la réalité du pouvoir de décision. Sous cet angle, elle constitue "une modalité spécifique d'accession à la personnalité de l'entrepreneur" (2) ; ce qui

(1) cf. R. Sainsaulieu, D.E. Tixier, M.O. Marty, La démocratie en organisation, Paris, Librairie des Méridiens, 1983, 272 p. Le fonctionnement collectif désigne les fonctionnements sociaux en organisation démocratique, en tant qu'ils tendent "à introduire des pratiques de démocratie directe caractérisées par la participation de tous à la décision, et à reconnaître à chaque participant les voies et moyens pour entrer sur la scène des rapports entre acteurs" (P.E. Tixier, "Démocratie directe et organisation", L'année Sociologique, 33, 1983, pp. 21-36.

(2) C. Vienney, "Des associations ouvrières aux coopératives de travailleurs" Revue de l'économie sociale, avril 1985, pp. 53-66.

signifie acquisition du pouvoir de mettre en oeuvre et d'affecter des moyens de production détenus collectivement à une utilisation donnée et de disposer des produits obtenus.

Ces pouvoirs sont garantis par un ensemble de règles statutaires qui sont la traduction de principes de fonctionnement démocratiques (voir annexe 2) dont les principaux sont :

- la double qualité d'associé et de travailleur ;
- la gestion démocratique, avec l'élection de dirigeants et la règle "un homme, une voix" ;
- la propriété durablement collective de l'instrument de production qu'assurent la non-cessibilité des parts et l'impartageabilité des réserves ;
- l'affectation des excédents aux travailleurs après constitution des réserves.

Si les règles coopératives reflètent aussi des options idéologiques - tendances égalitaires, anti-capitaliste, idéologie professionnelle... -, il est un fait qu'elles s'attachent essentiellement à définir des structures de fonctionnement dans la sphère du pouvoir décisionnel qui concerne la gestion, ou encore la politique, de l'entreprise : un schéma de démocratie parlementaire reposant sur l'assemblée et la délégation de pouvoir.

Les principes et les règles coopératifs ne portent pas sur une autre dimension essentielle des rapports de pouvoir qu'est l'organisation du travail dans une unité de production (1) soumise à des rapports marchands. Or la sanction de la concurrence et des prix exerce une influence décisive en la matière, dans le sens d'une tendance à la reproduction des modes d'organisation qui règnent parmi les entreprises concurrentes. La recherche de la participation du plus grand nombre aux décisions rencontre les inégalités produites par la division du travail, par les inégalités culturelles de départ et les habitudes acquises.

Deux structures de pouvoir coexistent ainsi en SCOP, qui ne sont pas indépendantes l'une de l'autre, mais l'une d'elle est inscrite dans les règles de fonctionnement : c'est le système coopératif qui offre un cadre minimum à l'accès des travailleurs aux décisions de gestion - au sens large - et à l'exercice de la démocratie de leur association. Ce minimum légal doit être en pratique dépassé pour ne pas limiter la participation à un contrôle formel.

En revanche, il n'est pas d'organisation du travail "coopératif". Ce qui excite, c'est la possibilité pour le groupe concerné de "choisir plus sûrement les méthodes les plus adaptées (à ses) aspirations et (à ses) besoins" (2), de "substituer à une discipline de production imposée une organisation

(1) On peut voir dans la tradition de pouvoir professionnel des coopérateurs un élément d'explication historico-sociologique de ce phénomène.

(2) Manifeste de la coopération de production, 1976, cité par D. Demoustier, Les coopératives de production, op.cit., p. 88.

du travail délibérée" (1). Compte tenu de l'hétérogénéité des SCOP, le mouvement coopératif à travers ses organes centraux ne peut définir une alternative, mais il n'alimente guère la réflexion dans ce domaine. Les recherches et les pistes émanent des expériences et des pratiques propres des entreprises coopératives.

D'une façon générale, le système coopératif ne suffit pas à fonder une réelle participation de tous dans toutes les sphères du pouvoir, mais, même formel, il ne reste pas totalement sans effet sur l'exercice du pouvoir et la négociation dans l'organisation. Il ouvre en effet aux travailleurs des espaces spécifiques d'intervention qui constituent un garde-fou face à la domination d'un noyau dirigeant, car ils requièrent un minimum d'information et de consultation. Les situations de crise sont notamment des moments privilégiés de réanimation de ces espaces d'intervention. Par ailleurs, si l'on s'attache à l'articulation des pratiques dans les deux structures de pouvoir, deux constats s'imposent.

Au-delà du corpus minimum de règles imposées par la loi, des innovations en matière de participation collective à la décision (voir infra, "pratiques de participation", dans ce chapitre) peuvent "parfaitement coexister avec une organisation du travail assez "traditionnelle" quant à la division des tâches et au degré d'initiative de chacun" (2). A l'inverse, les expérimentations en matière d'organisation du travail ne semblent pas pouvoir se développer en SCOP sans qu'un effort particulier soit porté sur le processus participatif en matière de gestion. Ce dernier élément différencie les SCOP des expériences patronales de "nouvelles formes d'organisation du travail" (3) où les contraintes et les objectifs globaux sont définis à l'extérieur du processus participatif qui touche l'atelier.

Partant de cette combinatoire des pratiques dans la gestion démocratique et dans l'organisation du travail, trois modèles de participation - nécessairement schématique - peuvent être dégagés. Ils permettent de caractériser à grands traits des types de fonctionnement dans lesquels les SCOP ne sont pas nécessairement figées de façon durable. Ils ne doivent pas cependant être compris comme trois étapes incontournables de l'évolution d'une coopérative, même si la question se pose de leur caractère transitoire (4).

5.1.2. Trois modèles de participation.

1 - L'auto-gestion pratiquée

La recherche de partage du pouvoir s'exerce de façon indissociée dans

(1) Adresse de la CG SCOP aux candidats aux élections législatives de 1978, *ibid.*

(2) M.F. Lefilleul, "SCOP et innovations sociales", Revue de l'économie sociale, n° 3, avril 1985, pp. 95-100.

(3) cf. Cereq, L'Organisation du travail et ses formes nouvelles, valeurs n° 10, nov. 1976, Paris, La Documentation Française, 292 p.

(4) Pour approfondir cette question, voir le débat présenté par P.E. Tixier à propos du "fonctionnement collectif comme modèle de la création ou du changement", article cité.

la sphère du travail et dans le système coopératif. Les modes de fonctionnement habituels de l'entreprise subissent une remise en cause globale. La forme coopérative joue comme une garantie, un garde-fou dont les règles doivent être dépassées dans la pratique pour leur donner leur sens plein et les rapprocher de formes de démocratie directe. Cela suppose une forme évolutive du fonctionnement coopératif qui recherche en permanence des modalités de régulation adaptées à l'évolution du collectif et de l'organisation. Ce mode de fonctionnement est toujours susceptible d'être remis en cause par un processus de développement non maîtrisé.

2 - La démocratie coopérative

La participation des travailleurs dans la sphère de la gestion n'induit pas de remise en cause de pratiques "classiques" en matière d'organisation du travail. La participation repose sur l'acquisition du pouvoir de propriété - gestion de l'outil de production. Son mode reconnu : le système de démocratie formelle et de délégation de pouvoir dans le respect des règles coopératives. Pour que celui-ci fonctionne sont ménagés des espaces de participation directe qui privilégient un ou deux domaines selon des modalités diverses, et des ambitions variables, et entretiennent une "vie coopérative" spécifique. Il existe un décalage permanent entre les modes de participation qui caractérisent les deux structures de pouvoir, mais les contradictions qui en résultent peuvent trouver à s'exprimer dans les différents lieux de participation, y compris ceux qui relèvent d'un contre-pouvoir du type syndical au structure de représentation du personnel.

3 - La participation dépendante

Ce modèle conjugue une organisation du travail sans innovation - avec une hiérarchie qui reste cependant limitée et des relations généralement plus détendues avec la maîtrise, voir infra "climat de travail dans la partie traitant des conditions de travail - et un système coopératif qui ne trouve pas son dynamisme (désaffection de la "base", manque de volonté réelle des dirigeants ...). Mais il existe une limite objective à l'exercice d'un pouvoir personnalisé de type patronal. Elle réside dans la contrainte d'adhésion minimale que suppose la structure coopérative spécifique du capital. Le fonctionnement se caractérise alors par des arbitrages et des négociations informelles opérés en amont plutôt que dans le débat au sein d'instances spécifiques. En aval, le pouvoir coopératif est désinvesti : les travailleurs privilégient le retrait dans les marges d'autonomie, individuelles ou partagées, qui traversent leur vécu quotidien. Ils conservent cependant un pouvoir de blocage, au sein du système coopératif, qui peut s'exprimer dans des moments de crise. En même temps, compte tenu du consensus général qui s'établit sur la survie de l'entreprise et la protection de l'emploi, les possibilités d'émergence de stratégies collectives de contre-pouvoir apparaissent très limitées.

Conditions favorables à la participation.

On est tenté d'établir une corrélation entre ces pratiques sociales et un certain nombre de critères qualifiant les coopératives, mais celle-ci ne peut qu'être nuancée tant sont multiples les éléments qui interviennent dans l'histoire d'une SCOP. A l'évidence certains pèsent pourtant d'un poids particulier :

- le niveau et l'écart des qualifications ;
- la taille de l'entreprise ;
- les caractéristiques idéologiques et culturelles du groupe - un enchevêtrement d'éléments où interviennent le "métier", le vécu antérieur des salariés, et d'autres dimensions telles que la culture locale ... sur lesquelles se fonde un projet collectif propre.

La réunion d'un niveau élevé et d'une homogénéité de qualifications, manuelles ou intellectuelles, d'une petite taille (1), et d'un projet militant constitue à l'évidence un terrain favorable pour le modèle auto-géré. Elle fait apparaître une prédisposition des jeunes coopératives à le mettre en oeuvre, mais pas dans toutes, et pas exclusivement.

La durabilité d'un tel fonctionnement semble supposer une activité qui implique une collaboration intense des acteurs du collectif - c'est particulièrement net dans les activités où la nature inventive du produit demande création individuelle et/ou remise en cause fréquente de la structure des tâches, la communication, par exemple, dans certaines activités de l'informatique, les industries graphiques et de la communication, ... - ou bien qui offre des possibilités de décentralisation d'équipes autonomes ou d'essai-
image (2).

Dans tous les cas, une certaine maîtrise du rythme de croissance (volume d'activité, investissement, embauche) est essentielle car, comme le montre l'observation en dynamique (voir infra "une perspective dynamique.." à la suite de cette partie), le développement est un facteur fondamental de différenciation dans la participation au pouvoir.

Au regard des critères avancés, seul un petit nombre de SCOP peut en réalité correspondre à ce modèle, sauf dans une phase transitoire. Dans les deux autres cas de figure, les SCOP apparaissent beaucoup plus hétérogènes. Si la taille n'est pas ici un facteur discriminant, celui de la qualification reste important. Dans les SCOP qui relèvent du "modèle coopératif", mettant en oeuvre des processus régulateurs de participation, il n'est cependant pas suffisant - toutes les SCOP de professionnels qualifiés ne sont pas participatives. Il se double d'une dimension "projet" dont les moteurs sont souvent les dirigeants, leaders coopératifs (qui peuvent éventuellement être issus du syndicat), et qui trouve une assise culturelle dans le collectif de travail. C'est bien cette dimension qui paraît le plus faire défaut aux coopératives du troisième modèle -dit de "participation dépendante"- qui, si elles regroupent plus souvent des travailleurs de qualifications moindres, apparaissent surtout comme des collectifs divisés qu'aucun ciment idéologique ou culturel ne vient rendre plus cohésif.

(1) La taille ne constitue pas cependant un critère absolu de développement de la participation. Comme le souligne M.F. Lefilleul à propos de l'innovation sociale (art.cit.), les problèmes se complexifient quand l'effectif est important et le mode de production industriel tend à imposer ses schémas d'organisation mais, "à l'inverse, les SCOP de petite taille peuvent se croire dispensées de cette recherche, faisant confiance à la convivialité et à la spontanéité pour résoudre leurs difficultés de fonctionnement", et éventuellement échouent par manque de formalisation.

(2) Ce qui évite l'écueil d'une fermeture du groupe sur lui-même et offre des possibilités de renouvellement du collectif de travail dans des conditions satisfaisantes d'intégration. Peu répandue encore, cette modalité de croissance a été expérimentée avec succès par certaines coopératives, notamment dans le bâtiment et la photogravure.

A propos de ces groupes, les remarques effectuées par Y. Chevalier (1) sont toujours d'actualité : "il convient de se demander si le "manque" fondamental, qui directement ou indirectement engendre les autres, ne se situe pas au niveau de la "conscience collective" des coopérateurs. Le fait que sociétaires autant qu'auxiliaires font preuve d'une certaine non identification personnelle (...) aux règles coopératives, qu'ils attachent, semble-t-il, une valeur importante aux "avantages" que leur procure le sociétariat et plus généralement l'appartenance à une entreprise coopérative où les problèmes humains et sociaux sont mieux pris en compte que dans les entreprises d'un autre type (...), montre que les idéaux dont se réclame le mouvement coopératif et qu'il tente de mettre en oeuvre dans le contexte industriel et social actuel, ne sont que mal assumés par un certain nombre de coopérateurs". Y. Chevalier poursuivait en soulignant toute la différence qui existe, de ce point de vue, entre le début d'une expérience et sa poursuite au fil des années.

Importante sur le plan de la participation des travailleurs dans l'entreprise coopérative, cette question de la "motivation" renvoie aussi à celle de la réalité du pouvoir et du travail dans la coopérative au cours de son évolution. C'est cette perspective dynamique qu'il convient d'aborder avant d'entrer dans le détail des modalités concrètes de la participation et des champs dans lesquels elle s'exerce.

5.1.3. Une perspective dynamique : division du travail et participation.

L'organisation du travail n'est certes pas vécue comme un enjeu dans tous les objectifs formant les SCOP, mais elle est pourtant un élément central des formes de participation mises en oeuvre. Caractériser les tendances de son évolution permet de rendre compte de processus qui, à des degrés variables concernent l'ensemble des coopératives.

Pour ce faire, nous nous appuyons sur les nombreuses observations portées sur les collectifs qui s'articulent sur un projet de type auto-gestionnaire, modèle auquel peuvent être ramenées une proportion non négligeable de SCOP créées "ex-nihilo" ainsi que certains "reprises" d'entreprises qui se situent en rupture par rapport à l'expérience de travail antérieur - quoique cette volonté de rupture résiste généralement mal aux habitudes acquises, une fois retrouvée une certaine sécurité d'emploi et constituée une direction souvent issue de la lutte menée pour l'emploi. Ce sont des groupes que l'on peut qualifier de "fusionnels" (2) dans leur formation, présentant un minimum d'homogénéité socio-professionnelle et un fort consensus entre les membres.

(1) A l'issue d'une enquête lancée par l'union régionale des SCOP de la région Bourgogne pour préparer un forum régional (240 questionnaires dépouillés sur un échantillon de sept coopératives). Synthèse in Archives internationales de sociologie de la coopération, Paris, janv-juin 1974.

(2) Voir J.L. Laville, I. Mahiou, Interactions économiques et sociales dans les SCOP, CICRA, Paris, fév. 1984, rapport de synthèse, 175 p.

5.1.3.1. Caractéristiques de l'évolution.

— Promotion individuelle et collective sont à l'origine indissociables. Chacun doit pouvoir développer à la fois son autonomie, sa maîtrise du travail et sa compréhension des mécanismes économiques, son contrôle sur l'évolution globale de l'entreprise. Les processus d'apprentissage mutuel sur le tas font de la SCOP un lieu de formation intense. La polyvalence et la rotation des tâches sont expérimentées - mais plus rarement formalisées - comme moyen de développement des capacités individuelles et de limitation de la division du travail, et comme outil de souplesse et d'adaptation vis-à-vis de la clientèle. La quasi-absence de hiérarchie traduit la volonté d'un accès égalitaire aux responsabilités dans le travail.

La démocratie directe s'exerce aussi bien dans le cadre de l'organisation du travail et du vécu quotidien que dans le cadre des décisions relatives à la politique de l'entreprise. Elle a pour support des réunions fréquentes et ouvertes à tous où sont traités les problèmes de toute nature. Il n'y a pas d'instance séparée pour prendre des décisions de différents niveaux, quotidiennes et stratégiques.

— Toutefois, les prises de responsabilités différenciées ne tardent pas à marquer les limites d'une volonté égalitaire, révélant les inégalités culturelles au sein du collectif et la prégnance des habitudes acquises. Une pression extérieure s'exerce pour faire émerger des leaders qui contrôlent progressivement les rapports avec les partenaires extérieurs. La relation à l'environnement constitue, en effet, un enjeu essentiel. C'est par ce biais, que s'opère un premier clivage, reproduction de la division sociale du travail, entre responsables de la gestion et des relations extérieures - confondus la plupart du temps - et travailleurs cantonnés à la production, avant qu'une division plus poussée des tâches n'affecte la production elle-même.

Ces phénomènes s'accroissent dans le développement de la coopérative, quand celle-ci embauche de nouveaux salariés, élargit ses marchés, opère des investissements qui lui demandent des moyens de financement importants. Les exigences de productivité et de rentabilité, les différences de technicité creusent les écarts de responsabilités entre travailleurs, en même temps que s'amenuisent les possibilités de formation collective. En contrepartie, la croissance permet la promotion individualisée de certains, les plus qualifiés et/ou les plus motivés.

— Même si la hiérarchie reste faible - ou inexistante officiellement -, si l'ambiance est "décontractée", la responsabilité de chacun à son poste de travail reconnue ..., le système de relations antérieur est fortement remis en cause. L'accentuation de la division du travail a des effets sur la participation de tous et sur le fonctionnement coopératif. Les réunions de discussion et de décision se structurent et s'espacent : les problèmes relatifs à l'organisation quotidienne et au travail sont dissociés de ceux de la gestion globale de l'entreprise ; ces derniers se traitent hors du temps de travail dans des structures collectives créées à cet effet et au sein de la direction ; en même temps, le pouvoir de celle-ci, l'"exécutif", se renforce progressivement par rapport à celui des organes collectifs de décision. Les différences de perception des problèmes de la coopérative et d'intérêts se creusent entre gestionnaires et "productifs" et les contra-

dictions tendent à se concentrer sur des questions de rendement et d'évaluation du travail individuel et collectif. Elles peuvent conduire à des revendications polarisées sur les conditions de travail et de revenu, de moins en moins orientées sur la nature même du travail. Les inégalités de savoir et d'expérience qui ont fondé la division du travail se reproduisent par l'expérience quotidienne du travail et de la décision, se traduisant par une participation différenciée des travailleurs à l'exercice du pouvoir (1).

Ce scénario rejoint celui décrit par A. Meister pour les communautés de travail (2) qui distingue trois phases :

- la première se traduit par un fonctionnement fusionnel et une démocratie directe qui permet les prises de décisions collectives mais conduit à une première différenciation des fonctions entre le "bureau" et l'atelier ;
- la seconde marque l'aboutissement de ces tendances dans un processus de rationalisation de l'organisation du travail et de spécialisation des fonctions qui débouche sur l'instauration d'une démocratie déléguée et la concentration du pouvoir par les dirigeants ;
- la troisième se caractérise par l'adoption des valeurs de la société dominante, la dérive économe de la communauté, la reproduction des antagonismes entre dirigeants et dirigés.

Toutefois, comme le soulignait A. Meister, ce schéma pris dans son intégralité s'applique à des communautés ou à des SCOP passées à un stade d'organisation industrielle. D'autres, bien que soumises aux mêmes tendances, ont pu mettre en oeuvre des modes d'adaptation différents leur permettant de rester proches de la première ou de la deuxième étape en restant de petite taille quitte à transformer leur activité, ou encore en décentralisant ou en favorisant la création d'autres coopératives dans le même créneau.

5.1.3.2. Quelques exemples d'adaptation.

- Une imprimerie créée en 1971 par des syndicalistes à la suite de la fermeture de leur entreprise a opéré un développement très prudent (9 salariés en 1983) fondé sur l'intégration de l'ensemble des phases du processus de production - à l'inverse de nombreuses petites entreprises axées sur un segment précis de production - ce qui lui a permis de conserver la maîtrise totale du processus et de préserver une certaine polyvalence dans la production. Mais le principe fut plus difficile à mettre en oeuvre dans les responsabilités commerciales et administratives, ce qui a eu notamment pour conséquence une remise

(1) Ce point développé par P.E. Tixier notamment dans La démocratie en organisation, op.cit. pp. 69-72, sera repris dans la partie suivante.

(2) Voir notamment A. Meister, Les communautés de travail, Bilan d'une expérience de propriété et de gestion collectives, Entente communautaire, n° spécial, 1959.

en cause de la stricte égalité de salaires en 1983, tout en maintenant des structures de décision ouvertes à tous.

- Autre exemple, dans le bâtiment, une SCOP qui comptait 26 salariés en 1983 (créée fin 1968) a mis en place, après une importante remise en question, une organisation fondée sur l'autonomie de trois sections: chacune opère directement sur l'organisation et ses conditions de travail, ses embauches, et ses investissements, son planning ... et élit un responsable tournant. Les questions de gestion et de politique globale de la SCOP sont discutées tous les mois en assemblée générale des sections et non par un conseil d'administration.

Même si elles se développent rapidement, dans des limites de taille toutefois "raisonnables" (1), et se trouvent confrontées aux tendances communes soulignées ci-dessus, certaines SCOP préservent l'originalité de leur démarche - elles limitent le processus plus qu'elles ne l'enrayent réellement en recherchant constamment de nouvelles modalités adaptées d'exercice de la démocratie. De la sorte, elles traduisent après coup dans de nouveaux schémas de fonctionnement le fait accompli de la croissance.

Ainsi, dans une coopérative du secteur du Livre confrontée à un développement économique et technologique rapide (créée en 1978 par six personnes, elle en comptait une trentaine en 1984), la recherche de nouveaux moyens de régulation de son fonctionnement s'est traduite par le passage d'un système de démocratie directe à la mise en place d'un "double mécanisme délégation/contrôle" (2) : réactivation du conseil d'administration, création d'une direction collégiale, transformation de l'assemblée générale en structure de participation large qui sert à informer, suivre et contrôler régulièrement la marche de la coopérative et constitue, avec les réunions d'atelier, un "puissant facteur d'intégration dans la cellule sociale", "une zone d'intervention" des coopérateurs.

Tous ces exemples sont le fait de collectifs militants animés à leur origine d'une forte conscience politique dépassant le cadre de leur structure de travail.

5.1.3.3. Des tendances communes dans l'organisation du travail.

Si toutefois l'on tente un bilan global des caractères communs de l'organisation du travail dans les coopératives, quelques grandes lignes émergent.

(1) Il n'est guère possible de fixer un seuil, mais les expériences sur lesquelles on se fonde concernent des collectifs de 15 à 40 salariés.

(2) A. Chataignier, "Italiques : une démocratie imaginative", Revue de l'économie sociale, n° 3, avril 1985, pp. 181-187.

De fait, on observe, en général, peu de réelle polyvalence ou de rotation des tâches et des responsabilités, du moins dans la durée. Mais on peut noter de fortes tendances à l'enrichissement des tâches (tâches de réglage de machines, de contrôle du produit par exemple) et à l'auto-organisation des salariés sur leur propre espace de travail (charge, rythme de travail, ...). L'autonomie qui en résulte peut d'ailleurs avoir, comme le note P.E. Tixier (1) à propos d'une usine reprise par les salariés, des conséquences positives sur la productivité et la qualité du travail, en libérant pour les ouvriers la possibilité d'effectuer des modifications sur les machines.

Par ailleurs, si elle ne disparaît pas, la division du travail peut être atténuée par les rapprochements qui s'opèrent autour du produit entre conception et exécution, dans certaines activités. De même, la concentration du pouvoir sur les relations extérieures n'exclut pas au quotidien une certaine ouverture des contacts entre les salariés et les clients. En dépit des réticences que peuvent montrer ces derniers, cela constitue pour certaines SCOP un atout commercial que de se prévaloir ainsi d'un collectif de salariés responsables.

Enfin, plutôt que sur un rôle de surveillance et de contrôle, c'est généralement sur la capacité technique que repose la hiérarchie directe. Ce principe d'expertise "va orienter les positions hiérarchiques vers l'actualisation de rôles de soutien et d'animation, plutôt que vers un pouvoir de sanction" (2).

Forts réduits dans les grandes SCOP industrielles, ces aménagements dans l'organisation du travail - qui créent sans doute d'autres rapports de travail mais pas nécessairement de nouveaux rapports au travail (3)-, peuvent paraître limités au regard d'expérimentations du type "groupes autonomes" dans l'industrie.

Mais, rappelons-le, les SCOP sont en majorité de petites entreprises - 90 % de celles recensées par la CG SCOP ont moins de cinquante salariés et regroupent 45 % des effectifs totaux - et l'on peut se demander dans quelle mesure les traits qu'elles présentent ne sont pas partagés par nombre de petites entreprises non coopératives. Il y a là une limite à l'analyse qui vient de la méconnaissance profonde du secteur des PME sous cet aspect, et se double d'une difficulté méthodologique qui tient à ce que les références théoriques en matière d'organisation sont dominées par les modèles de l'Organisation Scientifique du Travail et de la Bureaucratie.

Mais en même temps, le rapport à l'organisation en SCOP se marque à travers des structures de démocratie représentative qui passent par l'élection et le mandat délibératif, induisant l'existence des zones d'intervention spécifiques où se manifestent les inégalités de pouvoir.

(1) Voir "Les effets de la gestion collective", Revue Française de Gestion, 34, janv.-fév. 1982, pp. 35-41.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Sur ce point, voir en particulier D. Linhart, L'appel de la Sirène, Paris, Le Sycomore, 1981, et Le vécu du travail dans les SCOP, Rapport d'étude principal et monographies, Paris, Cerebe, 1975.

5-2. ORGANISATION DU POUVOIR ET MODALITES DE LA PARTICIPATION.

5.2.1. Le minimum légal et les tendances communes.

A un niveau formel, le modèle de la démocratie coopérative repose sur un système de délégation à deux degrés : l'assemblée générale des Sociétaires élit des administrateurs qui nomment à leur tour un ou des dirigeants (1).

- Les mandats sont d'une durée limitée à quatre ans mais renouvelables. Un tiers au plus de ceux-ci peut échoir à des associés extérieurs à la SCOP et les élus sont théoriquement révocables à tout moment par l'assemblée.
- L'assemblée générale des coopérateurs se réunit au minimum une fois par an (assemblée "statutaire") et autant de fois que le C.A. le juge nécessaire. La fonction de contrôle des sociétaires sur les élus s'exerce par le renouvellement par tiers des membres du C.A.
- L'accès au sociétariat repose à la fois sur la liberté d'adhésion et sur une forme de cooptation entre les membres. Cette admission est soumise à la souscription de parts sociales ; elle donne droit à participer aux assemblées délibératives à égalité de voix.

Ce système attribue aux seuls sociétaires un pouvoir de contrôle plus qu'une réelle participation au pouvoir décisionnel.

Et si les pratiques varient selon les coopératives - en tant qu'elles sont le produit vécu des déterminations statutaires et des utilisations qui en sont faites pour réguler les "rapports entre acteurs et entre activités et acteurs" (2)-, des tendances communes se font jour à travers de nombreux exemples. A la base de celles-ci : la reproduction d'une inégale distribution des pouvoirs née dans la pratique du travail et de la décision, en dépit de l'accès possible aux lieux d'exercice du pouvoir (3).

(1) Ceci correspond à la forme juridique de la SCOP Société Anonyme (SCOP-SA) dotée d'un conseil d'administration (CA) et d'un président, presque toujours directeur général en même temps (P.D.G.), ou encore d'un directoire. Les coopérateurs peuvent aussi choisir la forme d'une société à responsabilité limitée (SCOP-SARL) : ils délèguent alors une partie de leurs pouvoirs à un gérant, assisté d'un conseil de surveillance. Mais les tendances décrites ici sont valables pour les deux statuts.

(2) Voir C. Vienney, Socio-économie des organisations coopératives, Paris, Ed. CIEM, 1980 et 1982, 2 volumes.

(3) A titre indicatif, nous reproduisons, en annexe 4, la synthèse d'une enquête effectuée par J.L. Bonhomme sur l'exercice du pouvoir et publiée dans Pour, n° 37 spécial coopératives, 1974. Quant aux résultats que nous présentons ici, ils se fondent sur les monographies réalisées par les différents chercheurs qui se sont penchés sur la question (voir bibliographie).

Formalisme de l'assemblée générale.

L'assemblée générale qui est théoriquement un lieu de décision essentiel sur tous les actes formalisés qui conditionnent la vie de la coopérative se transforme souvent en chambre d'enregistrement ratifiant plus que ne les débattant les propositions des dirigeants. Si elle est rarement le lieu où s'expriment des enjeux importants, notons cependant qu'elle est souvent investie d'un pouvoir d'arbitrage sur des choix fondamentaux pour l'avenir de l'entreprise - comme investissement important, succession du P.D.G. qu'il n'est pas statutairement obligatoire de lui soumettre -, que son rôle est ré-activé en temps de "crise" pour obtenir une participation-engagement des sociétaires.

L'exemple extrême d'une coopérative de plomberie (30 salariés) caractérisée par une organisation du travail traditionnelle et une gestion très concentrée aux mains de son P.D.G. illustre bien ce rôle de l'ensemble générale, ainsi que les limites qui bornent l'exercice d'un pouvoir personnel. Il est en effet apparu nécessaire à son P.D.G. qu'un consensus large se forme sur la question de son remplacement pour cause de départ en retraite. Les sociétaires, très rarement appelés à s'exprimer par ailleurs, ont donc eu le pouvoir de choisir la solution qu'ils souhaitaient voir appliquée et ont rejeté la solution préconisée par le P.D.G. qui s'est incliné.

Dans une autre SCOP (bâtiment, 60 personnes), l'échec antérieur d'une tentative de diversification de l'activité décidée par le conseil d'administration ayant eu des conséquences négatives sur le "climat" de l'entreprise, le prochain projet d'investissement doit être soumis à l'assemblée générale afin de créer un consensus autour de celui-ci (1).

Faible rotation des mandats.

Au modèle théorique de circulation des mandats se substitue en pratique une faible rotation des membres aux responsabilités d'administrateur faites d'alliances stables de fondateur ou de membres anciens, souvent parce qu'ils jouissent d'une certaine confiance ou encore parce qu'il manque d'autres volontaires. Cette stabilité est poussée à l'extrême pour celui qui occupe la position de P.D.G. - les fonctions de président du C.A. et de directeur général sont rarement dissociées - ce qui fait toujours de son changement un problème difficile quand ce n'est pas une crise interne.

Prééminence de la hiérarchie.

La prééminence de la hiérarchie parmi les élus entretient la confusion entre les structures de pouvoir. Toutefois le souci fréquent de respecter une parité entre des intérêts différents au sein du collectif conduit à des ajustements partiels : par élection de représentants de la "base" et équilibre des élus entre services.

(1) Exemples tirés de l'étude du CICRA, op.cit.

C'est parfois une volonté délibérée qui conduit alors à une répartition préalable des candidats pour que chaque secteur de l'entreprise ait son représentant. Dans certains cas - comme dans l'exemple cité plus haut d'échec de la diversification - l'élection d'ouvriers au C.A. représente une réaction face à la politique menée jusqu'alors et le réveil d'une volonté d'exercer un contrôle ; de même que par la non réélection s'exprime une sanction. Même dans un contexte assez figé et peu participatif, les structures formelles sont donc susceptibles d'évoluer, au rythme des apprentissages qu'effectuent les coopérateurs.

Direction élue et direction exécutive.

Un rôle essentiel d'impulsion et de décision revient rapidement dans l'évolution de la SCOP au P.D.G. et/ou à la direction (1), qui ne se limite pas à l'administration courante et à l'exécution des délibérations du C.A. Les administrateurs ne peuvent guère produire les éléments complexes de la décision ni situer les enjeux réels de la décision politique, ils ont un rôle réduit à celui de contrôle de la direction plus que de participation active à la définition d'objectifs stratégiques (2).

Ambiguïté du rôle des administrateurs.

Dans un sens, ils reproduisent une fonction partiellement syndicale. Relais essentiel de l'information dans la coopérative, ils sont amenés à se faire les défenseurs des intérêts des coopérateurs face à une vision qui leur paraît trop exclusivement tournée vers le développement de l'entreprise. A une logique gestionnaire de la direction, ils tendent à opposer une rationalité de la production. En même temps, dans l'exercice de leurs mandats, ils se rapprochent d'une direction dont ils légitiment les orientations. L'ambiguïté de leur rôle se situe entre ces deux pôles. Elle est accentuée par la fonction souvent minime des représentants du personnel ou des élus syndicaux - fonction qui peut d'ailleurs être cumulée avec celle d'administrateur.

Par exemple, dans une coopérative opérant dans la téléphonie (30 salariés), le C.A. a modifié son rôle, au départ assez formel, après qu'une erreur attribuée au P.D.G. a montré la nécessité de réaffirmer le pouvoir du groupe face à celui-ci. Il a ainsi progressivement acquis un rôle de défense de l'intérêt des salariés sur les questions de gestion du personnel (définition des qualifications, progression des salaires, ...).

(1) Les situations varient selon que la direction est collégiale ou très concentrée au niveau d'un seul homme. D'autre part, quand il y a une réelle distinction entre élus et management, la réalité du pouvoir revient à ce dernier et le conseil d'administration est le garant de la politique humaine de la coopérative.

(2) Constat à moduler en fonction du domaine sur lesquels porte la décision, comme de l'information et de la formation qui nourrissent la connaissance des problèmes et des possibilités par les administrateurs.

Dans le domaine de la hiérarchie également, les frontières se font plus floues : la fonction de relais d'information remplie par les administrateurs contribue pour la hiérarchie présente au C.A. à une valorisation de son rôle comme médiatrice entre les différentes logiques en présence.

Limites et nécessité de la participation.

A s'en tenir au strict minimum coopératif défini par la loi, la participation de la majorité des coopérateurs risque de se réduire à sa plus simple expression de dimension financière (contribution au capital et distribution de bénéfices). C'est ce qu'expriment nombre de constats sur l'assouplissement de la vie coopérative, la désaffection des coopérateurs vis-à-vis des structures collectives ... que les appels à la mobilisation lancés par les dirigeants cherchent à ranimer régulièrement lors d'assemblées.

Le recours à l'information et à la formation coopérative peuvent tenir lieu de réponse. Mais leurs effets sont limités si elles se réduisent à la distribution, même régulière, de données chiffrées, et à la participation à des stages de formation qui, ne s'articulant pas avec le vécu dans la SCOP, restent en décalage et ne trouvent pas de prolongement dans la coopérative - c'est un constat très souvent exprimé par les coopérateurs.

Ces tentatives restent inefficaces si elles ne conduisent pas à une bonne compréhension des mécanismes liant l'activité de chacun et les résultats globaux; et plus la maîtrise des salariés sur le produit et le procès de travail est faible, plus ils sont éloignés d'une perception globale de l'entreprise et de son insertion dans l'environnement.

Ce type de situation recouvre des conflits qui, s'ils n'éclatent pas, rendent cependant la coopérative fragile face à des choix qui exigeraient une adhésion supérieure de l'ensemble du collectif. Surtout ces choix sont susceptibles de remettre en cause cette forme de la participation qui est fondée sur la stimulation financière.

De telles considérations peuvent conduire la direction d'une SCOP à impulser des pratiques participatives qui se présentent alors comme un élément d'équilibre doté d'une dimension préventive et compensatoire face à une perspective destabilisante. Sous cet aspect, la participation apparaît comme une "contrainte" liée à une étape de la vie de l'entreprise, de son histoire économique et sociale.

Mais dans nombre de cas, elle est partie intégrante d'un projet initial d'innovation dans le mode de fonctionnement de la coopérative. Elle passe par l'instauration de structures et de pratiques qui se superposent aux organes et aux règles coopératifs. Les modalités évoluent au rythme des phases de développement et de crises.

5.2.2. Pratiques de participation.

Deux types de coopératives peuvent être distinguées selon que leurs pratiques de participation visent un domaine délimité de la vie de l'entreprise coexistant avec des formes d'organisation par ailleurs classiques, ou bien qu'elles cherchent à s'étendre à toutes les sphères de pouvoir dans l'entreprise. Ces deux types renvoient aux modèles de "démocratie coopérative"

et d'"auto-gestion pratiquée" définis plus haut.

5.2.2.1. Pratiques de participation dans le modèle "démocratie coopérative"

Ces coopératives (1) élaborent en parallèle avec des formes d'organisation du travail "classiques", des pratiques d'information, de concertation et de décision selon des modalités et des ambitions très diverses : commissions thématiques, assemblées mensuelles, réunions par groupes, réunions d'information-consultation avant toute décision importante, bulletins réguliers...

- Un premier grand champ d'application recouvre grosso-modo des problèmes de "politique du personnel" : évolution des salaires et des qualifications, congés, formation ... Liées au fonctionnement de la collectivité de travail, ces questions requièrent moins de technicité gestionnaire et financière, de connaissance du marché et de la technologie que les décisions de gestion stratégiques, ce qui en facilite l'accès. Thèmes mobilisateurs parce qu'ils sont susceptibles de modifier la condition des salariés, la concertation axée sur eux permet aussi de limiter les risques de conflits dans le collectif (notamment sur l'évaluation des qualifications et sur les promotions).

Tout ou partie de ces thèmes peut être attribué à la compétence d'une structure spécifique fondée sur le volontariat (commission qualification, commission formation, ...) ou bien à la réunion du personnel. Lieux d'expression, d'information et de proposition, ces structures introduisent des lieux de négociations qui sont aussi des substituts aux organismes de représentation du personnel. Quand ceux-ci existent de façon active, ils occupent ce champ de la vie coopérative ou bien s'intègrent au processus.

Par exemple, dans une coopérative d'électricité industrielle (une soixantaine de salariés) où le comité d'entreprise a encore un rôle limité, les promotions sont examinées tous les ans par une structure mixte, et les problèmes de gestion sociale font l'objet d'assemblées d'information du personnel (organisation des congés, durée du travail par exemple). Dans d'autres lieux, l'assemblée régulière du personnel animée par le délégué du personnel devient un lieu où s'élaborent des propositions qui débouchent sur des pratiques de négociations avec le conseil d'administration.

- Un deuxième volet des pratiques mises en oeuvre concerne les domaines de l'information et de la participation collective à la gestion de la SCOP. Elles s'appuient sur la nécessité de mettre sur pied des réseaux d'information à double sens pour alimenter les décisions. Les outils élaborés sont variés ; ils dépassent la simple transmission des compte-rendus de réunions du Conseil - pas toujours effective d'ailleurs dans les SCOP - ou de documents chiffrés, notamment : en mettant l'accent sur la préparation des réunions, sur la fréquence et la régularité de bulletins d'information, en ouvrant les réunions de C.A. à l'ensemble du

(1) Elles constituent une sorte de référence pour le "mouvement" coopératif pour lequel elles sont caractéristiques de l'"esprit coopératif".

personnel ou en prévoyant une rotation d'observateurs à ceux-ci, en créant des réunions périodiques d'information qui peuvent éventuellement se transformer en organe de décision.

Aux Solidaires d'Izernay, par exemple (bâtiment, 85 salariés), un bulletin mensuel adressé aux sociétaires rend compte des débats et des décisions du C.A., un "flash" trimestriel adressé à tous les salariés fait le point sur les questions concernant directement les conditions de travail et d'emploi (création de postes, mouvements de personnel ...). Les associés qui représentent 50 % des salariés ont tous les deux mois une assemblée d'information-débat sur les problèmes de l'entreprise, assemblée qui peut à l'occasion se transformer en organe d'évaluation et de décision, et peuvent assister à tour de rôle aux réunions du C.A. en tant qu'observateurs.

D'une façon générale, "à un certain niveau d'information est pratiquement toujours liée, à de degrés divers, une participation collective à la décision" (1). Une attention particulière est accordée aux décisions stratégiques d'investissement qui mettent en jeu le métier et les capacités financières de la SCOP. S'il ne peut s'agir que rarement d'une définition active de l'objectif stratégique, un pouvoir de contrôle des sociétaires s'exerce qui peut aussi être frein ou blocage. En aval, par contre, une fois le principe admis, le choix du matériel, s'il s'agit d'une machine, fait souvent l'objet d'une participation active de ceux qui seront amenés à l'utiliser.

L'imprimerie est un terrain particulièrement riche d'exemples en la matière car, porteuse d'une certaine tradition coopérative d'ouvriers de métier, elle est profondément bouleversée par les changements techniques qui touchent l'activité depuis une vingtaine d'années. Les débats auxquels donnent lieu les investissements dans ces entreprises illustrent toute la difficulté qu'il y a à conjuguer dans une SCOP les attentes des travailleurs et les exigences de compétitivité face à des investissements vécus comme déqualifiants.

Plus rares sont les systèmes de décision qui font porter le débat sur la définition d'objectifs globaux. Un exemple particulier est fourni par une entreprise de menuiserie de bâtiment (créée en 1951, 195 salariés en 1984) dont le mode de fonctionnement centré sur "l'assemblée d'objectifs annuels" s'est mis en place au moment crucial de son passage à un stade de production industrielle pour maintenir une certaine qualité de rapports sociaux (2). Des réunions de petits groupes élaborent tous les ans des objectifs sociaux et coopératifs, ensuite synthétisés par la direction et les rapporteurs des groupes. La direction étudie les performances économiques et financières nécessaires pour les atteindre et présente deux ou trois variantes possibles à l'assemblée générale qui arrête les orientations pour l'année. Le suivi

(1) M.F. Lefilleul, in Revue de l'économie sociale, op.cit.

(2) Pour des monographies de cette SCOP, voir D. Demoustier, thèse du 3ème cycle, et l'étude et le livre du Frêne sur les innovations sociales en SCOP, op.cit. En annexe 5, voir le schéma de décomposition des objectifs.

de la réalisation s'effectue ensuite sur la base d'un prévisionnel au moyen de réunions tous les deux mois, de bulletins mensuels et de commissions spécialisées. L'ensemble des décisions constitue alors une sorte de contrat entre les sociétaires qui exercent leur responsabilité aux deux extrêmes de la définition des objectifs et de leur travail quotidien, et la direction qui applique la politique nécessaire à la réalisation des objectifs tout en en rendant compte aux sociétaires.

Mais cette tentative pour allier délégation de pouvoir et processus large de participation aux décisions n'efface pas pour le travailleur de "base" la difficulté à concrétiser la relation entre sa situation concrète de travail et la réalisation d'objectifs globaux, dans un contexte caractérisé par des modes d'organisation du travail "classiques". Si l'hypothèse d'un effet autonome d'entraînement exercé par le développement de l'information et de la participation doit être prise en considération, l'existence d'un rapport au travail concret inchangé impose cependant des limites : les contradictions vécues peuvent tout aussi bien être génératrices de positions de retrait pour une partie des salariés, alors qu'un noyau peut se saisir du processus pour s'impliquer plus amplement.

5.2.2.2. Pratiques de participation dans le modèle "auto-géré".

L'originalité des pratiques coopératives que nous avons qualifiées d'auto-gestionnaires réside moins dans les domaines auxquels elles s'appliquent, dans les modalités adoptées que dans l'articulation de plusieurs champs d'intervention des salariés, et dans l'exercice indissocié d'une participation dans le travail et dans la gestion coopérative - dans les micro-décisions comme dans les macro-décisions.

Dans ces coopératives "à projet", le mode de fonctionnement évolue par expérimentations successives suscitées là aussi par des étapes clés de leur histoire. L'inscription du fonctionnement collectif dans la durée suppose une structuration que bien des groupes à l'origine fusionnels ne parviennent pas à réguler, convaincus que les relations informelles et conviviales suffisent à résoudre leurs problèmes de fonctionnement.

Par ailleurs, en étendant la participation aux salariés non coopérateurs, les SCOP instaurent des mécanismes d'intégration qui les prémunissent partiellement contre un clivage entre deux groupes de salariés et constituent des lieux d'apprentissage.

Si dans une première phase la démocratie directe s'exprime souvent par un fonctionnement en assemblées qui nie la délégation de pouvoir à une structure élue ou à une équipe de direction, par la suite l'organisation tend à s'établir de la façon suivante :

- L'assemblée régulière et fréquente des sociétaires ouverte à tous les salariés constitue l'organe de décision sur un champ très étendu de thèmes : investissements, embauches, salaires, politique commerciale, ... La dynamique inégalitaire y reparaît cependant : les questions qui portent sur des aspects concrets de fonctionnement suscitent plus d'expression que ceux qui exigent un savoir spécifique concentré par les dirigeants qui élaborent les propositions, préparent les réunions, appliquent les déci-

sions prises ... Lieu de contrôle, l'assemblée reste une zone d'intervention où les coopérateurs peuvent peser sur les choix, un lieu où se mûrit - souvent longuement - le consensus.

Les extraits d'entretiens que livre A. Chataignier (1) sont significatifs à cet égard : "Quand l'A.G. se réunit, le CA a déjà réfléchi", "c'est l'information qu'ils (les dirigeants) communiquent qui est la seule ... on ne peut que faire confiance ... il faudrait plusieurs autres personnes formées qui aient du temps pour exercer un contrôle", ou encore "il faut que les décisions soient débattues ... mûries, il y a souvent report... pas de décision immédiate" et "ceux qui sont à la production n'ont pas pendant le temps de travail, la même possibilité d'extrapoler".

- Des lieux intermédiaires horizontaux, réunions d'atelier ou de section, s'attachent aux problèmes qui affèrent directement à leur fonctionnement quotidien. Leur autonomie peut être importante et se traduire par une véritable décentralisation qui inclut le pouvoir de décider des investissements, du budget, des prix... A ce niveau peut s'instaurer la rotation des responsabilités.
- Des structures transversales du type commissions thématiques se réunissent régulièrement ou sont créées à l'occasion pour étudier un problème spécifique comme le passage à un nouveau mode de rémunération ou l'étude des possibilités offertes par différentes options en cas d'investissement matériel.
- Un C.A. élu peut coexister avec une direction collégiale correspondant soit à une direction fonctionnelle soit à la coordination des responsables de sections qui travaillent alors partiellement à la production. En général, le P.D.G. a occupé - parfois occupe encore à temps partiel - un poste "productif" en même temps qu'il exerçait son mandat, situation qui s'avère intenable à long terme et qui pose de façon aiguë la question de son renouvellement.

Si la rotation des postes en général est souvent abandonnée "par réalisme", il lui est parfois substitué un système partiel - comme le partage de certaines tâches administratives. Dans certaines SCOP, la volonté que personne n'échappe à une responsabilité se traduit par le fait que chacun doit, en plus de son poste de travail, être responsable d'une fonction dont il a à rendre compte à toute l'équipe.

L'Imprimerie contemporaine (17 salariés) offre un exemple très accompli de structuration : un système verrouillé limitant au maximum les possibilités de prise de décisions individuelles (2).

(1) "Italiques : une démocratie imaginative", Revue de l'économie sociale, op. cit.

(2) Pour une monographie de cette SCOP, voir l'étude et le livre réalisés par le Frêne, op.cit.

- Le "collectif des travailleurs" est l'instance suprême de décision sur un éventail large de questions engageant l'ensemble de l'entreprise : salaires, embauches, investissements, politique commerciale ...
- Le conseil d'administration prépare les réunions du collectif, en s'alimentant du travail des commissions et des ateliers ; il est composé de représentants des trois commissions, des deux ateliers et du "trio".
- Le "trio" est une sorte de directoire réunissant le P.D.G. et les deux "animateurs" d'ateliers : il est chargé d'appliquer les décisions, d'expédier les affaires courantes ...
- Les deux ateliers sont des unités de production au fonctionnement autonome, chacune dotée d'un "animateur" qui effectue le suivi et la régulation, fait le lien avec le C.A. et le "trio", et d'un délégué - "voix des salariés" - conçu comme un contre-pouvoir mais au rôle mal défini.
- Les commissions (social, formation, gestion), obligatoires, sont des chambres de réflexion et d'élaboration des choix.

Dans cette coopérative fondée en 1975 sur un projet à la fois idéologique et professionnel, le refus de la hiérarchie constitue un principe fondateur, l'égalité des salaires est perçue comme une nécessité, la responsabilité collective et le partage des tâches sont des objectifs permanents. Si ce dernier point est limité à des tâches d'administration, l'information permet cependant d'acquérir une connaissance polyvalente du travail ; et chacun prend une part de responsabilité à travers une fonction précise qu'il exerce en plus de son poste de travail.

Au-delà de cette expérience très élaborée qui met en jeu un haut niveau de cohésion du collectif et une croissance maîtrisée de la coopérative, un constat général s'impose quant à l'évolution des coopératives "auto-gérées".

Dans la durée, à une remise en cause radicale de la division du travail se substitue une stratégie de responsabilisation des salariés qui s'opère à la fois dans la gestion coopérative par l'information et le contrôle et dans le travail par l'auto-organisation et la décentralisation de décisions. Le niveau de contrainte qu'engendre un tel fonctionnement exige un investissement personnel important des salariés. Dans un contexte de valeurs partagées et de relations humaines chaleureuses, la fréquence des interactions, et la multiplicité des structures de négociations diversifient les sources de pouvoir des acteurs. Mais elles placent ces derniers dans des rapports de face à face généralisés (1) qui diminuent leurs protections et peuvent aussi entraîner des relations conflictuelles difficiles à vivre pour ceux qui disposent de peu de ressources stratégiques.

(1) Comme le souligne P.E. Tixier, op.cit.

Si le fonctionnement collectif établit une possibilité d'expression directe en reconnaissant le statut d'acteur aux individus, il semble que, quels que soient les efforts faits pour l'éviter, la distribution inégalitaire du pouvoir se traduit - sauf exception - par une participation différenciée des travailleurs.

5.2.3. Une participation différenciée.

Derrière la tension paritaire, les SCOP sont constituées de groupes ou encore de strates (1) qui n'ont ni le même passé, ni même des projets et des intérêts communs fondamentaux. Les clivages ne se réduisent pas à des différences de catégories socio-professionnelles ; c'est davantage la diversité de leurs origines qui marque les rapports des acteurs à la coopérative et entre eux, et peut se cristalliser par moments dans des clivages catégoriels ou coopératifs.

Les inégalités et les différences culturelles reposent sur l'expérience antérieure des individus : une formation supérieure et une origine bourgeoise ou un apprentissage effectué à travers le militantisme donne accès aux responsabilités, développe les capacités d'expression et la construction de stratégies individuelles ; une formation moins poussée et un passé d'"exécutant" produisent des comportements qui valorisent davantage le climat humain que l'accès aux décisions et la prise de parole.

Les différences fondent et se reproduisent dans la division du travail. Elles sont la source de la formation de projets et d'objectifs qui diffèrent selon la position occupée dans l'organisation et les systèmes d'alliances établis.

Reprenant partiellement, en la complétant, la typologie établie par P.E. Tixier, on peut distinguer :

- Une strate participative.

Si elle ne contrôle pas les enjeux décisionnels, elle participe cependant au pouvoir. Certains peuvent vivre la participation comme une formation, un "accès à une culture de pouvoir" (2) (par exemple, les secrétaires d'un bureau d'étude). Cette strate nous paraît également recouvrir une partie de ceux que D. Demoustier appelle les "professionnels" (3) qui jouissent d'un pouvoir technique et voient dans la coopération un moyen de le valoriser en maintenant leur relation au produit, en résistant à la destruction du métier (par exemple, les ouvriers imprimeurs).

- Une strate retraitiste.

Son appréciation de l'ambiance et des relations conviviales ne va pas jusqu'à la motiver pour s'impliquer dans la coopérative. Pour ces salariés.

(1) "Par strate, il faut entendre un ensemble défini par l'appartenance à une position définie par des règles ou des réseaux d'alliances, et pas seulement par l'idéologie", P.E. Tixier in Revue Française de gestion, op.cit.

(2) P.E. Tixier, ibid., voir aussi La démocratie en organisation, op.cit.

(3) D. Demoustier, Les coopératives de production, op.cit.

la SCOP est avant tout un moyen de se procurer un revenu. Ils n'en attendent pas de valorisation particulière pour diverses raisons : leur faible qualification les pousse à réduire au minimum l'emprise du travail et le fonctionnement reste l'affaire des cadres ou des anciens ; d'autres privilégient leur vie personnelle en dehors de la coopérative (ils sont en retrait parce qu'acteurs ailleurs) ; d'autres encore contestent le modèle des relations dominantes et refusent de l'intérioriser (en retrait parce que déviants).

- Une strate décisionnelle.

Aux postes de direction et de responsabilités, la coopération permet à ces "gestionnaires" de poursuivre un projet personnel de développement de leurs capacités et de leurs responsabilités. Leur projet se centre sur la reconnaissance économique de l'entreprise dont ils assurent et l'expansion et la cohésion.

Selon cette approche de la participation en termes de stratégie, chacun apparaît agir en fonction des enjeux qu'il peut maîtriser et des gains qu'il peut en attendre. Les acteurs disposent d'un champ d'autonomie qui évolue dans un système de contraintes objectives et subjectives. La coexistence, au sein des coopératives, de plusieurs structures de pouvoir offertes aux mêmes individus - à la différence du schéma des entreprises traditionnelles - amène ces derniers à jouer plusieurs rôles, multiplie les espaces de négociations et les possibilités d'ajustement. Aussi, lorsqu'il s'y superpose, le pôle "contre-pouvoir" voit son rôle modifié et marqué d'ambiguïté.

5-3. QUELQUES REMARQUES SUR TIERS-SECTEUR ET ORGANISATION

Sous l'aspect de leur organisation, les expériences d'auto-gestion qui ne relèvent pas de la forme coopérative peuvent être ramenées au premier modèle - "auto-géré" - défini pour les SCOP. On peut tout au plus faire quelques remarques supplémentaires.

- Autour du "produit" : la réflexion sur l'utilité sociale du produit ou du service liée à la volonté d'instaurer un autre type de rapport marchand est sans doute un élément favorable à l'exercice de la participation du collectif quant à la définition du "produit" (1).
- Autour de la forme juridique : l'évolution du fonctionnement collectif dans les SCOP révèle sa tendance à se formaliser progressivement en prenant appui, tout en les dépassant, sur les structures du modèle coopératif. Il s'opère une sorte de mouvement de recentrage sur la règle coopérative,

(1) Les SCOP de la jeune génération ne sont pas exclues de cette démarche. Mais soulignons que celle-ci est étrangère à la tradition de la coopération de production qui, dès la fin du 19^e siècle, affirmait la prééminence des enjeux de la production sur ceux de la consommation, ce qui ne fut pas étranger à un certain corporatisme des coopérateurs.

facteur de maintien de la cohérence du groupe à travers la protection de l'entreprise. Le recours à une règle liée au statut juridique est absent dans les autres formes d'entreprises à projet collectif. On peut faire l'hypothèse que cela n'est pas indifférent dans l'évolution de leur fonctionnement qui peut, plus que dans les SCOP, conserver un caractère informel. Cas extrême, dans une entreprise auto-gérée à forme commerciale classique, il n'y a pas d'autre protection à la privatisation que la règle édictée par le groupe. Autre écueil, le départ de l'un des apporteurs de capital peut signifier l'arrêt de l'expérience.

- Autour du pouvoir : des études menées auprès d'associations (1) ou d'organisations à projet idéologique fort (2) soulignent que l'importance du projet - hautement valorisé - conduit souvent au refus de penser l'organisation comme une réalité importante du fonctionnement participatif. Les rapports de pouvoir ne seraient reconnus que de façon implicite ou indirecte. "Les problèmes de pouvoir se traitent alors dans le secret des relations privées" (3), l'"arrangement" prend le pas sur la négociation. Qu'il y ait une volonté ou au contraire un refus de formalisation, les processus de décisions seraient en fait reliés à des régulations inter-individuelles, informelles, à des tractations et des pressions... Il en résulterait "l'existence d'une violence latente associée à des rapports de pouvoir qui sont d'autant plus menaçants (...) qu'ils ne sont pas institutionnalisés" (4).

6. - RELATIONS INDUSTRIELLES

En l'absence d'informations statistiques ou d'enquêtes sur le poids du syndicalisme et sur le rôle des institutions de représentation des salariés en coopératives, cette partie ne peut que se fonder sur les observations que fournissent les monographies existantes. Rappelons au préalable que les syndicats sont relativement peu présents dans les petites et moyennes entreprises françaises et que les coopératives, en dépit de leur spécificité, ne peuvent totalement échapper à cette tendance. Encore faut-il relativiser cette affirmation selon un critère de secteur d'activité.

(1) cf. notamment M.O. Marty in La démocratie en organisation, op.cit.

(2) R. Nehmy, Les fonctionnements collectifs de travail, II Les organisations à projet, rapport d'études du MACI (CNRS), Paris, déc. 1980; et "organisations à projet", l'Année Sociologique, 33, 1983, pp. 67-84.

(3) Ibid.

(4) Ibid.

Cette partie tente plutôt de rendre compte des difficultés et des ambiguïtés inhérentes au rôle des structures de représentation des salariés dans des entreprises dont ceux-ci sont censés exercer la gestion.

6-1. SYNDICALISME ET COOPERATION

La montée du chômage et la multiplication des faillites d'entreprises ont, depuis quelques années, amené les mouvements syndicaux et coopératifs à reconnaître la nécessité d'une collaboration, même limitée et critique.

Au niveau local cependant, les situations sont diverses. Des expériences de "reprises" d'entreprises sous forme coopérative montrent des syndicats favorables à cette solution et dynamiques dans sa mise en oeuvre. Cependant, certains syndicats restent hostiles à la création de SCOP, d'autres ne s'y résignent qu'en dernier recours, d'autres encore sont divisés sur l'opportunité d'une "reprise" sous forme coopérative (divergence entre une section d'entreprise et une union locale, par exemple).

Au niveau de l'entreprise coopérative elle-même, le principe de l'action syndicale n'est pas toujours reconnu (1). Comme l'exprime le président de la CG SCOP : "il y a chez quelques coopérateurs, une tendance à considérer que si la coopérative fonctionne correctement, le syndicalisme devient inutile. Cette conception vise l'intégration de l'homme tout entier dans une "communauté" de base (...), ne peut conduire qu'à un certain totalitarisme. Elle n'a d'ailleurs jamais réellement vécu (...), plus commodément certains pensent que le syndicalisme (même lorsqu'il a été à l'origine de la coopérative), y est devenu inutile - dès lors qu'il n'y a plus de lutte de classe au sein de l'entreprise commune - voir nuisible, puisqu'il peut aller jusqu'à créer un double pouvoir au sein d'un collectif ouvrier souvent fragile - et alors que l'élection des responsables coopératifs au suffrage universel des travailleurs fonde assez leur légitimité". (2).

Face à cette attitude erronée et à celle inverse qui tendrait à "vouloir absorber le pouvoir économique de la coopérative dans le pouvoir syndical", le président de la CG SCOP attribue au syndicat une double mission "de soutien et d'affirmation des intérêts individuels face à l'intérêt collectif du groupe (...), d'ouverture à l'environnement économique" face à la tentation des SCOP de se fermer sur elles-mêmes.

(1) Les coopératives sont soumises au régime commun des entreprises en matière de représentation des salariés (et plus largement de droit du travail) : ces derniers peuvent créer une section syndicale sans limitation de seuil depuis les lois Auroux de 1982 (avant le seuil s'élevait à cinquante salariés) ; quant aux autres institutions représentatives, elles sont obligatoires à partir du seuil de onze salariés pour les délégués du personnel, de cinquante pour le comité d'entreprise. Elles sont investies par les syndicats quand ceux-ci sont présents dans l'entreprise. Signalons par ailleurs, que face aux insuffisances que connaît la négociation entre employeurs et salariés en France, en dépit des conventions collectives des branches, les lois Auroux tentent de relancer la politique contractuelle en obligeant les deux parties à négocier régulièrement les conditions de travail, tant au niveau de la branche qu'au niveau de l'entreprise ; ce qui n'est pas toujours la proposition naturelle des organisations représentatives et des employeurs.

(2) Citations reprises de l'article de Y. Régis, "SCOP et syndicats", Revue de l'Economie Sociale, op.cit., p. 153-155.

6.1.1. Plusieurs cas de figure

Lorsque le principe de l'existence d'un contre-pouvoir syndical est reconnu (1), plusieurs cas de figures se présentent :

- Il est généralement difficile à une section syndicale de se maintenir dans une coopérative "reprise" par les salariés après une lutte menée par le syndicat. Outre les contradictions que soulève la nécessité de passer à une "lutte pour" la mise en route de l'entreprise, le phénomène de désyndicalisation est particulièrement accentué quand ce sont les leaders syndicaux qui deviennent les dirigeants de la coopérative. Pour se prémunir contre ce risque, le syndicat CGT préconise d'ailleurs le recrutement extérieur des dirigeants de façon à faire coexister trois pouvoirs (C.A., direction technique et syndicat) entre lesquels puisse s'exercer un jeu contradictoire qui assure la défense des intérêts des travailleurs et la cohérence de l'action syndicale (2).

Mais les échecs ne sont pas rares d'expériences de recrutement de cadres qui, formés à l'école de l'entreprise privée, s'adaptent difficilement au jeu des pouvoirs en coopérative.

- Cette orientation peut déboucher sur des formes d'action syndicale très proches de celles développées dans les entreprises patronales. C'est aussi le cas de certaines SCOP qui ont grossi rapidement et/ou ont embauché une main-d'oeuvre mobile et peu qualifiée. Des salariés non sociétaires choisissent alors le syndicat pour faire entendre leur voix auprès des sociétaires et de la direction qui leur apparaît comme une autorité patronale et adoptent une position de classe traditionnelle. Parfois aussi, la création ou la re-création d'une section syndicale exprime la réaction d'un groupe de sociétaires face à la dérive du fonctionnement par rapport à leur projet initial.
- D'autres coopératives lient, dès leur création, projet coopératif et projet syndical, soit par conviction politique : les créations ex-nihilo par des militants syndicalistes jalonnent l'histoire ancienne et récente du mouvement coopératif ; soit plutôt par tradition, comme dans la branche de l'imprimerie. (3)

(1) Compte tenu de l'absence de données, il est impossible de dire dans quelle proportion de coopératives ; en revanche, il est certain que l'institution d'un contre-pouvoir se heurte aux dimensions mêmes de l'organisation. Par ailleurs, la culture militante d'une partie des "nouvelles" coopératives, nourrie d'idéologie post-soixante huitarde, s'éloigne de la tradition coopérative ouvriériste, encore largement représentée dans les institutions du mouvement.

(2) La CFDT, plus traversée par des interrogations sur le rôle du syndicalisme et une réflexion auto-gestionnaire, ne récuse pas la nécessité du syndicalisme en coopérative, mais a des pratiques plus souples.

(3) A l'inverse, dans des secteurs traditionnellement peu syndiqués, comme le bâtiment, les SCOP échappent pour une grande partie à la syndicalisation.

Dans ces SCOP, le maintien, au cours de leur évolution, d'une forte proportion de syndiqués - voir la syndicalisation totale - se pose tout d'abord comme une affirmation de la poursuite de la solidarité avec le mouvement ouvrier (1), sans toujours parvenir à lui définir un rôle actif dans l'entreprise.

6.1.2. Ambiguïté de la situation du syndicat.

Si, par delà la diversité des situations, la présence du syndicat a bien une dimension de maintien de la coopérative dans l'ensemble de la lutte du mouvement ouvrier en empêchant la fermeture du groupe des coopérateurs sur une vision étroite - d'autant que celui-ci bénéficie également des avancées qui s'opèrent dans le droit du travail -, son rôle de défense des intérêts des salariés sous une forme collective pose d'autres questions.

En pratique, le syndicat joue plutôt un rôle de garde-fou qui empêche l'appropriation de la coopérative par une partie de ses membres. "Le syndicat serait alors une garantie de vie démocratique interne, en représentant des salariés face aux sociétaires qui, par leurs voix en Assemblée Générale, disposent d'un moyen d'expression ou en représentant les producteurs face aux gestionnaires". (2)

Relais de l'information syndicale, observateur vigilant de la gestion de l'entreprise sans être directement gestionnaires, défenseur de la dimension collective des revendications individuelles sans être uniquement revendicatif..., la situation du syndicat dans les organisations coopératives, souffre d'une profonde ambiguïté ; son action oscille entre co-gestion et revendication.

A la base de cette ambiguïté : la contradiction incontournable du statut de travailleur-sociétaire dans un environnement dominé par le salariat. Là où le schéma traditionnel de l'entreprise sépare les rôles, les travailleurs sont amenés à vivre une superposition : ils sont en même temps sociétaires et syndiqués et éventuellement responsables hiérarchiques. La façon dont ces contradictions sont vécues, oriente largement la dynamique collective ; et si globalement, le syndicat ne retrouve un rôle actif de défense des salariés qu'en temps de crise, les nombreux réseaux de négociation qui coexistent en SCOP permettent la recherche de compromis et d'arbitrages, qui limitent les phénomènes de bi-polarisation et de blocages.

(1) Solidarité qui, en cas de mouvement de grève nationale ou sectorielle par exemple, peut s'exprimer de façon spécifique : comme verser une partie des salaires à une caisse de solidarité plutôt que de perturber la production dans la SCOP.

(2) D. Demoustier, Les coopératives de production, p. 83.

6-2. INSTITUTIONS DE REPRESENTATION DU PERSONNEL ET RESOLUTION DES CONFLITS

Dans de nombreuses SCOP, la petite taille de l'entreprise, l'opposition à une structure jugée inutile, le "bon" fonctionnement collectif forment des facteurs limitatifs de l'instauration de contre-pouvoirs (1). Les conflits se résolvent de façon informelle dans la relation directe et souvent aisée avec la hiérarchie, ou au sein des structures collectives de la coopérative, structures organiques ou structures propres à l'entreprise.

Là où la taille de l'entreprise et la volonté des coopérateurs se conjuguent, on observe des interventions des différentes structures représentatives des sociétaires et des salariés, en particulier C.A., comité d'entreprise (C.E.) et syndicat, qui débordent leurs attributions formelles.

Ainsi, le comité d'entreprise - qui est investi par le syndicat quand celui-ci existe - est souvent représenté au C.A. en tant que membre à part entière ou en tant qu'observateur associé ponctuellement à des décisions importantes. Il possède alors un droit de regard (2) sur l'ensemble de la vie de l'entreprise et se trouve associé de façon plus ou moins active à la gestion. Le C.E. devient souvent, dans ce cas, un lieu d'apprentissage du pouvoir qui peut servir de voie d'intégration au C.A..

Ailleurs, pour des raisons historiques, ce peut être le syndicat qui exerce le véritable pouvoir de contrôle. C'est le cas de la Verrerie Ouvrière d'Albi (500 salariés en 1982, créée en 1958), où le conseil syndical exerce sa vigilance sur tous les aspects sociaux, contrôle les grandes orientations, diffuse l'information et éventuellement revendique, face à une hiérarchie qui remplit son rôle fonctionnel et à un C.A. et un C.E. en quelque sorte arbitres.

La répartition des tâches est loin d'être partout aussi clairement définie. Elle dépend à la fois du degré de reconnaissance du syndicat en tant que partenaire et du fonctionnement des structures coopératives. Plus souvent C.E., s'il ne se limite pas à gérer les oeuvres sociales, peut se voir définir un domaine limité d'action, comme celui de la formation, ou bien se porter garant de l'évolution des salaires et des promotions en l'absence de fonctionnement réel du syndicat ...

Le rôle des organismes de représentation des salariés n'est donc en aucun cas réductible à un modèle. On peut affirmer toutefois que ces structures sont soumises à deux tendances contradictoires : elles sont en partie court-circuitées par les autres lieux de négociation du fonctionnement coopératif et à la fois, elles interviennent dans un domaine plus large que celui des conflits du travail, en particulier sur la question de développement de l'entreprise.

(1) Même le volontarisme des militants syndicalistes d'une petite imprimerie auto-gérée (voir supra, l'exemple de l'Imprimerie Contemporaine dans le chapitre "formes d'organisation", partie "pratiques de participation") ne suffit pas à faire vivre l'instauration d'un contre-pouvoir sous la forme de délégués d'ateliers, chargés d'intervenir en cas de contradiction entre les revendications des salariés et l'intérêt général de la SCOP.

(2) C'est précisément ce que l'une des dispositions des lois Auroux renforce dans l'ensemble des entreprises. Dans le cas particulier des entreprises nationalisées, une autre disposition récente introduit la participation de représentants des salariés au C.A.

Un exemple cité par D. Demoustier, à propos de la Verrerie Ouvrière d'Albi (1), illustre bien ce double aspect. Lors du choix d'implantation d'une nouvelle usine, le conseil syndical a imposé au C.A. une localisation qui permettait le maintien de l'emploi localement. A l'inverse, un conflit opposant conseil syndical et C.A. à la direction à propos d'un licenciement, a été arbitré par l'Assemblée Générale du personnel en faveur de la direction qui avait saisie l'occasion pour poser la "question de confiance" sur sa gestion.

Il semble de plus que les travailleurs accordent leur confiance à l'une ou l'autre structure en fonction de la conjoncture, la tournant plutôt vers les organes coopératifs ou la direction quand la situation de l'entreprise ou les conflits internes menacent la survie de la SCOP. C'est d'ailleurs des raisons pour lesquelles les conflits se polarisent peu sur la question des dirigeants, le plus souvent inamovibles.

Les dispositifs négociatoires internes aux SCOP sont généralement suffisants, même s'ils ne sont pas toujours transparents, pour résoudre les conflits. L'Assemblée Générale des sociétaires retrouve là un rôle actif, dans celui d'arbitrage suprême. Mais en cas de blocage, il peut être fait appel à des arbitrages extérieurs à travers le mouvement coopératif ou encore les organismes professionnels ou syndicaux. Le recours à la grève apparaît comme un cas exceptionnel, manifeste d'une certaine inertie : "faute de réflexion collective, la gestion de type familial (autour d'un petit noyau de fondateurs, par exemple), ou anonyme (autour de la compétence de gestionnaires recrutés à l'extérieur)". (2)

Les figures évoquées plus haut concernent des coopératives suffisamment importantes et volontaristes pour ainsi multiplier les structures : plutôt petites ou moyennes entreprises industrielles, mais aussi entreprises des secteurs traditionnellement coopératifs du bâtiment et du livre, dotées d'un collectif militant, du moins à leur origine. Ces constats ne sauraient faire oublier que nombre de coopératives échappent à ces caractéristiques : leur petite taille et la dimension collective de leur fonctionnement ne laissent pas place à une nouvelle structure de contre-pouvoir. Ou encore elles se contentent de respecter formellement - comme souvent les P.M.E. - les obligations légales.

Les conflits se résolvent alors au sein d'un système de négociations plus ou moins informelles qui leur est propre et varie selon le fonctionnement qui les caractérise et selon l'importance des enjeux.

(1) On renvoie ici à sa thèse qui en donne une monographie.

(2) D. Demoustier, Les coopératives de production, p. 85.

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ANNEXE 1 : LE MOUVEMENT DES COMMUNAUTÉS DE TRAVAIL

Source : D. Demoustier, Les coopératives de production, Paris, La Découverte, 1984, p. 31-32.

Réfugiés en zone libre, alors que la moitié du territoire français était occupée, des travailleurs et leurs patrons se retrouvaient dans une entreprise d'horlogerie démenagée de Besançon à Valence. Elle prit le nom, devenu célèbre, de Boimondau (Boitiers de montres du Dauphiné) et s'attacha à diffuser les caractéristiques originales de son fonctionnement : propriété sociale et indivise des moyens de production, éducation et responsabilités extérieures obligatoires, salaires calculés sur « la valeur humaine » et non sur les seuls résultats économiques, rémunération des « familiers » et non des seuls travailleurs dans la production, élection des responsables à la double confiance (des supérieurs hiérarchiques et des subordonnés), prise de décisions à l'unanimité...

De telles exigences limitèrent l'essor du mouvement : une cinquantaine de Communautés fonctionnaient en 1954, seulement vingt-sept en 1957 avec mille travailleurs au maximum. Boimondau même dut fermer ses portes en 1971, après quelques années mouvementées¹. Dans cette mouvance, se formèrent plusieurs coopératives encore très actives aujourd'hui, telles, en 1947, Rochebrune dans l'Est parisien et Imcarvau dans le Vaucluse.

Démarrée par l'association de neuf personnes dont un juriste et quelques menuisiers, Rochebrune eut pour première activité le débit et la vente de bois de chauffage. Enthousiaste, quoique peu expérimentée, cette petite équipe envoya quelques-uns de ses membres en Allemagne pour travailler et gagner un revenu nécessaire aux premiers investissements. L'entreprise était alors considérée non dans sa finalité strictement économique, mais comme un moyen pour lutter contre l'emprise de l'argent par le partage de la vie de travail, et participer ainsi à la libération ouvrière.

Assez semblable est l'histoire d'Imcarvau, formée par un groupe de jeunes scouts qui, ayant traversé difficilement la guerre, voulaient travailler ensemble et librement, tout en utilisant les résultats économiques à des objectifs sociaux. Sans opter pour la charte communautaire qu'ils jugeaient trop contraignante, ils cherchaient à promouvoir la formation des travailleurs, par des cours du soir, des groupes de travail, des réunions et des sorties fréquentes.

L'Entente Communautaire, regroupement des Communautés de Travail, ne fonctionne plus ; les collectifs encore en activité ont intégré le statut coopératif, mais ces aspirations restent présentes chez ceux qui participèrent à un tel mouvement. Elles ne cessent de renaître dans les jeunes groupes de coopérateurs.

Les vingt années qui suivirent la Seconde Guerre mondiale ont cependant été, pour les SCOP, plus une période d'accumulation qu'une phase de foisonnement. Le rythme de création s'est ralenti, le fort accroissement des années 1947-1950 a été suivi d'un nombre important de disparitions, alors que les coopératives les plus solidement implantées assuraient leur expansion, augmentaient leur chiffre d'affaires et, pour beaucoup d'entre elles, voyaient croître le nombre d'auxiliaires dans l'ensemble du personnel.

ANNEXE 2 : STATUTS ET PRINCIPES COOPERATIFS

1 - L'apport de la loi de 1978

Source : H. Sibille (sous la direction de), Les coopératives ouvrières de production en France et dans la C.E.E., Notes et études documentaires n° 4690-4691, nov. 1982, Paris, La Documentation Française, p. 27-28.

Jusqu'en 1978, le statut juridique des SCOP résultait de la combinaison de différents textes législatifs, peu ou mal accordés les uns avec les autres. La loi du 19 juillet 1978 a donc constitué une étape importante, dans la mesure où elle a défini un statut unique de la société coopérative ouvrière de production, bien accueillie par la Confédération générale des SCOP dont les propositions avaient été largement reprises dans le texte de la loi. Lors de la rédaction de la loi, l'esprit qui avait inspiré le législateur était d'adapter les « principes historiques de la coopération », de faciliter la recherche de financement, de limiter l'influence des associés principaux et d'encourager la création de nouvelles SCOP.

Cette loi met en accord le droit avec les faits, dans la mesure où elle n'écarte aucune activité professionnelle de l'objet des SCOP, ni aucune catégorie de travailleurs, prenant ainsi en compte le développement récent des SCOP dans le secteur tertiaire ou vers des salariés qui ne sont plus des ouvriers ; d'où la possibilité de prendre le nom de « Société coopérative de travailleurs » qui convient mieux aux coopératives n'exerçant pas une activité manufacturière (bureaux d'études, prestation de services...).

La loi de 1978 donne la définition suivante des SCOP : « Les sociétés coopératives ouvrières de production sont formées par des travailleurs de toutes catégories ou qualifications professionnelles, associés pour exercer en commun leurs professions dans une entreprise qu'ils gèrent directement ou par l'intermédiaire de mandataires désignés par eux et en leur sein. Les associés se choisissent et se groupent librement. Ils disposent de pouvoirs égaux, quelle que soit l'importance de la part du capital détenu par chacun d'eux ».

Ainsi la SCOP présente-t-elle la double caractéristique d'être à la fois une entreprise, soumise comme toutes les autres sociétés commerciales françaises aux obligations résultant du droit commercial et du droit des sociétés, mais aussi une association qui doit respecter un certain nombre de principes fondamentaux. Soumise au droit des sociétés (loi de 1966 sur les sociétés commerciales), les SCOP peuvent depuis 1978 opter entre deux statuts, celui de la société anonyme (SA) et celui de la société à responsabilité limitée (SARL). Le nombre minimum d'associés est de 4 pour les SCOP/SARL et de 7 pour les SCOP/SA. Comme les autres, elles ont la qualité de sociétés commerciales, la responsabilité des dirigeants est la même. La possibilité ouverte par la loi de 1978 de choisir un statut de SARL a certainement été une incitation favorable au développement des coopératives et notamment pour les petites entreprises. En effet, la SARL est d'un fonctionnement plus souple et moins formaliste que la société anonyme : le nombre minimum d'associés y est moins important, les comptes n'ont pas besoin d'être publiés, le rôle du gérant est plus simple. De même, la loi de 1978 a facilité la transformation d'une société classique en SCOP. Puisqu'elle prévoit que cette transformation ne donne pas lieu à création d'une personne morale nouvelle, il n'y a donc pas de droits fiscaux de mutation à payer. Il y a là un encouragement pour des chefs de petites entreprises parvenus à la retraite de transférer la propriété et la responsabilité de leur entreprise à leur personnel en la transformant en coopérative.

Source : plaquette de la CG SCOP.

2 - Les principes coopératifs et leur application dans le statut des SCOP

ANNEXE 2 : (suite 2)

associés salariés à temps plein dans la forme S.A.,
& dans la forme S.A.R.L.

Admission des associés : une SCOP ne peut considérer les travailleurs non encore associés comme de simples fournisseurs de travail. Elle doit voir en eux des coopérateurs en puissance, accomplissant un stage les préparant à leur admission et les former à cet effet. Pour aider les SCOP à accroître de façon significative le nombre de leurs travailleurs associés, la loi prévoit 4 systèmes d'admission :

. Un système de droit commun : la candidature de toute personne majeure employée depuis un an est soumise à l'assemblée des associés, son acceptation est prononcée à la majorité simple;

. Trois systèmes facultatifs :

- l'admission automatique de tout travailleur présentant sa candidature après la période de stage prévue aux statuts;

- la candidature obligatoire qui peut être prévue dans les contrats de travail et qui entraîne l'admission automatique si elle est présentée au terme du stage prévu, ou la rupture du contrat de travail si l'intéressé refuse de la présenter;

- l'incitation matérielle, qui oblige les associés travailleurs désireux de bénéficier des avantages fiscaux de la "souscription de parts sociales réservées aux salariés" à admettre automatiquement les salariés non encore associés qui, connaissance prise des obligations résultant de l'association, désiraient eux aussi bénéficier des mêmes avantages.

Perte de la qualité d'associé :

. la démission comme associé entraîne la démission comme salarié ;

LES MEMBRES DE LA COOPERATIVE

Les principes : double qualité (associés-travailleurs), personnalisme et porte ouverte

Le principe fondamental est celui de la double qualité : les associés de la coopérative doivent être ses salariés, les salariés de la coopérative doivent être ses associés; lorsqu'on a acquis l'une et l'autre de ces qualités, on ne peut pas perdre l'une sans perdre l'autre.

Il est complété par deux principes secondaires:

. le principe du personnalisme : la coopérative rassemble des personnes, et non des capitaux; on n'est pas associé parce que l'on détient des parts sociales mais parce qu'on a été admis par les autres associés;

. le principe de la porte ouverte : l'adhésion (sous réserve de l'admission dans les conditions prévues aux statuts) et le retrait (sous réserve du droit d'exclusion par l'assemblée de la coopérative et de l'application du principe de double qualité) résultent d'un acte volontaire.

Leur application :

Associés et travailleurs : pour tenir compte des besoins et possibilités des SCOP, la loi autorise celles-ci à avoir des associés non employés (mais elle limite leurs droits) et des salariés non associés (mais elle facilite leur admission comme associés).

Nombre minime d'associés employés : la SCOP doit avoir, sous peine de dissolution, au moins 7

. la démission comme salarié et le licenciement pour une cause réelle et sérieuse font perdre la qualité d'associé;

. les organes dirigeants peuvent toujours décider de rembourser le capital d'un associé qui ne travaille pas, ou ne travaille plus, dans la SCOP, et l'intéressé perd alors la qualité d'associé;

. l'assemblée des associés peut décider, à la majorité des 2/3 des voix dans la forme S.A. et des 3/4 dans la forme S.A.R.L., l'exclusion d'un associé, employé ou non.

Dirigeants sociaux : les directeurs généraux, membres du directoire et gérants, sont obligatoirement associés. Dès lors qu'ils sont rémunérés, et même s'ils n'ont pas de contrat de travail, ils sont considérés comme salariés au regard de toute la législation du travail et de la Sécurité sociale.

LA GESTION DE LA COOPERATIVE

Les principes : démocratie économique et gestion par les travailleurs

. Le principe de la démocratie économique : de la même façon que dans la cité, les citoyens votent et sont électeurs et éligibles dès leur majorité et en leur qualité de citoyens, sans considération de leur fortune; de la même façon, dans la SCOP, les associés votent et sont électeurs et éligibles dès leur admission, sans considération du capital qu'ils détiennent.

. Le principe de la gestion de l'entreprise par ses travailleurs : même si la SCOP comporte des associés non employés, sa gestion est assurée par ses travailleurs, ayant acquis la qualité d'associés.

Leur application :

Dans les assemblées, chaque associé ne dispose que d'une voix, quels que soient son capital, son ancienneté, sa qualification, sa rémunération.

Les dirigeants sociaux sont obligatoirement associés (il ne peut y avoir de directeur général, membre du directoire ou gérant non associé).

Dans les organes collégiaux d'administration, gestion ou contrôle (conseil d'administration ou de surveillance, directoire, gérance), les 2/3 au moins des mandats doivent être détenus par des associés travailleurs de la SCOP.

Les représentants légaux de la société (administrateurs, membres du conseil de surveillance ou du directoire, gérants) sont élus pour une durée maximum de 4 ans. Ils sont rééligibles mais leurs mandats peuvent être révoqués à tout moment par l'assemblée. Il ne peut y avoir de gérants statutaires.

Le principe de la gestion de l'entreprise par ses travailleurs implique une règle - non écrite mais dont l'application est la condition d'un bon fonctionnement de la SCOP - de formation coopérative et gestionnaire des associés et dirigeants.

LES RESERVES DE LA SCOP

Les principes : propriété collective et impartageabilité des réserves

Les deux principes de la propriété collective et de la pérennité de la coopérative s'expliquent et s'appuient l'un par l'autre, et se traduisent dans les règles d'impartageabilité des réserves.

Les instruments de production ne sont pas la propriété, directement ou indirectement, à titre individuel ou en commun, des porteurs de capital: ils sont la propriété collective de l'entreprise commune, sans doute composée de ses associés travailleurs, mais dont l'espérance de vie" dépasse l'espérance de vie de chacun de ses membres ou de chacune des générations qui s'y succèdent.

Les réserves collectives - accumulation, au fil des années, des profits non distribués - sont à la fois la représentation et l'instrument de cette propriété collective.

Impartageables entre les associés et les travailleurs, ces réserves forment le seul vrai moyen de financement permanent de l'entreprise : les associés qui se retirent peuvent se faire rembourser leur capital, mais laissent intactes les réserves, qui assurent ainsi la pérennité du financement et donc du patrimoine et de l'exploitation de la coopérative.

Leur application :

Les dotations aux réserves ont un caractère prioritaire. Elles recevront tous les ans, avant toute autre répartition, au moins 15% du bénéfice net (réserve légale) plus une fraction du bénéfice net, chiffrée dans les statuts, à une réserve statutaire (fonds de développement). Certains profits exceptionnels, non liés à l'exploitation, seront affectés aux réserves.

Les réserves sont impartageables : elles ne peuvent ni être incorporées au capital, ni être distribuées, pendant leur existence ou lors de la dissolution de la coopérative, aux associés ou travailleurs de celle-ci. Il en résulte qu'en cas de dissolution, les

sommes restant après réalisation de l'actif et remboursement des dettes et du capital, sont obligatoirement attribuées à une autre coopérative ou à la Confédération des SCOP, représentant l'universalité des coopératives.

Corollaire de la règle précédente, les parts sociales représentant le capital ne peuvent en cas de démission, retraite, exclusion, décès ou en cas de dissolution de la société, être remboursées qu'à leur valeur nominale.

LE CAPITAL DE LA COOPERATIVE

Les principes : responsabilité des associés et subordination du capital

Parce que la loi exige la présence d'un capital social individualisé et que l'équilibre financier rend nécessaire l'accroissement de celui-ci, les associés doivent souscrire des parts sociales. Mais, au-delà de ces contraintes légales ou techniques, le capital traduit deux principes :

. le principe de responsabilité : la souscription de parts de capital représente l'engagement personnel des coopérateurs, qui, par leur effort d'épargne au fa-veur de la SCOP, manifestent leur volonté d'assurer le bon fonctionnement de celle-ci et d'assurer collectivement le risque d'entreprise;

. le principe de subordination : le capital est un instrument, subordonné aux fins de la coopérative. Le pouvoir exercé ne dépend pas du capital détenu, mais de la compétence reconnue et de la confiance accordée; sa détention par quelques-uns ne doit pas faire échec aux principes fondamentaux.

Leur application : les statuts peuvent prévoir différents types d'engagements de souscription au capital, le plus souvent en proportion de la rémunération perçue par chaque associé travailleur. Une assemblée extraordinaire modificative des statuts peut, en cas de besoins, augmenter ces engagements. Différents moyens (accords de participation, opérations de souscription de parts sociales réservées aux salariés) peuvent réduire le coût des versements au capital et compléter ou alléger l'effort des coopérateurs. L'assemblée ordinaire peut décider la transformation en capital des répartitions revenant aux associés.

Les statuts doivent prévoir que la cession des parts ne peut être faite qu'à une personne déjà admise comme associé, et avec l'autorisation des organes statutaires de la SCOP elle-même.

Aucun associé ne peut détenir plus de la moitié du capital pendant les 10 premières années, plus du quart à partir de la 11e.

La SCOP peut différer de 5 ans au plus le remboursement du capital d'un associé démissionnaire, exclu ou décédé.

Comme déjà indiqué :

- . les droits de vote sont indépendants du capital;
- . le remboursement du capital ne peut se faire qu'au nominal;
- . la SCOP peut toujours décider de rembourser le capital détenu par un associé non employé.

En outre, l'intérêt servi au capital est limité dans les conditions indiquées ci-après.

LES BÉNÉFICES DE LA COOPÉRATIVE

Les principes : priorité aux réserves, ristourne, intérêt limité,

Ils sont ici au nombre de 3 :

. principe de la priorité des réserves qui, instrument de la propriété collective et de la pérennité de la coopérative, forme le seul vrai moyen de son financement permanent;

. principe de la restitution des excédents au travail qui les a produits. Les résultats positifs de l'exploitation doivent revenir en partie à tous les salariés, dont seule l'activité a permis d'utiliser avec profit les moyens de travail et les capitaux de l'entreprise (ce principe, dit aussi principe de la ristourne, a fait des SCOP la première forme d'entreprise à assurer un intéressement des travailleurs aux bénéfices);

. principe de la limitation de l'intérêt au capital, qui, considéré comme un simple instrument, ne doit pas voir sa rémunération prendre le pas sur l'accumulation des réserves et l'intéressement des salariés;

Leur application : les dotations prioritaires aux réserves ont déjà été indiquées.

25% au moins des bénéfices nets (après impôts sur les sociétés et, le cas échéant, apurement des pertes antérieures) doivent être attribués à tous les salariés, associés ou non, ayant travaillé au moins 3 mois dans l'année ou ayant au moins 6 mois d'ancienneté (répartition au travail). La répartition entre eux se fait au prorata des salaires ou du temps de travail de chacun pendant l'année.

Par le moyen d'un accord de participation, la

répartition au travail peut être épargnée (reprêtée par les salariés à l'entreprise, ou affectée à l'acquisition de nouvelles parts sociales). Elle bénéficie alors d'importants allègements fiscaux et ouvre droit à la constitution de réserves en franchise d'impôt.

Il est possible de prévoir que le capital ne recevra pas d'intérêt. Si un intérêt est versé, d'une part le total de ces intérêts est au plus égal à la répartition au travail; d'autre part, le taux de cet intérêt est au plus égal au taux moyen d'intérêt des obligations.

Comme déjà indiqué, l'assemblée ordinaire des associés peut décider que les répartitions au travail et au capital seront affectées à la création de nouvelles parts de capital.

LA SCOP DANS LA COOPERATION OUVRIERE

Les principes : fédéralisme et neutralité.

La tradition coopérative reconnaît en outre deux autres principes :

. celui du fédéralisme : les coopératives ne sont pas des éléments isolés. Porteurs d'un projet social nouveau, elles ne peuvent réaliser celui-ci qu'en liaison avec les autres coopératives. Elles doivent donc se rassembler dans des fédérations, qui sont aussi le lieu et l'instrument de la solidarité entre coopératives;

. celui de la neutralité : agents de transformation de la société, les coopératives et leurs fédérations peuvent collaborer avec d'autres organisations poursuivant la même fin mais ne sauraient leur être in-

féodées : leur neutralité - politique, philosophique, religieuse - est le gage de leur nécessaire indépendance.

Leur application : la loi ne reprend pas le principe de neutralité, encore que par plusieurs dispositions elle tende à assurer l'indépendance des SCOP, qui ne peuvent, ni dans leur capital, ni dans leur gestion, dépendre d'éléments extérieurs.

Elle se réfère au principe du fédéralisme dans plusieurs dispositions : attribution des sommes provenant de la liquidation à des fédérations de SCOP, avis obligatoire de la Confédération des SCOP sur la conformité des statuts et du fonctionnement.

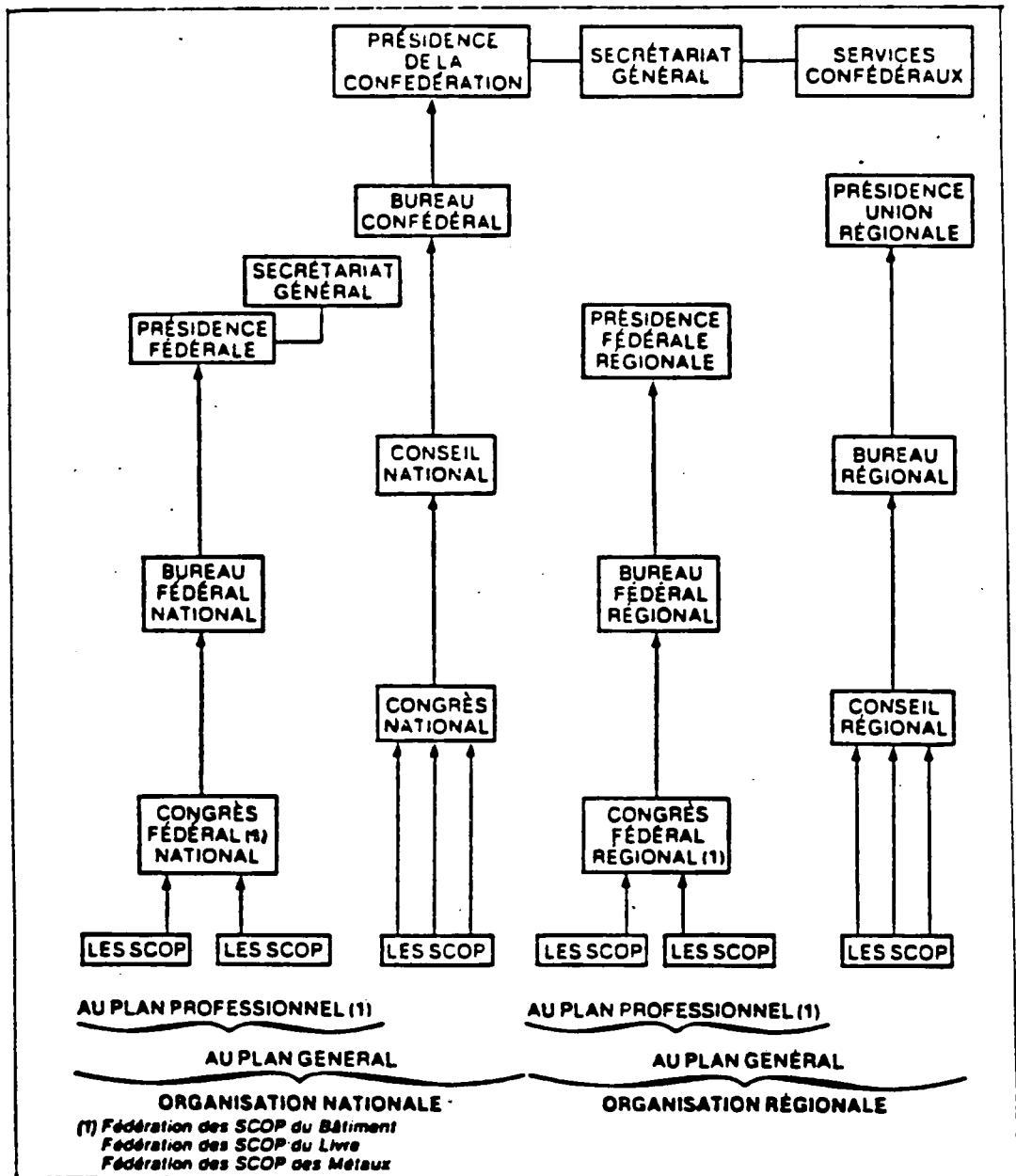
Unions de SCOP

La pratique coopérative a suppléé sur ce point les insuffisances de la loi : le rassemblement des SCOP en une Confédération, relayée par ses unions régionales et les fédérations professionnelles et par les organismes techniques ou sociaux qu'elle a créés, leur permet de résister aux risques de dépérissement entraînés par l'isolement, de bénéficier de services communs, d'assurer la formation coopérative et gestionnaire de leurs membres et de pratiquer entre elles, comme elles le pratiquent en leur sein, une solidarité active, qui rend en particulier possible la création de nouvelles SCOP.

ANNEXE 3 : ORGANISATION DU MOUVEMENT

1 - Organigramme des structures électorives.

Source : H. Sibille, op.cit.

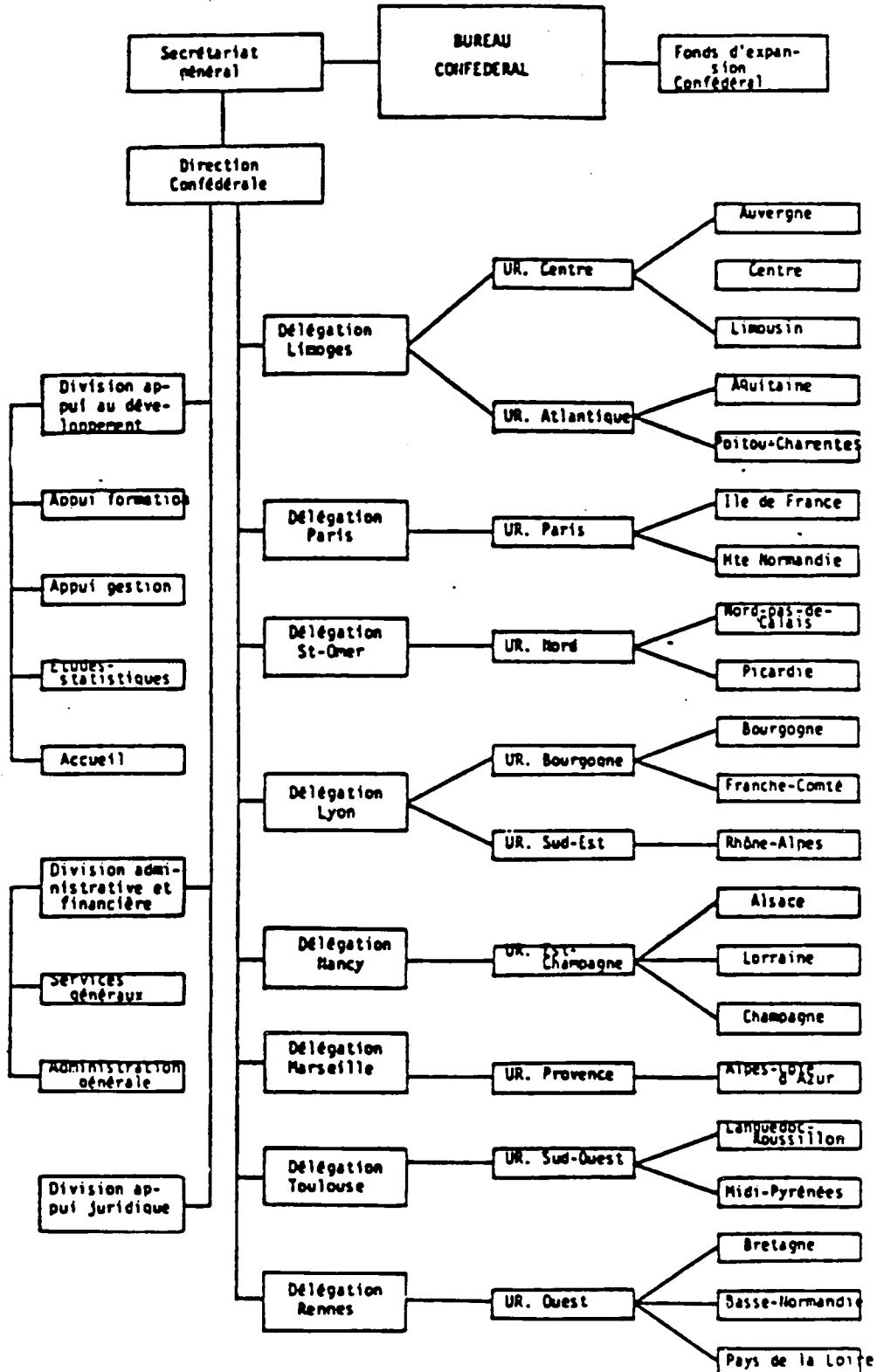


Source : Confédération générale des SCOP.

2 - Organisation technique des services de la CG SCOP.

Source : texte préparatoire au colloque international "Les coopératives de travailleurs et travailleuses pour la création et le maintien de l'emploi" organisé par HEC Montréal, août 1984.

ORGANIGRAMME



3 - Quelques aspects de la structuration du mouvement depuis les années soixante.

Source : colloque ibid.

- 1965 Création du "Fonds d'expansion confédéral" (FEC)
 alimenté par une cotisation de 0,1% du chiffre
 d'affaires des SCOP.
 Création d'une Société coopérative d'entraide
 (SOCODEN) à l'occasion d'une participation des SCOP
 à la reprise en SCOP d'une imprimerie la SADAG.
- 1968 Création du "Bilan coopératif":
 pour assurer la pérennité de l'entreprise collective
 sur le plan humain en contrôlant:
 Composition de la population coopérative
 (âge moyen)
 Promotion
 Formation
 Information, consultation, décision
 Climat intérieur et budget social
 Accord de participation
- 1971 Naissance de SOCODEN-FEC par la fusion de ces deux
 organismes
 Objet: faciliter le développement de la coopération
 ouvrière en aidant les SCOP à maîtriser leur
 autofinancement.
- 1973 Création de l'"UNION SOCIALE"
 Organisme commun aux SCOP qui intervient au profit
 de leurs membres et de leurs familles: maladies,
 accidents, vacances, loisirs, etc.

ANNEXE 4 : UNE ENQUETE SUR L'EXERCICE DU POUVOIR

Source : J.L. Bonhomme, "Les SCOP : structures de participation", Pour, n°37, spécial coopératives, 1974, pp. 21-26.

Petit échantillon significatif :

Le petit échantillon auquel je suis arrivé (9 S.C.O.P. - 92 questionnaires complétés pour 707 travailleurs) n'est pas scientifique. Mais il a cependant une valeur significative car les réponses émanent de personnes qui, manifestement, étaient intéressées par l'objet de mon travail.

Profession de sociétaires : 66%

Différences directions - cadres et ouvriers :

J'ai tout de suite été frappé par la différence de comportement et de perception de l'entreprise qui existe non entre les Sociétaires et les Auxiliaires (ceux-ci sont en fait des "exclus" en raison de leur qualité), mais entre directeurs et cadres d'une part, ouvriers et maîtrise d'autre part.

En effet, malgré une information et une "participation physique" aux différentes réunions et assemblées, on ne peut dire qu'il y ait réellement gestion collective.

Les travailleurs ont connaissance des décisions à prendre :

Les travailleurs, à une faible majorité, 55%, ont répondu qu'ils avaient connaissance des choix de l'entreprise avant que la décision ne soit prise. Ce pourcentage trop proche de la moyenne ne peut donner une indication significative. Par contre, il semble manifeste que les directeurs et cadres, avec 66%, soient effectivement au courant avant toute décision. On peut penser qu'il en est de même pour les ouvriers pour qui cette réponse recueille 59%.

J'ai essayé de déterminer si le fait d'avoir un engagement dans l'entreprise ou à l'extérieur pouvait avoir une incidence sur les réponses. Or, cela ne transparaît aucunement, ce qui signifierait effectivement que les travailleurs, même s'ils n'ont pas participé à la phase d'études, connaissent les projets avant que la décision définitive ne soit arrêtée. Il y a donc à ce niveau un échange d'informations qu'il est intéressant de relever.

Leur avis n'est pas entendu :

Mais il pourrait bien ne s'agir que d'une simple consultation pour avis afin de donner l'impression de la participation, les réponses à une question "Pensez-vous qu'il soit tenu compte de votre avis" étant pour 57% d'entre-elles négatives et les non-réponses représentant 13% des travailleurs.

Les réponses négatives sont significatives dans toutes les classes. Ce qu'il y a de remarquable, c'est que seuls les directeurs et les cadres estiment, à raison de 60%, que leur avis est entendu.

Mais, les réponses ne sont pas aussi nettes si on parle de "décisions prises en dehors de vous". Toutefois, il se confirme que ce sont bien les cadres et directeurs qui donnent leur avis et décision. N'est-ce pas leur fonction reconnue dans toute entreprise ?

Tous les travailleurs peuvent s'exprimer :

Lors des réunions et assemblées, la parole ne semble pas accaparée par une catégorie de travailleurs, puisque les interventions proviennent :

- des directeurs : 60 réponses
- des administrateurs : 47 réponses
- des autres sociétaires : 58 réponses

avec une ventilation semblable par catégorie professionnelle. Les coopératives tiennent donc réellement à ce que tous puissent s'exprimer mais la participation semble s'arrêter à ce stade, pour la plupart.

J'ai alors cherché à savoir si l'accaparement ne serait pas le fait de personnes et non de catégories, ce qui expliquerait pourquoi, malgré ces réunions fructueuses, les travailleurs estiment ne pas être écoutés. En réalité, il ne se dégage qu'une faible majorité, dans la classe des ouvriers, pour considérer que ce sont "toujours les mêmes" qui prennent la parole (55%). Dans les autres classes, on ne dégage aucune réponse caractéristique.

Il est cependant curieux, si l'on fait dépendre la réponse donnée à cette question de l'engagement, au niveau professionnel ou politique, de voir que les personnes "engagées" répondent avec une forte majorité (67 à 76%) que ce sont "toujours les mêmes", à l'exclusion des auxiliaires dont les réponses ne sont pas nettes. Pour les non-engagés, par contre, ce sont les réponses "cela dépend" qui l'emporte.

Ceci peut signifier deux choses : soit que les travailleurs "engagés" se perçoivent comme les seuls éléments actifs ou au contraire qu'ils ne s'estiment pas suffisamment écoutés par la Direction. S'agissant des travailleurs les plus actifs et les plus conscients des entreprises, il me semble que le deuxième point est proche de la réalité. Les délégués et représentants du personnel rencontreraient alors les mêmes difficultés dans les S.C.O.P. que dans toute entreprise patronale pour faire admettre leur point de vue à la Direction.

Pas de gestion collective

La synthèse de ces réponses est donnée par celles fournies à la question : "Pouvez-vous dire que l'assemblée générale décide de quelque chose, que la gestion collective existe ?" :

- OUI : 37 réponses soit 40%
- NON : 42 réponses soit 46%
- SANS REPONSES : 13 réponses soit 14%

La démocratie semble donc formelle et non réalité. Ceci est bien perçu par les travailleurs puisque seulement 40% peuvent répondre catégoriquement qu'il y a gestion collective.

Il est donc normal, après toutes ces constatations, que seuls les directeurs et les cadres considèrent la gestion comme collective. Toutefois, chez eux, la majorité qui se dégage (60%) peut paraître faible. D'autre part, la catégorie "employés-maîtrise" est celle qui enregistre le plus de déceptions à cet égard (68% de réponses négatives). Jusqu'ici, je n'avais pu analyser vraiment son comportement car, situé entre la base et la tête pour de nombreuses questions, aucun caractère

ANNEXE 4 : (suite 2)

spécifique dans un sens ou dans l'autre ne ressortait. Ici, il est flagrant qu'ils sont plus proches des ouvriers ou des auxiliaires que des membres de direction.

La gestion est l'affaire des directeurs :

Il est donc flagrant que la gestion est l'affaire de quelques-uns. Les membres de la direction qui agiraient sur le conseil d'administration, pourtant organe souverain après l'assemblée, sont le plus souvent cités lorsque l'on donne à choisir entre eux et les membres du conseil d'administration, qui recueillent respectivement 35 et 22 réponses. Il est alors bien évident que les réponses de la catégorie "directeurs-cadres" soient hésitantes, coincés comme ils sont entre une structure formelle de Démocratie et la structure réelle. Aussi, leurs réponses se ventilent à raison de :

— Direction	4 réponses soit 23%
— Conseil d'Administration	5 réponses soit 33%
— Sans réponses :	6 réponses soit 40%

Les travailleurs, dans leur majorité, ne pensent pas vivre une expérience de démocratie économique, telle qu'elle leur est présentée dans certaines coopératives dans le livret d'accueil remis à l'embauche.

Et pourtant, le taux de participation est élevé !

Le taux de présence, important, aussi bien aux réunions d'information qu'aux assemblées, - entre 50 et 75% suivant les sujets abordés - prouve que les travailleurs aspirent à connaître leur entreprise, à être au courant de tout.

Il s'agit d'une participation active :

Ces participations, en grand nombre, ne se contentent pas d'enregistrer ce qu'on veut bien leur dire puisque 59 sur 92 affirment prendre la parole, soit aux assemblées, soit aux réunions, pour demander des explications ou manifester leur désaccord, qu'ils soient sociétaires ou auxiliaires, cadres ou

ouvriers. La ventilation de ceux qui prennent la parole indique une attitude dynamique générale, par catégorie, à l'exception des auxiliaires.

— cadres :	80%	— sociétaires :	75%
— employés :	63%	— auxiliaires :	42%
— ouvriers :	60%		

Il est significatif aussi que cette prise de parole soit plus forte chez ceux qui sont engagés quelque part, que parmi les autres travailleurs : 80% en moyenne, contre 53%.

Mais la participation est inefficace — La SCOP n'est pas connue.

Les travailleurs dans l'ensemble, paraissent connaître assez bien leur entreprise, puisque 85% connaissent un ou plusieurs des indicateurs cités dans le questionnaire (taille; chiffre d'affaires; situation financière, etc . . .), mais l'analyse de leurs réponses, d'une part selon les catégories de travailleurs, d'autre part selon le type d'indicateur, montre que tel n'est pas le cas de tous.

Elle n'est pas connue des ouvriers

Les ouvriers et les auxiliaires sont ceux qui connaissent le moins bien l'entreprise. En effet l'on trouve chez eux la plupart des personnes qui disent ne connaître aucun des indicateurs proposés :

- près de 100% chez les ouvriers
- près de 70% chez les auxiliaires.

Selon les catégories les éléments à connaître ne sont pas les mêmes :

C'est la taille de leur entreprise que les travailleurs annoncent connaître en plus grand nombre (73 réponses pour les 79 travailleurs qui connaissent au moins un élément).

ANNEXE 4 : (suite 3)

En fait, cadres, employés et sociétaires semblent se préoccuper en priorité de l'exploitation et de la situation financière de la société (au jour le jour) sans trop penser à l'expansion future.

Les ouvriers et auxiliaires, quant à eux, ne semblent pas préoccupés par un problème plutôt qu'un autre. Toutefois, les débouchés de leur fabrication paraissent bien être le dernier de leurs soucis, puisque ceux qui connaissent les commandes acceptées représentent seulement 24% des ouvriers et 16% des auxiliaires.

Les processus de décision ne sont pas perçus.

Les organes de décision sont connus dans la même proportion : 15% déclarent ne rien connaître en ce domaine. Toutefois, la ventilation des "ignorants" montré qu'il ne s'agit plus essentiellement des ouvriers et des auxiliaires.

Les réponses fournies dépendent dans une mesure importante de l'entreprise. Ainsi, dans deux coopératives il ressort que la presque totalité des décisions sont prises par la direction, quelquefois associée au comité d'entreprise, soit pour la fixation de la masse salariale comme cela se passe dans beaucoup d'entreprises patronales. Rares sont les fois où l'assemblée générale est mentionnée :

- 1 fois pour des commandes spéciales;
- 1 fois pour la répartition des bénéfices.

Dans une autre coopérative, au contraire, c'est l'Assemblée Générale qui est mentionnée le plus souvent par les sociétaires : 17 fois. Le conseil d'administration interviendrait aussi beaucoup : 21 réponses. Puis des décisions communes conseil d'administration - comité d'entreprise surviennent aussi, notamment pour les questions de diversification et les investissements.

Mais dans celle-ci, la multiplicité des organes qui est avancée semble indiquer que les processus complexes mis en oeuvre ne soient pas bien assimilés par les travailleurs, aussi bien sociétaires qu'auxiliaires. En général 4 processus sont mentionnés pour chaque décision.

Donc, l'information et les processus de décisions ne sont pas perçus de la même manière par les travailleurs. Pourquoi, alors que le niveau de participation est élevé y a-t-il un tel manque de connaissance ? Il semble que cela vienne du processus par lequel les travailleurs sont informés.

L'information est le domaine réservé de la direction :

L'information repose essentiellement sur la direction puisque 56 personnes sur les 92, soit 60% considèrent que c'est elle qui s'en charge. Ce fait est perçu dans chaque classe professionnelle avec la même intensité. Il est fort intéressant de constater, que pour 43% des sociétaires, un travailleur ou les travailleurs, par leur comité d'entreprise par exemple, seraient responsables de leur information contre 33% pour les auxiliaires. Le point de départ de toute l'information ne se situe pas au même niveau selon la qualité de sociétaires ou d'auxiliaires. Mais si les réponses globales concernant la préparation des réunions ou assemblées indiquent une majorité de 63% en faveur de la "direction" qui semble-t-il n'agit pas seule, le conseil d'administration recueillant 40% des suffrages, la ventilation par catégories professionnelles d'une part, puis sociétaires-auxiliaires d'autre part, montre que ce phénomène est mal perçu. Ainsi, elle serait du ressort de la direction selon toutes les catégories, à l'exception des auxiliaires dans les proportions suivantes :

- cadres et direction	75%
- employés	80%
- ouvriers	53%
- sociétaires	72%
- auxiliaires	42%

ANNEXE 4 : (fin)

Les auxiliaires mettent à peu près sur le même niveau, quant à la préparation des réunions, la direction et un responsable de l'information, alors qu'à l'évidence, il ressort des réponses de la "Direction-Cadres", les premiers concernés, que cela est de leur domaine. Les auxiliaires ont donc une méconnaissance de cette réalité.

Or, dans une entreprise, la Direction et les cadres sont ceux "qui savent les premiers". Il leur est alors possible de conserver les informations qu'ils recueillent pour eux-mêmes, de pratiquer la rétention des informations qui, risqueraient de nuire à la fonction qu'ils exercent.

Il en est apparemment ainsi dans les SCOP. Les informations "données" aux autres travailleurs ne sont que celles que les directeurs et cadres veulent bien divulguer. Selon certains ouvriers, celles-ci seraient même erronées.

Dans ces conditions, il n'est pas surprenant qu'il ne puisse y avoir de gestion collective véritable.

L'assemblée est l'organe privilégiée de l'information

Il se vérifie par ailleurs que, dans les entreprises étudiées, l'Assemblée, statutaire ou non, est l'institution la plus couramment utilisée, 41 réponses sur 88, soit 46%, et que pour les auxiliaires, les revues et bulletins sont effectivement le support privilégié de leur information : 20 réponses sur 28, soit 71%.

Aussi, les modalités moins lourdes que sont les réunions et commissions ne semblent pas être perçues comme utiles à la connaissance de l'entreprise :

- réunions : 38 réponses sur 88
- commissions : 19 réponses sur 88

Il est curieux de constater que le comité d'entreprise et les délégués du personnel sont rarement mentionnés :

- comité d'entreprise : 33 réponses sur 88
- délégués du personnel : 14 réponses sur 88

Le besoin d'information est vif :

Les travailleurs cherchent par eux-mêmes ce qui les intéresse.

En général, l'Assemblée se réunit une fois par an, au maximum, une fois tous les trois mois. Il paraît évident dans ces conditions, que les travailleurs puissent manquer d'information.

Surtout qu'une très forte majorité (87%) se dégage pour reconnaître que l'information est nécessaire, mais pas n'importe quelle information. Elle est le plus vivement ressentie chez les employés et la maîtrise, qui paraissent être les laissés-pour-compte (95%) et les auxiliaires (94%).

D'une façon générale ce besoin est plus fort parmi les travailleurs engagés (90 à 100%) que chez ceux qui ne sont dans l'entreprise que pour exercer leur profession; mais l'appel à l'information est non moins manifeste (67 à 98%).

Le besoin d'information est si vif que sur les 87% de travailleurs qui considèrent cela comme une nécessité, 80% ont un comportement conforme à leurs opinions puisqu'ils font le nécessaire par eux-mêmes afin de recueillir les renseignements qu'ils veulent connaître, en complément de ceux qui leur sont déjà fournis officiellement. Ceci se vérifie à nouveau pour tous les travailleurs y compris les auxiliaires (74% déclarent, en effet, vouloir en savoir davantage sur les 87% qui ressentent le besoin d'information). Ce comportement est général pour tous les travailleurs et avec la même intensité, qu'il y ait ou non engagement personnel.

Les travailleurs aspirent à savoir, non à décider

Aussi, il n'est pas étonnant que le besoin des travailleurs des SCOP se cantonne essentiellement au niveau de l'information. Ils veulent savoir, mais, ils n'ont pas encore franchi le pas... Ils n'ont pas conscience qu'ils peuvent être leurs propres maîtres. Actuellement, ils préfèrent leur situation présente qui leur est moins exigeante mais aussi moins enrichissante.

En effet, les motifs de mécontentements qu'ils avancent sont, par ordre d'importance :

- les salaires
- le manque d'information
- une direction autoritaire
- les conditions de travail
- une participation insuffisante.

A la limite, je pourrai en conclure qu'il leur conviendrait mieux d'être dans des sociétés de type paternaliste.

Une bonne information devrait pourtant conduire à ce que chacun ait envie de participer, puis de décider.

Les travailleurs sont imprégnés de l'idéologie bourgeoise : à chacun sa fonction

En effet, les travailleurs sont imprégnés de l'idée que le rôle de chacun doit être strictement limité à ce qu'il est ailleurs. Ainsi, il est notoire que le conseil d'administration des SCOP soit fait plus pour les cadres ou directeurs que pour les ouvriers. Ceux-ci aspirent pour 60% à être présents dans une organisation représentative des travailleurs, mais ils n'y sont en réalité que très peu nombreux (2/20).

Aussi, les travailleurs "envoient-ils" au conseil d'administration surtout des "gestionnaires" reconnus, comme tels, par leur fonction et les ouvriers se retrouvent alors dans leurs organisations, tout comme dans une entreprise capitaliste.

Une division très nette semble donc exister au niveau professionnel. Une cassure existe qui peut signifier que les ouvriers ne se sentent pas capables d'assurer des responsabilités de gestion. Un travail important d'explication et de formation devrait donc être entrepris auprès d'eux pour qu'il n'en soit pas ainsi.

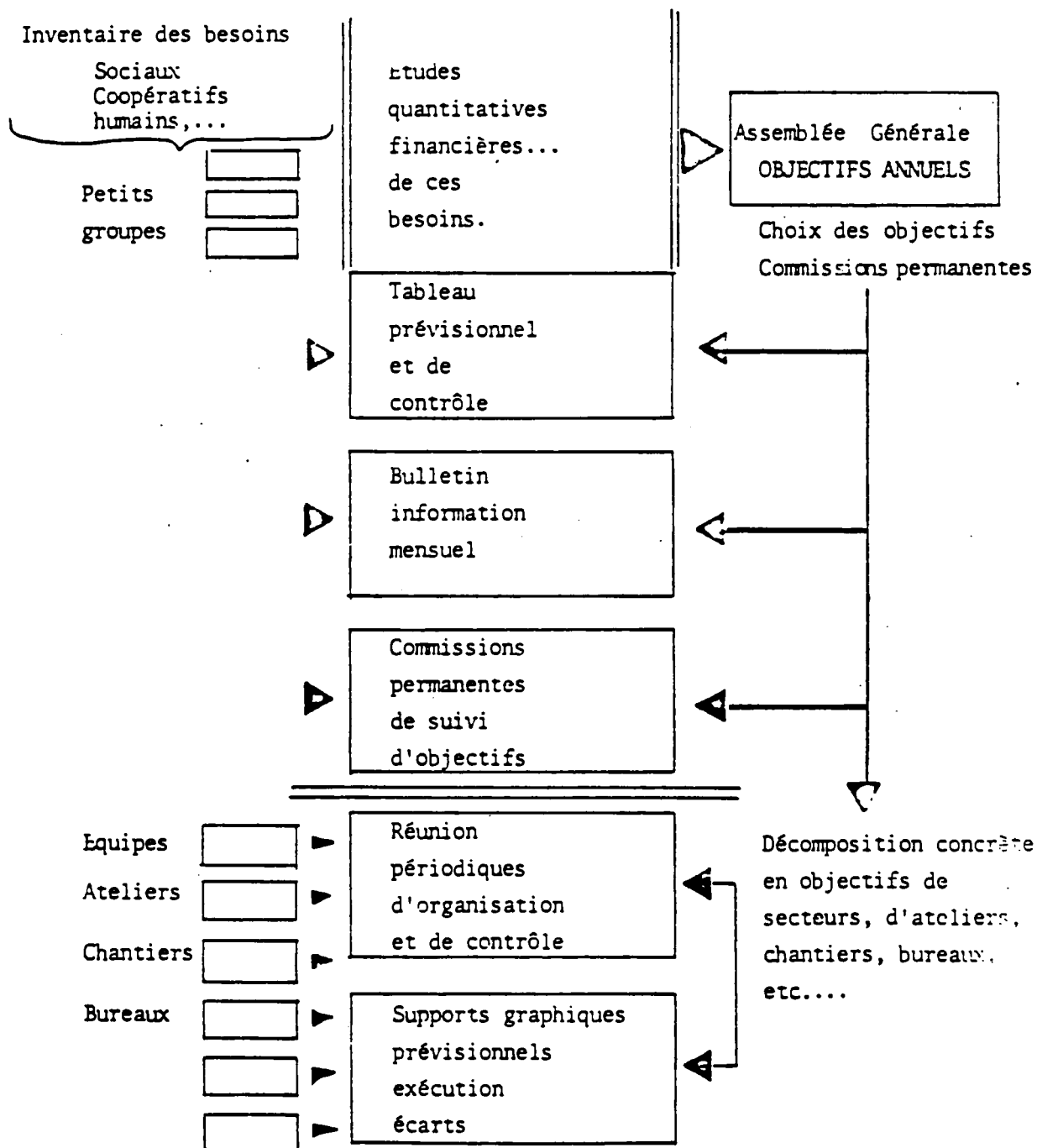
Les problèmes inhérents à la vie Démocratique dans les SCOP proviennent de ce fait, d'une incompréhension entre catégories professionnelles qui se nourrit de la structure traditionnelle des entreprises.

L'entreprise capitaliste avec sa hiérarchie, son hyper-spécialisation est le modèle d'organisation des SCOP. De même, leur modèle de Démocratie est le système bourgeois de délégation. Or, ces deux modèles ne peuvent faire des hommes réellement responsables, chacun étant cantonné dans le rôle qui lui est dévolu.

ANNEXE 5 : SCHEMA DE DECOMPOSITION DES OBJECTIFS DANS LA SCOP AOCM

Source : D. Demoustier, Les coopératives ouvrières de production en France : pratique économique, pratique éducative, Thèse de 3ème cycle, Université de Grenoble, 1979.

" POUR UNE PARTICIPATION PLUS GRANDE DE CHACUN SUR LE LIEU DE SON TRAVAIL : DECOMPOSITION DES OBJECTIFS GLOBAUX EN OBJECTIFS CONCRETS ET PARTIELS." (AOCM)



EMERGENT COOPERATIVE : INFO

I - INFORMATION GENERALE

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INFO est créée en Octobre 1977 par cinq ingénieurs à la suite d'une SCOP, "Bureau d'études, ingénierie et câblage", qui avait dû déposer son bilan au cours de l'été et dont ils avaient également été les initiateurs. Deux autres personnes apportent un capital symbolique pour atteindre le minimum de 7 nécessaire pour une société anonyme (S.A) - SCOP.

L'entreprise compte en 1984 12 salariés dont 10 sociétaires. L'activité est la réalisation et la commercialisation de systèmes électroniques et informatiques.

Un effort de diversification a été mené. La structure de la clientèle s'est inversée : composée en 1978 pour 80% d'intermédiaires qui commercialisaient sous leur nom les services fournis par Info et pour 20% de clients finaux, elle est passée à 60% de clients finaux pour 40% d'intermédiaires ; des prototypes sont fabriqués et commercialisés directement en petite série pour compléter le travail à façon.

Le chiffre d'affaires a été multiplié par cinq et l'image de marque commerciale et technique s'est consolidée. La coopérative, qui reste tributaire des grosses entreprises clientes pour les conditions de règlement, peut par contre imposer plus ses délais d'intervention et s'ouvrir à l'exportation (10% du chiffre d'affaires).

Info s'est confronté dans les premières années à un septicisme de la Confédération des SCOP à laquelle elle a toujours été affiliée, du fait que, dans l'entreprise précédente, un prêt du Fonds d'expansion coopératif (FEC) n'avait pas été remboursé. Néanmoins, Info a accru son rôle au sein

du mouvement, en formant une association de coopératives d'informatique qui préfigure une fédération professionnelle et dont le président est représentant de droit, à ce titre, au Conseil régional de la Confédération des SCOP.

2 - FORMES D'ORGANISATION

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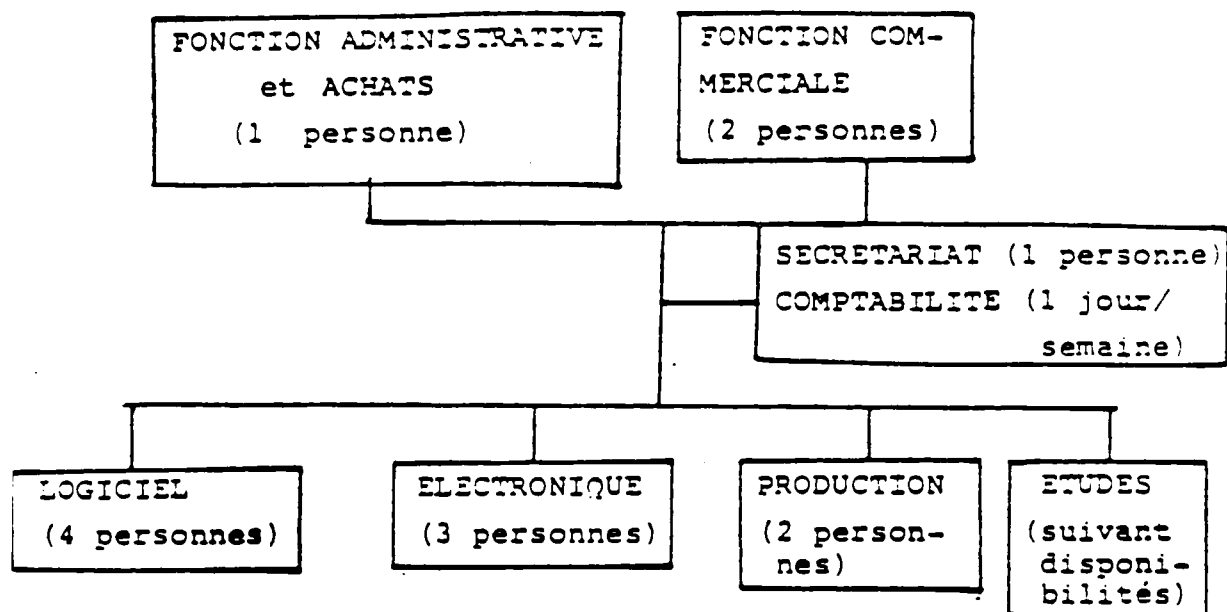
Trois départements distincts existent :

- Le logiciel comprenant 4 personnes, 3 ingénieurs et 1 technicien, deux de l'équipe initiale dont l'un assume la responsabilité de ce département et deux rentrés plus récemment ; le planning est géré en commun et les affaires ensuite traitées par un travail solitaire de conception de programmes ;

- L'électronique avec 3 personnes, 1 technicien devenu ingénieur et 2 techniciens dont les tâches sont très tributaires de dates impératives ;

- La production dont s'occupe l'ancien cableur qui gère son secteur d'activités, décidant des approvisionnements, fabriquant les prototypes de câblage, préparant le travail de la sous-traitance et prenant contact avec les clients, avec l'aide du PDG si nécessaire, et en étant assisté d'un cableur engagé pour la petite série.

A cela s'ajoutent les études qui sont confiées à diverses personnes suivant leurs disponibilités, le commercial assuré par deux des créateurs et la gestion administrative toujours confiée au PDG qui centralise et traite aussi les problèmes d'achats de composants.



Pour arriver à la répartition actuelle une structuration a dû être consentie pour réduire les glissements entre postes. Les commerciaux, après avoir été soulagés de leur tâche technique par l'arrivée d'ingénieurs, veulent abandonner leurs rôles de chefs de projet qui les faisaient vérifier la jonction entre logiciel et électronique lors de l'intégration finale et régler les difficultés non prévues. Cette passation de pouvoirs ne se fait pas sans difficultés, la délégation de confiance étant très forte. Cela implique également une formation sur le tas puisque les données informatiques ne représentent qu'une partie des variables à prendre en compte pour l'installation d'un système chez un client. La dimension relationnelle qui conditionne l'acceptation du changement et la compréhension de l'environnement mécanique pour une bonne insertion technologique ne se comprennent

qu'à partir de la connaissance du terrain qui s'acquiert peu à peu.

La démission de deux anciens du Conseil d'administration en 1981, double protestation contre l'absence de statut spécifique de cet organe et contre leur ~~excédent~~ excédent de travail, a agi comme révélateur en montrant la nécessité :

- de continuer plus énergiquement le partage des responsabilités entamé (dont témoignent les coordinations "logiciel" et "production" maintenant prises en main par deux personnes qui y travaillent) ;

- de redonner au Conseil d'administration un rôle plus dynamique d'animation et de préparation des réunions générales. L'entrée de trois nouveaux élus a contribué à redonner un réel contenu au conseil centré pour l'instant sur l'adaptation des statuts aux évolutions de la législation, les décisions prises pour l'aménagement des locaux et autres achats urgents de moyenne importance. Les investissements essentiels devraient normalement être discutés en assemblée pour définir les grands axes, les projets étant ensuite détaillés par les membres du Conseil d'administration et les autres personnes intéressées pour être présentés de nouveau en détail lors des réunions mensuelles : cette procédure rationnelle est encore embryonnaire dans la réalité.

La SCOP est donc pour le personnel une structure différente qui développe un très fort esprit d'entreprise. La nécessité d'être efficace et l'engagement moral vis-à-vis du collectif sont des leitmotifs. INFO se doit d'être rentable et d'imposer sa crédibilité reposant sur la compétence des travailleurs. La promotion est subordonnée aux besoins d'INFO. L'absence de hiérarchie favorise des rapports d'amitié (bien que "moins forts qu'au début"), une attention portée aux autres. Les relations sont axées sur le professionnel et

les sujets de conversations plus personnels sont évités.

Les assemblées générales, très suivies, ouvertes à tous les travailleurs mais où les coopérateurs seuls disposent du droit de vote sont vues comme le moyen de se tenir au courant de l'évolution de toute la société en sortant du cadre restreint des seules attributions techniques de chacun. Le Conseil d'administration qui se réunit le vendredi soir précédant les réunions du lundi s'efforce pour l'instant de préparer celles-ci et de définir un point de vue unique. Les discussions très larges, allant des investissements au personnel, donnent lieu plus souvent à un échange d'informations qu'à des décisions votées. Au niveau de la marche de l'entreprise la loi qui prime est celle des commerciaux ; "tout passe par le commercial parce que tout passe par la loi du marché", "c'est une autorité nécessaire". Leur maîtrise des relations avec un environnement très mouvant renforce leur charisme personnel et la légitimité accordée aux fondateurs dont la parole a plus de poids et dont les jugements sont plus valorisés : "j'ai plus confiance en eux qu'en moi" dit un salarié. Des initiatives ont été prises pour accroître la participation, présidences de réunions et écritures de comptes-rendus tournantes, demi-heure mensuelle consacrée à l'explication des travaux par les opérationnels, ces procédures réclamant des efforts ont été progressivement oubliées. Le réel contrôle des orientations par l'ensemble des gens repose tout autant que sur ces tentatives sur la capacité des créateurs à voir leurs opinions controversées et à ne pas se retrancher derrière leur compétence et leur pouvoir de convaincre reconnus de tous. Cette participation octroyée est difficile à réaliser mais peut-être la réduction des inégalités dans l'accès au pouvoir passe-t-il par une meilleure reconnaissance des temps de formation et d'information nécessaires pour s'assumer comme associé ?

Le grand nombre de communications sur les projets, la gestion individuelle du temps créent une ambiance de travail à laquelle les salariés tiennent tout en induisant une forte insécurité. Un indicateur montre cette ambivalence : le contrôle des temps et des consommations matières, objectif affiché depuis 1978 dans les Conseils d'administration et dont la responsabilité de l'application a été confiée à plusieurs personnes successivement s'est heurtée à une résistance passive justifiée par la difficulté d'affectation des heures ou les modifications constantes de plannings sous l'effet d'urgences ou de retards non prévisibles. Cela aboutit à ce que les devis sont rédigés plus par expérience que par référence aux prix de revient. A travers cette difficulté sans cesse rencontrée et dont la résolution est périodiquement différée, la contradiction entre la préservation de l'indépendance implicite et la demande d'organisation explicitée par plusieurs personnes se révèle.

Les surcharges de travail supportées par l'équipe initiale depuis le départ sont de plus en plus mal admises. L'embauche de techniciens ou d'un dessinateur pour réduire les lourdeurs de la sous-traitance se heurte aux habitudes prises, à l'exigüité du local et au manque d'évaluation des besoins à moyen terme. L'étude de ces options est retardée par appréhension devant les conflits ouverts. Les problèmes de fond ne sont pas abordés de front mais plutôt par des biais moins susceptibles de remettre en cause la solidarité de l'ensemble des travailleurs, tout changement demande beaucoup de temps pour s'inscrire dans les faits. Néanmoins, par rapport à 1982 une amélioration est relevée : regain d'activité du Conseil d'administration, efforts de délimitation des fonctions et réunions techniques de réflexion sur les produits.

3 - TYPES D'EMPLOI =====

En 1976, les embauches ont été différées pour profiter des indemnités de chômage et pour les faire correspondre aux évolutions du volume d'affaires. Les cinq créateurs ont une qualification d'ingénieurs.

Trois personnes ont été embauchées en 1979, une en 1980, les trois derniers depuis 1981.

L'originalité du contenu des postes rend difficile le recrutement. INFO s'ouvre largement aux stages (pour l'emploi des jeunes ou l'insertion des étrangers) qui fournissent aux deux parties une période d'observation sans engagement : 2 personnes ont été gardées à l'issue de ces essais. La décision d'embauche est prise après plusieurs mois de discussions sur l'opportunité de soulager une personne débordée mais souvent sous la pression d'un besoin ponctuel qui sert de déclencheur sans que le plan de travail à moyen terme du nouvel arrivant ne soit forcément défini. Les critères mentionnés sans être stricts sont :

- la sociabilité,
- la motivation au travail,
- les connaissances techniques et la rapidité d'exécution.

La formation sur le tas dure à peu près six mois et nécessite une capacité d'adaptation puisque l'auto-organisation des tâches est la règle et que les conseils doivent être sollicités: "au début on m'a donné carte blanche", "on ne reçoit d'ordre de personne", "un peu plus d'explications éviterait parfois des erreurs", les réflexions montrent la liberté individuelle et l'exigence liés à ce mode l'organisation. La possibilité de se prendre en charge est donnée

sinon imposée et développe les potentialités professionnelles et individuelles qui rejaillissent sur la vie personnelle sous forme d'une plus grande facilité d'expression par exemple. Pour ceux qui connaissent les autres structures ou comparent avec des collègues, les sociétés "classiques" ou administrations provoquent une irrémédiable passivité. "On s'y sent figé" alors que dans cette coopérative la compréhension de ce qui est fait, du processus de production dans lequel on s'insère rend les salariés personnellement concernés. La richesse des relations (contacts directs avec clients et fournisseurs, multiplicité des relations internes), la confiance (pas de contrôles d'horaires) et le recours à l'initiative (il faut aller chercher l'information) demande aux individus de tolérer l'affrontement fréquent dans les rapports humains et rend sensible à la pression des normes du groupe.

Dans le cas où la promotion réclame une formation externe, INFO prend en charge la documentation et le paiement des dépenses:

- le câbleur a été embauché au niveau PI, il est maintenant presque au niveau P3 grâce à une formation de type CAP;
- la secrétaire prend des cours de comptabilité gestion;
- deux autres personnes sont allées au CNET (Centre National des Etudes en Télécommunication).

Une personne a assisté au stage "administrateurs de coopératives" durant quinze jours répartis sur un an. Ceci lui a permis de relayer le PDG dans sa journée d'explication de l'information comptable qui prépare l'assemblée générale annuelle pour laquelle les documents sont fournis à l'avance. Un comité pour la formation professionnelle à peine mis sur pied a pour but de systématiser la politique dans ce domaine.

Un comité de loisirs créé, lui, en 1981 pour des raisons fiscales de préférence à un comité d'entreprise s'occupe principalement de proposer des sorties.

4 - SALAIRES ET CONDITIONS DE TRAVAIL

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L'amélioration des salaires relativement bas au départ traduit la progression rapidement reconnue (technicien passe ingénieur débutant en un an, salaire multiplié par 1,3; ingénieur de programmation : salaire multiplié par 1,3 au bout de quelques mois; salaires multipliés par 1,7, 1,6 et 1,4 pour les derniers embauchés sur 2 ans, 1 an et demi et 1 an 2 mois). Les qualifications sont indicatives : sept personnes sont ingénieurs sans être situées sur une grille correspondant à une convention collective. En plus des deux augmentations annuelles, les réajustements personnalisés se décident en réunions générales sur propositions : la totale transparence des rémunérations permet des négociations où les évolutions sont envisagées par rapport à la masse totale disponible en fonction des charges de travail et de l'augmentation éventuelle des responsabilités. Les salaires bruts de 1 à 2,9 en 1980 vont maintenant de 1 à 3,13 ce qui, compte tenu de l'élargissement de l'éventail des postes, procède d'une remarquable continuité; l'écart des salaires entre créateurs à l'origine de 1,7 s'est même réduit à 1,5 et tous les salaires des personnes embauchés dans les trois premières années ont progressé plus (entre 1,8 et 2,4) que les salaires supérieurs (X 1,8).

Cette règle du 1 à 3 paraît bénéficier d'un fort attachement affectif et en tant que telle n'est pas remise en cause directement; les tensions qu'elle provoque sont plutôt déviées et reportées par exemple sur les différences d'appréciation à propos de l'affectation des bénéfices aux travailleurs.

L'excédent obtenu a permis de distribuer entre un et trois mois de salaires supplémentaires chaque année. Cette correspondance non différée entre les résultats et les intéressements retirés aide à ce que les employés considèrent que l'effort fourni reçoit une rétribution. Ce lien fait clairement par tous diminuer l'acuité du problème des heures supplémentaires non payées. En même temps, le mode de calcul de la répartition avec les coefficients d'ancienneté auxquels s'ajoute l'octroi d'une prime pour les créateurs égale à 1/2 mois de salaire en 1982 élargit indirectement l'échelle des salaires. Ainsi les mieux rémunérés s'accordent des compensations partielles à leur sous-paiement par rapport au marché tandis que certains parmi les moins payés préféreraient une augmentation des salaires mensuels les plus hauts à une inégalité sur le partage émanant du travail. L'inadéquation latente entre l'échelle des salaires et les désirs de certains membres d'INFO (qui se complique par la perception de différences dans les temps de travail) a émergé quand un commercial a demandé une augmentation individuelle qui lui a été refusé en assemblée. Ce problème est appelé à resurgir.

5 - RELATIONS INDUSTRIELLES

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Malgré les convictions politiques des membres de la coopérative, favorables à l'engagement syndical, aucune demande, individuelle ou collective, dans ce sens.

6 - HISTOIRE DE LA COOPERATIVE ET DE LA PARTICIPATION INTERNE
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En ce qui concerne le pouvoir dans l'entreprise un système original s'est mis progressivement en place :

- les deux commerciaux à l'influence prépondérante n'ont aucun mandat électif ;

- trois personnes sont devenues administrateurs : leur nomination vient compléter leur ascension précédente dans les filières techniques et ils sont encadrés par le PDG qui les initie à leur fonction ;

- le collectif est régulièrement informé par les assemblées mensuelles.

L'intégration entre nouveaux et anciens s'est réalisée informellement. Différentes strates se sont formées (correspondant assez fidèlement aux niveaux des salaires) pour arriver à un compromis inégalitaire respectant les personnalités. Pour tous, la SCOP offre des perspectives d'apprentissage technique, d'enrichissement des tâches et de développement de la polyvalence qui se concrétisent dès les premiers mois. A travers les évolutions ainsi engendrées, des individus révèlent un intérêt et une aptitude qui en fait ensuite des membres du Conseil d'administration. L'absence de fonctions électives peut être compensée par la responsabilité d'un département ou par une progression de salaire légèrement plus accentuée pour les associés expérimentés qui préfèrent rester plus en retrait. Cette distribution différenciée des rôles et gratifications doit se poursuivre par l'affirmation de l'identité du Conseil et la dissociation entre les postes du président et du directeur général. Elle repose sur une concertation qui doit être fréquemment relancée afin de régler les frictions qu'elle risque de provoquer. Elle témoigne d'une volonté de pratiquer la rotation des responsabilités en tenant compte des contraintes économiques.

Dans cette entreprise en expansion où les positions des acteurs semblent conciliables le principal obstacle au maintien de l'équilibre est le manque de temps disponible pour la gestion. Aux horaires très chargés s'ajoutent la culture de la profession (plus centrée sur la technique) aussi bien que la formation sur le tas des fondateurs (qui ne les prédispose pas à apporter une réponse pédagogique au manque des repères dont sont victimes ceux qui accèdent à un rôle de contrôle). Le renforcement d'une complémentarité acceptée par les travailleurs et le succès de la déconcentration des pouvoirs supposent que l'attention soit portée sur :

- l'encadrement initial au sein des départements ;
- le suivi des décisions prises collectivement et l'explication des écarts entre objectifs et résultats ;
- une préparation des réunions qui passe par l'identification et le respect du temps nécessaire à l'élaboration des dossiers et aussi par un effort de prévision ;
- la réflexion sur les seuils dont le dépassement doit entraîner le renforcement de la structure.

7 - OBSERVATIONS GENERALES

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Les quatre ingénieurs fondateurs d'INFO se sont connus à l'université et ont travaillé ensemble dans une petite société d'électronique de quinze personnes. Ils se sont opposés au gérant de celle-ci parce que le rôle des cadres était subordonné à la place des détenteurs de capitaux : ainsi ils ont refusé la proposition qui leur était faite de devenir actionnaires pour un montant global de 30% des actions,

la participation minoritaire leur apparaissant comme une manipulation qui entérinait leur dépendance. C'est donc convaincus du caractère inévitable des affrontements entre dirigeants et salariés dans les sociétés de capitaux qu'ils ont cherché dans la coopérative un cadre de travail leur permettant d'avoir une influence réelle dans les prises de décision, de développer la personnalité de chacun et de lier plus le pouvoir à la compétence qu'à l'argent investi.

L'organisation du travail dans la profession, qui rend indispensable le contact direct entre les chefs de projet et les clients a facilité la création d'entreprises puisque les responsables peuvent facilement, quand ils constituent une nouvelle société, drainer une partie des contacts dont ils s'occupaient pour constituer le premier carnet de commandes.

MARGINALISED COOPERATIVE : CAES

I - INFORMATION GENERALE

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Le centre autonome d'expérimentation sociale occupe depuis 1981 une fiche urbaine, en l'occurrence une base de l'armée de l'air abandonnée depuis 1977.

I.I - UN PROJET AMBITIEUX ET DIVERSIFIE

Au départ donc, une petite équipe "occupe" ces lieux, d'abord parce qu'ils sont inoccupés effectivement depuis trois ans, ensuite parce que l'implantation de cette caserne dans un quartier vivant et très accessible mais cependant suffisamment isolé afin d'éviter des rapports trop conflictuels avec le voisinage (mode de vie différent), pouvait permettre, dans ces espaces nouveaux réhabilités, d'élaborer un terrain neuf d'expérimentation sociale, en rassemblant sur un même lieu des personnes voulant vivre d'une autre manière et, ce faisant, s'opposer à la parcellisation à outrance de la vie en essayant :

- ° d'élaborer collectivement leur habitat dans un rapport harmonieux d'espaces individuels et collectifs ;
- ° de créer, pour employer un maximum d'entre eux, des ateliers de production dans un véritable esprit collectif ;
- ° d'ouvrir sur l'extérieur des espaces de création et d'animation (de la musique à la mécanique, de la culture à la menuiserie ...) ;
- ° d'aménager et faire fonctionner un centre d'hébergement.

Aujourd'hui, une trentaine de personnes y vivent en permanence. Le CAES qui existe juridiquement en tant

qu'association loi 1901 rassemble, coordonne sur un même lieu des ateliers, des associations, des structures et des personnes désireuses de maîtriser ensemble habitat, travail, création d'emplois, activités sociales et culturelles et animation. L'ancienne base de l'armée de l'air est en cours de transfert au ministère de la solidarité avec qui le CAES négocie actuellement un bail qui lui permettra de voir officialiser l'occupation et l'utilisation des locaux.

Certaines activités sont mises sur pied par les habitants du CAES qui veulent créer leur emploi. D'autres sont nées de l'important réseau de contact et de soutien qu'il a su créer autour de lui. Elles se veulent ouvertes à toutes les expériences de formation, stages d'insertion, éducation, formation professionnelle permanente.

Les habitants doivent parallèlement participer à la réhabilitation des lieux, à la réflexion et aux décisions concernant l'évolution du projet.

I.2 - STRUCTURES AUTONOMES ET ATELIERS

On peut donc distinguer :

a) Les ateliers qui font partie de l'association générale CAES :

- le café-théâtre : restauration et animation
- le camion : déménagement et transport
- la sérigraphie : production d'affiches
- le garage : entretien et (auto-) réparation
- le centre d'hébergement
- l'organisation de spectacles et d'activités culturelles.

b) Les structures autonomes juridiquement qui agissent sur le lieu :

- "L'Atelier du parvis" : production et vente de mobilier urbain original (association)
- "La MUSE" : second-oeuvre du bâtiment et fabrication-location de murs d'escalade (SCOP)
- L'atelier d'architecture : conception de projets et invention de murs d'escalade (travailleur indépendant)
- Tempo : cours de musique et danse, fabrication d'instruments de musique, spectacles et animation (association)
- "Le CREA" : construction de matériel de piscine pour enfants et personnes handicapées animation (association)
- Le "Service civil international" : restauration et aménagement des bâtiments par mise à disposition d'objecteurs de conscience.

ATELIERS

- Café-théâtre
- Camion
- Sérigraphie
- Garage
- Centre d'hébergement
- Organisation de spectacles et d'activités culturelles

CAES

STRUCTURES AUTONOMES

- Atelier du parvis
- Muse
- Atelier d'architecture
- Tempo
- Crea
- Service civil international.

M.4

Les ateliers font partie de l'association CAES.

Les structures autonomes ont des rapports avec le CAES, des membres de celles-ci les représentent au Conseil d'administration du CAES.

Le centre est donc basé sur la pluri-activité mais la marginalité sociale des promoteurs et leur expérience associative et socio-culturelle rend difficile l'inscription sur le marché et l'essentiel des ressources irrégulières émane encore des circuits de redistribution (subventions ponctuelles, stages divers,...).

Depuis Février 1983, le CAES a voulu se donner une structure juridique qui inclut les acteurs directs mais aussi quelques représentants de l'extérieur qui les soutiennent. L'attention a plus été portée sur la régulation des rapports internes et la reconnaissance du rôle de certains relai privilégiés que sur la recherche de réseaux plus larges.

2 - FORMES D'ORGANISATION

2.1 MONTAGE JURIDIQUE

Le montage juridique détaillé adopté depuis 1983 est le suivant :

- ° le CAES est une association à composante collégiale.
- ° 5 collèges sont définis :
 - Les membres adhérents : individus ou associations extérieurs
 - Les ateliers CAES : activités lancées à l'intérieur de la structure
 - Le "village" : représentant les habitants-travailleurs
 - Les associations actives : nées grâce au CAES et destinées à créer des emplois pour les gens qui y vivent
 - Les associations associées : qui, en restant à l'extérieur, tiennent une partie de leurs activités au CAES ou lui apportent des aides régulières.

Les collèges doivent être les lieux d'expression des besoins par l'intermédiaire de réunions qui composent l'assemblée générale. Ils élisent un conseil d'administration de 15 personnes qui est le pouvoir exécutif et doit rester le garant d'une cohérence dans la décision, le bureau de 5 secrétaires n'ayant pas de pouvoir décisionnel. Des commissions accessibles à tous sont prévues pour préparer les décisions en liaison avec et sous le contrôle du conseil d'administration.

Les objectifs visés étaient :

- le contrôle du CAES par ceux qui y vivent et y travaillent
- l'ouverture à des partenaires extérieurs
- l'acceptation conjointe de personnes physiques et morales.

2.2 EVALUATION DU FONCTIONNEMENT

a) Les acquis

Le CA est attractif en tant que lieu d'information et de coordination. Le mélange entre les participants légitimés par une élection et les volontaires qui viennent d'eux-mêmes n'est pas gênant si les gens y viennent pour continuer à savoir ce qui se passe sur le lieu. Un tel espace d'échanges est nécessaire pour faire le point à intervalles réguliers mais est très différent du rôle officiel affecté au CA.

A titre accessoire, le CA semble s'orienter vers l'édiction et le contrôle de règles d'hygiène et sécurité.

b) Les limites du fonctionnement

Les constats faits sur les thèmes et les types de traitement des thèmes se confondent et mettent en

évidence des écarts par rapport à l'organisation du pouvoir qui était visée :

- les collèges devaient être les lieux d'expression des besoins , ils n'ont aucune existence, les acteurs se sentent appartenir à l'activité dans laquelle ils sont impliqués mais pas au collège dans lequel ils sont censés figurer.

- les commissions ne fonctionnent plus et ne servent donc pas à l'élaboration de projets.

- le CA, qui ne peut s'appuyer sur un travail préparatoire ni de la part des collèges ni de la part des commissions, ne peut jouer son rôle d'organe de décision d'autant plus que :

- ° sur tout ce qui concerne les relations avec l'environnement, il n'est que formellement consulté de temps à autre.

- ° il n'est pas sollicité pour choisir entre plusieurs solutions car il n'y a ni confrontation entre arguments contradictoires ni vote explicite.

- Les membres du CAES vivent une situation paradoxale :

- ° ils prennent part aux réunions tout en sachant que l'essentiel n'est pas ce qui s'y passe, mais le fait d'y être pour prouver son attachement au projet général.

- ° ils ressentent un malaise devant cette parodie de démocratie qui se perpétue ("personne n'est dupe", "tout le monde sait que les décisions sont prises ailleurs").

2.3 INTERPRETATION DE L'EVALUATION

La question qui se pose est de savoir : qu'est-ce qui explique qu'une telle dérive soit entérinée ? Notre hypothèse est qu'elle résulte principalement de la

volonté, imposée par quelques leaders, de garder le contrôle de l'ensemble du CAES : cette volonté fait écran contre toute clarification et simplification des règles ; ceux qui en sont porteurs maintiennent un discours dépassé sur l'illusion fraternelle égalitaire en oeuvrant pour que les régulations continuent dans le flou des procédures informelles.

En même temps, les autres ne tiennent pas à mettre en cause ces leaders qui sont des personnes indispensables, en particulier par leurs qualifications, leur "poids historique" ou leurs relations.

Malgré les bénéfices qu'elle procure à certains et l'absence de réaction explicite, la complexité d'un tel fonctionnement a des effets négatifs en retour qui se sont manifestés pendant la période charnière de l'été 1984. Les frustrations engendrées se sont traduites par une détérioration du climat collectif et par des évolutions dans l'engagement effectif des participants :

- plusieurs départs ou retraits ont été enregistrés dans le groupe des leaders qui s'est réduit à un petit noyau - la reformulation de certaines associations (parvis, mecforme...) ou leur défection (Aurore, Envers du Décor,...) ont montré la difficulté d'admettre les différences.

Le compromis inégalitaire qui s'est établi peut être schématisé comme suit :

- la participation dominante des quelques leaders restants se transforme en une direction de fait du CAES. Conscients du rétrécissement de la base sociale qui tentait de définir les orientations et de la nécessité de faire avancer les projets, ils ont tendance à distribuer les rôles et à assigner des tâches précises aux permanents des différentes activités.

La stagnation a accentué les découragements qui, eux-mêmes, ont renforcé l'urgence des réalisations ("il faut faire vite", "c'est une question de vie ou de mort"). Mais le partage qui s'est instauré entre "responsables" et "travailleurs de base" est également un facteur de blocage parce que les gens ne sont pas venus au CAES pour subir dans leur travail les conséquences de la hiérarchie.

- la participation dépendante est le lot du plus grand nombre dont le mécontentement ne s'exprime qu'en "coups de gueule" isolés ou en absences au CA. Le souhait de contribuer à la décision et d'avoir au moins un droit de regard sur ce qu'il advient du CAES, s'estompe. Il ne s'agit plus que de s'identifier à une structure gérée dans l'ombre par ceux à qui "on fait confiance". Les droits et devoirs de chacun ne sont d'ailleurs pas identiques, les passe-droits étant la conséquence des ambiguïtés et des jeux de couloir.

A l'heure actuelle, les différentes instances qui devaient assurer la représentation de tous les partenaires n'arrivent pas à empêcher que le fonctionnement soit basé sur :

- le discours de fusion qui suppose résolue toute contradiction.
- les coups de force qui permettent de lancer des opérations sans avertir toutes les personnes concernées.
- les territoires réservés sur lesquels s'exerce le monopole de quelques-uns.
- la déception qui amène à tout percevoir à travers les relations inter-personnelles.

3 - TYPES D'EMPLOISNOMBRE D'EMPLOIS

<u>CREES</u>	<u>EN COURS DE CREATION</u>	<u>PREVUS</u>		<u>TOTAL</u>
		1985	1986	
2 (café- théâtre) I (tracto- pelle)	I (camion) I (café- théâtre) I (tempo- mi-temps) I (structure CAES)	I sérigraphie I structure - CAES 3 (tempo- mi-temps)	I sérigra- phie. I héberge- ment.	
<u>TOTAL</u> : 3	<u>TOTAL</u> : 4	<u>TOTAL</u> : 5	<u>TOTAL</u> : 2	<u>I4 emplois</u>

Ce tableau récapitule le nombre d'emplois générés par le travail déjà effectué, il ne table pas sur l'acquis méthodologique accumulé et l'entr'aide qui peut se manifester pour faire avancer des projets complémentaires ou nouveaux.

Les emplois dégagés concernent une population majoritaire jeune, défavorisée qui était auparavant exclue du dispositif de formation et d'insertion professionnelle.

Ne sont recensés que les emplois permanents auto-financés à terme, à ceux-ci s'ajoutent les emplois de passage pour des jeunes qui présentent une utilité indéniable vis-à-vis de l'environnement.

La solidité des emplois et leur caractère pérenne a pour contrepartie une durée d'émergence importante.

Un turn-over important s'est manifesté au sein des créateurs initiaux (plus de 50%), les leaders restants recherchent maintenant des porteurs de projet pour remédier aux manques actuels. Tous les salariés sont membres du CAES. La formation a du mal à être conçue comme une priorité et à être organisée systématiquement néanmoins :

- une action d'assistance technique de plus d'un an menée par une association de conseil a permis un travail d'élaboration de chaque projet, modulé en fonction de l'avancement sur le terrain et de l'implication des acteurs.

- des stages courts d'initiation à la méthodologie d'un projet et à la comptabilité - gestion ont été suivis par les promoteurs volontaires.

4 - SALAIRES ET CONDITIONS DE TRAVAIL

Une même base de salaire a été fixée pour tous les postes de travail, elle correspond à peu près au minimum garanti. Cette décision s'est heurtée à des oppositions qui ont cherché sans succès à faire admettre les différences dans les charges de travail et dans les besoins, en particulier, selon les situations familiales. Le nombre de postes de travail étant insuffisant par rapport au nombre de gens présents sur place, la situation des salariés est ambiguë, ils peuvent être considérés comme favorisés et pourtant ils doivent accomplir de nombreuses heures non payées.

Des contributions mensuelles doivent être versées par chaque habitant pour couvrir les frais généraux, en contrepartie des échanges informels (incluant des rémunéra-

tions en nature ou "au noir") entretiennent une souplesse solidaire indispensable pour que les participants tiennent sur place.

5 - RELATIONS INDUSTRIELLES

Il n'y a aucune appartenance politique ou syndicale les membres du CAES, s'ils affichent une sensibilité libertaire, refusent les rapports aux organisations de dimension nationale qu'ils conçoivent comme déconnectées de leurs préoccupations quotidiennes.

Le groupe s'est protégé par le rejet des déviants ce qui pose le problème de l'acceptation des différences, au delà des principes allégués.

6 - HISTORIQUE ET EVOLUTION DE LA PARTICIPATION

L'histoire du CAES peut être appréhendée en distinguant 2 phases successives.

6.I Ière PHASE : LA CREATION (1981-1983)

Le fondement du groupe réside dans le projet de s'attaquer au "problème global des jeunes qui veulent vivre différemment en banlieue". L'arrivée à la caserne donne corps à ce projet, elle est l'aboutissement d'un refus de la marginalité sans issue et d'une situation subie. "On est de la région, on est venus pour vivre, travailler, créer nos loisirs ici". - C'est la recherche d'un mieux-être collectif par l'appropriation d'un territoire où il est possible de se rencontrer et qui doit permettre le décroisement des activités dans la vie quotidienne.

Au départ, l'enthousiasme permet, malgré la précarité, la mobilisation pour la mise en valeur aussi bien vis-à-vis de l'extérieur- quelques permanents bénévoles se dévouant pour faire connaître l'expérience- qu'à l'intérieur pour se défendre contre le parasitisme et remettre en état les bâtiments. Un incontestable succès récompense cet élan initial basé sur les relations entre les fondateurs, qui se connaissaient déjà et qui ont de forts liens affectifs et idéologiques. La cohérence de leur démarche repose sur un ensemble de valeurs communes qu'ils vivent dans des rapports sociaux très personnalisés. Les difficultés peuvent ainsi être dépassées par une imagination en actes. La couverture légale est assurée par une association " l'Envers du Décor" en attendant que la situation soit régularisée en ce qui concerne l'occupation.

Le partage des biens entre les membres du groupe est évité, le patrimoine reste dans l'indivision avec une volonté de gestion collective à consonnance utopique. Sous l'effet de contraintes réelles, la coopération règle les admissions et exclusions. Chacun doit choisir un projet particulier de travail dans lequel il veut s'insérer pour prouver qu'il a la volonté de faire quelque chose et pas seulement de chercher un toit. Toutefois, les arrivées progressives se doublent d'une différenciation, non reconnue, entre les anciens fondateurs et les nouveaux. Les fondateurs qui ont fait leurs preuves soit par leur capacité à porter le projet à l'extérieur, soit par leur sérieux dans les travaux manuels sur place ont un rôle privilégié. Les nouveaux arrivants qui prennent de l'importance sont ceux qui, tout en venant habiter, ont des qualifications qui apportent un plus au groupe ou les responsables d'associations qui peuvent légitimer par leur soutien l'expérience sur le plan institutionnel.

L'ensemble des activités témoigne d'une capacité d'innovation issue de la conquête libératrice d'un espace autonome. Toutefois, la réalisation des projets ne se fait pas sans difficultés.

Le passage de l'utopie initiale à la concrétisation de celle-ci implique souvent un travail de renoncement et d'adaptation. Cette transition, jointe à la nécessité de réajuster le projet à la réalité, ne se fait pas sans problèmes pour les créateurs, inquiets de ne pas être à la hauteur de leurs "ambitions" ou de trahir leurs objectifs premiers.

La volonté de s'appuyer sur l'auto-organisation pour atteindre la gestion et le contrôle collectif dans le respect des différences ne peut s'inspirer d'aucun modèle. Mettre en place un modèle économique différent, éviter la parcellisation du travail et la hiérarchisation, favoriser la complémentarité des structures, partager les connaissances et cela en développant la création d'emplois sur place, ne se déroule pas sans heurts.

A cela se greffe l'épuisement de plusieurs mois de bénévolat, le poids de la structure CAES, et l'opposition entre l'urgence des décisions et la situation de formation dans laquelle se trouve une majorité pour l'acquisition de nouvelles compétences.

Dès ce moment, l'initiative repose le plus souvent sur des "leaders", qui pour avoir consacré une part de leur vie et beaucoup d'énergie à la conception du CAES, s'identifient en rendant difficile l'émergence d'autres initiatives. Les "leaders" ont tendance à se disperser, à vouloir être partout, plutôt que d'assurer la bonne progression de l'association dans laquelle ils se sont le plus investis. L'absence de reconnaissance explicite et l'égalitarisme formel maintiennent une personnalisation informelle du pouvoir.

Ce flou révèle le problème du recours à la "règle" pour des "marginiaux" dont l'apprentissage s'est fait autour de l'évitement. On retrouve cette même contradiction au niveau du travail ; habitués à ruser avec les lois, à les contourner, ils sont plus à l'aise dans l'économie souterraine que dans l'économie officielle.

L'économie souterraine leur semble être le garant d'une non-institutionnalisation, d'une alternative aux modèles économiques.

Elle est le terrain connu, l'univers dans lequel les créateurs ont l'habitude d'évoluer. Le quitter équivaut à une perte, à une insécurité à venir.

6.2 2ème PHASE : LA NECESSAIRE STRUCTURATION (à partir de 1983).

La tenue d'une assemblée générale hebdomadaire ne suffit pas à régler les problèmes rencontrés.

La recherche d'une nouvelle structure organisationnelle est un recours contre les prises de pouvoir informelles dont le risque est reconnu par les participants les plus actifs mais l'initiative reste concentrée entre leurs mains. Ce sont eux qui proposent le montage juridique avalisé par l'ensemble du CAES.

Le CAES devient une association à composition collégiale qui est déclaré en février 1983. (cf. partie 2. Formes d'organisation).

7 - OBSERVATIONS GENERALES

Dans cette expérience des difficultés spécifiques se cumulent avec les écueils habituels de la création d'activités.

7.1 DIFFICULTES D'ORDRE ECONOMIQUE

- l'absence de capitaux propres initiaux,
- le manque d'insertion sociale et de qualification professionnelle antérieure pour de nombreux créateurs, entraînant un surcoût social pour les activités envisagées lors de leur phase de lancement.
- la priorité accordée à la production, liée à la prégnance d'une culture fondée sur le "technique" et le "manuel"; les équipements étant acquis (ex : salle de concerts, garage, sérigraphie"), parce qu'ils correspondent à des secteurs perçus comme accessibles et attractifs, la commercialisation n'étant envisagée qu'après.

7.2 DIFFICULTES D'ORDRE PSYCHOSOCIOLOGIQUE

- le refus des normes de l'entreprise traditionnelle sans que des règles alternatives aient été recherchées, la définition des visées du CAES restant très globalisée au niveau d'une volonté générale : "créer, pour employer un maximum de personnes, des ateliers de production dans un véritable esprit collectif".

- l'ambiguïté des habitudes prises dans les contacts avec l'environnement institutionnel ; le prosélytisme très utile dans les relations publiques pour arriver à faire reconnaître l'expérience dans ses deux premières années, ayant valorisé les responsables du CAES et les ayant amené à surestimer l'intérêt qu'ils suscitent dans les média et

dans les administrations et à minimiser, en corollaire, l'appréhension des contraintes propres aux démarches de créations d'activités.

- la difficulté à définir des options stratégiques et à programmer une action pluri-dimensionnelle dans le temps pour des personnes plus familières des "tactiques de résistance" (1).

- la force de "l'imaginaire collectif" (2) structuré par la négation de toute différence (qu'elle soit de statut, de savoir ou de pouvoir) chez les participants à l'expérience.

- l'absence de motivation de la plupart des gens pour les activités économiques, effet pervers induit par la logique du CAES. Comme il n'est pas question de vivre seulement au CAES et qu'il faut s'inscrire obligatoirement dans un projet, des acteurs le font pour se donner bonne conscience et fournir une justification à leur présence, sans plus. La volonté de faire que les individus explicitent "leur investissement sur le lieu" les encourage à choisir ainsi une activité pour laquelle ils préfèrent ensuite rester dans une phase de latence plutôt que d'en commencer le montage concret. Ceci entraîne également la modification très rapide des projets (abandonnés, repris, modifiés au gré des urgences) légitimée par la primauté du vécu.

- la méfiance, au nom de "l'intégrité et la morale du projet", envers les lois du marché orientant vers un recours aux subventions ou aux stages, c'est-à-dire un positionnement de fait à l'intérieur des circuits de redistribution plus que

(1) De-Certeau. L'invention du quotidien, Paris, U.G.E., collection IO/I8, 1980

(2) "L'imaginaire collectif", peut être défini comme l'imaginaire social du groupe d'appartenance fait des croyances communes et des références indiscutables partagées par ceux qui parlent au nom du groupe entier.

dans la sphère marchande qui ne procède pas d'un choix véritable mais plutôt d'une trame de représentation. L'ensemble de ces difficultés, étroitement imbriquées, montre bien qu'une assistance extérieure est nécessaire pour mener un suivi mais la situation impose à l'assistance plusieurs exigences :

- qu'elle soit non seulement technique mais aussi sociologique pour favoriser l'accès à la rationalité dans un milieu où les acteurs liés par l'affectif ont tendance à s'en remettre à l'idéologie pour trouver des solutions d'organisation.

- qu'elle repose sur une contractualisation entre groupe-intervenant et groupe-client qui facilite la mise à distance et évite la confusion des rôles.

RESCUE COOPERATIVE : CARTO

I - INFORMATIONS GENERALES

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- CARTO, société anonyme (SA) - SCOP a été créée en Juin 1976 avec un capital de 55.000 F par 10 personnes. Ils avaient tous travaillé auparavant dans la même société et ils ont formé le projet de monter une SCOP quand ils ont eu la certitude que leur emploi était menacé. Trois ont été licenciés, sept ont volontairement démissionné de leur poste.

L'entreprise compte en 1984 23 salariés sociétaires et utilise les services de sept représentants commerciaux. L'effectif a donc été multiplié par près de trois en moins de 10 ans.

- L'activité est l'impression-cartonnage dans les industries du livre.

Le procédé utilisé en 1976, la typographie, est surplacé par l'offset plus moderne, plus compétitive, plus riche en possibilités. CARTO s'adapte en cela à l'évolution du secteur soumis à des changements technologiques rapides.

- L'effort commercial est largement orienté vers l'offset. Les entreprises sont démarchées par des représentants à une échelle nationale. Le principal atout est le prix, les concurrents de la région parisienne ayant des coûts en particulier salariaux, beaucoup plus importants. Trois gros clients fournissent la moitié du chiffre d'affaires annuel qui est au total de plus de 9 millions de francs en 1984, et a donc été multiplié par 10 par rapport au premier exercice.

- CARTO, en 1976, fut la première coopérative ouvrière créée en Charente, la région Poitou-Charentes en comprenant 17 pour 450 travailleurs. En 1983, la Charente compte 14 SCOP et la région plus de 60 employant 1500

travailleurs. CARTO a largement contribué à ce développement par son exemplarité et par l'implication de son PDG qui est maintenant vice-président de l'Union Régionale des SCOP et qui, fort de sa grande expérience, est en mesure de conseiller les porteurs de projet. Une association a été fondée récemment "Asso-Scop-Inter" pour favoriser par l'organisation de loisirs commune les contacts entre les coopératives du département. CARTO poursuit donc une ambitieuse mission continuer à s'appuyer sur la solidarité à l'intérieur de l'entreprise mais aussi à développer la solidarité inter-coopérative.

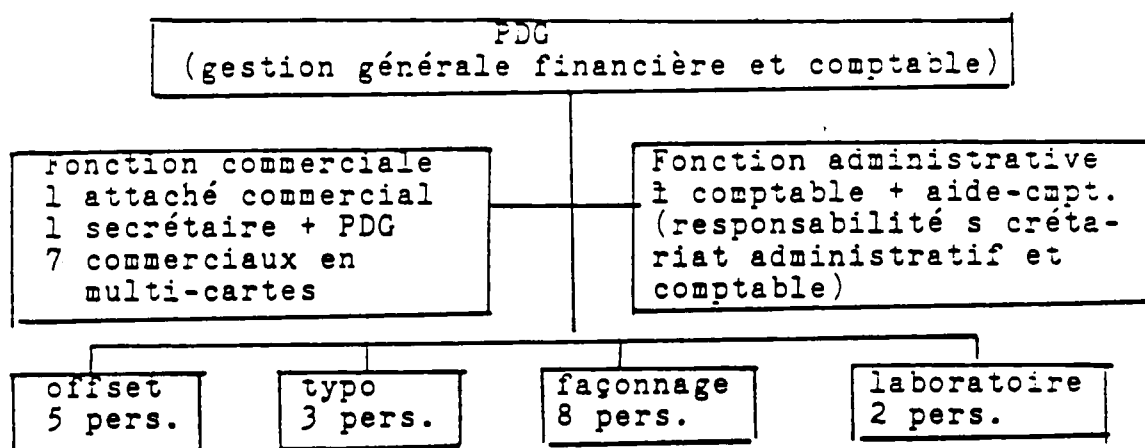
- Pour comprendre le développement de CARTO, il faut savoir qu'en 1978 à la suite d'une fermeture d'entreprise une autre SCOP a été créée. Le PDG de CARTO est alors à l'initiative de la mise sur pied d'un service commercial commun entre les deux SCOP.

En 1980, cette deuxième coopérative dépose son bilan pour des raisons de sous-activité. Une concertation s'engage avec le groupe bancaire coopératif, le représentant du Fonds d'Expansion Confédéral (FEQ, institution d'aide financière de la Confédération), le délégué de l'Union régionale des SCOP et le syndic; un plan est élaboré pour le sauvetage de l'outil de production. Dans un premier temps, un regroupement de fait est opéré entre CARTO et la nouvelle structure coopérative qui émane de cet accord, dans un deuxième temps, CARTO intègre celle-ci en s'installant dans de nouveaux locaux.

L'appui du mouvement coopératif a donc été important pour sauver l'entreprise qui a ensuite été absorbée par CARTO, cette action a en retour inséré plus étroitement le PDG de CARTO dans le mouvement.

2 - FORMES D'ORGANISATION

La structuration actuelle , adoptée à partir de Juillet 1980 après la réélection du PDG pour quatre ans à l'unanimité, est la suivante :



L'effectif global, après l'arrivée d'une aide-comptable atteint 30 personnes.

Ce groupe de 30 est constitué de 23 personnes salariées et de 7 représentants

Les trois responsables du commercial salariés (PDG, attaché commercial et secrétaire) sont regroupés dans le même bureau pour faciliter la coordination. Un chef d'atelier unique fait la liaison entre le bureau et la production ; en ce qui concerne le façonnage, une ouvrière assure la coordination de son équipe.

Le nombre de membres (IO) du conseil d'administration est plus hérité de l'histoire que garant d'une réelle participation.

La stratégie du PDG soutenue par le "bureau" apparaît clairement : assurer le développement en s'adaptant aux évolutions techniques et en conquérant de nouvelles parts de marché sur les créneaux les plus porteurs dans l'impression. Cet effort entraîne un endettement important , une bonne connaissance de l'environnement institutionnel a permis de cumuler toutes les opportunités de financement mais le remboursement des annuités d'emprunts oblige à dégager une rentabilité importante.

Une majorité des travailleurs se sentent menacés par des changements qu'ils n'ont plus l'impression de pouvoir contrôler. Ils constatent la raréfaction des lieux de concertation que ce soit les conseils d'administration (CA) ou les réunions de travail :

- il n'y a plus que deux CA par an, et leur appauvrissement en termes d'information et de décision est déplorée. Certains administrateurs disent ne plus pouvoir s'exprimer librement. "Parfois", dit l'un d'eux, je crains que ce que je vais dire ne plaise pas. Alors je me tais". "Peu de choses y sont décidées", "les décisions sont souvent prises au préalable par deux ou trois personnes" ; "le personnel est embauché et les machines achetées, sans notre consultation" disent d'autres participants.

- avec l'arrivée de la deuxième SCOP, des réunions du personnel avaient été organisées une fois par mois en dehors des heures de travail. Elles constituaient des moments d'information et de discussion entre tous. Les thèmes en étaient les conditions de travail, l'amélioration de la production, l'état des finances ou les avantages sociaux des travailleurs. Elles se sont progressivement espacées pour n'avoir plus lieu irrégulièrement qu'une ou deux fois l'an. Les rencontres étaient appréciées, pourtant la demande de leur reprise n'est pas formulée. Pour certains c'est dans les caractéristiques

des dernières qu'il faut chercher une explication à l'apathie des travailleurs : "plus rien d'intéressant ne se disait".

- il est évident qu'un groupe restreint d'administratifs regroupés autour du PDG, dont l'attention est focalisée sur les contraintes économiques, oriente et détermine l'ensemble des décisions concernant l'entreprise. Dans ce contexte, les travailleurs productifs s'estiment délaissés d'autant plus qu'ils sont déstabilisés par la régression de la typographie. Les ouvriers typographes la vivent comme une infériorisation et une menace. La culture du groupe qui repose sur la délégation au chef charismatique ne facilite pas l'explication des ressentiments. Les dirigeants peuvent être tentés d'avoir recours à l'autoritarisme pour résoudre des problèmes humains, comme l'attestent la démission et le renvoi de deux déviants.

3 - TYPES D'EMPLOI

- L'effectif total de 30 personnes, dont 23 salariés sociétaires se décompose comme suit :

- 8 femmes au façonnage (dont 1 ouvrière polyvalente travaillant aussi sur machine) ;
- 3 ouvriers à l'atelier typographie ;
- 5 ouvriers à l'atelier offset ;
- 1 PDG ;
- 2 personnes au laboratoire
- le personnel administratif et commercial :
4 personnes plus 7 représentants multi-cartes.

Tous les employés bénéficient de contrat à durée indéterminée à temps plein sauf les représentants qui sont payés à la commission.

- En 1976, le groupe de départ de 10 personnes, tous sociétaires sauf un qui n'était pas volontaire était formé de :

- 6 femmes au façonnage ;
- 3 ouvriers typographes ;
- un responsable techico-commercial, le leader "naturel" aujourd'hui PDG.

- Le groupe, uniquement ouvrier, au démarrage, s'est donc graduellement étoffé, dès 1976 d'une secrétaire aide-comptable, en 1978 de deux femmes au façonnage et de deux ouvriers typographes, en 1979 d'une secrétaire et de cinq représentants, les autres étant arrivés en 1982 par l'intégration des ouvriers offset venus de l'autre SCOP plus un artisan en faillite et un attaché commercial spécialisé dans l'offset. L'attachement à l'entreprise est fort, le taux de turn-over étant nul si ce n'est les deux "exclusions" opérées en 1983. Les dispositions légales concernant la formation sont sous-employées. Malgré la demande de plusieurs typographes de passer à l'offset, aucun programme n'est défini, seuls des stages courts d'initiation à la vie coopérative ont pu être suivis dans les premières années.

4 - SALAIRES ET CONDITIONS DE TRAVAIL

Les salaires sont légèrement inférieurs à la moyenne de la branche et égaux à ceux pratiqués dans la région. La SCOP a permis aux femmes employées au façonnage d'avoir accès à la convention collective du livre donc aux

avantages sociaux qui y sont liés : 13^{ème} mois et 5^{ème} semaine de congés payés, et de réduire l'écart de rémunérations entre elles et les hommes ouvriers. L'échelle est de I à 3 depuis 1983 après avoir été de I à 2 entre 1978 et 1982, les salaires ayant été pratiquement égaux pendant la période antérieure. Pour les sociétaires les heures supplémentaires ne sont payées qu'avec une augmentation de 25% du taux horaire au lieu de 33%. La contribution au capital se fait par prélèvement de 5% sur les salaires et les participations aux bénéfices sont systématiquement remontées en capital. La question des salaires illustre la manière dont sont prises et appliquées les décisions. En 1982, arguant de leur polyvalence aux machines, des travailleurs avaient demandé au CA une augmentation de salaire qui avait été approuvée par vote à l'unanimité. Mais ce vote n'a pas été suivi d'effet. L'installation d'une pointeuse est également révélatrice. Elle suscite un réel désaccord chez plusieurs membres du CA qui n'est pas exprimé officiellement. "De toute façon, la pointeuse sera achetée avec ou sans notre accord" dit, sur un ton fataliste l'un des administrateurs.

Dans les situations difficiles, les méthodes utilisées pour faciliter le redressement ont été :

- un effort financier des coopérateurs allant jusqu'à des apports exceptionnels au capital et des prêts individuel faits à la SCOP.

- le recours au bénévolat des travailleurs.

- ces deux sources de souplesse amènent à faire peser une forte pression cumulative sur les premiers coopérateurs qui sont restés ouvriers-typographes et qui ne voient pointer en échange aucune amélioration dans leur travail, ni perspectives de mobilité. Ainsi il n'est pas étonnant que plusieurs aient demandé à ce que l'aménagement des nouveaux locaux soit rémunéré et que, après le refus, seule une "élite"

selon les termes du PDG se soit proposé, élite composée des travailleurs de l'autre SCOP qui venaient d'être sauvés du chômage et étaient donc prompts à manifester leur bonne volonté.

5 - RELATIONS INDUSTRIELLES

En 1975, en apprenant que plusieurs licenciements sont envisagés, les futurs créateurs avaient tenté une négociation avec leur patron pour conserver un contrat de travail à certains et pour obtenir six mois d'indemnisation aux autres. Ceci leur semblait plus judicieux que l'engagement d'une action revendicatrice. Cette position leur valut de couper leurs relations avec le syndicat CGT qui désapprouvait une action dont le but immédiat n'était pas, de la part des salariés, la lutte contre le patronat. Cette attitude est conforme à celle qui a prévalu à la direction du syndicat pendant une cinquantaine d'années et qui va évoluer, mais quelques années plus tard seulement.

Depuis 1981, toutefois, des travailleurs se sont syndiqués et ils y voient une preuve de l'altération de la confiance mutuelle au sein de la SCOP. "Dans une coopérative où tout va bien", pense l'un d'eux, "il n'y a pas besoin de se syndiquer". Un autre reconnaît "Moi, je suis en principe contre le syndicat, ça détériore l'entreprise; quand on a monté l'entreprise il n'en était pas question mais actuellement certains d'entre nous ont trouvé préférable de se syndiquer".

6 - HISTOIRE DE LA COOPERATIVE ET DE LA PARTICIPATION EN SON SEIN.

6.I LE TEMPS DES PIONNIERS (1976-1978)

La faiblesse du capital initial et l'absence de soutien mènent à une situation de trésorerie très tendue et la cessation de paiement n'est évitée que de peu. Des pis-allers doivent être recherchés pour éviter la cessation de paiement : une subvention de 5.000 F est accordée par la Confédération et un prêt de 50.000 F du FEC est envisagé pour régler les dommages et intérêts. Un contrat de participation est passé pour augmenter les fonds propres et une avance de trésorerie de 30.000F est obtenue de la part du trésorier-payeur-général.

- Dans la mémoire des coopérateurs d'aujourd'hui cette première période est décrite comme un moment d'intense activité et d'enthousiasme au sein d'une équipe soudée autour du PDG. Les mots prononcés pour évoquer cette époque sont ceux de "confiance", "solidarité", "responsabilité", "entraide", "vie de famille". "Nous étions alors", dit un ouvrier-typographe, "une équipe de camarades sortis vainqueurs d'un conflit avec un patron abusif". Cette solidarité se traduit pour chacun :

- par une activité fournie à la demande de la production et non selon le décompte exact des heures de travail prévu (8H.25 effectives par jour). Les heures supplémentaires sont, au tout début, payées au taux des heures normales.

- par une certaine capacité de passer d'un poste à l'autre, "polyvalence nécessaire pour réduire les surcharges". Ainsi, les façonneuses sont capables, selon les nécessités immédiates de la fabrication, de passer du

façonnage à l'encolleuse ou à la découpeuse. L'une d'entre elles dépasse même ce cadre pour s'initier aux "machines" (le secteur des hommes). "Je suis passée de l'encolleuse à la dorure à chaud, ce n'est pas la même chose !" explique t-elle, "je n'aurais pas pu faire cela dans une entreprise classique". De même, un des ouvriers-typographes, formé pour faire fonctionner les OFNI (petites machines) est passé, après initiation par ses collègues, sur les "grandes machines". A ce propos, plusieurs témoignent de la possibilité qui leur était donnée, à travers cette nécessité de polyvalence, de se "former sur le tas".

- Les coopérateurs se réunissent une fois par an en assemblée générale ; celle-ci élit pour 3 ans les membres du conseil d'administration. Le conseil d'administration se réunit très régulièrement au moins une fois par mois pendant les heures de travail. Toutefois, durant les tous premiers mois, le conseil d'administration est constitué de l'ensemble des coopérateurs et se réunit une ou deux fois par semaine.

A propos des conseils d'administration de cette époque, les travailleurs, aujourd'hui, parlent d'un "outil de travail d'un "lieu de décision et de concertation". "A travers ces rencontres", dit l'un d'eux, "on savait où on allait. On pouvait s'exprimer aussi bien sur l'achat d'une machine que sur le changement d'un représentant". En effet, au cours de ces conseils d'administration, il est question de l'embauche, du marché économique, des conditions de travail, et de la gestion et, jusqu'à mi-1978 : du chiffre d'affaires, du bénéfice, des situations bancaires, des échéances-clients-fournisseurs.

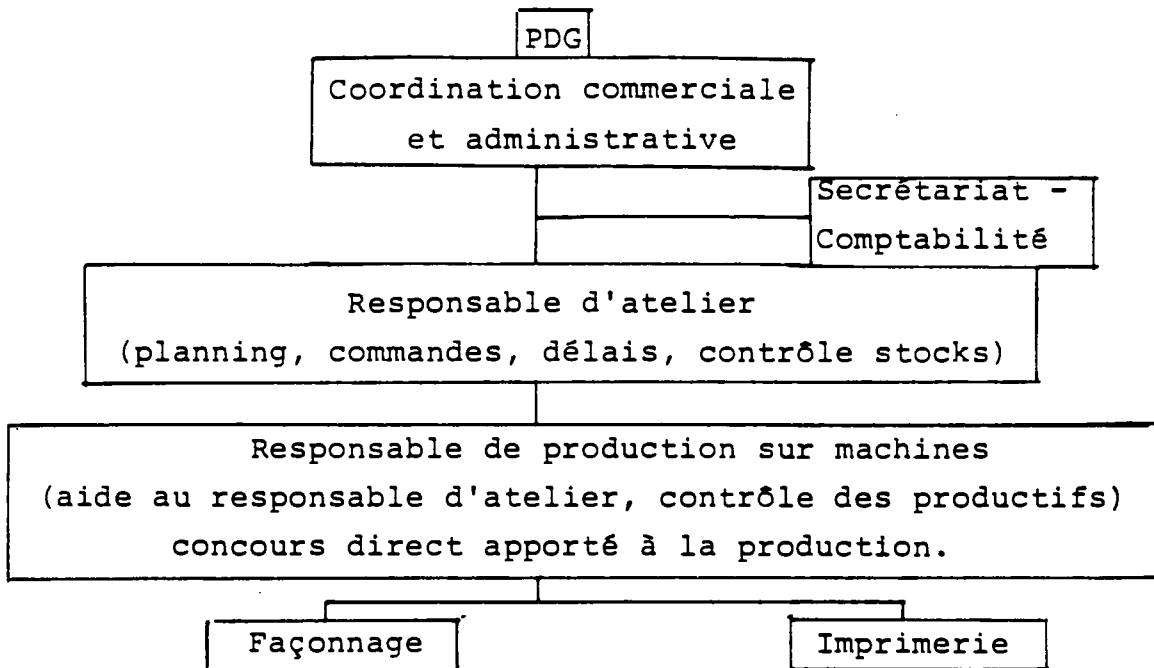
Le conseil d'administration est alors un lieu déci-

sionnel. L'accord des administrateurs est nécessaire pour l'achat des machines ou l'embauche du personnel. Pour exemple, un ouvrier- typographe rapelle que, quelque temps après son embauche, alors qu'il était question de le licencier pour manque de compétence, le Conseil d'administration avait décidé de lui "offrir une autre chance en le plaçant sur les grandes machines". Cette décision s'était avérée positive par la suite.

6.2 LA RELANCE (1979-1981)

Le conseil d'administration du 9 Juin 1979 marque un tournant dans l'histoire de CARTO. En effet, à l'ordre du jour de cette réunion est prévue l'élection d'un nouveau PDG à la candidature duquel se présentent deux administrateurs, dont le directeur-général, en plus de l'ancien PDG. Cette concurrence manifeste le problème du leadership qui a été confusément posé plusieurs fois auparavant par les deux administrateurs qui se présentent aux suffrages des coopérateurs. Finalement, après ballottage, le PDG est réélu. S'appuyant alors sur la réaffirmation de sa légitimité, il règle le problème de la pérennité de l'entreprise en décidant sa continuation malgré la consommation des trois-quarts du capital. Peu après, le PDG présente une analyse de gestion et propose une nouvelle répartition du travail sur laquelle il emporte d'adhésion des coopérateurs :

- changement d'horaires au niveau des ateliers et préparation des machines le soir (pour éviter que leur lavage et leur redémarrage ne soit pris sur le temps de travail du matin) ;
- élaboration, comme suit, d'un nouvel organigramme :



A cette nouvelle structuration correspondent :

- la rétrogradation du précédent directeur général technique, à la fois dans sa fonction et dans ses émoluments (salaires mensuels diminués de 500F) ;
- l'instauration d'un contrôle des temps de la production.
- le licenciement économique d'une personne aux boîtes rondes ;
- un emprunt FEC de 100.000 F pour consolider la structure financière.

Pour la mise en oeuvre de l'ensemble de ces nouvelles dispositions, il est fait appel à la responsabilité individuelle de chaque coopérateur qui doit voir dans l'application de ces mesures, le seul moyen d'augmenter la production.

Une nouvelle logique s'affirme donc basée sur l'application d'une forme "d'organisation scientifique du travail" (unité de direction, assimilation entre responsabilité

fonctionnelle et autorité hiérarchique, division entre cadres du bureau, maîtrise et exécutants). Cette évolution n'est possible que par la délégation de confiance dont continue à jouir le PDG même si les distances dans les relations interpersonnelles sont plus marquées. Il s'agit de reconnaître et de fixer officiellement les rapports de dépendance et de subordination qui se sont dégagés progressivement à partir du groupe fusionnel de départ et de donner à l'entreprise une nouvelle assise lui permettant d'acquérir une compétitivité indispensable. Dans cette optique, la surveillance des productifs semble le facteur privilégié pour augmenter le rendement et relayer la mobilisation volontaire des travailleurs.

C'est, parallèlement, à ce moment, qu'apparaissent les signes d'une certaine évolution dont les témoins de l'époque parlent aujourd'hui en terme d'"esprit coopératif". Pour eux, celui-ci a commencé, alors, à manifester un certain affaiblissement. "Avant" dit, en effet, l'un deux, "nous formions une équipe. A la suite du remaniement de 1979 il y a eu désignation des postes indiqués sur les fiches de paye et, à partir de là, des écarts sont apparus". L'échelle des salaires est de I à 2.

Par ailleurs, la fréquence des conseils d'administration a diminué pour se stabiliser autour de 6 à 7 Par an. Les réunions se font désormais en dehors des heures de travail. En outre, à cette même époque, le conseil d'administration selon certains anciens administrateurs, commence à perdre de son rôle en tant que lieu de décision et d'information. "On commençait déjà à ne pas tout savoir" disent-ils aujourd'hui. "Un début de coupure s'amorçait entre le bureau et l'atelier. Et le dialogue n'était plus le même entre le PDG et les administrateurs".

Le compromis inégalitaire instauré en 1979 a donc

servi à concentrer en 1980 la vie de la coopérative sur la réponse aux contraintes du marché. Au cours de cette période de relance, CARTO s'est assurée un débouché sur le marché de l'offset grâce à une alliance avec une autre SCOP en dépôt de bilan. Elle a aussi :

- étoffé sa structure administrative (grâce à l'adjonction d'une secrétaire), sa force de vente (qui correspond à 7 représentants) et mis en place un contrôle de gestion en étudiant la structure des charges, en établissant un budget prévisionnel sur l'année et en dégagant des comptes d'exploitation trimestriels, avec les conseils du délégué de l'Union régionale des SCOP;

- rendu plus sélectif l'accès aux responsabilités coopératives : la candidature au sociétariat au bout de deux ans de présence dans l'entreprise doit être acceptée par l'assemblée générale et, surtout, les membres du conseil d'administration ne sont plus réélus systématiquement : un choix s'exerce ;

- cherché à donner une orientation plus opérationnelle au conseil d'administration (grâce à une formation interne faite par la délégation régionale et ouverte aux dix administrateurs) sans que cette volonté rentre vraiment dans la pratique.

6.3 LA POLITIQUE DE CROISSANCE (depuis 1982)

CARTO dispose de nombreux atouts :

- le dynamisme et la compétence de son PDG unanimement reconnus ;

- l'intégration de l'offset réalisée à un coût minimisé par la vision d'ensemble qui a guidé toute l'opération ;

- la solidarité de son équipe de travailleurs renforcée par les liens familiaux qui unissent de nombreuses personnes au sein de l'entreprise ;

- l'efficacité de son équipe de direction qui s'est formée sur le tas à travers la progression de la coopérative.

Comme dans toute entreprise en développement, des points qui peuvent paraître secondaires doivent cependant être pris en considération pour garantir le niveau de résultats auquel oblige l'endettement. La diversification qui a été bien conçue au niveau financier s'accompagne d'une inquiétude devant l'importance des sommes engagées et d'une crainte de déqualification chez les typographes pour lesquels l'identification au métier est forte. Cela s'explique certainement par le fait que le PDG extrêmement accaparé par ses relations avec l'extérieur n'a pas toujours pu formaliser l'aspect social de cette profonde mutation. Le danger existe alors d'une coupure entre "les bureaux" tout entier absorbés par les contraintes commerciales et financières, une équipe de productifs posée en modèle et une autre dévalorisée.

Le conseil d'administration ne joue plus assez de rôle d'animation. Le nombre (IO) de ses membres plus hérité de l'histoire que garant d'une réelle participation n'a plus guère de sens.

La sous-utilisation des dispositions légales concernant la formation, l'absence de perspectives de promotion pour les plus anciens ne peuvent être facilement admises.

CARTO après s'être donné les moyens d'un "bond" économique doit maintenant inventer des procédures qui favorisent le maintien du fort "ciment" collectif qui a fait sa force. Tous les travailleurs doivent être persuadés qu'ils sont respectés et non négligés (ce qui suppose la prise en compte au même niveau de toutes les suggestions formulées, l'application des décisions prises dans les instances coopératives, la reconnaissance des qualifications acquises...). C'est la condition qu'ils estiment essentielle pour continuer à s'investir dans une entreprise pour laquelle ils ont montré qu'ils peuvent faire des sacrifices s'ils ont la sensation qu'elle est la "leur".

7 - OBSERVATIONS GENERALES

Les travailleurs qui avaient une qualification homogène et qui se connaissaient bien n'ont pas attendu que leur entreprise ferme pour commencer la coopérative ; comme leur leader avait pris l'habitude de seconder un patron souvent absent, il a pu récupérer une partie de la clientèle et il n'y a pas eu de coupure dans l'activité. L'échec de la société familiale antérieure tient à l'incapacité de son directeur et aux détournements de fonds opérés pour entretenir son niveau de vie, la réussite de la SCOP repose sur ce que les travailleurs eux-mêmes désignent comme les "vertus" coopératives : concertation, information des travailleurs, dialogue entre ouvriers et hiérarchie. Tous, malgré des réserves non négligeables (cf. plus haut) considèrent que la SCOP a un fonctionnement nettement plus satisfaisant que l'entreprise patronale.

TRADITIONAL COOPERATIVE : VET

I - INFORMATION GENERALE

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I.I UNE COOPERATIVE JEUNE ET UNE ENTREPRISE ANCIENNE.

L'entreprise coopérative V.E.T. est jeune en tant que coopérative (née en 1975) mais elle a déjà de l'ancienneté comme entreprise (créée en 1955). Pendant 20 ans, elle fonctionna en effet comme une société patronale, avec toutefois des liens particuliers entre le personnel et le dirigeant. Ce fut ce dernier qui proposa la transformation de V.E.T. en S.C.O.P avant de la quitter en 1979. Entreprise du textile, placée sur un créneau spécialisé: les vêtements de protection, V.E.T. a connu depuis ses origines un essor certain, marqué par l'accroissement de ses effectifs et de son chiffre d'affaires et par une rentabilité constante. Les 8 dernières années ont conduit l'entreprise coopérative à diversifier ses produits et sa clientèle, à accroître la part de la sous-traitance dans son chiffre d'affaires, tout en cherchant à s'assurer le contrôle de la production faite à l'extérieur.

Aujourd'hui, V.E.T. emploie 175 personnes, en majorité des femmes, réalise un chiffre d'affaires de 50 millions de francs environ, dans son usine de T. et son établissement de P. , tous deux en Haute-Savoie. Elle a soutenu la création d'une autre SCOP dans la Drôme, à laquelle elle fournit la totalité du travail en sous-traitance. Elle doit affronter des problèmes de réorganisation de la production, à la fois dans l'aménagement de l'espace du fait de l'extension dans un nouveau local, et dans la structure des responsabilités. L'amélioration de la productivité, rendue nécessaire par la pression de la concurrence, semble passer par une meilleure participation du personnel aux décisions qui les concernent.

I.2 UNE CROISSANCE ECONOMIQUE REGULIERE

Pendant ces huit ans de fonctionnement coopératif, V.E.T. a connu un essor régulier. Malgré la baisse d'activité en 1976, les résultats ont toujours été bénéficiaires, et les années 80 ont été marquées par une progression accélérée. De 1975 à 1982, les effectifs ont ainsi été multipliés par 1,75, alors que le chiffre d'affaires et la valeur ajoutée croissaient de 200%. La valeur ajoutée par travailleur a donc plus que doublé pendant cette période.

Ceci s'est fait par un élargissement des marchés et une diversification de la production d'une part, par un développement interne mais aussi externe d'autre part. L'organisation de la structure commerciale a été renforcée, la structure financière est restée saine, mais l'organisation de la production ne suivit qu'avec peine l'évolution de l'activité.

2 - FORMES D'ORGANISATION

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2.1 DES TRAVAILLEURS PEU CONCERNES

L'initiative de la création de la SCOP ne leur revenant pas, les travailleurs de V.E.T. ne sentirent que peu de changement dans la vie de l'entreprise. Il faut sans doute nuancer cette affirmation selon les catégories socio-professionnelles. Les cadres ont été les premiers sollicités à participer financièrement au capital de l'entreprise, et le dirigeant travaillait déjà en étroite association avec le Comité d'Entreprise^(CE) dont le secrétaire jouissait de son entière confiance .

C'est pourquoi les premiers Conseils d'Administration furent composés des responsables et conseillers extérieurs de l'entreprise, auxquels se joignent deux membres du C.E. qui devinrent rapidement, en tant que tels, administrateurs à part entière.

De la création de la SCOP, date donc la composition du conseil d'administration de V.E.T. en trois collèges : cadres, agents de maîtrise, et comité d'entreprise (à l'origine, il fallait y ajouter des sociétaires extérieurs). L'ensemble des ouvriers est considéré comme représenté par les élus au C.E. Lors de l'une des premières séances de ce nouveau C.A. (12 Septembre 1975), le dirigeant s'attacha à définir son rôle : trait d'union entre les membres de la SCOP pour en préserver l'harmonie, garant du respect du règlement intérieur et des promesses faites, organe de solidarité mais aussi de discrétion : "Ne dire que ce qu'il faut, quand il le faut, et à qui il le faut".

Une première sélection des travailleurs susceptibles de devenir sociétaires fut établie en son sein (28 travailleurs sur 74 en Février 1975 puis 46 en Juillet). Et s'il y eut quelques refus de sociétariat, certains travailleurs en furent délibérément écartés du fait de leur comportement envers leurs collègues de travail.

Au sociétariat fut associée la recherche de quelques avantages : d'abord l'intérêt versé aux parts sociales qui, on le verra, n'a pas été négligeable dans les huit dernières années de V.E.T. ; puis la prise en charge par l'entreprise de la cotisation à une mutuelle.

Mais une formation donnée au départ aux administrateurs n'a été ni renouvelée, ni élargie à l'ensemble des sociétaires. Et le soutien du mouvement coopératif

s'est davantage manifesté par des conseils juridiques (mutation, accord de participation...) et financiers (accès au Crédit Coopératif...) que par l'animation de la coopérative.

L'absence de motivation, autre que financière, pour la coopérative peut s'expliquer également par l'absence de changement dans l'organisation du travail et les responsabilités.

Les réponses des travailleurs aux questionnaires précédant les A.G en 1975 comme les interventions au C.A. traduisent une certaine méconnaissance et indifférence au fonctionnement coopératif. Malgré un taux de réponse élevé en 1975, le nombre de "sans opinion" est tout à fait remarquable, chez les sociétaires comme chez les non-sociétaires, et seule la participation au bénéfice apparaît comme un changement notoire dû à la coopérative.

2.2 V.E.T. FACE A SON AVENIR.

Les restructurations de l'industrie textile, à l'échelle mondiale maintenant, obligent V.E.T à se situer face aux différentes perspectives qui s'ouvrent à elle. Le statut coopératif peut peser fortement comme frein ou, au contraire, comme stimulant dans des choix de développement qui, en retour, affecteront profondément la vie interne de la coopérative. La participation de l'ensemble des travailleurs à ces choix peut faire éclater les contradictions d'intérêts entre eux, ou au contraire souder plus fortement le collectif de travail. C'est un peu le pari qui a été fait par le recours à l'expression. Il semblerait que, pour subsister, les entreprises textiles du style V.E.T. doivent s'orienter dans quelques voies qui peuvent être complémentaires ; ainsi le développement de la technicité pour la conception de produits nouveaux avec ou sans croissance de la sous-

traitance, nationale ou étrangère, pour la fabrication en série et à bas prix. Ceci aurait pour conséquence d'accroître la qualification de quelques-uns tout en rejetant à la marge le travail peu qualifié.

D'autres évolutions pourront voir le jour avec la diffusion des machines automatisées (jusque là produites exclusivement au Japon) qui pourraient devenir compétitives pour des séries de moins en moins importantes, mais dont l'adoption demanderait des masses financières importantes pour un emploi réduit.

Face à de telles perspectives, les craintes d'un conseil d'administration ou d'un comité d'entreprise par rapport à l'avenir de l'entreprise (dans sa capacité technique comme financière) et à celui des salariés (en nombre d'emplois, comme en niveau de qualification) ne paraissent pas dénués de fondement.

Toutefois, l'évolution est en cours. Et le recours au silence (pour la prise de décision) et/ou à l'autorité (pour leur exécution) n'apparaît conforme ni au projet "coopératif" (que les travailleurs n'ont pas élaboré mais qu'ils ont un peu intégré du fait que V.E.T. est devenu "leur" entreprise) ni à l'intérêt de l'entreprise qui réclame des attitudes de plus en plus "responsables".

On pourrait dire que V.E.T., entreprise transformée unilatéralement en SCOP par son dirigeant il y a 8 ans, a plus que jamais besoin de coopération aujourd'hui. Et qu'en cela, elle pourrait satisfaire également certaines aspirations des travailleurs jusque là peu impliqués dans sa gestion.

L'intégration des travailleurs à la coopérative a été essentiellement basée sur leur participation financière : au capital et aux résultats. Si le lien entre l'un (le capital) et l'autre (la distribution de bénéfices) est rompu, beaucoup de travailleurs risquent de perdre leur confiance dans leur statut de "propriétaire". Si V.E.T. décide d'investir massivement dans les nouvelles technologies, ses capitaux propres devront être renforcés à la fois du côté des parts sociales et de la transformation du bénéfice en capital ou réserves. L'incompréhension de ces mécanismes, la non-participation aux décisions, risquent de renforcer les positions de défense ou d'inerties, ou de créer des réactions d'hostilité face à de tels bouleversements (qui toucheront à la fois les conditions de travail et la répartition des revenus).

La direction de V.E.T. a donc saisi l'enjeu de la participation des travailleurs, en impulsant des techniques d'animation, pour faire s'exprimer les opinions sur la vie de la coopérative, et intégrer les travailleurs à la logique "gestionnaire".

Ainsi à la suite d'une première réflexion avec l'équipe de direction, des enregistrements en vidéo-cassette ont été faits par une société extérieure auprès d'une trentaine de volontaires. Ces témoignages "à bâtons rompus" ont été regroupés dans sept cassettes, dont une "revendicatrice" a été présentée en assemblée générale des sociétaires. Les six autres (formation et vie coopérative, organisation et conditions de travail, qualité, maîtrise et encadrement, salaires, communication et information) servent de base à six commissions de travail qui ont choisi un ou deux objectifs précis et doivent le/les mener à terme dans un délai relativement rapide.

Ces commissions, formées sur la base du volontariat, se réunissent périodiquement en partie sur le temps de travail. Mais elles ne semblent pas avoir réussi à motiver un nombre important de personnes, ajoutant ainsi à la déception de ceux qui se plaignent du manque de responsabilité et de cohérence des plus revendicatifs.

Ces commissions peuvent permettre, par contre, à un noyau de travailleurs de s'impliquer plus amplement dans la vie de la coopérative en rompant l'inertie de l'ensemble, et une certaine pesanteur du cheminement hiérarchique.

Cela suffira-t-il à créer une nouvelle dynamique coopérative ? D'autres "réactivations" sont sans doute nécessaires, que ce soit dans la formation et les perspectives de promotion, dans la diffusion de l'information (relativement sélective et filtrée, à différents niveaux), dans les rôles attribués aux délégués du personnel, au comité d'entreprise et au conseil d'administration, non seulement à l'initiative de la direction mais également d'un plus grand nombre de travailleurs.

3 - TYPES D'EMPLOI

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En 1972 V.E.T. employait 72 salariés, en 1973 l'effectif était passé à 117 avec l'ouverture d'un nouvel atelier. Chiffre qui fut ramené à 98 en 1974 et 94 en 1975. La section "tanneries" ayant refusé de s'associer au projet de coopérative, la transformation s'est donc effectuée avec 87 salariés en 1975.

<u>ANNEES</u>	<u>SALARIES</u>	dont <u>SOCIETAIRES</u>
I975	87	28 puis 46 puis 62
I976	I00	76
I977	I20	86
I978	II6	85
I979	I33	95
I980	I32	I08
I98I	I52	II7
I982	I7I	I23
I983	I75	I25

L'augmentation du personnel comme de la productivité a donc été régulière.

Toutefois les hausses de productivité se heurtent à des limites dans la mesure des résultats individuels et dans l'organisation interne. La structure de la production n'a pas suivi l'évolution du chiffre d'affaires et du type de production.

Le personnel de V.E.T. se répartit ainsi :
6 cadres, II agents de maîtrise, 25 employés et I33 ouvriers. La constitution de l'encadrement "supérieur" est, pour une grande partie, récente. Et elle n'est pas achevée puisqu'un directeur de la production doit être embauché prochainement. La maîtrise semble plus stable et plus ancienne, tandis que les effectifs administratifs ont continué à croître (de 22 à 25 entre décembre I98I et août I983), alors que les effectifs ouvriers tendent à plafonner. L'introduction de l'informatique dans l'entreprise s'est faite par une promotion dans les bureaux. Par contre, la mobilité professionnelle paraît très faible à la production.

La coupure entre bureaux et ateliers semble assez forte, renforcée par un gonflement relativement récent du personnel administratif. De plus les employés ont bénéficié de l'intégration de leur ancienne prime de rendement dans leur salaire, alors que les mécaniciennes y sont encore soumises.

Deux autres divisions, internes à la production, séparent deux ateliers et la coupe de la couture. A plusieurs reprises, les membres du conseil d'administration ont regretté le peu d'échanges entre les ateliers ; mais cette question n'est réellement abordée que lorsque des problèmes de délai ou de qualité opposent la coupe et la couture de grandes séries. La dépendance des mécaniciennes, qui ont toujours une prime individuelle de rendement, par rapport à la coupe, où a été instaurée une prime collective, suscite chez elles des réactions quand l'approvisionnement n'est pas fluide. Là se posent des questions de répartition des responsabilités. L'absence d'un directeur de production qui conçoit l'ensemble du processus, l'échec de l'agent des méthodes, renforcent mais aussi traduisent la difficulté de la maîtrise à concevoir la production dans son ensemble, et à en promouvoir les transformations. C'est pourtant sur le statut des mécaniciennes que se cristallisa le plus souvent l'attention du conseil d'administration sur les problèmes de production. En effet, nous l'avons vu, la spécificité des techniques et matériaux utilisés pour la fabrication de vêtements de protection bien spécifiques rend inadéquate l'évaluation commune des tâches, des temps, des classifications... et donc des revenus qui s'y attachent. Mais cette question, pour importante quelle soit, n'est-elle pas un peu "l'arbre qui cache la forêt" ? La polarisation sur la classification et le revenu des plus anciennes, des plus expérimentées, ne trahit-elle pas une crainte de voir perdre le peu de qualification acquise sur le tas et par l'expérience, au profit

de tâches banalisées et répétitives sur des productions en grandes séries, pour lesquelles de jeunes ouvrières sans beaucoup d'expérience sont tout aussi, si ce n'est plus, performantes. La rapidité de la formation professionnelle, dans l'entreprise, par une travailleuse elle-même formée dans ce but, le manque de perspectives de promotion interne, la mise à l'écart des grandes décisions de la coopérative (notamment par le faible rôle joué par le comité d'entreprise et ses représentants au conseil d'administration, et par l'absence, jusqu'à peu, de délégués du personnel "autonomes") peuvent peut-être expliquer ce malaise qui (en dehors d'une pétition transmise par le comité d'entreprise au conseil d'administration en 1980) prend des formes de résistance individuelle - un exemple, l'absentéisme en 1978, contré par une "prime d'assiduité" - et donc d'inertie face aux changements.

4 - SALAIRES ET CONDITIONS DE TRAVAIL

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4.1 DES DISPARITES DE SALAIRES CONTESTEES

De même, parmi les questions particulières concernant les travailleurs dans l'exercice quotidien de leur travail, la grille des salaires de production occupe une place toute à fait prépondérante, dans le sens d'une "amélioration de la grille hiérarchique des compétences récompensant les efforts des ouvrières hautement qualifiées".

En effet, dans ce type de production où chaque ouvrière est le plus souvent amenée à "monter" l'ensemble de l'article, rendement et qualification ne s'accordent pas toujours. La petitesse des séries, la nature et la difficulté des produits obligeraient à de constantes révisions des temps

alloués (cela tendrait à expliquer la difficulté de recruter un agent des méthodes stable et accepté). Un salaire au minimum légal, au départ, une formation sur le tas, un rendement qui peut atteindre 15% du salaire et éventuellement des primes de fin d'année "à la discrétion du dirigeant", tels sont les éléments du revenu des ouvrières de production. C'est dire combien les motivations financières peuvent être fortes, à la fois dans l'augmentation de la production et dans l'accès au sociétariat (par l'intérêt versé au capital qui a plusieurs fois atteint 12%).

C'est dire aussi que la question de la disparité des salaires à la production est une question épineuse. La comparaison bureaux-ateliers est aussi un souci qui revient fréquemment : une prime de rendement ayant été instituée aux bureaux également, puis supprimée.

La hiérarchie des salaires, qui peut être évaluée de 1 à 5 entre le plus bas et le plus haut salaire, apparaît comme un élément qui a toujours servi de stimulant au travail de chacun. Elle ne fait pas globalement l'objet de remise en cause ; ce sont davantage les disparités entre travailleurs de la production, entre qualification, rendement et ancienneté, qui font l'objet de réclamations.

4.2 UNE STRUCTURE FINANCIERE SAIN, REGULATRICE

La structure financière de V.E.T. aurait été totalement saine, si elle n'avait été tenue de rembourser le capital des anciens actionnaires et si elle n'avait pas du financer l'augmentation des stocks.

Le remboursement des anciens actionnaires, selon le protocole signé en 1975, eut pour conséquence de faire baisser rapidement le capital social de la SCOP. Ce rembour-

sement s'est achevé en 1983; son montant avait diminué de moitié en 1978 (passant de 882 000 Francs en 1975 à 400 750 Francs en 1978. Devant l'impossibilité juridique d'y incorporer les réserves, la SCOP dut mener une active politique de sociétariat (qui lui fut également dicté par le Fonds d'Expansion Confédéral, F.E.C., lors du dépôt d'un dossier de financement de fonds de roulement). En 1981, fut ainsi lancée une opération "actionnariat", basée sur les avantages accordés par la loi Monory. En quelques mois, 89 des 96 sociétaires avaient souscrit pour un montant de 242 000 Francs, et 4 des 27 non-sociétaires avaient souscrit 8 500 Francs.

Cette bonne situation commerciale et financière a permis à la SCOP de distribuer régulièrement une participation et des intérêts au capital. Pour 1980-1981, la participation, bloquée 5 ans avec un taux d'intérêt de 7%, a représenté environ 1,8 mois de salaire ; sur laquelle a été retenue la constitution du capital des sociétaires.

Quand à l'intérêt du capital, il a été successivement de :

12%	pour les sociétaires-travailleurs	en 1974.75
et 6%	" " " extérieurs	
6%	pour les premiers sociétaires	en 1975.76
3%	" " nouveaux sociétaires	
12%	" " anciens sociétaires-travailleurs	en 1976.77
6%	" " nouveaux sociétaires	
12%	" " anciens sociétaires-travailleurs	en 1977.78
6%	" " nouveaux " "	
et 12%	" " anciens sociétaires-travailleurs	en 1980
12%	" " " " "	en 1981
13%	" " " " "	en 1983

5 - RELATIONS INDUSTRIELLES

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Quand elle était encore une société anonyme classique, VET distribuait déjà des primes de fin d'année avant les décrets sur l'intéressement et la participation des travailleurs. Un comité d'entreprise y fut également constitué avant que l'entreprise n'atteigne l'effectif réglementaire de 50 salariés. La coopérative s'inscrit donc dans le prolongement de pratiques paternalistes, fortement marquées par les conceptions social-chrétiennes du créateur, qui aboutissent à sélectionner au sein du collectif ouvrier les interlocuteurs avec lesquels doivent être organisés les échanges, en dehors de toute représentation traditionnelle syndicale.

6 - HISTOIRE DE LA COOPERATIVE

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6.I UNE INITIATIVE PATRONALE

V.E.T. fait partie des toutes premières entreprises patronales "saines" transformées en SCOP à l'initiative de leur patron. L'influence des courants d'idées propagées en mai 1968 s'est-elle faite sentir ? Il faut remonter sûrement plus loin dans le temps pour comprendre la démarche de son dirigeant qui a cherché à préserver ainsi l'unité de l'entreprise, alors qu'aucun de ses fils ne voulait prendre sa succession. Mais la transformation de l'entreprise se fait également dans un contexte de petite récession économique pour l'entreprise et d'une certaine incertitude quant à son avenir commercial. Il est difficile d'évaluer la part que ces éléments ont eu dans la décision de la transformation ; ils ont sans doute été plus déterminants pour les autres actionnaires que

pour le dirigeant principal. Enfin, l'ensemble du personnel, intégré d'une certaine façon depuis longtemps à la marche de l'entreprise (notamment les cadres et le comité d'entreprise) n'a guère senti de bouleversements à la création de la SCOP puisqu'aucun effort financier immédiat ne lui a été demandé, que l'accès au sociétariat a été organisé de façon très progressive et que le système de rendement et de primes a été maintenu sans grand changement malgré les problèmes posés.

6.2 UNE EXPANSION INTERNE ET EXTERNE

La concurrence de plus en plus vive dans le secteur industriel - notamment des fabricants de vêtements de travail - a conduit V.E.T. à s'orienter dans deux directions : le développement de la technicité qui a nécessité la mise en place d'un bureau d'études ; et la fabrication en grandes séries, de façon industrielle, pour atteindre des prix plus compétitifs, ceci imposant la constitution d'un stock de produits finis.

Ces deux orientations sur lesquelles les travailleurs n'ont été informés qu'à postériori, se sont traduites par une expansion à la fois externe et interne.

Depuis 1978, le recours à la sous-traitance a pris une part croissante : de 0.2% du chiffre d'affaires, en 1978 à 5% en 1984. En 1978, le projet de soutenir une autre SCOP a été soumis au conseil d'administration. Cette SCOP d'une trentaine de personnes avait dû fermer ses portes. Des élus et notables locaux désiraient en soutenir le redémarrage, et V.E.T. a été sollicitée par le délégué de l'Union régionale des SCOP pour en faire une filiale.

Malgré l'avis favorable du nouveau directeur, l'inquiétude des administrateurs l'a emporté. Leurs craintes se manifestaient par rapport à l'éloignement des deux unités de production et aux difficultés potentielles à alimenter en travail trois ateliers. Bref, des craintes envers un éventuel recul de V.E.T.

Celui-ci ne s'est pas réalisé, malgré ou grâce à l'essor de la sous-traitance.

6.3 L'APPUI INTERCOOPERATIF DISPENSE PAR V.E.T.

Une seconde proposition, sans engagement financier direct de V.E.T., cette fois-ci, a recueilli l'avis favorable des administrateurs. En 1983, en effet, V.E.T. a soutenu, techniquement et administrativement, la reprise de l'outil de travail d'une entreprise de confection de la Drôme.

Poussée par les élus locaux, une autre SCOP est née avec deux gérants, cadres de V.E.T., et sept demandeurs d'emploi qui ont suivi un stage de formation pour la confection de vêtements de cuir. Cette SCOP travaille actuellement à 100% pour V.E.T. Quelques difficultés dans l'organisation et la qualité de la production vont amener l'embauche d'un agent de maîtrise, dont le coût devra être supporté par une hausse des effectifs (de 7 à 15), et une réorientation vers elle de l'activité d'autres sous-traitants.

7 OBSERVATIONS GENERALES

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En 1983, V.E.T. est pratiquement entièrement la propriété de ses travailleurs. Avec un outil de travail prochainement réparti en trois ateliers, une production relativement diversifiée et de haute technicité, sur des marchés

privés et publics, des effectifs stabilisés grâce à une sous-traitance qui ne se limite plus à "éponger les crêtes de production", la coopérative occupe une place de leader sur le marché français pour de nombreux produits. De plus, elle joue un rôle non négligeable à l'exportation.

Du fait de ses résultats et de ses faibles besoins en investissements, la coopérative a pu distribuer régulièrement des bénéfices. Si les salaires mensuels ne sont guère supérieurs à ceux prévus par la convention collective, le revenu annuel permet une comparaison favorable. C'est sans doute un des éléments qui attache les travailleurs à leur entreprise, d'autant que l'habitude est bien antérieure à la transformation en coopérative. Mais cette expansion, accélérée en 1981 et 1982, risque de se ralentir sous l'effet de l'exacerbation de la concurrence. La compétitivité de l'entreprise tient alors non plus à une pénétration plus large sur les marchés, mais à une compression de ses prix de revient.

La faiblesse de la participation des travailleurs aux décisions de la coopérative freine la capacité d'adaptation. Si le taux de sociétariat n'est pas négligeable (en dehors de toute obligation 63%), c'est plutôt d'un sociétariat "passif" qu'il s'agit : les assemblées générales sont peu fréquentées et peu animées ; le conseil d'administration dont les membres ne se renouvellent guère, et sont plus cooptés qu'élus, ne joue guère un rôle d'animation. Il prend peu d'initiatives, enregistre les données communiquées par la direction, pour intervenir principalement sur les questions de salaires, et manifeste une certaine prudence face à des engagements extérieurs de la SCOP.

Le souci de la direction d'impulser davantage de coopération peut-il conduire à plus de coopération dans

le travail sans en même temps ouvrir à plus de coopération dans la décision ? L'émergence, dans les Commissions de travail, d'un petit noyau d'intermédiaires permettra-t-elle d'arbitrer entre les demandes des travailleurs et les perspectives de développement de l'entreprise, sans court-circuiter les réseaux antérieurs d'expression et d'autorité, ou bien va-t-elle conduire à terme à leur simple remplacement ?

Implantée sur un marché devenu difficile, V.E.T. cherche dans sa forme coopérative des atouts pour affronter les mutations à venir. Cette démarche peut-elle la faire passer d'une coopérative avec peu de coopérateurs dynamiques à une coopérative de coopérateurs actifs ?

U.K. NATIONAL STUDY

By

Richard Macfarlane
Tavistock Institute
of Human Relations

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INTRODUCTION

The Scope of this Study

The brief for this study directs attention to the forms of organisation, types of employment, working conditions and industrial relations in co-operatives, collectives or other self-managing structures that seek to be economically viable.

This brief would permit the study of any part of 'the co-operative movement' in Britain (including retail, housing, agricultural, marketing and community co-ops) plus a variety of other community and collective initiatives. However, such a study is beyond the resources of the present study and a more narrow focus has therefore been adopted.

The focus chosen for here is worker co-operatives - organisations which are owned and controlled by the people working within them. Co-operatives and other local economic initiatives that do not satisfy this criteria will generally be excluded. Where there are marginal cases - for example, worker organisations that have a degree of outside ownership - then the decision to include or exclude these from the study will depend on how far they appear to be worker controlled.

SECTION ONE

**THE UK WORKER CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT
IN 1985**

This section aims to describe the size and nature of the present U.K. worker co-operative movement.

1.1 The Origins of the Present Movement

The co-operative movement has a history that can be traced back to William Thompson and Robert Owen writing and experimenting in the first half of the 19th century. It arose as one of the responses to the inhumanity created by the industrial revolution as "one of the defensive reactions of the working class to the great social and economic upheaval a response to the severe hardships and human degradation generated not by industry as such, but by capitalist industry"(1).

The original concept of co-operation was essentially socialist and broad based, aiming at the establishment of self-governing commonwealths. It developed in opposition to capitalism but the pressures of operating in a market economy showed in the problems of raising capital and in certain aspects of management. This led to debates about whether producer co-operatives were an appropriate way of protecting producers interests and over time a conventional wisdom emerged that producer co-operatives either failed as businesses (in the market economy) or failed as co-operatives. As a result the momentum of the fight for socialism moved into Trade Unions fighting through collective bargaining, and the labour party forming policies for nationalisation. The role of co-operatives was restricted to the consumer movement. This pattern has been maintained to the present day and can be seen, in particular, in the discussions about the Trade Unions and co-operatives in Section 5. A number of producer co-operatives have survived from the beginning of this century, but by 1975 there were less than 20 producer co-ops in the U.K.

From the mid-1970's the numbers of co-operatives has increased rapidly. One impetus for this new growth was the foundation of the Industrial Common Ownership Movement as a campaigning and

promotion body for new 'common-ownership' co-operatives(2). Another impetus has been the formation of local co-operative development groups. The first of these was formed in 1976 but there has been a major expansion in numbers since 1982. Whereas the ICOM initiatives were inspired by philosophical beliefs, these agencies were formed in response to local economic decline - seeing co-operatives as a way of creating jobs, changing patterns of ownership, and stimulating local responsibility. As Cornforth and Lewis state -

"Since 1980....it has only been in areas with local CSOs that the number of co-operatives has grown significantly".

(Cornforth C. and Lewis J. 1985 p.66)

So, ICOM and the local CDA movements have been the major contributors to the growth of the new movement.

1.2 Size and Growth Rate of 'New' Co-operatives

As can be seen from Table 1.1 there are now 678 worker co-operatives trading in the U.K., employing 6,150 people full-time and a further 1,574 people part-time. From this it can be seen that the largest number of co-operatives is in the services, but the largest number of workers is in manufacturing. However, employment in some sectors is significantly influenced by a very small number of co-operatives. In manufacturing 54% of full-time jobs are in the five largest co-ops while in community services 37% of full-time and 46% of part-time jobs are in one co-op.

It is not possible to indicate the growth rate for worker co-operatives since the mid-1970s because there was inadequate data prior to the establishment of the Worker Co-op Database in 1984. Previous sets of figures included a wide variety of trading co-operatives (including neighbourhood and community co-ops) and co-ops that were not registered and some which were not yet trading. However, an indication of the changes that took place in the movement can be seen in Table 1.2 which compares the 1980 and

NUMBER OF WORKER CO-OPERATIVES + NUMBER OF FULL-TIME AND PART-TIME WORKERS
IN U.K. CO-OPERATIVES (JULY 1985)

	CO-OPS IN U.K.		FULL-TIME WORKERS		PART-TIME WORKERS	
	NO.	% OF TOTAL	NO.	% OF TOTAL	NO.	% OF TOTAL
Agriculture & Fishing	7	1.0	44	0.9	3	-
Building	56	8.3	336	6.5	46	3.0
Manufacturing	111	16.5	2102	40.9	235	15.3
Services	307	45.4	1648	32.1	644	41.9
Transport	5	0.7	33	0.6	9	0.7
Wholesale	18	2.7	110	2.2	33	2.2
Retail	151	22.3	689	13.4	447	29.1
Community Services	21	3.1	175	3.4	119	7.8
Total:	676	100.0	5137	100.0	1536	100.0

Source: WORKER CO-OP DATABASE JULY 1985

TABLE 1.1

TABLE 1.2

Comparison of 1980 and 1984 Populations of
New Co-operatives in the United Kingdom

Trading Activity	(a) 1980			(b) 1984		
	F/T	P/T	No.	F/T	P/T	No.
Advisory, consultative educational	140	0	15	336	178	78
Building, house renovation cleaning, recycling	229	22	29	377	147	80
Crafts, carpentry, furniture- making, joinery	296	44	12	168	103	49
Engineering, electronics, chemicals	1500	14	20	910	68	28
Footwear, clothing, textile	950	0	11	898	118	51
Printing, publishing	621	22	48	517	130	89
Hire transport, motor vehicle repairs	169	0	8	96	26	32
Record, films, theatre	526	9	25	375	269	111
Retail	1379	55	96	989	577	190
Other	-	-	-	1878	613	193
Total:	5810	166	264	6544	2229	911

Source: (a) N Wilson "Economic Aspects of Worker Co-operatives
in Britain - Recent Developments and some Evidence"
Table 3 and Table 12

(b) The New Co-operatives - A Directory and Resource
Guide 1984
Unpublished work by N Wilson

Note: This includes all co-operatives, not just worker co-operatives,
and also a number of co-operatives that were registered but not
trading.

1984 populations of all 'new' co-operatives. From this Table it can be seen that between 1980 and 1984 there was a rapid growth in the numbers of co-operatives registered, and in the number of part-time workers, but a much smaller rise in the number of full-time employees. Part of the explanation for the latter is that a number of long established and relatively large co-operatives went out of business in this period, with a considerable loss in full-time employment.

A direct comparison can be made between 1984 and 1985, using the worker co-op database(3). This comparison is shown in Table 1.3 and indicates that there has been a 7% decline in the total number of co-operatives (and a 17% decline in the number of co-ops in services) but an overall growth of 5% in the number of full-time jobs.

From the above material it would seem that there has been a rapid growth in the number of worker co-operatives since 1980, but that there is now a period of consolidation with a small decline in the number of co-ops, but some growth in numbers of employees in the remaining co-ops(4).

Table 1.4 sets out the regional distribution of current worker co-operatives. From this it can be seen that by far the largest concentration of worker co-operatives is in London - 28%, with the lowest numbers in East Anglia, South-West England and Northern Ireland.

It may be noted that all of these areas are predominantly rural, and have a low presence of co-operative development agencies(5). It would appear that co-op formation is associated with larger urban areas.

It is also clear from Table 1.4 that only in Scotland has there been a significant overall growth in numbers of co-ops in the last year.

CO-OPS AND WORKERS IN 1984 and 1985

	NUMBER OF CO-OPS		NUMBER OF FULL-TIME WORKERS		NUMBER OF PART-TIME WORKERS	
	1984	1985	1984	1985	1984	1985
Agriculture & Fishing	3	7	18	44	3	3
Building	57	56	339	336	55	46
Manufacturing	112	111	2037	2102	193	235
Services	371	307	1656	1648	711	644
Transport	8	5	51	33	11	9
Wholesale	14	18	100	110	19	33
Retail	147	151	543	689	443	447
Community Services	14	21	143	175	141	119
Total:	726	676	4887	5137	1576	1536

Source: 1984 Figures - Extracted from The New Co-operatives - A Directory and Resource Guide. 1984
 1985 Figures - Provided by Worker Co-op Database. July 1985

REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF U.K. WORKER CO-OPS

	LONDON	SOUTH EAST ENGLAND	EAST ANGLIA	SOUTH- WEST ENGLAND	WALES	WEST MIDLANDS	EAST MIDLANDS	YORKSHIRE & HUMBERSIDE	NORTH- WEST ENGLAND	NORTHERN ENGLAND	SCOTLAND	NORTHERN IRELAND	TOTAL
Agriculture & Fishing	0	0	1	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	7
Building	22	3	0	2	6	2	7	4	5	3	2	0	56
Manufacturing	18	3	2	2	10	12	17	18	7	9	11	2	111
Services	115	17	7	9	12	20	19	37	27	29	13	2	307
Transport	1	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Wholesale	5	2	0	2	0	2	3	1	2	0	1	0	18
Retail	26	9	5	4	13	9	10	17	18	10	28	2	151
Community Services	4	1	0	1	1	2	3	2	2	2	3	0	21
Total:	191	35	15	20	48	49	59	79	61	53	60	6	676

No. Women Only Co-ops	15	4	0	0	5	1	1	7	5	1	2	0	41
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No. Ethnic Minority Only Co-ops	11	0	0	0	0	2	2	1	1	0	0	0	17
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Source : DATA PROVIDED BY WORKER CO-OP DATABASE
7 BRADBURY STREET, LONDON N16.

A regional distribution of full-time workers in co-operatives is not available for 1985. However, the analysis done in 1984 indicated that over 26% of all full-time jobs were located in the East Midlands - but almost 70% of the jobs in this Region were in only 4 co-operatives. The influence of this distorted the percentage distribution in other Regions.

1.3 Sources of Finance

In his 1980 survey Wilson collected data about sources of funding from 69 co-operatives(6). This indicated that in newly established co-ops the rank order of sources of finance was personal stakes, commercial banks, sympathetic sources (ICOF, other co-ops and charities) and government sources. The distribution between these was well spread for manufacturing and service co-ops, but retail co-ops relied more on personal and charitable sources. Once established, ploughed-back profits become a major source of funds; bank overdrafts and loans become relatively more important and personal stakes relatively less important (although these changes are relatively small).

The distribution of sources of finance gives no indication of how much of the capital requirement is supplied by each source or the amount of security required by the providers. Little information is available here although the survey indicated that 35% of bank overdrafts were secured by personal guarantees (provided by individual co-op members) and a further 35% were secured by co-op assets.

Since 1980 the range of funding available from the public sector has increased. No firm information is available but it is likely that the following sources of finance will now be significant for co-ops -

- * local authority economic development schemes providing loans and grants for new enterprises and especially co-operative enterprises;

- * Local Enterprise Boards established by local authorities to lend and invest money in local business to protect and create jobs;
- * central government funds administered by local authorities and available for innovative ways of tackling urban problems ('The Urban Programme') which has been used for economic development, and specifically for co-operative projects undertaken by ethnic minority groups;
- * the central government 'Enterprise Allowance Scheme' which subsidises wage costs for new jobs created by unemployed people, for one year.

It may be significant that the rapid growth in the number of new co-ops has coincided with a relatively good supply of funding. However, since much of this has come from local authorities that are either being abolished (like the Greater London Council and other Metropolitan Councils) or having spending limits imposed by central government, it is unlikely that this supply will be maintained. In the 1970s ICOF(7) (channelling deposits from sympathetic organisations and individuals) was an important source of capital. However, its power to take deposits was removed by the Banking Act 1979. There is currently no organisations that can act as a deposit-taking body: accepting money from sympathetic individuals (and organisations) and lending this to co-operatives - and the problem of establishing such a body are considerable(8).

1.4 The Customers of Co-operatives

This was the major focus of the 1984 CAG study(9). Their survey suggests that -

"For almost half of all co-operatives, individual consumers are the principal customer groups. Sales to retails and non commercial organisations are also important, but only 15% sell principally to other manufacturers, wholesalers or service businesses." (CAG. 1984 p.26).

It is also clear that co-ops tend to sell their goods locally - 68% of co-operatives have the majority of their customers within a 10 mile radius - and that a fairly normal share of their sales go to regular customers(10).

1.5 Legal Structures for Co-operatives

For a trading worker co-operative there are three legal forms for the business - a partnership, an Industrial and Provident Society, and a company.

A partnership is formed by two or more people agreeing to a partnership agreement. This agreement can have clauses which would meet requirements for the establishment of a co-operative set out by the International Co-operative Alliance. However, as a legal structure for a co-operative, partnerships have several drawbacks -

- * most partnerships are limited to 20 people;
- * they do not offer complete limited liability;
- * whenever a partner leaves or joins, a new partnership agreement must be made.

For these reasons partnerships are not widely used by co-operatives, although ICOM does offer a model partnership agreement with a co-operative structure - and this is most commonly used in activities where no limited liability is permitted - e.g. architects practices.

The Industrial and Provident Societies Acts 1965-1978 (I&PS) provide a way of registering a co-op with the Registrar of Friendly Societies. This method was specifically designed for co-operatives and the Registrar will ensure that the basic ICA principles are met before a co-operative will be registered. The Registrar can also de-register a co-op if it deviates from ICA rules. Although this has been considered the appropriate form of

registration for a co-operative - differentiating the mutual nature of the co-operative from the 'individual gain' nature of a company structure - it is limited by a requirement that there should be a minimum of seven members. This effectively establishes a minimum size for a co-operative registering in this way - although 'sleeping members' have sometimes been used.

The Companies Acts 1948-1983 are the normal way of registering a limited company in Britain and can be used to register a co-operative company with two or more members. Under these Acts a company can be limited by shares. However this structure presents problems for a worker co-operative that wants its rules to limit the power of worker shareholders to sell their shares outside of the co-operative. For this, and for ideological reasons, co-ops commonly use a structure of a company limited by guarantee without share capital.

Co-operative principles can be incorporated in any of the structures although as Snaith has detailed(11) the potential for achieving direct democracy and collective decision making is limited.

The normal way for a co-operative to register is to adopt a set of model rules prepared by a promotion agency like ICOM or the National CDA. Alternatively, the co-operative would have to develop its own rules and register these - but they would probably require specialist legal advice in order to write rules that would meet all the requirements of the relevant Acts of Parliament. Where a set of model rules are used the promoting body will usually submit these to the appropriate Registrar and charge a fee to the client co-operative. The fee charged by the Registrar of Friendly Societies is reduced if model rules are used, but this is still more expensive than registration as a Company.

In general there are no special tax provisions for co-operatives

in the U.K. although there are some special arrangements for the treatment of 'interest'on loans provided by members of Industrial and Provident Societies(12).

1.6 Federation of Co-operatives

Federations have not played a major role in the development of the 'new' worker co-operative movement.

Among the wholefood collectives, Federations were established in the mid-1970s but the functions of the Federation were developed by independent worker co-operatives - Suma in the North(13), and Wholesome Trucking in the South. The latter was financed by a levy on purchases by individual co-operatives and this levy still provides the working capital for Wholesome and enables a limited amount of credit to be given to shops. Both Suma and Wholesome still carry out some of the communication functions of a Federation. Since they deliver goods to many co-ops they are in a strong position to consult each co-op and understand their needs. The development of strong wholesalers (as co-operatives) appears to have been the way the members of the Wholefood Federations preferred to see their joint needs met. The original Federations now only exist as occasional talking-shops. However, there are indications that a Federation of Wholefood Wholesalers may now be formed(14).

In London, the Greater London Enterprise Board has recognised the need for co-ops to form federations if trade sectors are to develop and compete in the commercial markets. They have therefore provided some assistance to the formation of the London Co-operative Printers Association (LCPA).

This Association was formed by five 'like-minded' printing co-operatives at the beginning of 1984 (only four currently exist). It is still in a development stage with its focus being on marketing training for individual co-operatives, and the

development of a joint marketing strategy. To undertake this the Association obtained a grant to cover 50% of the cost of employing a consultant to undertake the developments and co-ordinate joint marketing. It is clear that the regular meetings of representatives from the co-operatives has helped to develop knowledge within these co-operatives and increased awareness of common problems. The Association has recently developed a constitution as a secondary co-operative - its direction being undertaken by a representative from each member co-op.

Clearly the LCPA is a significant development for co-ops in the U.K. - and there are already suggestions tha' similar organisations be developed elsewhere. However, it is also unclear in what direction the LCPA will develop. It could move towards greater integration of marketing and production for the member co-ops - although if it does this membership would probably be limited. Alternatively, the individual co-ops may diversify and develop their own sales teams. This would weaken the role of the Association - perhaps limiting it to training and discussion groups - but would enable membership to be more open.

1.7 Umbrella Bodies in the U.K.

There are no bodies that can claim to represent co-operatives as a whole. At the national level six groups might be considered; these are described briefly below -

The Industrial Common Ownership Movement - representing co-ops and individuals committed to common ownership, and often a degree of collective working. This includes most of the 'new wave' co-operatives. It has always been dominated by individual members rather than by people working in co-operatives.

The Co-operative Union - dominated by the interests of consumer co-operatives but now including the old worker co-operatives which are insignificant in numbers but still relatively

significant in numbers of employees.

The National Co-operative Development Agency - which is a government institution promoting co-operatives in general, but who offer 'model rules' that have tended to dilute the extent of worker control in co-operatives.

The National Network of Local CDAs - a network of autonomous agencies which promote co-operatives; it acts more as a forum than a pressure group.

Job Ownership Ltd - which promotes Mondragon-style worker ownership concentrating on conversions of existing companies and the privatisation of existing state services.

Instant Muscle Ltd - which promotes youth enterprises including some co-operatives.

See Section 6 for further details.

All of these bodies are effectively representing the views and interests of professional people promoting co-operatives, rather than co-operatives themselves. There is no national body which is controlled by people working in co-operatives, and can claim to represent the views of co-ops or their members. Moreover, the structure and the mode of organisation (e.g. the timing of the meetings, the funding of travel expenses, the style of operation) of these bodies tends to discourage participation by people working in worker co-operatives. In terms of resources, all of the organisations are very weak.

At a local level the situation is better. Many CDAs have membership structures which ensure that co-operatives have significant (in some case a majority) representation. However, even here it is likely that many co-ops don't have the time or energy to play an active role in a local CDA.

1.8 Political Support for Co-operatives(15)

Worker co-operatives have the support of all the main political parties in Britain, although each tends to have their own preferred view of appropriate forms of organisation and management in a co-operative.

The Conservative Party view has been expressed by the Government Minister responsible for the National CDA who stated -

"I see worker co-operatives as a valid expression of private enterprise"(16).

This views co-ops as a means of extending employee ownership and responsibility, and as a form of private enterprise (a small business) which they seek to encourage.

The Liberal Party favours co-operatives as a means of extending worker democracy. Their views have come to be associated with Mondragon-style co-operatives with employee share-ownership (rather than common ownership) and a professional, but accountable, management.

The Social Democratic Party also gives prominence to worker co-operatives in its policy documents, favouring the development of a 'third sector' of employee ownership, and seeing this as an alternative way of providing public services - as an alternative form of privatisation.

The 'third sector' ideal is also provided by the Labour Party, but as an example of social ownership rather than private enterprise -

"We hope that co-ops will be an important new third sector of the economy....(which)....with a greater role for public enterprise....(will)....point the way to a new vision of social ownership....(17).

Thus, all four political parties give support to co-operatives - the Conservatives as an extension of private enterprise; the Liberals and SDP as an extension of a policy of share ownership and employee participation, and the Labour Party as an extension of social ownership. Labour, Liberal and SDP parties propose significant support for co-operative development, but the Conservatives only the same support as provided for other small firms.

It would appear that the Liberals see co-operative structures as replacing the role of trade unions within the workplace, and the SDP as a means of undertaking public services (which is wholly opposed by trade unions). Only the Labour party see trade unions and co-operatives as co-existing and mutually supportive.

1.9 Problems Facing U.K. Co-operatives

There have been two recent studies which set out the problems reported by co-operatives, and by co-op development workers.

In 1984 the CAG study(18) identified a lack of finance and marketing/sales as the major problems in the view of both co-op and CDA workers - although it may be significant that CDA workers also identified 'financial control' and 'member relations/dynamics' as important. The 1985 study by Cornforth and Lewis(19) sought to differentiate between start-up and trading situations. This study again finds that obtaining finance, managing finance and marketing are major problems, with interpersonal conflicts of increased importance once the co-operative is trading.

The consistency in finance and marketing/sales being listed as major problems has been maintained from earlier studies. For example Wilson's 1980 study(20). This is despite the development of local authority funding through Enterprise Boards and economic development units which have largely been

established since 1982. However, simply providing increased finance or marketing support may not be an adequate response to the problems. Finance, in particular, tends to be a 'barometer of health' for a business and the attention given by development workers to the problem of managing finance may reveal a deeper problem of skills in business management or indeed business viability.

1.10 Evaluating Co-operatives

Survey material on what participants value about working in a co-operative is available for endowed co-operatives. For example in 'Fairblow Dynamics' -

"Job security (mentioned by 47%) is the most widely perceived benefit, followed by relations with supervisors or managers (29%). Then come pensions (20%) participating in management (19%) and total pay (19%)".
(21)

This suggests that the major value of 'co-operation' perceived by employees derived from the success of the business (which was shared with them) and from the working relationships established with the supervisors and management. Participation in the management was not universally valued.

The importance given to good working relationships and the control of work that can follow from this is confirmed in recent studies of Scott Bader and Strand Glassfibre(22). Once again working relationships and job security are given a higher value than democratic control and income (with bonus and overtime opportunities being given very low scores).

There is very limited data available for other co-operatives. However, one study of six collectively-run co-operatives states -

"In order to pin down why members of the co-operatives liked working there, interviewees were asked what they perceived to be particularly salient features of their working environment. Their most frequent responses were: (a) quality of social relations within the workplace (b) control of own work situation, (c) equality, and (d) work sharing". (23)

These findings have been echoed in case studies of collective co-operatives(24).

It would be unwise to give too much weight to the importance given to social relations rather than economic rewards in these studies. The responses in the 'endowed co-operatives' are likely to reflect an already adequate level of salary, and those in new small co-operatives, an appreciation that wage levels are largely dictated by circumstances. However, the high value given to social relations in all the co-operatives mentioned is significant and suggests that the social relations that tend to accompany forms of internal democracy are valued more highly than involvement in the democratic process itself.

Apart from these studies of participants evaluation of their work situation, two other approaches - both academic - should be noted. The first is the attempt by Estrin, Jones and Svejnar to utilise econometrics techniques to analyse the effect of participation on productivity in co-operatives(25). These studies have tended to use rather weak measures of participation but suggest that participation either has no effect or has a positive effect on productivity. A second approach taken by Bernstein has been to develop a 'grounded theory' about co-operative management and the components that will facilitate participation in a co-operative(26).

NOTES

1. Tucker V., 1983, P.26.
2. This body campaigned for new legislation for co-operatives, for the formation of the National Co-operative Development Agency and for funds for Industrial Common Ownership finance - a major source of funding for many of the 'new co-ops' formed in the 1970s.
3. Although this actually includes many co-operatives that are not worker co-ops, and co-ops that are not currently trading.
4. It appears probable that the maintenance of co-op numbers etc., results from the survival and growth of existing co-ops, rather than the decline of 1984 co-ops being compensated for by the establishment of new co-ops.
5. Although Northern Ireland appears to also have specific legal problems about worker co-op formation - since the Registrar in this area has refused to accept ICOM model rules.
6. Unpublished data collected by N. Wilson, University of Bradford Management Centre.
7. Industrial Common Ownership Finance
8. See the attempt by the Wales TUC to establish a fund for co-ops - Gregory D., EEC Study 82/14, PP.21-30.
9. 'Marketing in Worker Co-operatives' CAG 1984.
10. CAG, Ibid, P.28.
11. Snaith, I., 1984.
12. See Snaith, Ibid, P.155.
13. See the Suma Case Study attached to this Report for more details of this development.
14. See Suma Case Study.
15. These descriptions are necessarily brief. For a full statement of policy refer to the individual parties.
16. David Tippiier MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry with special responsibility for small firms, in an interview for the NCDCA Newsletter "Co-operatives".
17. 'Labour's Charter for Co-ops', p.19.
18. CAG, 1984, P.25.

19. Cornforth, C. and Lewis, J., 1985, Table 12.
20. Wilson, N., 1982.
21. Paton R. and Lockett, 1978, P.72.
22. Oliver N., Unpublished Study, The Open University, 1985.
23. Oliver N., 1984, P.41.
24. See, for example, the Suma Case Study attached to this Report.
25. Estrin S., Jones D.C., and Svejnar J., 1985.
26. Berstein P., 1976.

SECTION TWO

ORGANISATION, MANAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

2.1 Introduction

This section seeks to describe the forms of organisation and management in U.K. co-operatives. Organisation is described in two ways. Firstly as a system of management and secondly as a way of distributing work tasks internally.

The limited evidence from case studies and surveys appears to support the argument that size influences the form of management adopted. In Wilson's 1980 survey of co-operatives(1), information was collected about the existence of management committees and the incidence of collective decision making. Although only 18 co-ops provided meaningful information, all of these that had more than 20 employees operated with a management committee and no collective decision making. Of the 12 that had less than 20 employees only 3 had a management committee and 11 operated a form of collective decision making. Although this generalisation probably remains fair, there is a growing incidence of collectively run co-operatives in the 20-100 member size(2). The Suma Case Study accompanying this Report describes one example.

So, broadly, this section considers indirect forms of participation in large co-operatives, direct participation in smaller co-operatives, and then work organisation.

2.2 The Structures of Management in Large Co-operatives with Indirect Participation

From the available case studies it would appear that most of the U.K. worker co-operatives with more than 100 members operate with a professional and hierarchical management who run the business 'day to day'. The members of the co-operative have rights of participation which may be at two levels -

- * to elect members of a Supervisory Board of Directors or a similar body;
- * to participate directly in or elect representatives onto a body established to influence or negotiate with professional management.

In their study of 'Fairblow Dynamics' (an engineering co-operative employing 200 people) Paton and Lockett describe one such co-operative(3).

In the Fairblow 'structure' (see Figure 2.1) there is a 'holding company' which is Fairblow Community Ltd and a trading company, Fairblow Dynamics Ltd. All employees of the trading company are automatically members of the holding company. The 'holding company' is the shareholder in the trading company, and its rights as shareholder are exercised by a Council which is elected by the employees/members - actually through a series of intermediary internal organisations like the Sports and Social Club, the Consultative Group, the Management Group, etc. In other large co-operatives this 'Board' may be elected from a general assembly of members.

The Directors of the Trading Company nominate new Directors who must then be ratified by the Council of the holding company. In Fairblow there are four operating divisions each headed by a Director, plus three other Directors. This group hold the senior posts in a conventional hierarchy. In some other co-operatives the Directors have to be approved by the membership in a general meeting(4), while in others the Directors of the trading company are non-executive but appoint a management team to administer their policies and ensure the economic prosperity of the business(5).

Most of the available information on large co-operatives relates to 'endowed co-operatives' like Fairblow. These have been

Source: Paton and Lockett, 1978, P. 15.

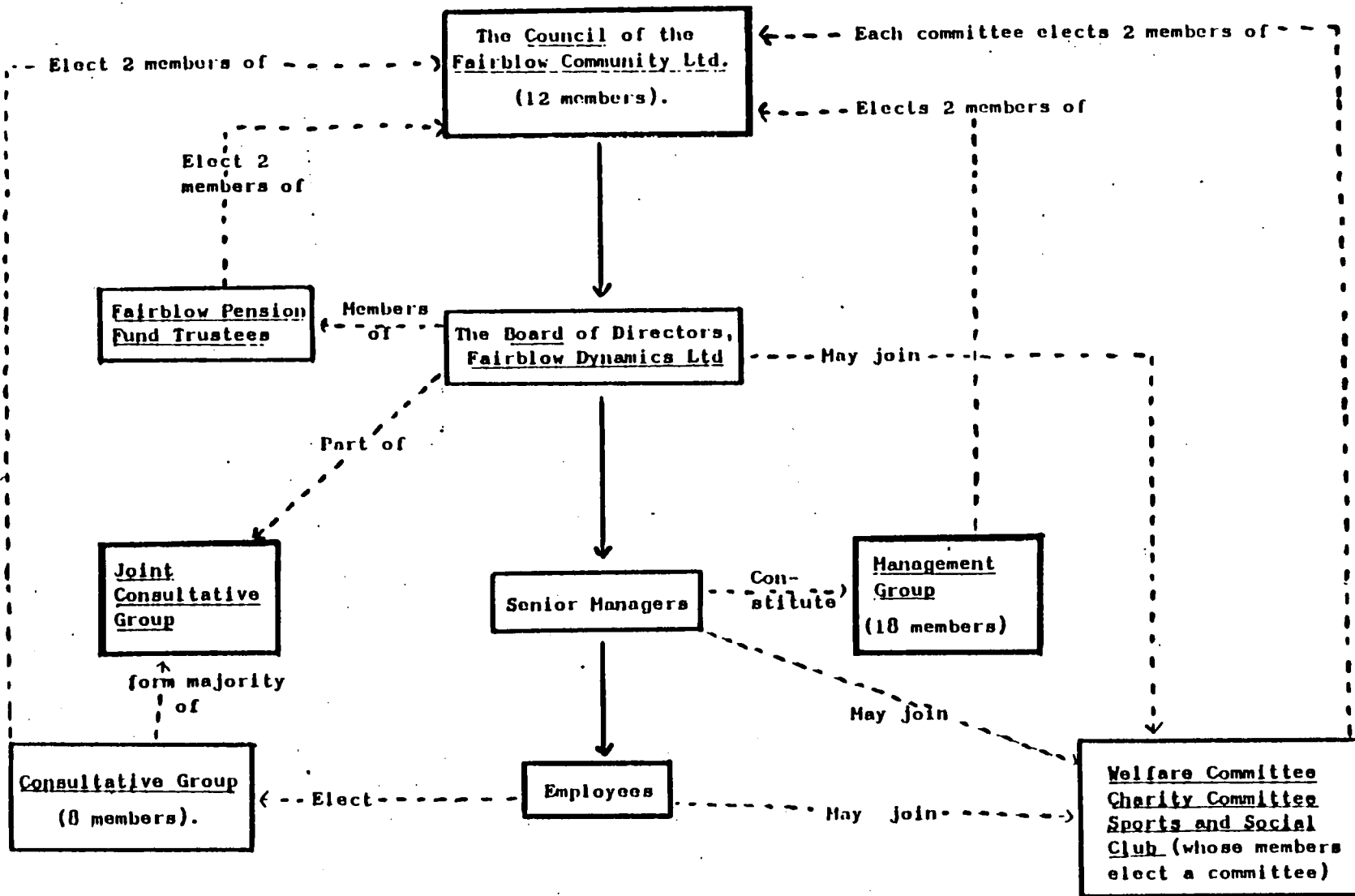


Figure 2.1

described by Paton as -

"those firms that have been 'given away' to the employees by the founders... (they)... are not usually unionised; they are usually well-established in financial and market terms."
(Paton R. 1978 p.15)

Since these derived from existing family owned businesses the structures tend to reflect the concern of the founder that workers participation should not damage the economic performance of the business. This has resulted in complex organisation structures which seek to provide participation but leave the professional management with a high degree of autonomy. The two-tier structure facilitates this but (as is intended!) denies the supervisory bodies overriding authority. Thus at Fairblow -

"the arrangements ensure that should a conflict between employees and directors and managers arise, either side will have the power to block the other. In addition, the constitution of the Airflow Community can only be changed with the approval of the Board of Directors of Fairblow Dynamics and 75% of the membership of the Fairblow Community in General Meeting." (Paton R. and Lockett M. 1978 p.16)

So there are in-built limits to the range of issues that can be decided by the members. These limits reflect the founders' belief that a hierarchical and professional management was the way to ensure commercial success but that an equitable distribution of the benefits of this success should be made through the participatory mechanisms. The result is that the supervisory bodies tend to have a rather passive role, responding to the initiatives of the professional management rather than directing that management.

In the larger co-operatives there may be arrangements for consultation between the workforce and the professional

management although trade union involvement is low. These arrangements appear to be more developed at Fairblow than other 'endowed co-operatives'. Here a Joint Consultative Group (JCG) consisting of worker representatives and the Company Directors meet regularly to discuss operational issues within the company -

"Most of the discussion involves either directors explaining policies or decisions, or representatives recounting their own or shop floor views on decisions or proposed courses of action. To this extent, the Consultative Group functions as it was intended, as a channel of communication." (Paton R. and Lockett M. 1978 p.21)

Paton and Lockett suggest that the JCG has a considerable amount of influence, but more over some issues than others -

"On non-commercial issues, the influences can be anything up to total...on the issues relating more closely to the commercial success of the company, the representatives' influence was significantly less...". (Ibid, p.24)

In these larger co-operatives with 'representative' forms of participation, the outcome would appear to be that authority resides with the professional management over a wide range of issues. To some extent this arises from the formal structures which seek to ensure the autonomy of the managers on day to day issues. But perhaps more significant is the way the managers are able to influence the processes that occur between themselves and the representatives and workers. They can do this by -

- * controlling the flow of information and providing an interpretation of this information(6);
- * deciding what issues should be referred to representative bodies for discussion;
- * deciding whether the outcome of the discussions should be regarded as leading to a decision made by the representative body, (and implemented by the management) or merely a consultation prior to the

manager making an independent decision(7);

- * formulating the proposals that go to representative bodies for discussion or decision - choosing what options to present(8).

Certainly in Scott Bader (Britain's largest worker co-operative with over 500 members) the workforce perceive the domination of the professional management in company matters. A recent survey indicates that 94% of members consider that company executives have a high level of influence. 88% consider the Company Board (non-elected) to have high influence, but only 50% think the elected Board and Council to have high influence (N. Oliver - Unpublished Study).

How far is the experience of management and participation in the 'endowed co-ops' shared by other large co-operatives? Information here is more sketchy. In the large old co-operatives using Co-operative Productive Federation rules(9), it appears that a distinction is made between policy making and policy implementation -

"Great emphasis has been placed on limiting employee participation to general policy issues and preserving the freedom of management to implement their interpretation of policy as they see fit."(10)

In the large rescue co-operatives the picture is more confused. At Kirby Manufacturing and Engineering an effective management structure was never established and although there was a management team their powers were never clearly defined; there were neither representative or professional management structures established. At Scottish Daily News the assumption appears to have been one of management autonomy(11) and at Meriden Motorcycles there was a move towards establishing a separate management team after the intervention of advisers from the

General Electric Company (GEC). This curtailed the influence of the worker directors and again aimed to create a professional management with 'day to day' autonomy.

2.3 The Extent of Participation in Large Co-operatives

The above discussion is concerned with how formal bodies within large co-operatives influence management and directions. Here the concern is with how far individual members of co-operatives use their rights of participation.

The most comprehensive data that exists in this area is again the Paton and Lockett study of Fairblow where -

- * over 70% of members know who their representative is, but on the whole do not regularly consult them about problems or discuss current issues with them;
- * over 70% 'quite often' read minutes of meetings and company information;
- * about 90% of members have never been a member of a Representative body, although about 70% are likely to attend general meetings(12).

In seeking to explain the pattern of who does participate, Paton and Lockett suggest that -

"...men, those with high status, and those who have been with the company for a number of years, appear more likely to have a close involvement in company affairs...(however)...Company participation does not appear to be associated with the type of work - whether manual or non-manual - of employees; but the skills and responsibility of employees within both these categories do seem to effect the degree of involvement." (Paton and Lockett 1978 p.90/91)

From this it can be seen that only a very limited number of members are involved in the representative bodies in the company and this involvement is associated with an informal seniority within the workers own section - based perhaps on skills, experience, length of service, etc.

Finally in this section, it is worth noting that where 'worker representatives' and 'management' come together in meetings, then the management staff tend to dominate the meeting. This is clear from the Fairblow Study and was documented by Paton and Cornforth with regard to 'Martin Williams Community Ltd' where they suggest -

"It is clear that both Board members and managers were more likely to attend and that when they came they were likely to say far more - a director being perhaps ten times more likely to speak than an ordinary staff member. Since these figures neglect the length of intervention and the significance of the topics on which directors, as opposed to staff, were likely to contribute, they are a very crude indication that understates the extent of managerial input into the co-operative meetings." (Cornforth C. and Paton R. 1984 p.15)

A part of the explanation for this is the need for the 'management' to give information and respond to questions. However, it may also reflect their confidence and their expectation of natural authority.

2.4 Summary - Management and Participation in Large Co-operatives

Although there is no dominant model for all large U.K. co-operatives, it does appear that there is often a two-tier arrangement with a professional management who retain effective control and representative bodies which legitimate the actions of the management and act as a channel of communication and

consultation. However, the rights of decision over which issues are to be discussed by representatives, how they are presented, and the status of 'decisions', is likely to rest with the management. There is thus only limited democracy and provided that management are sensitive to the conventions of participation there is likely to be little opposition to their proposals. Nevertheless, the participation arrangements and the internal relationships they engender do give significant advantages to the employees -

- * they will obtain more information, as a right, than in other firms;
- * they will be consulted on a range of commercial issues that they would not normally be consulted about;
- * there will be 'open management' and therefore greater consideration of shop-floor opinions;
- * they would be able to veto totally unacceptable proposals(13).

2.5. Management and Participation in Small Co-operatives

In Britain today a form of collective management seems to be the convention for small co-operatives - but there is a wide variety of forms. In this review an attempt will be made to develop some generalisations from the available information, although this is hampered by the lack of recent case studies(12) during a time when there has been a rapid growth in the numbers of new co-ops.

Regular formal meetings - are a common form of management in small co-operatives. These may be weekly, bi-weekly or monthly. These probably include all the people working in the co-operative; full members and probationary members, part-time and full-time workers. These meetings are the formal decision-making body of the co-operative. The range of decisions clearly varies from broad policy decisions to detailed allocation of work.

Attendance at these meetings may be taken as an indication of interest in the co-operative (rather than just in the job) and may be used as a form of induction for new members(15). It would appear common for the meetings to be run by a chairperson and for minutes to be taken, although these functions may be rotated amongst the members.

Informal discussions frequently supplement the formal meetings with dinner and tea breaks and 'ad hoc' meetings being used to discuss matters of importance that have arisen(16). In some cases all the business of the co-operative is carried on at informal meetings(17). In reality the differences between a formal general meeting and an informal meeting might be quite small - with many 'formal meetings' actually operating in a very informal way. It also appears that decisions made in a formal meeting can be changed by subsequent informal meetings:

"At other times, because meetings were not always conducive to lengthy or informal discussions, members would continue to debate matters after the meetings and subsequently change their minds."
(Cornforth C. 1982 p.45)

It is likely that informal meetings are essential for collective day-to-day management in co-operatives without a manager or executive management committee since they facilitate flexible and rapid responses to changing situations.

Executive or Management Committees do exist - especially where larger numbers of people are involved (say, more than 10 or 15

people). At Louis Argyle, for example:

"The Management Adviser and an Executive Committee - elected by the General Assembly - are responsible for the day to day decision making".
(CREW 81/26 p.E2)

It would appear that this committee has delegated powers from the General Assembly, rather than having an independent role under the constitution of the co-operative.

There is little evidence in the case studies about the effectiveness of management committees - either in decision making or in maintaining the support of other co-op members.

Special committees have been developed in some co-operatives as a way of handling particular problems (e.g. co-ordination or planning) and the Suma Case Study attached describes one such development. Here the committees have delegated authority from the general meeting for certain executive functions, prepare reports for the G.M. and act as a channel of information for members.

Managers or Co-ordinators have been appointed. In new co-operatives, these are perhaps more associated with 'phoenix' or 'conversion' situations where a manager was part of the existing team that became co-operative. There have also been a number of co-operative initiatives where a manager was appointed by an external body (e.g. a management or advisory committee) sometimes to try and resolve desperate trading or production problems(18).

In some co-operatives there have been problems arising from the allocation of powers and rights between the members and the manager; and the limited understanding of the manager's role. Some common problems here appear to be:

- i. the workers judged the manager's role by their shop-floor performance and - having the right to express this in general meetings, etc. - inhibited the manager's off-site work (e.g. selling);
- ii. there was no clear idea of what power the manager had, and what power could only be exercised by the general meeting or by individual members e.g. has the manager the power to dismiss workers?
- iii. the lack of clear managerial rights may mean that the limits of power are developed through conflicts over individual issues as they arise - a destructive process for the confidence of both manager and managed.

Now, to a considerable extent these are not problems that need arise. A general meeting could choose to delegate certain powers to an individual and agree systems for reporting back or settling disputes that arise from this. It therefore appears that a manager's role in a small co-operative is more likely to work if:

- i. there are clearly established rights and obligations accepted by both manager and the membership;
- ii. the membership respect and trust the manager.

Advisors have played an important role in small co-ops but do not appear to have 'management' roles in a formal sense. Attendance of an 'advisor' may be an important way of extending the knowledge, skills and experience that can facilitate co-operative decisions. Advisors may also be allocated some 'executive' functions and thereby extend the management resources of the co-operative. However, it must be recognised that the rights of advisors to participate in meetings where decisions are made is likely to enable them to exercise considerable power in some circumstances. In part this may arise from respect for the advisor's knowledge and experience and in part may arise from - as is often the case - the role of advisor as 'gatekeeper' to other resources like finance.

The influence that an advisor can have is likely to vary with the basis and degree of trust that is established with the co-operative. An advisor that works closely with financing bodies is likely to have influence because of their 'contacts' but may have a difficult 'trust' relationship. For example, in London the development workers are expected to monitor co-ops on behalf of the Greater London Enterprise Board, where the latter has loaned money to a co-op. This clearly affects the relationship between advisor and co-op. There may also be an implicit assumption by local authority officers that the development worker controls the co-op, and can instruct it to fulfil Council requirements, etc. An independent advisor may not be immune from all of these pressures, but is more likely to obtain influence through a personal trust relationship with the co-operators.

Advisory Groups have been established in a number of 'co-operatives' where the method of funding has required an independent body to be formally responsible for administration. This was true of a number of job creation and skill training co-operatives financed by the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) in the late 1970s. Often these groups were initially established as 'steering groups' which effectively established the co-operative and then appointed the members.

There appear to be a number of problems that arise with advisory groups:

- * conflicts can arise if the employees think they are in a worker co-operative and therefore have control; but the advisors think they have some powers to direct and (e.g. under MSC funding) may be legally responsible for the funding of the co-operative;
- * the advisory group is unlikely to be sufficiently involved in the co-operative to understand all the problems, or to be able to intervene with solutions either on a basis of trust or a basis of knowledge - they may then seek to intervene by appointing a manager!(19)

The outcome of this situation may be a set of complex relationships arising from the confused pattern of authority and managerial rights.

It is likely that an appropriate role for an advisory or 'steering' group can be established - but this has to be clear to

the workers involved. In a workers co-operative it is essential that the workers interests can dominate. If it is intended that other interests dominate, e.g. the MSC's interest in job-creation or training, or a local community's interest in the provision of a service, then the dominance of an advisory group may be correct and this must be made clear to the workforce. The rights of the workforce can then be seen as rights of participation rather than rights of control.

2.6 Collective Management

In this sub-section it is intended to review some of the alleged problems of collective management. Relatively little is known about the extent to which co-operatives experience these problems or how they deal with them - although the case studies attached to this Report do provide some insights. Part of the explanation for this lack of information is that the problems of collective management tend to be dealt with as group dynamics issues(20) - and experiences are not written into available case studies of co-operatives. Another likelihood is that problems remain unresolved.

It should also be noted that many of the issues raised as problems, also have benefits for the co-operative or its members, and it may not be valid to see these 'problems' as criticisms of collective management within the terms of reference of the participants.

Collective decision making is likely to be more time consuming than a 'managerial system'; at least in the narrow sense of person-hours involved in the decision. From this it is sometimes claimed that collective working is inefficient - although this ignores the unmeasured advantages of bringing a wide range of skills and knowledge to the decision and not having to impose this decision on a reluctant workforce. To some extent co-ops overcome the time problems by organising formal meetings - often outside working hours - and supplementing these with informal discussions. This may give them equal or greater flexibility than other firms.

Collective decision making has been described as unstable - the decision can be overturned at subsequent meetings, perhaps because a different range of people are present. This may present problems for 'executive management' and may undermine the confidence of outside bodies (suppliers, customers, etc.) insofar as they are affected. However, once again, this preparedness to review decisions may give advantages to the members. It is likely that from these discussions the members develop their knowledge and decision-making skills and that, over time, decision-making will become more stable. Furthermore, to review decisions increases the likely level of members commitment to the eventual decision.

Implementation of decisions may be a problem - especially where no specialist managerial roles exist. In meetings a wide range of issues may be discussed and decisions made. However, deciding who carries out the decision may demand as much discussion and

emotional input as making the original decision! In these circumstances the discussion of implementation may not happen(21).

Arguments that occur within the decision making process may be carried over into the day-to-day working relationships in the co-operative. This could result in lost production. The extent to which informal meetings and unstable decision-making were accepted might tend to accentuate this(22).

Differences in the skills, knowledge and confidence in the membership may lead to some individuals or a clique becoming dominant. These differences may be in technical and commercial skills, or they may be in the knowledge about the co-operative. Case studies reveal numbers of examples where an individual or group was perceived by other people to have captured the decision making process. This can result in either a withdrawal from the process by those who felt left out, or by a growing conflict within the co-operative. The Suma Case Study describes how this was dealt with in one situation.

'New people, old ideas - old people, new ideas' - the right of new members to introduce ideas that have already been rejected by the co-operative can be seen as time-wasting and frustrating by older members - although on some occasions it may be correct to re-open old debates.

Collective decision making has been described as inherently conservative. This arises from the need for those individuals

within the co-op who have higher levels of enterprise, to obtain the support from other members for new projects, products, services, etc. These new 'enterprises' are likely to place stress on the co-operative and involve a higher degree of risk than the co-operative is currently experiencing, and may not be supported by the majority of co-op members. Because of this the co-op may not be as enterprising as its 'small business' competitors, its growth may be inhibited, and those members with higher levels of initiative may tend to leave in frustration.

Collective decision making may result in a power-vacuum. The rejection of hierarchical or managerial systems of decision making and power may take place without the development of any alternative perception of power; there may be a denial of power. Yet power will exist through the decisions which each member makes in the carrying out of their tasks. Unless the collective is recognised as having rights over each member - it acts as the employer and each individual as an employee - then collective decision making can become individual decision making. This can result in contradictory action within the co-op and the rise of a new hierarchy based on individual power - based on knowledge, skills, experience and confidence.

Finally, involvement in the collective management of a business, as well as carrying out the work in a business, can be emotionally and physically exhausting. This will be especially so in the early stages of a co-operative business when

- * the commercial problems of a co-operative are likely to be great and the need to establish the reputation of the business demands long working hours, etc.;
- * the system of collective decision making is likely to be at its most primitive - it will develop with experience;
- * the personal differences between the members still have to be reconciled - with the scale of these differences being accentuated by the pressures exerted by the commercial situation and the lack of a mature collective management system.

To a considerable extent the problems of collective management can be resolved, and are resolved in co-operatives. However, the process by which people become aware of the problems and are able to overcome them - or at least control them - is handicapped by the lack of knowledge about collective management, and the lack of models of collective management which could be discussed, used and modified. At present many small co-operatives appear to go through a similar learning process about collective management - which is painful, time-consuming, and threatening to their business. More information about collective management needs to be made available.

2.7 Work Organisation

There is, perhaps, an expectation that democratic organisation of work must include or will lead to new forms of work organisation. By this is meant job rotation, different supervising

arrangements, abandonment of job-stereotyping, self-servicing flexible hours, job sharing and autonomous work groups. The importance of this is supported by survey data for two co-operatives(23) and for British companies(24) which suggest that issues relating directly to the control of the individual's work and working conditions are felt to be more important to workers than 'company issues' like investment. This is also very apparent in the case studies of the co-operatives that form part of this Report.

Information on the experience of new forms of work organisation has to be taken mainly from case studies and these will be reviewed. However, one survey of 46 co-operatives in 1980 indicated that 60.9% had a policy of total or partial job rotation(25) - much higher than (for example) the experience of job rotation in U.K. metal working firms which was only 2.3% in 1984(26).

Case studies of endowed co-operatives tend to suggest that workers are expected to work flexibly, and be prepared to move between jobs as the requirements of work-flow demand. It should be noted that, on the whole, these companies are not unionised and demarcation between jobs has (in Britain) been a major concern of Trade Unions(27). One reason for this concern is that flexibility eliminates slack periods and results in an intensification of work - although in a co-operative it can be argued that the economic benefits of 'intensifying work' accrue to the workers themselves. However, this flexibility does not seem to reflect a conscious job rotating procedure and other

indicators like the maintenance of hierarchy and a conventional distribution of job stereotypes(28) do suggest that in these areas the co-operatives are unexceptional.

In terms of working conditions and the style of management, it does appear that these co-operatives offer an unusually good situation. At Fairblow for example -

"There are no piece rates or production bonuses (other than the distribution of company profits as a bonus) and since practically none of the work is machine-paced, employees have a comparatively high degree of control over the pace of their work - production rates, for costing purposes, are deliberately set to allow a steady and relaxed pace of work". (Paton R. and Lockett M. 1978 p.9)

Paton and Lockett also highlight the concern of managers at Fairblow to consult employees or representatives wherever practicable, and the high value managers give to maintaining consensus within meetings and maintaining control through coaxing rather than coercion(29).

Clearly a style of open management is practised and the participative structure of the co-operative encourages this. However, it should be noted that these companies usually operated soft management prior to them becoming a co-operative - the 'co-operatisation' of the company arising from the 'soft management' beliefs of the founders, rather than the soft management arising from co-operatisation!

Clarke's view of work organisation in large rescue co-operatives suggests that little significant change occurred -

"the central features of the co-operative work experience resemble the predicament of workers in other factories under private and public ownership: the work organisation, shift systems, payment systems, conditions and holidays, and level of supervision are similar to that of other factories...The division of labour into fragmented and frequently stultifying, repetitive and arduous work has remained, particularly at KME where there is a high proportion of semi-skilled workers and women workers, but this is also true of many jobs at MMC and SDN. Though there might be greater flexibility and job rotation in the co-operatives, this is between essentially boring jobs."

(Clarke T. 1978 p.43/44)

Nevertheless it should be noted that Meriden did adopt an equal wage policy and abandon the close supervision of work and at Scottish Daily News traditional 'demarcation' was abandoned to achieve greater flexibility.

Two reasons might be suggested for the failure of these co-operatives to establish new forms of work organisation -

- i) they never reached a position of stable and viable trading where such issues could be considered and experimented with;
- ii) trade union involvement inhibited change since this violated traditional T.U. practices(30).

In 'new co-operatives' it appears that conscious attempts are made to change traditional patterns of work organisation. For example at Ragged Robin -

"The co-operative has flexible working arrangements. All the women are skilled and all are involved in making the clothes. The administration is shared out between the women and every so often the jobs are rotated. This allows everyone to take part in all the activities of the co-operative." (CREW 1982 Appendix F2)

and at Artemis Building Co-operative:

"Although they are all carpenters, they also do other work: reslating roofs, plastering, glazing. The women feel it is important to bridge the gap between the "skilled" and the "unskilled" and so insist that everyone learns to do all the jobs of the co-operative." (CREW 1982 Appendix G.2)

The case studies attached to this Report also reveal the extent to which job rotation is experienced in some co-operatives. For example, at Suma -

- * nobody is recruited for specialist functions, so these posts are filled internally; but people are expected to move (voluntarily) to other tasks, after a time;
- * people can move between jobs and expand their skills and experience accordingly;
- * most members do a mixture of tasks each week, including both manual and office functions;
- * these arrangements have been maintained over a ten year period.

It is clear from the above that the motivation for changing the patterns of work organisation in these co-ops is not for commercial gain but has arisen from a decision to tackle the inequality that arises in work organisation where there are high levels of differentiation. However, much of the information

available is from co-operatives which are all women and it may be that here there is a special sensitivity to issues of new work organisation since women are frequently marginalised by conventional patterns of work organisation - especially job stereotyping.

There are some indications that the desire for new methods of work organisation has to arise spontaneously from the membership. In some cases where this has been imposed, insufficient account has been taken of the importance that work-roles may have for people's self-esteem, and the stress people encounter when forced into new roles without adequate preparation or support.(31)

So, improved forms of work organisation - improving the experience of work and diminishing the barriers that highly differentiated work tasks create - are clearly important to co-op members. How far these are achievable clearly varies. It can be hypothesised that the following factors may influence its achievement -

- * the economic circumstances of the co-operative;
- * the commitment of the members of the co-operative to ensure that new practices are given priority;
- * the ability and willingness of the members to change - which may be influenced by the traditional structures of management and trade unions 'in place'.

Notes

1. Unpublished data collected by Dr N Wilson, University of Bradford Management Centre.
2. In London the ICOM Pilot Programme is providing training for 5 co-operatives (ranging in size from 20 to 170 members) that operate collectively.
3. See Paton R. and Lockett M. 1978.
4. See for example the description of Martin Williams Community Ltd in Cornforth C. and Paton R. 1984.
5. See for example 'Scott Bader' in Pateman C. 1970 and Mcmannies D. 'Trade Unions and Co-ops'.
6. At 'Fairblow', for example council members felt "inhibited in doing anything that might constitute 'taking on the directors on their own ground' - they lacked the necessary information" (ibid p.20).
7. As Paton has pointed out this decision can be made differently by the same manager over the same issue but in different commercial circumstances, and lead to confusion amongst the representatives who might legitimately conclude that managers ignore the co-operative principles when it suits them. See Paton R. 1978, p.24.
8. See Cornforth C. and Paton R. 1984 p.20/23 for a description of how influential this can be.
9. These rules allow the transfer of shares and control outside of the workforce and are used mainly by co-operatives established in the nineteenth century or early twentieth century.
10. Paton R. 1978 P.25.
11. Although the life of the co-operative was short and tempestuous.
12. For a detailed statistical breakdown of this information see Paton R. and Lockett M. 1978, p.34.
13. See Cornforth C. and Paton R. 1984, p.27/28 for a discussion of the direct and indirect impacts of participation in decision making.
14. Many of the published studies relate to top-down developments in the 1970s, although these are often instructive in revealing problems of collective management.

15. See for example at Kennington Office Cleaners where new members "serve a three month probationary period before they become full members. During this period they are expected to attend all meetings". (CREW 1982, p.B4).
16. See for example Cornforth C. 1982, p.22.
17. E.g. Artemis Building Co-operative - see CREW 1982, p.91.
18. See for example Cornforth C. 1982, p.22-26.
19. The Case Studies of Neighbourhood Textiles (Emerson T. 1982) and Milkwood Co-operatives (Rhodes R.) illustrate the problems discussed here.
20. See for example Randell R. and Southgate J. 1980.
21. See Cornforth C. 1982, p45.
22. Ibid
23. See N. Oliver, Survey of Scott Bader and Strand. Unpublished work.
24. See Heller F, et al.
25. See N. Wilson University of Bradford Management Centre. Unpublished work.
26. See N. Wilson University Bradford Management Centre. Unpublished work.
27. In many factories workers doing different jobs will be members of different unions, but even where there is a single union a hierarchy of skills and wage levels is maintained by the union.
28. See for example Fairblow Dynamics - Paton R. and Lockett M. 1978, p.166.
29. See Paton R. and Lockett M. 1978, p.125.
30. See also the Mckenzie and Brown Caernarfon Ltd Case Study where wage differentials are being maintained.
31. See for example the experiences in Sunderlandia (Tynan E, p.21) and Unit 58 (Tynan E, p.6).

SECTION THREE

TYPES OF EMPLOYMENT

TRADE DISTRIBUTION OF U.K. WORKER CO-OPS

	NO. CO-OPS	NUMBER OF WORKERS	
		FULL-TIME	PART-TIME
Fishing & Agriculture	7	44	3
Building & Construction - general	44	279	40
Building & Construction - insulation	5	25	2
Building & Construction - other	7	32	4
Manufacturing - mouldings	0	0	0
Manufacturing - furniture & joinery	13	74	9
Manufacturing - clothing & textiles	36	396	114
Manufacturing - mechanical engineering	16	130	27
Manufacturing - electrical engineering & electronics	7	252	2
Manufacturing - food processing	4	28	3
Manufacturing - shipbuilding & repair	1	3	0
Manufacturing - crafts	4	10	0
Manufacturing - other	21	203	20
Manufacturing - chemicals	1	530	35
Manufacturing - footwear	8	476	25
Services - repairs & restoration	21	71	9
Services - landscaping & gardening	7	26	12
Services - cleaning	13	34	66
Services - business, professional, research	31	166	75
Services - performing & other arts	36	242	116
Services - media	32	94	59
Services - printing	49	382	40
Services - publishing	24	117	79
Services - vehicle repair	16	53	13
Services - education & training	13	88	48
Services - miscellaneous	51	311	105
Services - architecture	15	64	22
Transport	5	33	9
Wholesale - books	1	8	0
Wholesale - food	11	92	20
Wholesale - other	6	10	13
Retail - crafts	10	19	46
Retail - books	31	129	68
Retail - restaurants & food	74	408	225
Retail - catering	6	15	14
Retail - other	29	118	94
Community Services	21	175	119
Total:	676	5137	1536

Source : WORKER CO-OP DATABASE JULY 1985

TABLE 3.1

3.1 Introduction

In this section it is intended to look at 'Types of Employment in U.K. worker co-ops', in a number of ways:-

- * the sector distribution of co-ops as an indication of the trade/technical skills involved;
- * the time distribution of full-time and part-time employment in co-ops;
- * the social and educational background of people working in co-ops;
- * the involvement of 'marginalised' groups;
- * the types of skills and the aims of training for people in co-ops.

3.2 Trade Distribution of Co-operatives and Workers

Table 3.1 sets out the number of co-operatives and the number of full-time and part-time workers, in each trade sector. This indicates that the largest number of full-time jobs are in manufacturing. However, although this is numerically correct, this sector is greatly influenced by a small number of large co-operatives. Thus -

- * in footwear 367 full-time jobs are in 3 co-operatives;
- * in mechanical engineering 103 jobs are in one co-operative;
- * in electrical engineering and electronics 200 jobs are in one co-op;
- * in chemicals all the jobs are in one co-op.

Since these large co-operatives are all special cases - the survivors of the old established co-operatives or endowed co-operatives(1) - it would be fair to suggest that the strongest

current growth sectors are services, wholesalers and retail.

The distribution of co-operatives tends to confirm the 'conventional wisdom' that co-operatives are growing in sectors that require relatively low levels of capital investment. Thus (leaving aside the large manufacturing co-operatives detailed above) the main manufacturing sector is clothing and textiles and the majority of other co-operatives are in trades requiring human skills rather than high investment in plant, etc.

It would appear that about 15% of full-time jobs are in professional services, and the remainder in sectors utilising craft skills, or offering semi-skilled employment - although within all the sectors there are a proportion of business and technical skills.

3.3 Full-time and Part-time Employment

From Table 3.1 it can be seen that in many sectors there is a relatively high ratio of part-time to full-time employment. The reasons for this appear to include -

- * some co-ops are in sectors where a high level of women workers are employed, and a high level of part-time work is accepted e.g. in clothing, textiles and retailing;
- * a number of sectors where most employment is part-time e.g. cleaning;
- * the formation of co-operatives to provide part-time employment for people who would otherwise be unemployed - for example actors employment agencies;
- * people establishing co-operatives as part of a lifestyle that gives them more free time or time to invest in other activities.

3.4 Labour Turnover

Only one study has collected data on labour turnover(2). This limited material suggests that -

- * labour turnover in well-established manufacturing co-operatives is similar to that for conventional companies in the same sector;
- * labour turnover in some 'alternative' co-ops (e.g. wholefood retail) was much higher - in one co-op between 50% and 100% per annum.

More research would be required to seek explanations for these variations although two points are worth making:

- (i) the case studies of new co-operatives do reveal a considerable turnover of workers in the early period - especially where the stress is high and the rewards uncertain;
- (ii) that the concept of 'labour turnover' may not apply to all 'alternative' co-operatives since, in some cases, there is a flow of people using the co-operative as a temporary source of income and community - so that leaving reflects a desire to 'move on' more than dissatisfaction with the employment(3).

3.5 People in Co-operatives

The lack of survey material, and the lack of attention to this in existing case studies, makes it difficult to say 'who are the people in co-operatives'. However, some indicative material is given below.

There are two surveys of educational qualifications covering people in two 'endowed' co-operatives(4) and six 'alternative'

new-start co-operatives(5). These studies indicate a generally high level of qualification - 60% of the employees of two well-established manufacturing co-operatives and 92% of the 'alternative' co-op's members having 'A' levels and higher qualifications. It may also be noted that 59% of the members of the 'alternative' co-ops had a degree although the trade these co-ops were in would not normally demand this level of education. Information in the Suma Case Study tends to support these findings although care should be taken in generalising from this.

Information about the previous work backgrounds is also limited. Oliver's study of two endowed co-operatives indicates that 42% of employees had held between 1 and 3 jobs previously, and 38% between 4 and 6 jobs previously(6). Case studies don't add much to our knowledge although it appears that at Suma there was a tendency for members to have had a number of jobs in diverse fields. In contrast to this at Mckenzie and Brown Caernarfon, many of the members had been apprenticed in the firm and never worked elsewhere(8). These different patterns may reflect the different circumstances in which the co-ops were established - but do underline the dangers of generalising from available material.

At the 'endowed co-ops' studied by Oliver, the socio-economic origins of the members was mainly middle-class (32%) and skilled working-class(55%)(9) but there is no similar survey material for other co-operatives although at Suma the backgrounds of those interviewed was about 50% middle-class and the remainder working-class(10).

There does appear to be a concentration of people aged between 20 and 40 in co-operatives(11).

3.6 Marginalised Groups and Co-operatives

In recent years substantial support for co-operative development has come from local government in areas suffering from severe unemployment. Their concern has been to encourage those people marginalised by the labour market - women, ethnic minorities and long-term unemployed and young people - to create their own jobs in co-operatives. This concern is reflected in the priorities of local co-operative development agencies(12).

There is no material to indicate how many co-operatives are established by unemployed people, but some data has been collected for women and ethnic minorities.

In July 1985 there were 41 'women only' co-operatives listed by Worker Co-op Database(13). The biggest concentrations are in London (15) and Wales, Yorkshire and North-West England (5 each). Analysis of the activities 'women only' co-ops undertake suggest that a majority are in fields like printing, media, publishing and architecture where it would not be common for women to undertake all functions. In the media related activities there is a bias towards supplying the feminist movement. However, it should also be noted that many co-ops that are predominantly women are not listed as 'women only'(14) and it would appear that these are in trades with a tradition of employing women, like clothing and cleaning. This suggests that women are forming co-operatives -

- * to protect and promote employment in trades where women have the trade skills and are traditionally employed (e.g. clothing and cleaning);
- * to allow women to obtain employment in jobs predominantly done by men, e.g. printing and architecture.

There is some evidence to suggest that in the large endowed co-operatives women participate less than men. Oliver's work at two 'endowed' co-operatives indicates only 17% of members were women and that both passive and active participation were lower for women than for men(15). At 'Fairblow Dynamics' role stereotyping of women was maintained(16).

To promote co-operatives of women, a programme of training has been organised, and a network of women in co-operatives formed (17).

Less information is available about ethnic minority involvement in co-operatives. The Worker Co-op Database shows 'ethnic minority only' co-operatives in 1985(18) (a rise of 6 since 1984 (19)) of which 11 are in London. However, this doesn't necessarily reflect the number of people who are members of ethnic minorities that are working in co-operatives. In London a special development and research group has been established to promote ethnic minority co-ops (20).

'Instant Muscle' groups are probably the largest section of youth co-operatives. It is understood that at the beginning of 1985 there were about 30 groups trading, with 172 members(21). A further 17 are understood to be in the development stage. Not all of these are co-operatives, however. Again, there is no information about the participation of young people in other co-operatives.

The above material underlines the scarcity of data in this area, but does indicate that co-operatives are seen as a way of achieving equal opportunities in employment for some marginal groups, and as a suitable way of organising job creation projects. Priority is given to these groups by CDAs in Britain - which is further supported by the growth of specifically targetted training and development programmes.

3.7 Skills and Training in Co-operatives

It might be useful to distinguish, at the outset, three categories of skill that will be needed in any business and therefore any worker co-operative. These are technical skills, commercial skills and participation skills. Each of these will be described below, although in any co-operative a combination of the three types will be necessary.

'Technical skills' refer to the technical knowledge and experience in the trade of the co-op e.g. as a motor mechanic, a sewing machinist, a bricklayer, a computer analyst, an architect etc. There are several important points to make about the nature of these skills -

- * the level of technical skill needs to be adequate for the market the co-op is approaching;
- * to compete in a particular market will demand an appropriate mix of skills which may be 'in house' or sometimes sub-contracted;
- * skills required to stay competitive in a particular market may change over time - and continued technical training may be necessary.

Little is known about absolute levels of technical skills in co-operatives. However, it might be fair to suggest that the problems many co-ops report in raising capital is likely to mean that co-ops are not investing in most modern equipment and (insofar as this is relevant in the particular trade) that the skills being utilised are not the most advanced in the trade. It is significant that technical skills do not seem to be recognised as a problem by either co-operators or co-operative development workers. In the surveys quoted in 'Problems of Co-operatives'(22) there is no specific reference to the need to

develop technical skills. This may be because problems associated with technical skills are described in other ways. For example, problems of 'production speed/capacity', 'design/identity of product or services being supplied' and 'staffing/recruitment'(23) may be about technical skill levels; insufficient demand may be described as a marketing problem but may reflect a lack of skills to compete in the markets where customers are plentiful.

Problems related to technical skills will differ, to some extent, with the origin of the co-operative. In a rescue co-op skills will be available but some essential skills may be missing. However, these companies are often in a market suffering from over-capacity, so the 'demand' for their skills (experienced as a fall in demand for their products) may be in decline.

A traditional co-operative, well established in the market, need have no greater problem than other firms. It is likely to have personnel and training policies to deal with problems it experiences.

The circumstances in which emergent co-operatives form may also mean there are few technical skill problems since these are often formed by groups of skilled people who have already worked together. However, severe problems may be faced in co-operatives formed by people marginalised in the labour market since their skills may be only partially developed (e.g. young people) - possibly through a lack of work experience or may already be redundant (e.g. unemployed people). This does not mean that they cannot learn new skills or establish themselves in trade or markets where their existing skills are adequate - but it does mean that more problems will be encountered.

By commercial skills is meant knowledge of markets and appropriate selling strategies and techniques, financial records controls and planning, credit controls, materials and their

supply, pricing, production planning, wages calculations, taxation and official procedures, employment and personnel matters, terms and conditions of trade and the employment and direction of advisors. Again, what is required will vary with the scale of the business and the way trade or industry is structured, and again it is appropriate levels of skill that are required rather than absolute levels.

A problem experienced here is the wide number of skills that are needed almost simultaneously. In large traditional co-operatives these are covered through conventional management functions and in emergent co-operatives at least some commercial skills (especially knowledge of the market) may be within the founder group. In rescue co-operatives some level of commercial expertise has often been available at the outset and other aspects have been learnt or 'bought in'. In marginalised groups the most difficult problems are faced since they may have most skills to acquire.

It appears likely that most groups establishing a co-operative will have commercial skills to learn and this area has been the main focus of training by development agents(24).

Participative management is one of the distinctive features of co-operative structures and a degree of skill in this area will be needed by all co-op members. Skills here will include information gathering and analysis, the organisation of meetings and decision making and the management of group dynamics. The skills required will be different depending on the organisation structures - but problems are more likely to be experienced in new co-operatives using a model of collective management. Some common problems are described in Section 2.

To some extent training in participative management is included in courses for co-operatives run by development agents. However, it appears that 'trial and error' is the dominant experience,

possibly supplemented with group dynamics consultants.

External training by co-operatives seems to be limited to large co-ops, with small co-ops undertaking in-house training "on the job" - apart from occasional attendance at courses provided by CDAs. This division probably arises because small co-operatives cannot afford the loss of production involved in external training. Nevertheless, many co-operatives do have a commitment to training as an important social goal, and the extent of job rotation must ensure that a considerable extension of skills and experience takes place in co-operatives.

Training in business and participation skills is often provided by local co-operative support organisations (CSOs)(25). This training may be carried out by -

- * the staff of the CSO;
- * specialist 'trainers' hired to provide or contribute to short courses;
- * local colleges or polytechnics who design a course in liaison with a local CSO.

There are a number of organisations that specialise in the provision of training(26) and an increasing number of individuals operating in this field. The National CDA has also played a significant role, especially in areas like Northern Ireland where there is no local CDA.

In many cases the training is funded, directly or indirectly, by public authorities(27).

Most training concentrates on providing information about establishment, and skills for starting a business. However, more attention is now being given to the training needs of larger and well-established co-operatives. For example GLEB and ICOM have jointly promoted a pilot training programme for five large (over

20 people!) co-ops in London(28).

Finally it should be noted that a range of distance learning material is now being prepared by The Open University. This will address the needs of people at the pre-establishment, start-up and expansion phases of co-op development, and will be a significant addition to the training material available - especially in areas without a CSO.

Notes

1. Where a successful private business was donated to the workforce by its philanthropic owner.
2. Wilson N. University of Bradford Management Centre Unpublished Data collected 1980.
3. See Oliver N. 1984 p.42.
4. Oliver N. Unpublished Study. The Open University 1985.
5. Oliver N. 1984.
6. ibid 4 above.
7. See Suma Case Study attached to this Report.
8. See Mckenzie and Brown Case Study attached to this Report.
9. Oliver N. ibid above.
10. See Suma Case Study ibid 7 above.
11. See Oliver 1985, and Suma Case Study ibid 7 above.
12. See Cornforth C. and Lewis J. 1985 Table 12.
13. See Table 1.4.
14. For example, of the 10 U.K. co-operatives studied by CREW (EEC Study 81/26) none appear as 'women only' although most are still trading and consist mainly of women.
15. Oliver N. ibid 4 above.
16. Paton R. and Lockett M. 1976.
17. ICOM Womens' Link-up.
18. See Table 1.4.
19. See The New Co-operatives 1984.
20. Kala Ujamaa (c/o Southwark CDA, 135 Rye Lane, London, SE15).
21. Information supplied by 'Instant Muscle' c/o Rank Xerox U.K. Ltd. Bridge House, Oxford Road, Uxbridge, Middx. England.
22. See Section 1.9.
23. Referred to in CAG 1984 p.25.
24. See Cornforth C. and Lewis J. 1985.

25. Co-operative support organisations include CDAs together with local government officers and other agencies providing support to co-ops. See Cornforth C., and Lewis J., 1985.
26. E.g. Beechwood College in Leeds and consultancy firms like Counterpoint and Co-operative Advisory Group.
27. E.g. The Greater London Enterprise Board and the Manpower Services Commission have funded a 12 weeks full-time course at The Polytechnic of Central London.
28. The ICOM Pilot Programme funded by the European Commission.

SECTION FOUR

PAY AND WORKING CONDITIONS

4.1 The Importance of Pay and Working Conditions

One of the arguments made against co-operatives is that they tend to undercut wage levels and working conditions negotiated by Trade Unions, and that they survive as commercial organisations by self-exploitation and 'unfair' competition with unionised firms. These issues are clearly important both to 'refute' the argument, but also to understand whether co-ops are providing an employment ghetto - with low pay, long hours, poor physical working conditions, poor conditions of employment, a lack of job security and high levels of work stress. It is these issues that will be the central focus of this section.

To a considerable extent the above charges are levelled not only at co-operatives, but at small firms in general. However, there is an expectation that co-operatives will have a higher level of social responsibility, and that they will strive to improve the work experience for their members.

4.2 Levels of Pay

There is no recent survey data on levels of pay and few recent case studies which cover this issue. So, once again, we are dependent on indicative material from the late 1970s and Wilson's 1980 survey using information obtained from 83 co-operatives(1). Those co-operatives that responded were not necessarily representative of the U.K. co-operatives that existed in 1980 - with manufacturing co-ops being over-represented.

Points arising from this survey are -

- * fixed wages are the most common basis of payment (48.1% of co-ops), followed by 'hours worked' 27.7%;
- * overall, 38.6% of co-ops said they were paying 'union' rates of pay and 32.5% were not - the remaining 28.9% did not respond;

- * 32.5% of co-ops in the survey had restrictions on differentials - 11 of these (i.e. 13.3% of the survey and 40.7% of the co-ops with limits on differentials) had a policy of equal pay. Again, there was a high 'non-response' level;
- * only about 50% of respondents to Wilson's survey answered questions on profit distribution. Of these 78% said that there was a profit distribution within the group; in over 80% of cases this was an annual bulk payment; in 58% of cases the distribution was decided by annual agreement of the members, rather than by fixed rates (21%) or by shareholding (21%).

Interpreting this data is problematic. Firstly, it must be noted that the responses are in terms of numbers of co-ops, and does not reflect the number of workers involved - it is likely that, since in most sectors it is the larger firms which are unionised, the larger co-ops are paying union rates. It is therefore quite likely that the majority of workers in co-operatives are receiving union rates. Secondly, the high rate of non-response may indicate that some co-ops did not know what the union rate should be, and were in trades which are not highly unionised - e.g. retailing where 39.2% did not reply. Finally, it need not be assumed that those firms that do not formally ascribe to union rates, necessarily pay at lower levels(2).

Material from case studies suggests that the wages paid are closely linked with the financial circumstances of the co-operative. A number of common situations are identified below.

In well established manufacturing co-ops it appears that wage levels will be linked to the appropriate trade rates. This reflects generally a need to recruit skilled members and in some circumstances a 'soft' management concern.

Fixed overhead costs have an impact on wage levels. In trades with very low overhead costs (e.g. office cleaning) the union or 'going rate' for the job is paid. Viability can be maintained by varying the hours worked depending on the level of business. In trades where fixed capital (buildings, machines etc.) are required and there is no revenue subsidy available, then there is a tendency for initial wages to be low, and to be unreliable - if there is inadequate cash to maintain wage payments and overhead payments, then the wages are not paid. In this situation the withheld wages effectively provide the cashflow for the business. Only when there is sufficient working capital to manage the cashflow properly, will wage levels become stabilised. It is probable that when there is cash, wages will be paid at normal trade rates(3).

In co-operative projects that are able to obtain revenue funding (e.g. through a job creation or temporary employment scheme) for an initial period, the wages situation may be very different. Here the pattern appears to be that initial wages are at trade rates or below. If the funding is from a Manpower Services Scheme, the rate is likely to be fixed for trainees and tradesmen. These projects are often established by concerned and committed individuals, and the employees/members recruited. The recruitment is based on stated wage rates and the employees will expect to receive this, and will be contractually entitled to the sum. The proposition in these co-operatives is that the project will move to a position of financial viability by the end of the agreed subsidy period. In all the documented cases this has failed to occur: wage levels have usually been maintained, but the enterprise closed when the subsidy period ran out. It has been suggested(4) that the wage guarantee in these circumstances creates a false sense of security by reducing the need to achieve independent commercial viability.

In the large rescue co-operatives it appears that the basic proposition is that wages levels are maintained at previous

levels, but that much greater flexibility is introduced than the unions would have permitted in a traditional firm. The financial and market circumstances under which these co-operatives operated - basically as undercapitalised firms in sectors of the economy that had excess capacity and were restructuring - meant that effective wage cuts were made, and for survival has required lay-offs and redundancies. Thus, Meriden Motorcycles started with an equal wage that was only 74% of wages offered by other local factories(5) and at SDN the workers were asked to invest about 12% of their monthly salary in the co-op - which they accepted as a wage cut(6). The Mckenzie and Brown Caernarfon Case Study attached to this Report details a temporary wage cut that the members have accepted.

In new-start co-operatives the wage levels appear to vary with the commercial situation. Certainly a 'heroic period' is common - where the working capital of the business is built up during a period when low wages are paid(7) - or indeed no wages are paid(8). As the commercial situation improves better wages are paid and possibly a bonus on wages out of the annual surplus. In recent years a number of Local Authorities have provided funding for co-operatives which have influenced wage rates. On the whole these authorities will expect wage levels to be close to the union norm. They will be reluctant to be seen supporting projects that have very low wage levels, or extravagantly high wage levels. However, it is likely that such judgements will be made on the 'funding proposal' and that the actual level of wages paid will, in practice, depend on the financial situation of the co-operative (as it develops) and the attitudes of the people involved. Once again, commercial/market pressures will tend to dominate the events within the co-operative.

To conclude this sub-section it should perhaps be noted that absolute pay levels may not be the main concern of people in co-operatives. Points arising here are -

- * pay may be related to need rather than to the job done; and need may be reduced by participation in an economy more directed to 'use-values' than to 'exchange values';
- * the achievement of social goals may be considered more important than wage levels - for example, 'Bean Machine' aim to produce a surplus to fund third-world development;
- * members may take a wider view of pay and operate on this, e.g Orton Friendly Cleaners Co-operative pay themselves only 70% at the local 'rate for the job' but to obtain the latter means travelling to the local town which would cost money(9);
- * the members of two endowed co-operatives gave wage levels a low priority in the list of things they valued in their employment - although this may reflect their position in a comparatively secure and well-paid section of the worker co-op movement(10).

So, in co-operatives, wages are frequently at union rates or above. However, it is clear that variations in wages are often made to maintain the co-operative as a going concern when financial pressures are great. This may cause problems for the co-operative - both for the financial circumstances of the individuals involved and for the ability of the enterprise to attract and maintain adequate levels of skilled members - but it is often tolerated by the members of the co-operative because of the long-term benefits that they hope will come from the co-operative. If there is no alternative employment, or only unattractive employment, then a low-wage job in a co-operative is better than no job.

4.3 Hours of Work

There is no statistical material on 'hours of work' in U.K. co-

operatives. However, a number of tendencies can be identified from knowledge of U.K. co-operatives.

Flexible hours around the norm for the trade appears to be fairly common both in co-operatives and in other U.K. firms. In unionised - and many other situations - the norm would be for overtime payments to be made. There is no evidence that this is not the position in established co-operatives.

Flexible hours in time of crisis is a variation on the above which occurs when workload or cash crises hit a co-operative. An example of this is when a co-operative is trying to develop its customer base it will prefer to take on work and cope with any resulting overload, rather than turn work away. Overtime may then be required to meet the delivery dates for the work. In these circumstances overtime pay may or may not be paid. Another example is where the co-operative is in a cash crisis and is not covering its costs. Here it will tend to drop its prices (to get work), overcommit itself on delivery dates, but then not be able to afford overtime pay since the income from the job has already been squeezed. This is the circumstances under which self-exploitation occurs. The extent to which these two scenarios occur in the U.K. is hard to estimate. However, it is likely that the circumstances under which this occurs is associated with the early part of a co-operative's development as a business - the 'heroic' period.

A number of co-operatives consisting of part-time workers limit the number of hours worked each week in order to limit the co-operative's liability for contributions to the State insurance scheme. According to this scheme the employer (and the employee) must make a contribution to the State social insurance scheme for any person earning above a set amount. The current amount is about £33.00 per week. The employers contribution is about 11% of gross wages. If a co-operative ensures that no employee earns more than this, then they can keep

their charges low - the co-operative doesn't have to carry the additional cost of the contribution, the employee doesn't have to make a contribution and therefore has higher take-home pay, and the co-op has less administration to do since its wage calculations and records are reduced(11). It is likely that this happens where part-time working is normal and where the business could not survive with full-time workers, eg where the flow of work is spasmodic.

Although there is no clear evidence on 'hours of work' it would seem that in many co-operatives the expectation is that a 'normal' week will be worked - about 40 hours. However, the commitment of the workers may result in more hours being worked - especially in crisis situations - sometimes, without additional pay. These 'crises' are likely to be more common in the early years of a trading co-operative.

4.4. Employment Conditions

In the U.K. employment conditions for people working in co-operatives are covered by the same employment legislation as other U.K. companies. This imposes requirements for -

- * a written statement of conditions of employment to be given to each employee;
- * a statutory sick pay scheme to be operated;
- * employers contributions to the state pension fund to be collected;
- * redundancy payments to be made if a co-operative closes;
- * maternity leave to be provided for pregnant women;
- * equal opportunities regardless of gender, race, religion or disability;
- * wage contracts to be met;
- * T.U. 'closed shop' agreements to be honoured.

Besides these statutory obligations - which provide for minimum conditions - co-operatives are expected to agree and publish disciplinary and grievance procedures. They may also wish to extend the statutory provisions - for example with provisions for paternity leave or improved sick-pay allowances.

The existence of both legal requirements and moral pressures to provide certain standards of working conditions does not guarantee that co-ops actually do provide these. Again, the ability of the co-operatives to administer the legal requirements and agree on other matters relating to conditions will vary. It is hypothesised that in larger and well-established co-ops better conditions will be provided. Here one might expect the necessary knowledge and expertise to have been developed, and a stable financial and trading situation that will permit the conditions to be met. In new small co-operatives it is possible that, whatever the aspirations of the members, there will be neither the time or the finances to provide ideal conditions. This is probably true also of other new small businesses. However, it does appear that people working in co-operatives have an expectation of 'better-than-normal' working conditions and do move towards these over a period of time.

Case studies provide some support for the above view especially with regard to flexible working hours and leave arrangements(12). However, there is also material to suggest that new co-operatives do not provide written statements of conditions of employment(13) and do not develop adequate disciplinary or grievance procedures. One of the reasons for this is that agreement on what the terms, conditions and procedures should be, will take time to agree. This time may not be available until the co-operative has achieved trading stability.

4.5 Health and Safety

As with employment conditions, health and safety is an area with

considerable legislation and an expectation that co-operatives will, at a minimum, meet these conditions. There is inadequate information about the actual 'health and safety' situation within U.K. co-operatives. However, once again it can be hypothesised that the provisions that exist will be related to the level of information within the co-operative and the financial and trading stability of the business.

4.6 Conclusions

It is clear that in many co-operatives the aspiration is that pay and working conditions will match, or improve on, those that are customary in their trade. In many co-operatives there are more liberal conditions than in other firms - more flexible approaches to working hours, better sickness pay, the reduction of differentials and production-related pay scales, etc. However, it is clear that these aspirations cannot always be translated into achievement. The barriers to achievement are:

- * the time it takes to accrue knowledge and discuss policy in a new business; and especially in a business with collective decision-making;
- * lack of financial and trading stability, which is required both to fund the conditions (eg permit payment during maternity or paternity leave although there will be no production for this money), and to give 'a breathing space' for wider issues to be discussed and decisions implemented.

Where a co-operative is in trading crisis both reduced pay and increased hours of work may be used to improve the trading position. However, these situations of self-exploitation are unlikely to continue indefinitely because of the stress it places on the working members of the co-operative.

Notes

1. Unpublished Survey by Wilson N. University of Bradford Management Centre.
2. See for example 'Fairblow Dynamics' - Paton R. and Lockett M. 1978, p.11, and the Suma Case Study attached to this Report.
3. See for example Pryfcopyn Tanat by CREW 1982 P.F.2.
4. Rhodes R, 'Milkwood Co-operative Ltd' p.38.
5. See Clarke T.F. 1978 p.34.
6. ibid p.28
7. See, for example, the Lake Language School Case Study attached to this Report.
8. See for example Bargoed Blouse Co-operative by CREW 1982 P.D.1.
9. See CREW 1982 P.B.12.
10. Oliver N. Unpublished study - CRU. The Open University.
11. For example Kennington Office Cleaners (CREW 1982 P.B.4) and Ragged Robin (CREW 1982 P.F.1).
12. See Suma and Lake Language School Case Studies attached to this Report, and the Calverts Press Study (Berry J. and Roberts M. 1984. p.63).
13. See for example the Mckenzie and Brown Caernarfon Case Study attached to this Report.

SECTION FIVE

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This section will address four issues:

- * Trade Union attitudes towards co-operatives;
- * the extent of Trade Union membership in co-operatives;
- * the role of a Trade Union in a co-operative;
- * Industrial Relations practices in U.K. co-operatives.

5.2 Trade Union (T.U.) Attitudes towards Co-operatives

The nature of T.U. support for co-operatives has been clearly stated by Gregory -

"The basic ideology of the trade union movement, with very few exceptions, commits trade unions to seek and widen the social ownership of the means of production. Hence the constitutions of the major unions contain some reference which can be interpreted to imply at least support for worker co-ops as one particular means towards this end;" (1)

Despite the existence of formal provisions within the constitution of T.U.s, the degree of actual support for the co-operative movement is generally very limited and (with the notable exception of the Wales TUC initiative to establish the Wales Co-operative Development and Training Centre) has been restricted to support for specific cases where trade union members attempt to establish a co-operative as a job-saving (and sometimes job-creating) initiative. Here the support tends to come from individual union officers (rather than the Trade Union as an institution) and be limited to the resources that those officers can personally administer. Trade union support for co-operatives thus tends to arise as a pragmatic (and often last-minute) response to a closure crisis, rather than for any ideological reasons.

Considering the reasons for this token T.U. support Gregory indicates factors at both macro and micro levels(2). At a macro level -

- * T.U. leaders still favour nationalisation as the way of widening social ownership;
- * partly because of the above, there has been few attempts to formulate or understand the role of unions in worker co-ops;
- * T.U.s view co-ops as diversionary and bound to fail if they attempt to rescue private sector failures.

While at a micro level -

- * union officials don't have the time needed to help develop co-ops;
- * role conflicts can arise when shop stewards take over the running of a factory;
- * the skills of T.U. officials are basically as advocates not as business developers.

Although there have been a number of occasions where unions have supported co-operative initiatives, it would be fair to state that co-operatives are not on the agenda for most T.U.s.

The above situation is confirmed by research into trade union attitudes towards co-operatives in Merseyside. In this study(3) over 25% of district officers (who are the first level of the union hierarchy of full-time officers outside of individual workplaces) from the 9 largest unions were interviewed or completed postal enquiries. The responses suggest the following:

- * there is no general antagonism towards worker co-operatives;

- * the level of knowledge about worker co-ops was very low;
- * the issue of co-operatives is not on the current agenda of most unions : if a policy existed the respondents did not know what it was.

The worries of some trade unionists about worker co-operatives are revealed by Tower Hamlets Trade Council(4) who set these conditions for T.U. support -

- * the co-op must not offer unfair competition by self-exploitation;
- * the co-op must not privatise or compete with established public services;
- * pay and conditions must be similar to those in other union firms - or steps must be taken to achieve these;
- * in a rescue situation the co-operative option must be a viable proposition - it must not offer unrealistic hope to workers fighting to save their jobs.

Given the attitude of unions to co-operatives it is perhaps not surprising that T.U.s play no significant part in financing co-operatives or co-op development. If they are willing to provide support it is in officer time, some expertise (e.g. helping co-ops with pricing or identifying potential customers) and some political backing (5).

Thus, for the trade union movement in Britain there is clearly a foundation for generalised support for worker co-operatives within their aims and constitutions. However, there are few proactive policies to be found; the decision of the Wales TUC to create the Wales Co-operative Development and Training Centre being the only significant initiative in recent years. At a local level there is clearly a lack of knowledge by local union

officers, but a number of instances where union officers have supported the work of local co-operative development agencies as a defensive response in closure situations where there are no alternative solutions. There is no significant funding of co-operatives by trade unions and where trade unions come together to discuss co-operatives, there are significant suspicions about their potential to undermine trade union strength.

It is possible that there will be some change in this position since both the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and the Labour Party have recently produced policy documents arguing for worker co-operatives as one part of their industrial and employment strategies. However, on the basis of past performance there must be some doubts about how far this generalised support will be put into practice by unions themselves.

5.3. The Extent of T.U. Memberships in Co-ops

There is only a limited amount of information available about how many people working in co-ops are members of trade unions. In his 1980 survey Wilson obtained some information which is set out in Table 5.1:

Frequency of Trade Unions in Co-operatives, in Selected Activities (1980)

Activity	Co-ops with Unions		Co-ops without Unions		% No. Response Survey		No.Co-ops in Survey
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Engineering	5	62.5	2	25.0	1	12.5	8
Electronics	3	30.0	7	70.0	0	-	10
Chemicals	1	33.3	2	66.7	0	-	3
Textiles	0	-	5	100.0	0	-	5
Printing & Publishing	5	71.4	1	14.3	1	14.3	7
Building	6	60.0	2	20.0	2	20.0	10
Retailing	0	-	21	100.0	0	-	21
Total	20	31.3	40	62.6	4	6.1	64

Source: N Wilson. University of Bradford Management Centre. Unpublished data from 1980 study

From this it can be seen that in 1980 there were significant differences in the extent to which different activities had unions in the co-operative, and that overall there were many more co-operatives without unions, than with unions. It must be pointed out that this is based on number of co-ops, not numbers of workers in co-ops and it should also be recognised that some activities are not highly unionised in the U.K. (e.g. small retailers) and the non-unionisation of co-ops in these sectors should not be surprising.

5.4 The Role of T.U.s in Co-operatives

Supplementary information from Wilson's 1980 study(6) suggests that, with the exception of the print trade, there was only one of the remaining fifteen unionised co-operatives where the union played a 'normal role'. In the print co-ops four declared the union to play an important role and one stated that membership was vital but the role of the union in the co-operative was minimal. (In the U.K. printing industry a unionised firm will not touch work that has been handled by a non-union workshop - this makes 'union shop' status very important to commercial success). What is the role of a T.U. in a co-op then? The following roles emerge from the case studies:

With regard to wages and conditions it is likely that the union rates will be used as the basis for wages and conditions(7).

An important role normally undertaken by unions is the protection of members rights. It has been argued that in a co-operative this role is unnecessary since the workers have control of decision making(8). However, as the East London Co-ops Branch of the TGWU (9) have argued -

"The fact that a co-op is controlled by its workers doesn't necessarily mean that they always tell people their rights or treat them fairly. Indeed, if members of your co-op want to sack you, you might be worse off than in a normal business where at least you could expect help from your workmates. You have many rights as a worker; the problem is making sure that you can exercise them if you need to."(10)

Thus, an important role may be the representation of individuals with grievances and the maintenance of individual rights.

The provision of information and services is an important union function. Information will include not only matters relating to wages and hours etc., but also health and safety and current employment legislation. Important services include legal assistance to members who suffer industrial injury or unfair dismissal, and training for some members in health and safety etc.

In a number of cases union officials have provided advice and contacts and legitimacy to co-operatives. This has included help with costings and contacts with potential customers(11).

Finally, union membership can be seen as an expression of solidarity with other workers and a way of informing labour and trade union members about co-operatives(12).

From the above material it can be seen that there is a clear role for trade unions in co-operatives; although this tends to be underrated because one 'high profile' role of unions (collective bargaining) is reduced in relevance.

There is a debate in Britain about whether co-operatives should form their own Branch (like the East London Co-ops Branch of the TGWU) or should join existing Union Branches. This identifies a problem for co-operative members - on the whole there would be insufficient co-op members within one trade within a reasonable geographical area to form a co-op branch; yet because co-operatives have a different relationship between workers and management a normal union branch may not be appropriate or even (as in the Suma case(13)) be prepared to accept them!

5.5 Industrial Relations Practice in U.K. Co-ops

There is no specific literature on industrial relations in U.K. co-ops. In organising the material that is available it has been necessary to relate this to a number of types of co-op situations.

In large well-established endowed co-operatives it would appear that T.U.s do not play an active role in industrial relations but other internal structures are developed to handle these issues.

At Fairblow Dynamics there is no union, and the dominant 'actors' in the industrial relations scene are the Executive Directors and the Consultative Group - the latter consisting of representatives from eight 'wards' in the office and factory but excluding senior managers. Once a month there is a Joint Consultative Group meeting involving the Directors and Representatives. This aims to provide a channel of communication although there are also non-bargaining discussions which clearly form the basis of a consensus model of decision making - even though this consensus is to some extent controlled by the Directors.

It is clear that Paton and Lockett view the Consultative Group as carrying out the functions of collective bargaining - but utilising different powers:

"The Consultative Group is concerned with matters of direct concern to employees: these cover pay, fringe benefits, working conditions and the establishing and overseeing of grievance procedures. To this extent, the representatives' work is no different from that of shop stewards. Indeed, the representatives often referred to what trade unionists in other companies were negotiating, as possibly appropriate requests to put to the board.

But here the similarity ends, because the representatives press their case in a rather different way. Instead of bargaining on the basis of a threat, implicit or explicit, of industrial action, the representatives operate on the board's sensitivity to criticism, their desire to be seen as upholding the ideals of the constitution and the highest possible standards of management practice. This is sufficiently firm ground for the Consultative Group to operate with considerable effectiveness."

(Paton R. and Lockett M. 1978 p.127/128)

There is a danger of the consultative process being used to defuse resistance within the company, and thereby increase or maintain the power of the Directors, and Paton and Lockett have described how this may have happened in respect of redundancies(14).

It is likely that elements of the Fairblow arrangements operate in other co-operatives that have a separate management structure. There is no available material on the CPF Co-operatives; however there is some material on Scott Bader Commonwealth. Here it appears that -

- * T.U.s have no official status within the company;
- * there is a commitment to resolving industrial relations questions through the co-operative structures rather than adversary collective bargaining;
- * that the accountability of the executive is regarded by both the executive and the other members as important - the Commonwealth see the executive as their agents and accepts the executive's advice as the best advice(15).

Once again it would appear that a process of consensus decision making occurs over industrial relations issues - but the executive may have considerable influence over the creation of this consensus and use it to pursue their own interpretation of the co-operative's best interest. This would also appear to have happened at Martin Williams Community Ltd (16).

In the three large rescue co-operatives that have been well documented (KME, SDN and Meriden) an important characteristic was the dual role that the union played.

At KME and Meriden Motorcycles the shop stewards committee played a major role in the rescue and never relinquished control to any other system of representation. In as far as there was workers representation in these co-operatives, it was through the union structures, not through any independent co-operative structure(17). At Scottish Daily News a workers' committee was formed at an early stage which was independent of the union structure but included a number of union leaders.

In these co-operatives the structures of industrial relations that existed in the pre-co-operative situation tended to be carried over into the co-op, but their operation was confused by the dual role that the workers now played. This confusion was especially clear at KME and Meriden where the T.U. shop stewards effectively added the business management role to their shop stewards role. Initially the response of the workers in all three co-ops was to accept much greater flexibility about pay, conditions, and tasks performed, than they had under previous management. This appears to be a response to the disappearance of a coercive management. When this coercion was implemented again, there was a rapid reversion to traditional protective responses(18) - even where this coercion was imposed on behalf of the shop stewards. At KME this even resulted in a strike which shop stewards led - against a plan the shop stewards had themselves approved!(19).

An important common element in these three rescue co-operatives was the difficulty in developing working arrangements that could integrate in a dynamic way the roles of management, trade unions and worker-owners. This lack of appropriate management practices had major implications for industrial relations. The unitary power structure under which the unions representatives became the only decision making body in the company - effectively its Directors - meant that when a dispute arose the 'managing shop stewards' were in the position of 'playing off' the union membership interest with the interests of the firm as an economic

unit. Under this arrangement the union members were denied an independent representative pursuing their narrow interests and the professional business managers were under the direction of a group that had to deal with the reactions of each group of workers (via their shop stewards) whenever it attempted to make a decision. These differences gave the decision process a further layer of politics - reconciling the legitimate and different interest of each group in the factory that was represented through the union structures. This was on top of the interpersonal, interdepartmental and economic factors that might normally be expected to play a part in directors decision making.

So, in these rescue co-operatives there has been a confusion of roles that has left the union representatives reconciling the 'management' interest with the workers' interest. At KME and SDN this added to severe commercial problems and resulted in considerable industrial relations problems. At Meriden there was little conflict but this was fortunate for, as Clarke comments -
"it is difficult to see how serious grievances could be adequately resolved." (Clarke T.F. 1978 p.34)

There is little information about how industrial relations are managed in small rescue co-operatives. In many cases the trade union has not been deeply involved(20) and the position is likely to be similar to that of other small co-operatives. This is described below.

As has been described previously there is a general commitment to collective working in many of the smaller co-operatives. In this situation it appears that the dominant model of industrial relations is to work through the co-operative's internal management structures. Thus rates of pay, hours and conditions of work, disciplinary procedures, etc., will be discussed at the co-ops general meeting and decisions made there(21).

One consequence of this tendency is that industrial relations decisions get mixed up with the commercial and personal decisions

within the co-operative. Wages decisions will be discussed as part of the financial state of the co-operative; discipline or 'work effort' problems as part of the interpersonal or decision making problems of the co-operative. This 'muddling through' appears typical of the early periods of new co-operatives. It is likely that the co-operative will not have established procedures for protecting individual rights and the most likely outcome of disputes is that disaffected individuals leave the co-operative.

The effects of inadequate procedures for dealing with industrial relations issues can be significant in small and less well-established co-operatives. At this stage of a co-operative's life-cycle there are likely to be many problems (organisational, commercial, interpersonal and domestic) that influence what happens in the co-operative - and the lack of clear structures or common understanding about roles and responsibilities in the co-operative are likely to inhibit attempts at more rational discussion and decision making.

There is some indication that over time small collective co-operatives do develop improved ways of handling industrial relations issues:

- * by clearly separating these issues on the agenda for general meetings(22);
- * by delegating some executive functions from the general meeting to a personnel committee(23);
- * by adopting discipline and grievance procedures.

However, problems may still remain because it is not always clear what is a personal dispute between members (which they must sort out individually) and what is a dispute between an individual and the co-op.

5.6. Summary

The situation on Industrial Relations in U.K. co-operatives is characterised by the following points -

- * worker co-operatives are not 'on the agenda' of most T.U.s in Britain and the limited amount of support unions do provide occurs through a personal decision made by a union officer, to support a particular initiative;
- * union membership by members of co-ops is common but not universal, and varies significantly between trades;
- * where unions are involved in co-ops they do not carry out a conventional union role on 'collective bargaining';
- * the industrial relations practices in co-ops are dominated by 'role confusion' - where the workers' rights and interests as workers are not clearly separated from their interests as managers or owners, and this can result in tensions within the co-operative.

Notes

1. Gregory D. 1983,p.31.
2. ibid p.34/35.
3. McMannies D. 'Trade Union Attitudes Towards Co-ops'.
4. 'Trade Unions and Co-ops' by Tower Hamlets Trades Council and ICOM.
5. A description of the support provided in one case is included in the Mckenzie and Brown Caernarfon Case Study, attached to this Report.
6. Wilson N. University of Bradford Management Centre. Unpublished Study.
7. See for example Tynan E. 'Unit 58' p.5/6 and Paton R. and Lockett 'Fairblow Dynamics'.
8. See for example Cornforth C. 'The Garment Co-op' p.48.
9. Transport and General Workers Union.
10. 'Trade unions and Co-ops' p.15.
11. See for example the Mckenzie and Brown Caernarfon Case Study attached to this Report.
12. See the Suma Case Study attached to this Report and 'Trade Unions and Co-ops' p.17.
13. ibid.
14. Paton R. and Lockett M. 1978 p.141.
15. For a full description see McMannies.
16. Cornforth C. and Paton 1984 p.13.
17. see Clark T.F. 1978.
18. Clark T.F. 1978 p.22 describes this reversion at SDN and Eccles A. p.147 relates a similar instance at KME.
19. See Eccles A. ibid.
20. Although the Mckenzie and Brown Caernarfon Case Study attached to this Report provides an example of a small rescue where the T.U. was involved.
21. The Lake School of English Case Study attached to this Report, provides an example of one such co-op.

22. See 'Trylon' by Michael Angerson in Berry J. and Roberts M. 198? p.69
23. See Suma Case Study attached to this Report.
24. ICOM offer a 'model' set of procedures.

SECTION SIX

NATIONAL AND LOCAL CO-OPERATIVE ORGANISATIONS

6.1 Introduction

In Section 1.7 it was suggested that there are no truly representative bodies for U.K. worker co-operatives, but a number of national support organisations were briefly referred to. In this section it is intended to describe more fully the structures and roles of these organisations and describe local co-operative support organisations (CSOs).

6.2 Industrial Common Ownership Movement (ICOM)

ICOM was formed in 1971 to promote common ownership enterprises. At the time of formation there was only one recognised common ownership enterprise - Scott Bader Ltd, which remains both the largest common ownership enterprise and the largest co-operative in Britain - and less than twenty co-operatives in Britain overall. Thereafter ICOM became an important catalyst for the development of 'common ownership' co-operatives, an important campaigning body (e.g. for the Industrial Common Ownership Act of 1976 and the amendment of various Finance Acts) and the most significant membership body for co-operatives in Britain(1).

ICOM currently operates with a staff of 3 people. Its major function is handling the registration of new co-operatives using model rules. This is an important service to both individual groups and those working with local Co-op Development Agencies because it simplifies the process of registration and (although there is a fee charged for the service, and affiliation to ICOM is necessary) reduces the legal costs involved.

ICOM also acts as manager (sometimes in partnership with other bodies) for training programmes. The most notable of these is operated by a sub-group of ICOM - its Womens' Link-up. This is a network of women involved in co-operatives and ICOM receives funds (half from the EEC and half from British local authorities) for new-start training programmes for women wanting to start co-

operatives. This network is significant not only for its training provision, but also for bringing together women in existing co-operatives to share experiences. A second training scheme, for members of large co-operatives in London, is currently getting underway, jointly funded by the EEC and the Great London Enterprise Board (GLEB) and managed by a joint committee of ICOM and GLEB.

Apart from money for these specific training programmes, ICOM is funded by:

- * income from handling co-op registrations;
- * affiliation fees for new co-ops;
- * annual subscriptions paid by members;
- * income from publishing.

ICOM is clearly the umbrella body for people committed to common ownership co-operatives. However, its membership comprises not only co-operatives, but also development bodies, and individual members. There are about 500 co-operatives in membership (although about half of these are still in their affiliation year and may not re-subscribe), and about 120 individual members. Promotional organisations are also members. It is run by a Council on which co-operatives have a constitutional majority. However, since they haven't filled all their possible places and members of co-ops may find it hard to find the time to attend meetings, the Council tends to be dominated by 'professional' development workers and committed individual members. As a promotional and campaigning body this may be fair - since these individuals have played a major part in its history, and still have an important role in providing information and development advice. However, this does weaken ICOM's position as representative of co-ops (even common ownerships).

6.3 The National Co-operative Development Agency (NCDA)

The NCDA is a central government quango - responsible to the Minister for Small Business in the Department of Trade and Industry. The Minister appoints the Members of the Board of the Agency who are significant individuals from major co-operatives and other concerns. These people may have very limited contact with the 'new wave' worker co-ops or with local co-operative development organisations. There is currently no member of ICOM Council, no member of a local CDA, no women and no ethnic minorities among the members.

The Agency is run by a Director who is seconded from Unilever plc. There are 15 other staff, most working part-time and/or seconded from other institutions. The Agency has offices in London (which is its administrative centre) and Manchester, and a representative in Northern Ireland.

The NCDA provides support for all forms of trading co-operatives, although its specific initiatives have tended to broaden participation away from a strict worker-only model. For example the model rules for a Neighbourhood Co-operative open membership to non-employee advisors and the Equity Participation Co-op "enables employees to participate in the control of the company in which they work.....(while providing).....a mechanism for new or expanding co-operatives to attract outside equity capital".(2) These moves have tended to maintain a suspicion of the NCDA by the many co-operatives and development agencies who have greater 'common ownership' ideals.

There are no formal links between the National CDA, and any local or regional CDA. It is not an open membership body and, ironically for a co-operative development agency, it has no democratic structure.

The NCDA does have a number of significant roles, including -

- * providing information about co-operatives and local co-operative support organisations;
- * assisting development, especially in areas that don't have a local development agency;
- * providing training - again, especially in areas without a local development agency;
- * maintaining links with government departments, and interpreting, advising and lobbying on legislation concerning the affairs of co-operative business;
- * developing model rules for co-ops and providing a registration service.

Nevertheless, its role is limited by its structure and its relative isolation within the 'new movement'. It exists to represent the interests of co-operatives, but is not 'national' in the sense that it is a representative body for U.K. co-ops.

6.4 The Co-operative Union

The Co-op Union acts mainly as a Trade Association for the consumer co-operatives. It provides advice on legal and constitutional matters, pensions, economic developments, finance and taxation. It provides an industrial relations service to co-operative societies (as employers). It has a range of information services, acts as a political pressure group, and has an education department and college.

The Union is responsible to Executive Central Committee elected at the annual Co-operative Congress.

The Union has had relatively little contact with worker co-operatives since its establishment in 1869 - mainly representing consumers interests rather than producers. However, it recently

absorbed the Co-operative Productive Federation (CPF) and offers advice and support to the remaining CPF co-ops. It has a production sub-committee with representatives of each productive society that is a member of the C.U. (mainly the old CPF co-ops). This largely works to create markets for the products of the co-ops amongst the retail societies.

6.5 The National Network of Local CSAs

This network has existed since 1981 as a loose collective of people involved in local co-operative development activities. It acts as a forum where questions of mutual concern could be discussed, and knowledge of initiatives or methods being tried elsewhere obtained. Those attending the network include people from co-operatives, and 'professional' development workers. For several years the Network had no formal structure but in 1984 the Network agreed the basis of a constitution with the following objectives:

- * to provide a national voice for local CDAs;
- * to promote the development and welfare of co-operatives and local CDAs;
- * to promote the ideal of workers' control through co-operation and common ownership;
- * to act at all times in ways which are democratic, anti-sexist and anti-racist.

Membership of NNLCDA is now limited to autonomous CDAs, excluding from membership, but not participation, those co-operative support services that are part of the local government structure or community controlled. There are currently 19 member agencies. There are no full-time staff and finance is limited to a 0.1% charge on each member's annual budget.

The Network has a regional structure with local networks being established in each Region if CDAs desire this (see 'local

networks' below). Each Region nominates two members to a Network Co-ordinating Group which is the authoritative body between Network Meetings. It also has a series of topic groups (although few of these appear to be operating at present) where persons with similar interests meet and organise topic-centred activities. A topic group (or individual members) may not claim to represent the Network without the authorisation of the Network Co-ordinating Group. The Co-ordinating Group must refer to a topic group all matters connected with the latter's subject area.

To promote and protect the anti-sexist and anti-racist objectives of the Network, no meeting of the Network (or regional networks) can be quorate without half of those present being women, and there is to be a social audit group to monitor these practices.

As well as organising meetings, the Network operates the Co-op Development News Service - a monthly news-sheet.

The NNLCDAs clearly aims to be an umbrella group for local CDAs. In formalising its organisation it has left open the question of whether these agencies are worker controlled or co-op controlled, but clearly differentiated between autonomous agencies and 'in-house' local government agencies. As with ICOM the arrangements for participation in Network activities are likely to favour professional development workers rather than workers in co-ops - since the former are more able to afford the costs. The explicit concern with issues of democracy and equal opportunities identifies the Network as going beyond the issues of ownership and control of viable organisations, that is perhaps the central focus of other national organisations.

6.6 Job-Ownership Ltd. (JOL)

This is a promotion agency for "worker owned businesses" that draws its inspiration from the Mondragon co-operatives in Spain,

and the style of their growth.

JOL offers a set of model rules for a company based on the principle of worker shared ownership through individual stakes "of a size significant enough to ensure identification with the business"(3). It requires that at least 90% of workers are members and that any additional capital required be raised by loans.

The JOL approach offers flexibility of styles of management within the structure outlined above. However, its literature emphasises the need for strong management, identifying this with a separation of duties between members and management.

Besides undertaking general promotional work JOL offers consultancy services and its main activity is "to help with the conversion to worker ownership of existing businesses (whether in private or public sector)"(4). It is unclear how many conversions have occurred although one (Baxi Heating employing 900 people who will eventually own up to 49% of the equity in the company) is currently underway.

JOL has a small permanent staff and a Board of Directors comprising significant and interested individuals.

JOL makes no claim to represent co-ops or be an umbrella body. Its contacts with the main body of co-operatives in Britain is slim because its rules run counter to the common ownership model which dominates the new worker movement, and because it has been prepared to offer its model of co-operatives "when nationalised or local authority undertakings face 'privatisation'"(5). These two factors have alienated the parts of the co-operative movement committed to common ownership and collective management, and those parts that are closely associated with the Trade Union movement or traditional socialist views (for whom 'privatisation' is anathema). However, it has the potential to represent the

interests of the 'worker ownership' co-ops.

6.7 Local Networks of CDAs

These operate within the structure of the National Network of CDAs but almost totally separate from it. It appears that these Networks operate at different levels and for different purposes, in the different regions. Here is one example:

The London Network meets at 6 weekly intervals; each time at a different CDA. The responsibility for arranging, minuting and chairing each meeting is taken on by the host CDA. In this way the Network runs without a secretariat. The Network discusses points of concern raised by CDAs, e.g. about local government policy, funding of CDAs, the local implementation of central government schemes. It will also undertake research on a problem (each CDA researching their local area). Where action is required an individual or one CDA will take responsibility for this and report back to the next meeting. The Network also nominates two members of the London Co-operative Enterprise Board (a local investment Board) and through these members makes the CDA's views on funding for co-ops known to the Board. The Network abides strictly by the 'anti-sexist' quorate rules for the National Network.

The local Networks of CDAs thus operate as a forum for social contact and discussion of mutual problems, but may also act as a pressure group to improve the policy environment for themselves and co-operatives. How they chose to operate will depend to some extent on the wishes of those attending, but it may also be influenced by the structure of the local administration - there may be more pressure group activities where the Network covers a metropolitan area with one metropolitan authority, than a Network covering an area with many independent local authorities. Geographical dispersion will also, clearly, have an effect on the cohesion of the group and the regularity of meetings.

6.8 Co-operative Support Organisations (CSOs)

In 1984 there were a total of 85 CSOs(6) including:

- * 36 funded and 31 voluntary Co-operative Development Agencies (CDAs);
- * 10 Local Authorities with CDA workers;
- * 4 Regional CDAs;
- * 4 other organisations offering support for co-ops.

The funding for these CSOs was mainly from local authorities, but sometimes government departments(7). The largest (regional) CDA employs 15 workers but most local CSOs have 3 or 4 workers(8).

Where CSOs form part of local authority services the workers are likely to be part of the Employment or Industrial Development Departments. Independent CDAs are normally responsible in a formal sense, to a management committee of local people. These may include representatives from local co-operatives, the local community and community organisations, and the local authority. In almost half of the CDAs, local co-operatives have a majority on the management committee(9). However, it would appear that in many CDAs the effective control rests with the full-time workers in the agencies(10) usually operating collectively.

Many CSOs target their services at particular social groups; most frequently unemployed people, women and ethnic minorities (11). This indicates that they regard themselves as promoting co-operatives as a way of relieving social and economic distress. Most CDAs also have a 'bottom-up' approach to development - responding to demands rather than developing a viable project and then recruiting the co-op members(12) - and therefore any potential co-operatives are likely to obtain support. This approach perhaps also helps

explain why most of the work of CSOs is with new-start co-operatives(13) rather than other forms (like rescues, or endowed co-ops) which would probably result from more pro-active policies. However, some CSOs have tried strategic or pro-active approaches (14).

CSOs provide most assistance to co-ops at the start-up stage, although it appears that over time they begin to do more work with established co-ops. The services offered by CSOs include -

- * consultations to help groups define the nature of their project, and to inform them about co-operatives;
- * help in preparing a comprehensive project plan including detailed financial projections;
- * advice and help in agreeing and registering an appropriate legal structure;
- * advice about sources of funds and help in making appropriate applications and undertaking the necessary political and administrative canvassing to give the application the best chance of success;
- * training, especially in appropriate business techniques (although the process of working with a group is treated as a training activity in itself) and advice about appropriate training courses;
- * help in establishing the project, including advice on property, establishing appropriate financial information and control systems, help with marketing, and general support.

CSOs also have an important role in promoting and providing information about co-operatives at the local level, and in developing the infrastructure to support co-ops. The latter

includes loan funds, appropriate workshops, access to specialist advice, and training provision.

The range of services and activities undertaken by any particular CSO obviously varies with the staff resources - the smaller CSO tending to concentrate on the provision of information and directing co-operatives to other sources of help.

It is clear that CSOs have an important influence on the rate of growth of worker co-operatives. Cornforth and Lewis indicate that between 1980 and 1982 the growth in numbers of co-ops in areas without CDAs was 24%, but in areas with CDAs it was 131%(15). Furthermore, after CSOs were established there was a steady increase in the numbers of co-operatives when very few existed previously.

6.9 Conclusion

From the material in this section it is clear that the 'new co-operative movement' is fragmented. The different organisations reflect different concepts of 'co-operative' and therefore service different client and interest groups. This is probably healthy. However, the lack of sympathy between these groups has made it impossible to convene an ongoing forum where mutual interests can be discussed and progressed. This diversity of approach also exists at the local level, within CSOs, and has worked against the formation of a broad-based national network where issues of co-operative development could be discussed.

Ultimately, the diversity within British worker co-operatives is based on variations in their approach to democracy. An essential feature of a co-operative is its democratic commitment and it is therefore not surprising that a degree of intolerance exists between organisations which have different approaches to democracy both within their own structures and in the 'co-operatives' they seek to support. Nevertheless, the failure of

both co-operatives and support organisations to form a strong, broad-based representative body does weaken the movement vis-a-vis other economic and political 'interest groups', and limit the extent to which the 'new movement' can learn from its own experiences.

Notes

1. For a full description of its origin and services see Rigge M and Young M. EEC study 81/39.
2. NCDA leaflet 'Working Together The Co-operative Way'.
3. JOL leaflet.
4. *ibid.*
5. *ibid.*
6. Cornforth C and Lewis J 1985. Table 1.
7. *ibid* Table 3.
8. *ibid* Table 5.
9. *ibid* Table 6.
10. *ibid* p.17.
11. *ibid* Table 13.
12. This was tried in the London Borough of Wandsworth in the 1970s, but failed. Such top-down approaches were then discredited in Britain.
13. Over 90% in the Cornforth and Lewis Survey - *ibid* p.32.
14. For example by the Scottish Co-operative Development Committee.
15. *ibid* Table 19.
16. *ibid* p.62.

SECTION SEVEN

CASE STUDIES:

The Lake School of English

Mckenzie and Brown Caernarfon Ltd.

Suma Wholefoods

The West Indian Catering Coop

The Lake School of English

1. Origins and Activities

The Lake School offers courses in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) mainly to people coming to England specifically for this purpose. It is located in Oxford and is one of a number of similar businesses in that city.

The co-operative was founded in 1978 by a number of EFL staff from a college that closed its EFL Department. Its origins as a 'phoenix' (i.e. arising from the ashes of the EFL Department of this private college) have been important for the success of the new venture- most notably in the following ways:

- * the bad feeling caused by the way the Department was closed (it is claimed that the EFL operations were profitable - but not profitable enough!) created solidarity amongst the founder members
- * the new business was able to get some initial trade through the links established by the earlier business and use ideas, materials and experience obtained therein
- * much of the development work for the cooperative was done by the Head of the earlier EFL Department - whilst still employed by the previous College
- * the founders were known and respected by other EFL colleges in the area who have provided recommendations and some 'overflow' business.

The courses run throughout the year (although between 30% and 50% of business is concentrated in the summer period). There are three academic terms offering courses of about 11 weeks plus a summer programme of courses lasting between 2 and 4 weeks. The school arranges accommodation and a social programme for their students. About 400 students are likely to

attend the school in the current year.

The co-operative is established under the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts using ICOM Model Rules. Of the original seven subscribers to this registration only five have ever played an active part in the co-operatives, and only one is still working at the school.

All permanent workers at the school are entitled to become full-time members after a probationary period of 6 months. Temporary workers are not entitled to membership and do not attend co-operative meetings.

There would appear to be two dominant reasons for establishing the co-operative. One was to create jobs - much of the employment of EFL teachers in Britain is on temporary contracts and wage levels are very often low so that teachers tend to feel exploited. The other was to create a friendly learning environment. The members feel they invest a larger amount in teaching materials and social activities than many other schools - so quality of service is clearly important.

The decision to be a co-operative appears to arise from a rejection of the style of working that had resulted in their previous employment disappearing. The original members wanted collective control and equal participation.

The Development of the Business

The business started with very little capital - each member donated £10, and a few hundred pounds were raised through a sponsored swim. From that point the business has generated its own funds. It charges slightly less than other similar schools in Oxford but has worked on the basis of paying lower wages and then allocating the surplus produced to a staff

bonus and to reserves. The reserves have provided working capital and security for the business. Recently a commercial bank loan was obtained to assist in the alterations to their new premises.

Initially they used an old school for summer classes but later rented an office in the centre of Oxford and used a church hall on the outskirts of the city for the teaching. This arrangement created some problems of credibility with the clients, and also created strains within the co-operative by splitting the administration from the teaching staff. From 1982-1985 they had a temporary lease (reviewed each year) on a building that was due for demolition. In 1985 they have leased new premises and had these altered to create a permanent centre with four teaching rooms and office space. Nevertheless in the busy summer period they still rent rooms to expand their capacity.

Students are obtained through two sources. Roughly half are obtained through the British Council and foreign travel agents specialising in youth travel services. The latter are brought to Britain to attend a conference organised by the British Tourist Authority and select the EFL school they are prepared to represent - they then act as agents working on a commission basis. The clients usually pay the agents, and the school then invoices the agent to collect the money. The remainder of the students are obtained through the personal recommendation of past students. The school sends out a mailing to past students each year.

It appears that a crucial development in the commercial stability of the co-operative was the school's recognition by the British Council (a government body that has a major influence on EFL teaching throughout the world). The British Council acts as an agent and is especially important for the supply of students outside of the summer period. This, along

with building their reputation through past students, helped enormously in getting students.

Trade and Co-operative Links

The Lake School is a member of The Association of Recognised English Language Schools and the Federation of English Language Course Organisations (ARELS-FELCO) the professional body for language schools. This gives 'Approval' to schools that follow its code of conduct and publishes a 'trade magazine' that lists approved schools and is important in attracting students.

It is also a member of Oxford Registered Schools of English which is a 'talking-shop' for the local schools. The co-op has obtained significant support from two larger language schools in Oxford - where some of the founder members were trained as EFL teachers. The support of these schools has enabled them to become recognised (e.g. by ARELS-FELCO) and also provided some students who are referred to Lake when the larger schools are full.

Lake have had contacts with other EFL co-operatives that existed in Britain. At one time there was a joint marketing initiative with three other schools and this continued with one school offering a similar service until that went out of business. Currently they are not aware of any other EFL cooperatives offering a similar service.

The main sources of advice used by the co-operative have been their appointed Solicitor and Accountant. It has some links with the (unstaffed) Oxford Co-operative Development Agency (CDA) although this is more through the personal involvement of one member than a broad commitment. The co-ops premises have been used for meetings by Oxford CDA and by Green CND (The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament linked to ecology).

2. Management, Participation and Work Organisation

The management arrangements have several parts -

A weekly General Meeting of members of the co-operative held on a Friday afternoon - a time when no teaching is scheduled. All members and probationary members can attend, but not temporary workers. The norm is for members to attend unless there is a special reason. There is a chairperson and secretary for each meeting, but these roles are rotated in an unplanned way. The secretary for the week takes the minutes. There is a standard agenda and any member can add items to this at the beginning of the meeting. Decisions are made by consensus and without voting although there appears to be an informal agreement that a consensus is only needed on large issues; on smaller issues the minority defer to the majority.

Academic meetings are held once or twice per term to discuss the academic programme, teaching etc., although there are also frequent informal discussions and a brief discussion each week before the general meeting.

Consultations between members are arranged if something important arises that needs to be dealt with before the next General Meeting. Available members will be consulted, and others informed as soon as practical. This happens very rarely.

Informal discussions take place over meals or during break-times, or while work is being done.

Individual decisions are made in the course of work - where these fall within administrative or teaching routines.

There are no written guidelines about what issues should be decided individually, and what collectively. However, over time work practices and administrative procedures have

developed which act implicitly in this way. For example, there are agreed procedures for administering student bookings or dealing with agents, so individuals can deal with these and only exceptions are taken to the weekly meeting.

The process of making a decision collectively has been described by one member as "mutual exchange of ideas - someone will throw out an idea; there will be mutual criticism and counter proposals put forward - there is a sort of evolution. It's rather like a scientific hypothesis; it is subjected to constructive criticism, ideas are bounced around and hopefully a solution usually presents itself".

This model of collective management appears to require high-trust relationships between the co-op members. The boundary of individual autonomy is set in part by custom and practice - at The Lake School the range of issues handled at the General Meeting has declined as the agreed (but unwritten) administrative and teaching routines developed - but in part also by individuals challenging the actions of other members. Under these arrangements it would be difficult for the co-op to prevent autonomous action by individual members - other members can only shout about it afterwards. The latter could lead to difficult personal relationships which would tend to further increase friction. Although there is no evidence of this happening now it would appear that such a situation may have arisen at one stage and may have contributed to a founder member leaving Lake. Some members have said they could not completely trust this member - feeling that she would withhold information or try to push through decisions without consulting others; but another suggested that this member left because she couldn't cope with the in-fighting! This could be interpreted as a dispute over the boundary of autonomy and the development of low-trust relationships - and the fact that this person was doing the office function at a

different location to the teaching members may have contributed to the problem.

At the Lake School the authority and organisation of the General Meeting is unchanged since 1977 although the content has changed (as described above). It should also be noted that this meeting is used as part of the winding-down process at the end of the working week. Wine is provided, and general chat is intermingled with the business affairs. There is thus a degree of informality.

Functional Specialisation

There are two specialist roles: the Administrator and the Director of Studies.

Even as a small business there was a considerable amount of administration - booking people into courses, arranging student accommodation and bus passes, finance, wages, invoicing etc. Originally the role of administrator was rotated annually (or 6 monthly) but in 1983 this was changed and a full-time administrator employed.

The problems with rotation were -

- * people would have to stay behind after teaching to learn how to do the job
- * not everyone was keen or good at administration.

Under the present arrangement there is a full-time administrator supported by two teaching staff that spend half their time on administration doing particular functions - student accommodation and publicity. Other teaching staff undertake some administration or maintenance work which enables them to keep in touch. The members clearly feel that administration is handled better than previously and this allows the teaching staff to concentrate on their function.

The Director of Studies is responsible for ensuring that staff cover the course programme, the social programme, reports on students, entering students for exams and dealing with individual student's problems. This job is rotated amongst the permanent teaching staff with a different person each term.

The teaching staff are very flexible in the way they work - they swap classes or cover for each other and if one teacher is away their duties can be covered by a teacher/administrator. The co-op have developed various flexible syllabuses for different courses, but teachers have a lot of discretion in how they are used. Teachers also get the chance to teach classes at different levels which adds further interest and variety to the work.

Personalities and Power

It appears that at the Lake School individual members have different levels of participation in the meetings - some members consistently making contributions or putting forward suggestions, but others having a less active role. The members' view of these differences is that these arise from:

- * expertise - the knowledge of EFL teaching, the business and the administration : so newer members might participate less
- * functions - the full-time administrator's function results in them bringing many items to general meetings, and suggesting possible solutions
- * interest - one member appears less interested in the business side of the co-operative and tends to leave other members to discuss business issues
- * personality - some members are more assertive than others.

All the members are aware of these differences - and roughly agree on the different 'roles' that individual members play. They appear to consider the different roles complementary rather than a source of manipulation. The administrator explained how care is taken in the presentation of information

"I have to be careful how I present information so as not to influence things too much. I try to present sets of alternatives, then say what I think rather than a one-sided view."

Assessing the importance of these different roles is difficult. To some extent the importance may depend on how far there is genuine consensus on the decisions produced by the decision process. Where there is consensus, then 'leadership' by those with expertise or experience perhaps results in more efficient decision-making without a loss of effective democracy; where consensus is lacking such 'leadership' can compromise the spirit of collective management. Perhaps, once again, the crucial element is the trust relationships between the members. Where there is high-trust, 'leadership' is happily tolerated - especially if different people provide leadership on different issues. For example, at the Lake School one member has tended to 'lead' on administrative matters, and another on academic matters. If low-trust developed then this 'leadership' would appear as domineering behaviour and could lead to conflict.

People and Employment

There are currently five permanent workers - all members. This size has remained largely unchanged since the co-op was founded.

Six people have left the co-operative over its seven year existence. Two left EFL teaching, and two moved away from

Oxford. It appears possible that three of these people found working in the co-operative difficult - either because of the personal relations or because of the pressure of building the business.

It appears that there has been a fairly constant rate of five women to one man in the permanent workers/members, although this does not appear to have been a conscious decision.

All of the present members have received 'higher education', studying either for a degree or a teaching certificate.

All of the teaching staff have undertaken training as EFL teachers prior to joining the co-op - and all had extensive experience in Britain and abroad. The present administrator had worked for five years in the administration of a small conventional business (including some accounting and costing functions) before joining the Lake School.

The co-operative has not offered formal EFL training to its members. However, one member thought that working in the co-op had greatly improved their skill as an EFL teacher. This was explained by -

- * the feedback from students that was generated at the Lake School - and its exposure to other members - meant that one couldn't remain complacent about personal performance: creating the right teaching environment, and ultimately business success, depends on these performances!
- * the supportive and non-competitive relationships with other members enables learning to take place in a 'safe' environment
- * taking a turn as Director of Studies made each member look at the teaching in a wider context.

The co-op clearly offers opportunities for people to learn more about business and develop these skills - the administrator has been on a number of short training sessions in accounting and computing - and other members regard participation in the administration as a learning opportunity. The principal method of training is learning from other members. The needs of the business demands that teaching performance is assessed and improved and the quantity of administrative work requires that this be spread as far as possible : the close personal relations between the members facilitates learning.

Up to four temporary teachers are employed to help with peak periods - principally the summer. This is normal practice in 'the trade'. It appears that this presents some problems for the Lake School because they are not able to offer high wages, and yet their style demands a high level of commitment and skills in temporary staff. New teachers are 'paired' with an established teacher for advice and support.

When recruiting new members the co-op looks for people who "want more than a job". Members feel that working in a co-op demands a high level of commitment - without additional financial rewards. One member suggests that co-operation is an ideal that is "feasible only when you have people with equal strengths and outlooks". Clearly this makes recruitment a crucial process. To aid this the co-op has tended to recruit from people that have worked as temporary teachers at the Lake School. There is then a six-month probationary period before full membership is implemented.

The co-operative has a very tolerant view of members taking unpaid leave. Membership can be carried over these periods and the person slotted back into teaching on their return.

The members of the Lake School value their working situation in several ways -

- * the relationship that they have with colleagues : where they are able to say what they think and get support when they are having a bad day - this means that they needn't have separate work and personal personae
- * by putting money and effort into social activities, materials and books, they are able to have better interaction with their students than at many other schools
- * the variety of teaching they are able to do, and extent of control which they have over their work.

It is hoped that the co-operative will be able to employ another full-time administrative worker soon - but apart from this there does not appear to be a desire to grow larger.

Pay and Working Conditions

Pay levels in the Lake School have generally been below what are paid in other language schools. This was especially so in the early years of the co-op when they were building up the working capital. Currently the basic wage is about 90% of what the members might expect at other schools. A bonus of about 20% is added to this so that the total remuneration is above the norm for teachers - although less than what a Director of Studies might expect to earn. When required, the wages have been reduced or even withheld in order to avoid cashflow crises or provide additional working capital. This has not happened in recent years.

There is an equal gross pay policy for members. Temporary employees earn about the 'market' rate for temporary teachers.

Members get 10 weeks holiday per year - compared with 12 weeks in other schools.

The working environment is considered to have improved greatly from the early years when the church hall was used for teaching. The new premises are clearly the most satisfactory, having been designed for the purpose.

Hours of work are greater than members would have to work elsewhere - with administration, management and preparation coming on top of a full teaching commitment. They work the time needed rather than fixed hours - but this commonly amounts to between 9 and 12 hours daily. Several members described how the work consumed all of their time. One member described resenting this at first, but how this changed -

"I wanted to go to work, then forget about it and do my own thing at home...(I) resented the late hours and feeling tired. But now my attitudes towards the school have changed...I want the school to be a success. That is very satisfying. As we are running the show we have got to do it...we all accept it".

So, the pay and working conditions in the co-operative have not been as good as might be available in other established language schools. However, the members clearly feel that the 'costs' are acceptable - as the necessary price they pay for the flexibility and stimulation they get from working in the co-operative.

Industrial Relations

Any disputes within the co-operative are handled at the General Meeting. There is no written disputes procedure - and no separate forum where these industrial relations matters can be discussed. This is perhaps not surprising in a co-operative with only five members - although it does mean that a member 'in dispute' can be very isolated.

There is no trade union within the co-operative although members indicated that they are not against unions. However, in their case they felt they have control of the issues that the union is campaigning about (wages and conditions). Furthermore, there is no branch of the appropriate union in Oxford.

Conflicts between members have been important but rare events at the Lake School. Being a co-operative appears to amplify the effects of these conflicts in two ways -

- * the structure of decision making, and its dependence on trust for limiting individual actions and ensuring efficient collective decision making, means that conflicts can be very disruptive for the business - discussions may be long and intense, absorbing time and energy that needs to be invested in the commercial activities
- * the intensity of the shared experience of working collectively tends to create or strengthen personal friendships - when disputes subsequently arise it may be difficult to separate the 'professional' from the 'personal' issues. Discussion of issues then become emotionally highly charged and the chances of finding an amicable solution may decline.

These problems may be seen as inefficiencies in the co-operative structure, but they are 'the other side' of the characteristics of co-operative working that the members of the Lake School value most highly -

"It is very rewarding when we all pull together, nowhere else can give you that high...it's

magnificent when everyone is doing their bit".

Clearly, the stimulation from the "high" generates levels of commitment and output that would be difficult to achieve in other businesses. Furthermore, the structure and the close relationships also afford better opportunities for the individual to express their view - even if it is a dissident view! So, in evaluating the effects of the conflicts between members, on the co-operative, it must be recognised that the disadvantages arise from the same features which generate the advantages of co-operatives - both in terms of personal experiences and in commercial performance.

One view expressed at the Lake School is that successful co-operative working depends on harmony -

"working in a co-op and close proximity means there has to be temperamental agreement...if there is a clash you can't escape...the amount of time you spend together means you need harmony".

Where there is harmony, high-trust relationships can develop; when this trust is lost, the co-operative process can become intensely acrimonious. It appears that there is a point where the only resolution to this is for a member to leave.

Given these circumstances it appears that some form of disputes procedure with independent arbitration would benefit the co-operative in two ways -

- * it might be able to help the co-operative resolve the conflict outside of the General Meeting - perhaps avoiding the emotional and time costs of attempting to settle severe conflicts in that forum

- * it would protect the individual from isolation, and assure them of an independent assessment - the majority view are not necessarily morally, factually or legally correct in all circumstances.

Key Points

There are a number of key points that are worth noting about the Lake School of English -

- * that low wages and poor conditions prevailed in the early period when the capital for the business was being established, but are now (after seven years) as good or better than in other EFL schools - in this they are probably little different to any new business that starts without capital
- * that the members of the cooperative have all been experienced EFL teachers - they knew their trade - so that their learning processes have mainly been limited to business techniques (although the co-op is described as a 'safe' place to develop teaching skills)
- * that the 'management' process is an amalgam of formal and informal arrangements that have required high-trust relationships: these have been aided by 'temperamental agreement' amongst the members, and by the process of collective working itself.

Mckenzie and Brown Caernarfon Ltd

1. Origins and Development

Mckenzie and Brown Caernarfon Ltd (M & B) is located in the small town of Caernarfan in the north-west area of Wales. It is an engineering company which provides a range of services including precision machining, high quality welding and fabrication, shot blasting, paint spraying, and sheetmetal work. It also manufactures mechanical handling equipment and is planning to market its own 'bag flattening' machine. It currently employs 15 worker/members.

The co-operative was formed in August 1984 but didn't start trading until January 1985. At the time of this study the new company had only been operating for about six months and much of the material herein reflects the early stage of its development.

The business which the co-operative has now taken over was started in 1946 as a partnership - Mckenzie and Brown - based in Caernarfon. By 1972 this business employed about 210 workers in a purpose-built factory on an industrial estate in Caernarfon. At that time about 40% of its work was making carcasses for mining switchgear for a Sheffield-based company called Baldwin and Francis (B & F). At around this time B & F took over Mckenzie and Brown, but eight years later they were themselves taken over by Northern Engineering Industries Mining Equipment Ltd (NEI). It seems that from this point the Caernarfon factory started to 'run down' due to a NEI company policy, and a series of redundancies occurred. In 1984 the demand for the main product manufactured at Caernarfon was reduced by the miners strike and NEI decided to close the Caernarfon factory and

concentrate production at another manufacturing plant. The factory closed in August 1984 with the 84 employees being made redundant.

The history of Mckenzie and Brown therefore appears to have three stages -

- i) growth as a locally owned firm providing services to a range of clients
- ii) take-over by larger and larger firms - not based in Caernarfon - and a concentration on providing a service to other units in these firms rather than other local engineering companies
- iii) changed company policy and company fortunes which results in rationalisation and restructuring - and ultimately in the closure of the Caernarfon 'branch' factory.

The idea of creating a workers' company arose from discussions between the Trade Union convenor at the Caernarfon factory - a member of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers (AUEW) - and the District Secretary (the local full-time official) of that Union. The latter is a member of the Wales Trades Union Congress that had initiated the establishment of the Wales Co-operative Centre and was aware of the potential support for a co-operative venture. Furthermore, he was aware that there was a potential demand for engineering services from other local companies (providing the service that Mckenzie and Brown originally offered) and that locally there was still goodwill towards the original 'local' company.

With the help of the District Secretary a series of meetings were held with the management of NEI, with the Welsh Development Agency (WDA - a government 'quango' with responsibility for economic development in Wales), the Wales

Co-operative Centre and the Local Authorities. Many of these were attended by the District Secretary as well as the convenor and shop stewards at the Caernarfon factory. These were in addition to the meetings with NEI to discuss redundancy payments for the Caernarfon workers. Particular efforts were made to obtain help from NEI who were asked to

-

- * make available plant and machinery that was in the factory
- * provide some continued work to the co-operative as sub-contractor
- * make available the premises.

NEI have allowed the co-operative to lease/buy some machinery over a twelve-month period, and allowed continued use of the factory in exchange for a monthly payment; although since they can ask the co-op to leave giving only 30 days notice, this is not very satisfactory. A longer lease is being held up by negotiations between NEI and WDA. No engineering work has been provided for the co-op by NEI.

2. Legal Structure

The present trading company was established as a temporary measure while the co-operative structure was worked out. It was bought 'off the shelf' (this is a procedure where a limited company is registered in accordance with the British Company law, but never trades; a person wanting a company can buy this 'shell', change the name and register new directors, and then start trading), its name changed to Mckenzie and Brown Caernarfon Ltd, and three directors registered. These directors were chosen by the workforce in a General Meeting and each holds one ordinary share. These are the only shareholders in the company.

The Wales Co-operative Centre is preparing a constitution for a co-operative company to be registered as a company limited by Guarantee under the Companies Acts. The proposal is to have a two-tier structure with a new co-operative company Mckenzie and Brown Engineering Ltd being formed as a holding company. Members would subscribe £1 and loan £999 to the holding company. The latter would invest the £1,000 per member in the present trading company, Mckenzie and Brown Caernarfon Ltd. The trading company would be able to raise additional capital by the sale of shares, provided that the holding company retained majority control.

It is intended that the members loans would be covered by a loan stock agreement which would ensure that it is left in the co-operative for a given period (possibly three or five years), and that withdrawal then has to be staggered. Special arrangements will apply if a member dies during this period.

Two reasons have been given for these arrangements -

- * if the trading company winds up, any residual assets would return to the holding company and could be used to repay the members loans
- * future financial needs could be met through investments rather than expensive loans - it was generally hoped that an initial WDA investment would be made but this is now being provided as a loan.

It is not clear yet what rights individual members will have with regard to the assets of the co-operative. They have decided that (in the event of closure) any assets should be distributed amongst the members, but the mechanism for this has not yet been agreed. Some members clearly envisage that the value of their financial stake (i.e. the loan) will increase as the assets of the company increase, and that at

some point they will be able to take out this 'profit'. Again, it is unclear how this will work with the legal structure proposed. It would appear that the members are looking for an equity-participation arrangement rather than a common-ownership arrangement.

The delay in completing the 'co-operative' legal structure has arisen because -

- * the workers want a form of constitution that is not available in a published form, and this has required a considerable amount of work by the WCC
- * the members have not given sufficient priority to discussion of the legal structure - the WCC had intended to run a series of training sessions about the constitution, but after the initial session these were cancelled (apparently) because of a policy decision by the WCC.

3. Financing the Company

The trading capital for M & B has been provided by an input of £1,000 for each full-time worker, and pro-rata amount for part-time workers. This money is taken from a 'contingency fund' that was established by the 40 employees of NEI that were committed to the co-operative idea. For each job created, the relevant sum (for full-time or part-time work) is transferred to M & B's trading account. It is not clear whether this is a loan or a gift, or an investment.

The initial business plan prepared for the co-operative indicated a capital requirement of £45,000 and it was hoped to raise this in the following way -

	£
Members loans and investments	10,000
WDA loan	10,000
Welsh Office grant	5,000
Bank overdraft (maximum)	20,000

Of these amounts the members loans have been exceeded and should reach £15,000, and the Bank overdraft has been agreed but has not yet been used. The other amounts are now agreed but cannot be paid until the legal structure is finalised. So, the current finance has come only from members contributions and the trading profits on the first six months production.

In the absence of other funding, considerable effort has been made to reduce cash requirements by -

- * obtaining credit from suppliers
- * asking customers for some money with the order
- * limiting the space used in the factory to save rates, electricity etc.
- * negotiating a lease/buy arrangement for their equipment
- * obtaining free use of the factory for a period by undertaking maintenance work for NEI; thereafter rent is at below current commercial rate by sub-letting from NEI with special agreement from the WDA.

While each of these has been important, the most significant financial benefit will be through wage subsidies by public bodies. Two sources have been used -

- * the Enterprise Allowance Scheme which pay £40 per week towards the wages costs of (up to 10) unemployed people who establish a business - this is payable for 52 weeks and will subsidise M & B's costs by £20,800

- * a county council scheme which pays 30% of 'essential' wages for one year - 4 M & B wages are subsidised, giving the co-operative about £5,800 over the first year.

4. Commercial Objectives

It is argued that M & B can be commercially viable although NEI claim that the Caernarfan unit was not. It is pointed out that prior to 1972 the firm had a range of customers but that NEI was only interested in the factory as a supplier of parts to their other units - and that they, therefore, didn't try to obtain other work when their own demand declined. The basis of the co-ops business strategy is to utilise the 'goodwill' still attached (locally anyway) to the name Mckenzie and Brown, to bring in general engineering work - mainly from companies based in North Wales.

Several consultants' reports and market surveys have been completed which appear to suggest that there is a 'demand' but that the co-operative should start on a smaller scale - 5 workers plus management - than it has done. It appears that the break-even point for the present company is £135,000 turnover in the first year. However, if the effect of the wage subsidies is taken into account a turnover in excess of £200,000 is needed in the second year of operating. Turnover in the first six months of operation has been £100,000.

The AUEW has played an important role in the marketing strategy of the co-op. The District Secretary was able to provide introductions to the management of other important engineering operations in North Wales which have been followed up by the co-operative. At another level, the co-operative is able to get advice about the potential for 'over-flow' work from other firms by maintaining links

with the union convenors in those firms.

Besides offering engineering services the co-operative is prepared to undertake any other work available - at present they have a grass-cutting contract for the WDA - and are preparing to market a vibrating bag-flattening machine that the original M & B produced.

5. Co-operative Objectives

The major objective in establishing the co-operative was job creation, and most of the initial members feel that there was no alternative employment, and certainly no employment that would use their engineering skills. A second objective is control over the business. This derives more from an appreciation of the way that the changing ownership of the original Mckenzie and Brown company resulted in the closure of the firm, than from a commitment to workers control in general. Nevertheless, experience of having control of the company is clearly valued by some worker/members and has generated high levels of commitment.

6. Support and Advice

The co-op has received significant help from the three sources described below:

The AUEW has played a major role in this initiative at a local level. This has included -

- * introducing the idea of the co-op
- * making introductions to sources of work and sources of finance and assistance
- * attending co-op meetings and acting as Secretary
- * covering the costs of travel to meetings

- * providing secretarial services; typing, photocopying etc.
- * through the local Branch getting support from other workplaces

It appears that these initiatives are more a reflection of a commitment by the District Committee of the AUEW than by the union on a wider scale - and it is doubtful if the initiative would have started or developed without this local commitment.

The Wales Co-operative Centre (WCC) has helped with development advice including -

- * discussion with potential members about what a co-op is
- * undertaking legal work on the constitution etc.
- * helping prepare the business plan
- * providing help with marketing.

However, there is some criticism of the way the Centre has helped which appears to arise more from policy changes at the Cardiff Head Office than the skills or intentions of particular development workers employed. The general criticisms are -

- * the workers at the Centre made commitments on training (e.g. regarding the constitution) and on funding applications (that they would make) that were not carried out
- * that the development workers generally advised on what the co-op should do - but didn't work with the co-op while they did it, or undertake some of this to relieve the work overload on the more experienced members of the co-op.

However these criticisms seem to apply more to the early period of development than later periods.

Again, it is doubtful whether the workers' initiative would have progressed far without the help of the WCC, but the co-op feels more progress could have been made with a more direct and consistent input from the WCC.

The Welsh Development Agency has provided support in three ways -

- * in negotiations with NEI that have resulted in M & B having the right to use the factory for the the time being - although the WDA's failure to reach a final agreement with NEI leaves the co-op at risk of losing its workspace at 30 days notice
- * in providing a business adviser who visited the factory on one or two days per week for six months and provided business advice and training in accounting systems
- * in agreeing a £10,000 loan at a subsidised rate of interest and with a repayments 'holiday' - although agreement has taken many months and the money cannot be paid until the legal structures are finalised.

This help has clearly been valuable to the co-operative although the failure to finalise the arrangements for the use of the workspace and the time it has taken to provide business capital has been a source of irritation in the co-operative.

7. Management

A monthly General Meeting (GM) is regarded as the dominant authority within the present company - although its status

in law is not clear since there are only three Directors of the company that is now trading and the rest of the members probably have no legal status. Nevertheless, the GM is regarded as sovereign.

This G.M. is held in the evening, on the third Tuesday of each month, and most workers attend. It is limited to 2 hours - an early decision of the meeting - which restricts its use for major discussions prior to important decisions. There is a regular Chairman, although his duties are limited to the G.M. only, and the AUEW District Secretary (who, along with the local WCC worker attends these meetings), takes minutes and has these typed. There is a standard agenda with additional items for discussion being added at the beginning of the meeting. The standard agenda includes:

- * apologies for absence
- * a review of the minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising from these
- * financial report from the bookkeeper
- * general progress report from the company secretary, including sales and enquiries, work in progress, information about funding applications, etc.
- * shop-floor report by the supervisor/inspector
- * any other business - where the company secretary (mostly) answers questions raised by other members

The extent of active participation in the G.M. is unclear. Two factors are involved here -

- * much of the purpose of the G.M. is to give information so that the few people holding this information tend to play a much greater part - both in giving reports and in answering general questions - than others

- * many members are inexperienced in participation and lack the confidence to take part and make their views known: a small group of members are very experienced and confident in meetings.

Given this imbalance it is perhaps not surprising that people in the company give conflicting reports on the process that goes on in these meetings. For example:

- * some reports suggest that most members take part in discussions; others say that most members don't contribute because they lack confidence - but participation is improving
- * some members feel that all decisions are made by voting; other members say that most decisions are made by consensus and that votes are only taken on important matters.

However, two issues do seem to be agreed. Firstly that there is rarely any serious dissent expressed at the G.M. Secondly, that the meeting is dominated by the company secretary who also handles marketing and sales at M & B. The role of this individual is crucial in understanding the management and dynamics of the company, and is discussed below under 'Leadership'.

Informal Meetings do occur in the co-op to make quick decisions. Three types of informal decision-making gatherings have been described:

- * when the members gathered on the 'shop-floor' to discuss buying a shot-blaster that was needed to undertake a particular job - the meeting agreed to buy the machine and this was done
- * when the Directors of the company are consulted by

the company secretary as a formality prior to the the secretary taking actions delegated to him by G.M. - e.g. to find out about something and make a decision

- * when members chatted in the canteen and decided to change the timing of the lunch-break: the company secretary informed them that they couldn't do this since it went against a G.M. decision and effectively changed the contract of employment.

So, it appears that decisions outside the G.M. are possible - but there is ambiguity about the circumstances under which this is legitimate.

There are four specialist functions within the management of the company. These are:

- marketing and sales
- estimating/planning/purchasing
- production supervision and inspection
- finance.

In general this group was not seen from 'the floor' as management, although there was a general recognition that the marketing and sales person tended to undertake a coordinating function. However, the latter person did refer to 'the management team' - including in this the four functionaries mentioned above, plus the third Director who is from the production staff. Because of their functions, this group of people do exercise the management role and although the idea of 'a management team' does not appear to have been legitimated by the G.M., the opportunity to make the co-operative a commercial success does rest with this group although, of course, realising this success depends on both 'management' and 'shop-floor' activities!

Leadership in the co-operative has been provided by the person who was the AUEW convenor during the NEI operation. The leadership experience of this person is considerable. He was convenor at the NEI factory for eleven years prior to closure (from the age of 21). This experience gave him -

- * confidence in dealing with management
- * an understanding of the business problems and potential of the company
- * confidence in addressing large groups of workers and obtaining their agreement to his actions
- * experience in meeting union members outside of the factory: he was a member of the AUEW branch committee and has good contacts in other engineering companies and with the District Secretary.

It might also be noted that the convenor 'ran' the social club in the factory!

As the response to the NEI closure decision moved from negotiations over redundancy terms to discussions about establishing the co-operative, the role of the convenor changed very little. It was he who led discussions with NEI, with the WDA, with the WCC etc; and subsequently he who visited other engineering companies looking for orders. Throughout this process he addressed general meetings of the workers - first as union convenor and then as spokesman for the workers - informing them of progress, interpreting this for them and being delegated to act on their behalf. This role continues in the general meetings of the co-operative. Here, wearing the hats of the Secretary of the Company and of marketing and sales person, he reports on most of the activities between the co-op and the outside world - he has the links and the information.

Now, while this leadership and experience has been very important in the development of the new initiative, it also creates its own problems -

- * too many tasks are allocated to this leader, and the 'overload' results in some not being adequately handled; at present members clearly feel that insufficient attention is being given to marketing and sales - the crucial ingredient in the survival of the new business

- * other members become too dependent -
 - they lack the skills because they have not had (or taken) the opportunities to do management or union work
 - they lack confidence, again because they lack experience

- * the inexperience of other members results in the 'leader' feeling unhappy about other members doing important work and therefore takes it on himself - perpetuating the situation

- * since many important links between the co-op and its environment come through the 'leader' outside contacts tend to address themselves only to that person - again perpetuating his information and power.

At M & B this situation would appear to have arisen. In general other members in the co-op are not unhappy about it - except that sales are not being given enough attention - although it would be difficult for an individual member to voice opposition to this semi-official and well-intentioned domination. It would be especially difficult to

raise this at a G.M. where the leader is supported by a highly respected union official - who has also worked closely with him for many years! In these circumstances it is not surprising that there is little dissent at the G.M. and the question of voting loses significance unless there is real dissent.

It should be noted that this situation appears very differently to 'the leader'. His effort and commitment has been great and he cannot understand why other members won't take more responsibility. For example, the District Secretary takes the minutes because no other member was willing to have a go. The 'leader' declares himself frustrated because other people will not accept responsibility - and yet they don't because their lack of experience has resulted in a lack of confidence - and perhaps a habit of letting others take responsibility for them.

So, management at M & B is currently handled by a group of functionaries who are responsible to the G.M. and report back each month. There are problems about leadership, and the tendency for the experienced leader to be the funnel for information and action between the co-op and the outside world - reinforcing his experience, confidence and power and denying other members the opportunity to obtain the experience and confidence that would enable them to take responsibility. This situation reflects the culture of non-responsibility by factory workers in large firms where -

- * inspectors and supervisors police their work - quantity and quality
- * management take responsibility for relations between the company and the outside world
- * the union - especially the convenor - takes responsibility for issues arising between the

worker and the management.

At M & B it would appear that workers have quickly adapted to taking responsibility for their own work - and are finding this responsibility rewarding. However, taking over the management responsibilities is more difficult - probably because it is totally outside of their skills and experience - and they are tending to rely on 'the convenor' model: leaving this to a knowledgeable few. In the short term this is functional but the longer term implications may be dysfunctional for true co-operative working since the concentration of expertise will be reinforced rather than broken down.

8. Types of Employment

The co-operative currently employs twelve people full-time, and three part-time. The latter are doing jobs which are not required full-time, e.g. bookkeeping and wages, and maintenance.

Initial members appear to have been self-selected and then randomly selected. The self-selection was in choosing to put the required £1,000 in the contingency fund, and then choosing to be considered for a job. It appears that the wage level offered by the cooperative meant that only people receiving the minimum level of unemployment benefit - men who are unmarried or have working wives - were interested in joining. The random selection appears to have occurred once the co-op had decided on the mix of skills it needed. A random choice was made from those with each skill. This process therefore has three elements:

- * the interested people tended to be those who saw no chance of alternative employment

- * those willing to consider employment were those for whom the low wages were still better than the State support they were getting
- * a random selection from the group emerging from the above processes to obtain the right skill-mix - although there was little 'competition' for most positions.

The group of founder members were therefore not necessarily those people with the most aptitude for running a business, or the most aptitude for working cooperatively. Neither was it built around existing friendship or trust patterns. The common denominator of the group was need - although some members who might have expected to get other jobs obviously came in because of commitment to creating the cooperative business.

Knowledge about worker co-operatives amongst the workers was very low at the start.

Many of the workers had served an apprenticeship in the original company and spent all of their working lives there. The range of skills includes machining, welding, metal fabricating, presswork, etc., plus semi-skilled jobs.

All the members are men. Most speak Welsh as their native language and although they are also fluent in English, some may lack confidence in having technical conversations with English-speaking clients etc.

Although the present workforce was recruited for their skills, all the workers are doing a mixture of skilled and semi-skilled work, plus new work like maintenance, grass-cutting, etc. There is no formal training now being done. Most workers are doing jobs that at some stage they have been trained for although there are also some cases where

a semi-skilled worker has been trained to do a skilled operation, and the 'finance person' had previously only done an office clerks job and was given some training by the WDA business advisor.

One worker was not recruited from the NEI workforce. When the co-operative started it lacked an estimator and draftsman and a person - who had previously worked for Mckenzie and Brown - was recruited for this crucial function.

It is hoped that the co-operative will be able to expand to about 25 people, recruiting more workers from the group that have placed money in the 'contingency fund'.

9. Pay and Working Conditions

The co-op is currently paying most workers £50.00 nett (i.e. take home pay) per week. This is about 60% of what a skilled worker would expect if they were being paid the normal union rate. One person - the specially recruited 'estimator' - is paid at a nett wage of £80.00 per week, although this is recognised as a special case. Apart from this, the normal differentials between skilled and unskilled have also been suspended.

There are two underlying reasons for the temporary abandonment of union rates of pay -

- * the business plan indicated that only 5 production workers would be needed but the cooperative wanted to employ 10 to make maximum use of the Enterprise Allowance Scheme - so more people were employed but at a lower wage

- * the company is short of working capital and is

using the savings on wage costs to build up its capital.

However, there are significant differences in the way that different members view the 'reduction in wages' -

- * some people have an expectation that they will receive the difference between the union rate and the actual pay, later in the year
- * some members expect to get back-dated pay (and the supervisor is keeping a record of the hours each person has worked to facilitate this calculation) while others expect it to be paid as a bonus from the profit
- * a third version is that the missing amount will be added to the individuals shareholding
- * some members are not concerned what happens provided a viable co-operative is established after this initial period.

It is not clear how far these ideas are based on a business plan and cash-flow indicating that any of these options are possible, and how far they are a rationalisation for working so far below the union rate.

There is a clear intention to reinstate the union rate and differentials as soon as the company can afford this - and some members have indicated that there is a limit to how long they will work at the present rate. The effect of doing this on the company's costs will be dramatic, especially if it coincides with the ending of the wage subsidies that currently pay over half the wage costs. So far the G.M. has agreed the following rates:

- Supervisor	£142.00 per week
- Turner	£140.00 per week

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------|------------------|
| - | Other skilled workers | £130.00 per week |
| - | Semi-skilled workers | £119.00 per week |

No rates have been agreed yet for the office functions.

A number of members have indicated that they are unhappy with the prospect of reimposing differentials because -

- * all the workers are now equals as shareholders
- * everyone is putting in the same effort.

It appears that once differentials are applied workers will get paid the rate for the job they are doing, not the rate appropriate to their skill. This is a break from union practice - where a semi-skilled person would get a higher rate if doing a skilled job, but a skilled person would not have a cut in wages when doing a semi-skilled job. The reason for this appears to be commercial - the co-operative could not compete with other firms if they were paying a skilled rate for semi-skilled work.

Members currently work 39 hours per week which is the trade and union norm.

There are no written contracts of employment issued - and no letters of appointment setting out the terms and conditions of employment. It appears that the basic conditions were discussed at a G.M. and the present unwritten 'contract' is based on this discussion. It is thought that the Wales Co-operative Centre will produce a written contract for them along with the constitution. Given the ambiguity over wages discussed above this seems a particularly unsatisfactory position.

The co-operative has not appointed a health and safety officer and members seem to agree that they are not as

conscious of this as previously. Nevertheless, the machines are fitted with the same guards as previously, the electrical installation and the cranes have been inspected, and a maintenance person is used for wiring up machines, etc. So there is a consciousness about health and safety, but the issue has not been given a high profile.

From the above it can be seen that in the short-term, pay and working conditions in this co-operative are not as good as those provided by NEI or those demanded by the AUEW. The intent of the members is to return to AUEW standard conditions as soon as possible.

10. Trade Unions and Industrial Relations

Prior to NEI closing the Caernarfon factory there were two unions represented on site - the AUEW and the General Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades (GMB). At the time of the closure the AUEW Secretary became involved but the District Secretary of GMB did not. Nevertheless the GMB shop steward was involved in discussions about establishing the co-operative.

When M & B was established it was agreed that it would be an AUEW closed shop, and the four or five GMB members joined the AUEW.

Despite the commitment to trade unionism there has been no shop steward elected and there is no union representation within the company. This would seem to arise for two reasons:

- * some members state that they can see no reason to have a union representative where the workers run the firm since they have the opportunity to decide what they want to do at the general

meetings

- * the continued involvement of the previous convenor and the close involvement of the AUEW District Secretary means that the workers are receiving information and advice about union matters without having their own representative.

Since the workers are union members they would be entitled to union services (e.g. legal help to sue the co-operative in the case of industrial injury).

As has been described above, the co-operative is not implementing the union agreement on pay and working conditions that other engineering firms have to meet - and that the union in other firms would insist that the management provide! This has been accepted both within the factory and within the District as a short-term measure to allow the new company to get established. After this it is expected to apply the normal conditions. It can also be pointed out that the benefits of the curtailment of normal conditions will accrue to the members not to outside shareholders, and may be repaid via a bonus or via increased share values.

From this it would seem that the local AUEW attitude is to 'turn a blind eye' to M & B until it is established as a viable business, in the expectation that it will then once again implement union conditions.

It would seem that the AUEW has no pro-active policy of support for worker initiatives at a national level. The local support reflects a long-standing concern about lost employment in engineering in North Wales and an inclination towards flexibility about conditions in the short-term in order to protect and expand longer-term

employment.

There has been a disciplinary procedure adopted by the general meeting. This gives only the G.M. power to authorise verbal and written warnings, and dismiss workers. There has also been discussion about forming a Disciplinary Group but this has not yet been established.

It is unclear how a dispute between a member and the co-operative (or another member of the co-operative) would be handled in the absence of a shop steward. One view was that the AUEW District Secretary would be called in to sort it out.

11. A Brief Review

It would seem that most workers (but not all) are now very committed to the success of the co-operative and would not leave now even if they were offered alternative employment. It appears that they enjoy the variety of work and the control they now have over the way that work is done. The frustration of being told to work in a particular way "by someone from upstairs - without any reason" has gone. Most members reported that they looked forward to coming to work, and enjoyed it. Their main complaint was the low wages, although some of 'the management team' complained about members lack of "willingness to take responsibility" and the extent of consultation required by the co-operative process which results in "clumsy decision making". The finance person said that he enjoyed the lack of barriers between 'the shop' and 'the office' and wanted to ensure that these did not arise again - although the tendency for the 'office staff' to use the canteen at different times to the 'floor staff' is already contributing towards traditional divisions.

It would seem that the cooperative way of working could yield substantial gains in productivity because the workers are keen to be flexible - and will do any job - and no longer need 'policing' as before. They perceive these as in their long-term benefit as they will receive the benefits either as a bonus or as an increase in the value of their shares.

To some extent this is 'the honeymoon period' for the cooperative. Thanks to the wages subsidies and the low wage levels, the financial pressures are not too great - and although there is work to do, the demand is not so great that there is pressure for increased production levels. But this is also the period when important issues about the organisation and constitution of the cooperative could be sorted out. This would ensure that a number of the ambiguities and problems in the current arrangements are clarified - e.g. the obligation on back pay and the devolution of power from the 'leader' to a wider group of members.

Suma Wholefoods

1. Origins and Development

Suma Wholefoods is the trading name of Triangle Wholefoods Collective Ltd. This was established as a private 'alternative' company but sold to its workforce in 1976. In this study the name Suma will be used since this is the name by which the co-op is best known.

The company was originally established as a delivery service to retail shops who were members of the Federation of Northern Wholefood Collectives (FNWC). The development of the business into a wholesaler coincided with the decision of the FNWC to establish regional warehouses, and Suma became one of these - the only one that was actually established. The business, therefore, developed with a 'captive market' of FNWC members - they tended to buy from Suma even if the prices were higher, but also received a 5% discount in this initial period.

Suma's principal activity is therefore wholefood wholesaling. It buys wholefoods in bulk (often on the commodity markets), stores this in its Leeds warehouse, makes up orders for customers and delivers these. It also has a small manufacturing and bottling activity although packaging is done by another cooperative - Hebden Water Milling - that 'floated-off' from Suma.

The cooperative mostly supplies independent wholefood retail shops although other customers include schools, hospitals and youth hostels. Monthly price lists are sent out to about 1150 customers who then place orders by telephone or post. The principal area of operation is the North and North Midlands areas of England. New customers are mainly obtained through recommendations but the co-op has a marketing section which undertakes advertising and displays (they have

developed their own Suma brand), and a representative who calls on customers. Most customers pay on delivery - invoices are prepared and sent out with the delivery driver - although credit is allowed in exceptional circumstances.

The co-operative has grown steadily. In the five years between 1978 and 1983 turnover grew by 456% - or 264% after allowing for inflation. Turnover is currently about £4 Million per annum. In the period since 1978 the number of full-time staff has grown from 15 to 34, with 13 new people starting in the last two years.

Suma is registered as a Friendly Society using the model rules of the Industrial Common Ownership Movement (ICOM) - it is a member organisation of ICOM. Under its rules the assets of the company are commonly owned. Although each member obtains one share in the company, this is regarded as a membership ticket and has no resale value. If a member leaves they must give up their share (and membership) but have no claim on the assets. If the company went into liquidation the assets would have to be passed on to another commonly owned venture - or sold so that the proceeds could be passed on.

Thus the members at any one time have the rights to use the assets but cannot dispose of them for their own financial gain.

The formal objectives of the company are -

- * workers hire capital, not capital hiring workers
- * work should be fulfilling
- * surpluses beyond the needs of the business are to go to charitable and communal projects which enable people to exercise control over their lives

- * ultimate control to be shared by the members.

Finance for the co-operative was provided initially by the original owner who accepted payment for the business over 5 years. These payments were made from surpluses generated. The co-operative has continued to build its own financial reserves - principally from surpluses - so that it currently provides 29% of its capital requirements. There is also a substantial bank overdraft and a bank loan (their bank is considered helpful) and about £15,000 in members loans.

The FNWC has declined and only a small 'talking shop' continues in one area. In some ways Suma may have contributed to the Federation's decline by taking on the bulk buying, distribution, packaging and subsequently branding operations that an active Federation might have expected to pursue. Furthermore, the delivery drivers and the Suma representative get around most of the retail shops and provide something of a communication link. The success of Suma may have left the Federation without an economic function.

Suma has developed good links with a number of other wholefood wholesale co-operatives in Britain and a certain amount of inter-trading has taken place. Discussions are now in progress about forming a Federation with three other wholesalers - based in Scotland, Southern England and South-West England. This Federation proposes to -

- * agree areas of operation and therefore avoid competing with each other
- * undertake joint marketing, joint branding and manufacture
- * purchase jointly

- * share information on market and changing products
- * jointly promote natural foods and co-operatives.

One view in Suma is that there are now good commercial reasons for this Federation of wholesalers, and that it is therefore likely to succeed.

2. Management and Decision-Making

Suma set out as a collectively run business and, despite its size, largely remains that way today. However, there have been significant developments.

In the period up to early 1984 there were no significant changes in the management structures. The formal decision-making body of the co-operative was the weekly General Meeting (GM). It appears that there were no 'intermediate' management structures and that the decisions not taken by the weekly meeting were taken by individual members as part of their work functions. GMs were held on a Wednesday afternoon - with the business closed but with some people still out driving. A chairperson was nominated from time to time (volunteers being approved by the GM and serving until they decided to step down) and minutes kept. Decisions taken one week would be ratified the following week (allowing absent members a chance to re-open discussions).

Up to early 1983 decisions were made by consensus rather than voting. It appears that on some items individuals or minority groups effectively vetoed a decision while on other items the majority merely disregarded the minority view and no vote was called for. In 1983 it was decided to implement 75% majority decision-making.

An observer of the co-op at this time has made the following comments:

- * too much time was spent on minor matters : an analysis of decisions taken by GM between April and October 1983 shows that 50% of 'first' decisions were routine or minor matters equivalent to decisions being taken daily by members in the course of their work.
- * new and relatively new members did not have the knowledge or experience of long-standing members and could not participate fully
- * when important questions came before meetings, many members were not adequately briefed - items would often be put on the agenda at the last minute and reports and recommendations were (at best) put on the notice board one or two days before the meeting and at worst presented verbally to the meeting.

To some extent the lack of 'briefing' was probably due to the lack of co-ordination and planning functions within the firm - despite having over twenty employees and a turnover of about £3 Million per year!! Reflecting on the 'management' of the co-operative the observer noted the following -

- * the daily rotation of jobs and inadequate training contributed to problems of inefficiency, inaccuracy, poor communication and general inefficiency.
- * in key areas of business - marketing, buying and finance - the co-op could only react to situations after they had happened rather than making things happen to achieve specified objectives : at this stage there was no management accounting function and therefore no regular performance figures, and no formal liaison between buying, marketing, warehouse and

finance to ensure that goods bought could be warehoused, sold or paid for!

As a response to the problems of planning and coordination there was discussion about whether a management committee should be formed. This was a very contentious issue. Ultimately the idea was resisted and two coordinating committees - Finance and Personnel - were formed. The basis of membership of these committees appears to have been 'those people who were interested'. This resulted in the holders of functions relating to finance attending the Finance Committee; and the makeup of the committees being split along 'conventional' lines with Finance dominated by men and Personnel by women! This was seen by some members as formalising the informal hierarchy which existed - with men in 'management' functions controlling the finance - although the work of both committees would appear to have been frustrated by a lack of time to meet and a poor flow of information from individual departments.

Dissatisfaction with this led to the convening of a special GM early in 1985 and this decided to change the make-up of the committees to representatives of each work area.

The Finance Committee does not make policy decisions but -

- * examines the arguments for the purchase of non-routine items requested by a department, and presents these to GM
- * makes decisions on the replacement and renewal of routine items, without any financial limit
- * makes decisions on purchasing non-routine items which do not exceed £1,000
- * supervises the preparation of budgets and forecasts.

Figures for the discussion of replacement items etc. must be supplied by the relevant department - and there must be a consensus decision on spending or else the matter is referred to GM.

The Personnel Committee -

- * interviews and makes decisions about new members
- * handles staff disputes and issues of discipline - and forms the Disciplinary Committee
- * handles matters relating to pay, conditions, and health and safety
- * prepares proposals for GM on organisational matters including the organisation of GM
- * undertakes labour planning and discusses the implications for costs with the Finance Committee.

Membership of the Committees is drawn from seven work areas in Suma. Each area nominates two people for each committee and the GM votes to choose the representative from these two. This means that the committee is unlikely to be dominated by 'functional' specialists (e.g. finance by people working with finance). Committees meet in working time and attendance is given priority over other work. Each committee nominates a chairperson and a secretary.

It would appear that there is a considerable degree of trust in, and commitment to, the working of the committees - and a sense that the general meetings are better informed and less cluttered than hitherto. Nevertheless, there is continuing concern about the need to change the GM, which has the potential of over 30 people attending, and some members are

still arguing that there should be a Management Committee to improve the management and (in their terms) ensure the survival of the business. There appear to be three basic criticisms of the GM model of management -

- * 35 people in GM cannot make business decisions
- * new members have not got the knowledge or experience of the business to make 'good' decisions
- * new people bring old ideas : old people bring new ideas - a feeling that new people argue for solutions that have already been tried and failed, and this causes frustration amongst the older members.

Of course the latter two points could also be used to argue for a domination by older members - again, a formal recognition of the informal hierarchy which is discussed below.

Besides the two permanent committees the co-op intends to form committees to deal with other functions e.g. long-term planning. This has not yet happened although a joint meeting of buying, marketing, warehouse staff is meeting to discuss such items as new products, marketing policies and the organisation of warehouse space.

There are also occasional get-togethers of the people in each work area to discuss work organisation and other matters of particular relevance, and to allow the representatives on the standing committees to give information. For example, the Transport Group - consisting of the main drivers and the Transport Manager - meets each month and discusses the maintenance and replacement of vehicles, delivery schedules, drivers' welfare items etc. If a new vehicle is required, this group will research and prepare costings for the alternatives, and discuss these with Finance Committee.

It appears that not all work areas meet regularly and there was little sense among the members that their representatives kept them informed of discussions in the standing committees. There is no sense of representatives being mandated by work-group discussions - but they are used as a communication link. Essentially the representatives are trusted to work in the interests of the co-op (not necessarily their work area), and the division of the co-op into constituencies is more to ensure that a range of perspectives is brought to the committees than to represent particular work area concerns.

All of the members interviewed at Suma feel that there is an informal hierarchy. Members suggested the following points as contributing to high 'informal' status -

- * long service so that you know the business, a range of functions, and the history of what has been tried before
- * holding a 'key' function e.g. marketing, buying, or management accounts, that give control over information
- * a strong and confident personality
- * a function in the co-op that enables you to attend all general meetings and, better still, an office function which leaves time for informal discussion with colleagues about co-op issues - this facilitates the development of proposals for the General Meeting which effectively defines the subject of GM discussions.

There is a clear sense that at the end of 1983 the co-op was dominated by a group of long-serving men, who held the key 'managerial' functions, who had the time to discuss and

develop policies, and also were confident 'middle-class' people. Several members explained their dominance in terms of 'male' behaviour.

There appear to be four factors that have contributed to the breakdown of this dominance -

- * dissatisfaction with the operation of the GM - in particular the veto right held by any member, and the domination of discussions by the more experienced (male) members - which led to the scrapping of consensus decision-making (and therefore the veto) and the re-organisation of the committee membership; with several long-serving members failing to get nomination
- * a movement for solidarity among the women members - who started to meet as a women's group and agreed to support each other in GM discussions
- * the rapid growth of the co-op - and of women members - meant that the longer-serving members could be out-voted by newer members
- * the transfer of many decisions from the GM to committees, and the limitation of the autonomy of some functions through budgeting and forecasting, mean that more discussions take place in the small-group atmosphere of the committee which is less intimidating for the less-confident members.

There remains an evident discontent with the format of the GM, and the Personnel Committee are considering changes that would provide more time for work area discussions and a more structured GM.

Most of the members interviewed feel that the changes made particularly since early 1985 - have improved both management

and democracy in Suma, and provided a basis for further development. Processes of collective management have replaced the informal hierarchy that had effective control. Other members feel that there is insufficient management and that too much power is left with people lacking the experience to exercise good judgement. Certainly there remain some problem areas - especially in long-term strategy and the resolution of fundamental questions eg about whether to grow, whether to seek a higher surplus in order to pay higher wages, etc. Perhaps there are two problems here; one is how to develop mechanisms to discuss these issues, and the other is to find the time to discuss them. Clearly some members feel that the failure to discuss and make decisions on these issues is in itself a form of decision-making - for example, one member felt that the decision had been made to lease another warehouse to facilitate growth - but there had not been a debate on whether growth was what the members wanted or on alternate ways of growing.

Despite the questioning and the criticism detailed above, it is clear that the system of collective management that is evolving at Suma is rewarding for the people involved: the frustration is a necessary part of the evolution process for this model of collective management. The 'rewards' for individual members (as well as the commercial success of the cooperative) would appear to arise from a management process that combines internal democracy with pragmatic individual decision-making which depends upon (but also generates) high-trust relationships between individuals.

3. People and Employment

Table 1

Length of service of permanent workers of Suma (June 1985)

Length of Service

4.5 years and above	7	0	7
2.5-4.5 years	5	4	9
0.5-2.5 years	7	9	16
0.5 years and under	1	4	5

	20	17	37

As can be seen from Table 1 there are now 37 permanent workers at Suma. Of these four are currently working permanent part-time (referred to as casuals).

There are currently 20 men and 17 women working permanently. However, a higher proportion of the longer-serving members are men - 75% of members with over 2.5 years service are male. There appears to be a conscious policy of balancing the gender mix of the co-op with 80% of the most recent appointments being women.

Staff recruitment is done with care. Prior to 1984 the post would be advertised and any member could attend the interviews of candidates. Since 1984 interviews have been carried out by the Personnel Committee. New workers are given a one week trial before a decision is made about offering a job. Thereafter there are reviews at one month and three months. Between three months and six months any member can nominate a new worker for membership - although this tends to be organised by the Personnel Committee - but if a person is not nominated then their employment must end.

Although a mixture of criteria are used in appointments it is

clear that personality - an ability to fit in with the other members of the cooperative - is given a high value. The trial week is used to assess people's skills.

All full-time workers must be members after six months employment. Permanent part-time workers do not appear to be offered membership although several have applied. The position of these workers (regarding membership) is an unresolved issue within the cooperative.

Table 2 Age distribution of Suma workforce (June 1985)

40+	4
30-39	19
20-29	14
19 and below	0

	37

As can be seen from Table 2 almost 90% of the workers are between 20 and 40.

It has not been possible to obtain personal details from all of the members but an indication of the background of people currently involved in the co-op can be obtained from the following (based on interviews with 6 women and 5 men members).

- * 6 respondents gave their parental background as middle-class - the remainder being working-class
- * 9 respondents had received higher education - either for degrees or professional certificates
- * none of the respondents had a career-based work background : most had done several different types of work

- * only 3 respondents had substantial contacts with other 'alternative' activities, or with other Suma people outside of work - although most had political sympathy with trade unions and 'left' movements for peace, womens rights, etc.
- * a minority of those interviewed said it was important that Suma was a co-operative when they originally applied - although all members indicated that it was important now. It is unlikely that this would be true of the co-operative as a whole
- * only two of those interviewed stated that the wholefood element was important at the time they applied for the job.

On the basis of this information it is possible to put forward a tentative characterisation of a typical Suma worker as - 'an educated person who had found it impossible to find (or settle in) the type of work that their education had prepared them for, and therefore moved between jobs or gave up initial careers; who was involved in social movements (and is probably socialist rather than conservative), but not especially with worker co-operatives; who joined Suma as much because they needed a job as because it was a co-op or sold wholefoods; who have a limited contact with other Suma people outside of work, and have a 'regular' rather than an 'alternative' life-style'.

Twelve of the present workers are supporting children - and most of these have joined the co-op within the last 2.5 years.

4. Work Organisation

Important features of Suma are that many staff have a mixed diet of work rather than a single function, and people with

specialist skills are not recruited to provide specialist functions - members are trained for these internally.

New members generally start by doing set periods each week in the warehouse (moving bulk goods), order picking (making up orders for despatch), the office (taking orders, making out invoices and despatch instructions) and driving (delivering orders or collecting bulk goods). After between three and six months of this the member may have a more limited range of work - but this is still likely to include a mixture of often both office and manual work. For example, the person responsible for purchase accounts also does three days as a delivery driver; the management accountant also delivers goods. There are some jobs where it is accepted that the incumbent must do it almost continuously e.g. buying and acting as representative. Other 'special' functions (e.g. warehouse supervisor or transport manager) may be shared between several members. One member has responsibility for preparing the rota; matching the needs of the business with the work and task preferences of the individual workers.

People continue with their function or functions until they ask to do a different task. When a function becomes vacant a notice is posted and people interested write their names on this notice. The General Meeting, advised by the Personnel Committee, will decide who is most appropriate. Previous experience of similar work may be one criteria for this decision, but members feel that the co-op is willing to give them opportunities to learn new jobs even where they have no previous experience.

The co-operative provides limited training opportunities for members. For most functions this is 'learning on the job' from existing workers. There is limited external training in operating fork-lift trucks, and for Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) driving. The latter - especially HGV class 1

which enables the articulated lorry to be driven - is seen as a great benefit by the members and especially by the women for whom this qualification and driving experience is not common.

Members interviewed generally expressed satisfaction with the work that they were currently doing. However, some were pessimistic about their future in the co-operative, indicating that:-

- i) much of the work was necessarily routine and not very stimulating
- ii) there was a very small number of more stimulating jobs and that opportunities for doing these were limited.

Certainly, it appears that the continued success of the job rotation arrangement depends on the members in the "higher level" less routine jobs, voluntarily returning to other work - or else leaving the co-operative - to make room for movement. Some people described the job rotation process as a career structure where people started in the warehouse, moved into office functions and then on to more highly specialised functions like buying or management accounting. There does appear to be some evidence to support this so that the long-time members have tended to hold the 'higher' functions. Several reasons have been put forward for this -

- * 'higher' functions require a greater knowledge of the business and this is held by longer-serving people
- * once people have obtained these positions they are reluctant to return to full-time routine work
- * the older members are men, and it has been suggested

that men give a higher status to these functions than women do.

In the last year there has been a number of changes in the personnel doing 'higher functions' with the previous incumbents leaving rather than returning to other functions.

5. Pay and Working Conditions

Suma operates a policy of paying all members an equal wage of £100 per week after the deduction of income tax and social insurance payments - a policy of equal net pay. The only additions to this is that workers with children are paid an extra £5.00 per child per week after deductions. The same wage rate is paid to all workers, including temporary and casual workers and non-members, but only £60 is paid to applicants in their trial week.

In the early life of the co-op wages were very low -

1977	-	£35	per	week	net
1978	-	£45	"	"	"
1980	-	£55	"	"	"
1982	-	£100	"	"	"

but after 1982 they were well above what most members might have earned for similar jobs in other companies. For example, the appropriate Wages Council Agreement for 1983 gave the following basic wages -

Warehousemen	-	£73	per	week	gross
Drivers	-	£82	"	"	"
HGV Drivers	-	£89	"	"	"

Since workers could expect about 40% of the gross salary to be deducted for tax and insurance, it can be seen that the Suma basic rate was approximately double the Wages Council rate. However since Suma workers do not get overtime pay and other workers do, the difference may not be so great as it

first seems.

In addition to this, a bonus has been paid at the end of each year. In 1983 this amounted to £200 after tax - equivalent to about 4% of salary. It is hoped to introduce a quarterly bonus based on quarterly trading performance.

Since 1982 there has not been a wage increase and some members are now finding the wage a problem. This is especially so for members supporting families - about 30% of members.

Whereas the wages are clearly still good when compared with manual workers in other firms, they are well below what those people in 'management' functions might expect to earn - although there are few which are directly comparable because most people combine manual or clerical functions with some 'management' functions.

Some members (a clear minority of those interviewed) have suggested that Suma cannot afford to continue the equal pay policy since their competitors are not carrying such high wage costs. However, most members seem committed to equal net pay as a fundamental aspect of collective working.

Suma operates between 8.00am and about 8.00pm - finishing when the last lorry is loaded for the next day's deliveries. The office opens at 9.30am and closes at 5.00pm. Workers have some flexibility over what hours they work although several departments now require workers to cover agreed hours. Everyone has to do a late shift loading lorries, on a rota basis.

Most members interviewed said that they actually worked very long hours - especially in peak periods - and regarded this as self-exploitation. This again was particularly difficult

for people with families and partners - some of whom expressed it as a failure of co-operative principles since Suma was not considering the personal needs of its members to have a 'whole life'. This appears to be true, not only for people with families. A number of other people reported that they had been involved in social/political movements - but now Suma consumed all of their time and energy!

The contractual conditions of employment are similar to those provided by most firms except that there is a more flexible attitude to time - people are able to work 4 day weeks and 9 day fortnights with pro-rata pay. Sick leave and maternity/paternity leave is also generous. There are no time controls and people are expected to discipline themselves.

Welfare provisions are generally good with a canteen facility and a rest room, but rather inadequate washrooms.

There is a non-contributory pension scheme for members.

Several members regarded health and safety provision and training as inadequate. Issues here are -

- * no training in lifting which could prevent back injuries etc.

- * no insistence that people working in the warehouse use safety boots although the co-op provides these free

- * delivery loads may be too heavy and with larger lorries now being used a daily load of 4.5 tons may be put out, compared with 3.5 tons maximum previously.

Nevertheless, there is a health and safety officer appointed and there is increasing consciousness about the

issues involved.

6. Industrial Relations

There is currently no trade union (T.U.) operating at Suma and none of the people interviewed were currently T.U. members. Nevertheless, out of 10 people asked about T.U.s in the interviews, nine had previously been in a union and expressed some keenness to join again, and only one was positively against unions.

There have been four attempts by Suma workers to join the Transport and General Workers (T.G.W.U.). This is Britain's largest union. It is nationally based and covers a number of trades and industries. At a local level it has a regional structure and then numbers of branches in each area, each branch covering workers in one trade or industry - but probably a number of workplaces. On the first three attempts local union officials said they had no place in the union since they were all Company Directors. On the last attempt Suma workers were accepted as T.G.W.U. members but there were problems in finding an appropriate Branch for them to join. Three courses were tried -

- * the T.G.W.U. allocated them to the local "Food and Drink" Branch, but the other branch members are reported to have refused to accept them - being suspicious of the co-operative and how this might compete unfairly with their own employers
- * they tried to form a separate Branch for local co-ops, but there was not enough support
- * they finished up in the 'Voluntary Sector' Branch which Suma members considered completely inappropriate.

As a consequence of this T.U. membership was allowed to lapse.

Members in Suma did not, generally, see a role for a T.U. within the co-operative - since there is no set of 'interests' other than those of the workers. Three reasons were given for joining a union -

- * because both union and co-op could learn from each other - although one member did suggest that co-ops would have to be good union members for a long time (e.g. pay union rates, avoid self-exploitation etc.) before they would be taken seriously
- * to show solidarity with Britain's biggest working-class movement; as a political statement
- * to obtain advice on health and safety, wages and benefits.

Disputes between members e.g. about someone not working enough, or about time-keeping, appear to be dealt with at a personal level. Some members said they would be reticent to do this because they didn't want personal conflicts - but other members seemed unconcerned. It is likely that this way of handling disputes may be less adequate with the present size of the co-operative since personal contact with all members is becoming more difficult.

There is a formal disputes procedure - which is primarily thought of as a disciplinary procedure. This is as follows -

- i) the matter is referred to the Personnel Committee to sort out
- ii) if this fails matters are referred to a Disciplinary

Committee (made up of some members of Personnel Committee) at which the complaint is heard; the person being complained against can bring a supporter to this meeting. It is this Committee that would issue official warnings about behaviour or make dismissals

iii) if the matter is unresolved it can be taken to a General Meeting

iv) if still unresolved the matter is taken to independent arbitration by another co-operative - the decision of the arbitrator is binding on both parties.

This procedure is a modification of an I.C.O.M. Model.

However, disputes do not seem to have gone beyond the first stage and no member of Suma has ever been dismissed, although workers have been dismissed prior to becoming members.

7. Current Issues in Suma

The dominant issue at present is where new premises should be situated. This question of premises has apparently been around for several years, and is seen as seriously handicapping the growth of the business. As an issue it cuts across a number of important themes in the co-op -

- * does the co-op want to grow : if so, how?
- * the financial obligation of new premises will mean that financial performance will have to improve - and this will require better management
- * how does the co-op decide between the interest of the

individual members, and the interest of the business?
: the 'best deal' on a new warehouse is 15 miles from
where most of the members live!

At a special all-day GM in July 1985 it was agreed - by consensus - that Suma would move to new premises 15 miles from their present location. It was also agreed that payments would be made for workers travel costs and any childcare costs that this decision imposed on members.

A second issue is the need to reduce the numbers of hours worked - the self-exploitation. This reflects in part the growing numbers of members with families and other commitments and interests, and in part a recognition that more members are regarding the Suma job as stable future employment - they will get old in Suma. They don't wish to be heroic about wages and conditions forever. The third issue is also linked to this - which is the need to raise income levels, especially for people with families. This is now being looked at by a joint Finance and Personnel Sub-Committee.

8. Suma - the Members Evaluation

- Likes - the people they work with
- control over their own work
 - flexibility of times and jobs
 - chances to move to new jobs and learn new skills
 especially commercial skills
 - being able to be yourself
 - the lack of management structure

Dislikes - the General Meetings and the slow decision-making

- lack of care for broad issues of welfare
- the amount of time it takes either working or recovering from working.

The West Indian Catering Co-op(WICC)

1. Introduction

WICC was formed in September 1984 around an idea developed by one founder member. It currently operates a canteen in a multiple-use workshop (providing meals, snacks and refreshments) in London and uses the base this provides to prepare food for 'outside functions' - including conferences and shows, weddings and parties. They have a very good forward order book.

The co-operative specialises in West Indian foods - predominantly vegetarian - although it has extended its range to include some English and Indian foods and some meat and fish. Pork is never used for religious reasons. The mixed but mainly 'ethnic' menus it offers has played a major part in bringing in business.

The development of the business had three stages -

- (i) 'Testing the market' by running a stall at the Notting Hill Carnival - a major street festival for West Indian people held annually in West London. From this a range of menus were developed and an idea of appropriate price and achievable sales volume was obtained.
- (ii) Preparing food at home for private functions - while two members attended a 16 week Co-operative Enterprise Programme at the Polytechnic of Central London(PCL). This course provided training for people with an idea for a co-operative business.
- (iii) Establishing the 'canteen' base in the present workshop.

The co-operative received advice and support from a local co-

operative development agency (CDA). This was most significant in the early stages when sessions with a development worker helped them clarify the important aspects of the business that they needed to research, and provided a framework for an initial business plan. On the basis of this plan the co-op won a national competition (and cash prize) for the most promising co-operative idea put forward by a person aged under 25, and obtained entry to the PCL course. The competition entry and training programme brought the co-op to the attention of the public authorities and resulted in them being offered not only the canteen opportunity but also catering jobs at conferences and seminars etc. Although they still get some support from this CDA, their canteen is in a different administrative area of London and most support is now being obtained from economic development officers employed by the local council in this area. This includes work to help WICC apply for a new business loan from the Council.

The co-operative has no registered legal structure - and relatively little attention has been given to a legal structure either by the advisers to the co-operative or by the members themselves. The present situation will prohibit them from obtaining loans or grants as a co-operative. It would appear that the original impetus was to establish a business, and the idea of forming a co-operative only arose because they heard they would get advice and public financial support more easily as a co-op than as a private small business. The present intention is to form 'a business' but continue to operate collectively. This conclusion arises from -

- * confusion about the objectives of a co-operative:
seeing these as perhaps non-profit making!
- * a concern by the Founder to retain the role of
Director to make sure the co-op is managed
properly.

However, the implications of ownership involved in being a

private business have not been thought through. Management and control have been the major concerns and these are detailed more fully in Section 2.

Apart from the competition prize, the co-operative has generated its own finance from the trading it has done. Its assets are limited to cooking utensils and a freezer. Working capital is required since many of the functions are invoiced after completion. Cash flow problems arise particularly from doing work with large but sympathetic organisations (like The Greater London Council) whose administrative procedures mean that long delays (possibly up to 4 months) in payment for functions are experienced. The commercial bankers to the co-operative have been helpful in providing overdraft facilities - but have also argued that a co-operative structure would not be appropriate for a business! The major contribution to the working capital requirements of the co-operative has come from the members (together with friends and supporters) working without pay. The turnover of the co-operative is now about £1,500 per month.

The WICC has not kept good financial records - in part because of inadequate advice, training and support, and in part because the member responsible for this did not do the work but refused to relinquish the records! A new set of records was started in July 1985 - ignoring the first 10 months trading.

The co-op currently has six members, mostly of West Indian origin and predominantly women. However, only two of these have worked full-time in the co-operative for more than the last month. Both of these members are single parents with young children who are often around when work is being done - with the members or friends providing childcare within the canteen while the mothers get on with the work. It is intended to develop an improved creche facility in due course.

2. Management and Control

The founder member has the role of Director of the project - a situation that is respected by the other members. Nevertheless, the Director exercises her authority through a process of consultation.

The present situation seems to have arisen because although the Founder invited other people to join the co-operative the people failed to take equal responsibility and at critical times opted out leaving the Founder with serious difficulties - in April 1985 the Founder was left on her own with the full responsibility of running the canteen facility. So the Founder/Director now distrusts the commitment of other members and sees her role as ensuring that the serious business objectives she originally set for the project, are achieved.

The decision making process is basically one where the Director raises issues that need to be decided - most of which are task-related e.g. what menus to prepare, what price to charge, what food needs to be bought. An informal discussion then takes place at which other workers make suggestions and the Director then makes the decision. It would appear that over many issues there is a consensus view but nevertheless the Director is seen as responsible. This process appears to be followed over the full range of issues although, perhaps, the decision of the Director is more overt with one-off decisions about prices, or purchase of equipment, than about task-related issues like menus or food purchasing.

Most discussions take place informally but the co-op does occasionally have a formal meeting with a 'chair' and secretary. It is anticipated that there will be more formal meetings as the size of the co-operative grows.

The Director has some supervisory functions in the preparation of food etc. but carries those out while also cooking etc. There is

no specialisation within the co-operative so that each person gets on with the next task to be done, whether this be 'icing a cake' or 'washing the floor'. Work organisation is thus informal although it has become more efficient over time.

As stated previously the co-operative is unregistered and the overriding concern at present seems to be with control, not ownership. Control, here, has two sides -

- * for the Founder, control is necessary to ensure that the functions within the business get done and that the steps necessary to make it a commercial success are carried out;
- * for the other workers/members this control is seen as 'leadership' of the group, and each of them expressed pleasure in being 'their own boss!'.

There is not a dispute about the rights of the Director to make decisions and there is a willingness to defer to her opinions - in part because she has developed the business to date and in part because of her catering skills. The co-operative works now rather like a family - where both work related and other responsibilities are shared among the members. However, the present arrangements of collective working with a recognised leader may be able to survive precisely because there is no legal registration and issues of ownership have never been raised or resolved. At some point this will be necessary (for example, to obtain public finance or a lease on other premises) and then it will have to become clear whether WICC is a private company with a high level of consultation, or a co-operative with a degree of delegation to a manager. This decision may, in turn, affect the internal dynamics of the workplace, and the commitment of the workers.

3. The People Involved

Of the six 'members' of WICC four are working full-time; one works part-time and has a full-time job elsewhere, and one is on maternity leave. Only the Director remains from the original 'founding' group although four of the other members were friends of the Founder and have known about the project since its inception. Three people have left the project altogether - one being 'pushed out' because of inadequate performance, and two others by personal choice.

Most of the members are of West Indian origin or have connections with the West Indian community in Britain. However, they were all brought up and educated in Britain.

There are currently five women and one man (the part-time worker) involved but the co-op is not seen primarily as a women's project - other men would be welcomed provided they had the skills and commitment. Nevertheless, for a number of the members the project is an important element in their attempts to break out of the social role they might otherwise have. There is an interest in recording their experiences as an example to other women who are trapped at home (by a combination of childcare responsibilities and the disapproval of them working by their partners).

The members are aged between 22 and 26 and each has held a number of jobs previously. These have included clerical and computer work, hospital work, jobs in food take-aways and bars, driving and shop work. One member had set up a catering business before, but that failed because the partners in the business had not taken it seriously. This experience has been useful to the present project by -

- * providing some knowledge of 'the trade';
- * providing an example of the effects of loose collective management - which

reinforces the concern about 'control'
of WICC.

One member had worked in collective situations previously. All felt that their previous work experience was helpful by giving them confidence in dealing with people.

None of the members had experience of higher education although four had some further education. For two of these this had been on a course designed for mature students wanting to progress to higher education. Most members had left school at 16 (the legal minimum age) and one at 14!!

The cooking skills of the members had largely been learnt at home. Several come from large families where they were expected to cook for the family. Cookery classes and some experience working in catering, had supplemented their basic skills. The Founder has a 'flair for cooking' and provides some training for other members. Several members said they would like to get more training both in more specialised cooking like 'cordon bleu' and in presentation of food - 'silver service'.

Two of the present members attended the Co-operative Enterprise Programme at PCL which had given them an appreciation of business skills. The course involved 'placement' in an existing co-operative and this experience seems to have highlighted the differences between theory (what PCL taught) and actual practice (in the working co-op). This placement seems to have reinforced, once again, a belief in the need for control!

4. Pay and Working Conditions

The members of WICC currently work very long hours but - even 10 months into the project - receive no pay.

The hours worked varies with the functions that are being

covered. It appears that most workers attend to the canteen service between about 10.00am and 4.00pm five days per week. In addition to this they will work until midnight and sometimes right through the night on Fridays and Saturdays if they have a 'function' on the following day. So, between 40 and 60 hours per week would be normal. On top of this they will spend time going to buy food from the wholesalers, keeping the financial records or preparing menus and 'estimates'. From this it can be seen that -

- * there is not much distinction made between work-time and own-time;
- * there is not much time for the longer-term business development - like organising a constitution.

Although the members don't get paid, the co-operative does cover some personal expenses and provide food for the members and their families while 'on the job'. Occasionally the co-op will also pay out a small cash sum - perhaps £30, when this can be afforded. It is hoped that in the near future it will be possible to start paying some wages although there is a dilemma about this which is described below.

All of the full-time workers are currently claiming social security benefits which include a cash payment of about £27 per week, plus direct payments to suppliers for rent, power, and local property rates. This enables them to live (at a very modest level) while developing the co-operative. But it also presents a major problem for the co-operative. If WICC wants to pay 'proper' wages then it will have the legal responsibility for deducting taxation and National Insurance (NI) payments from individuals, and paying an employers NI contribution on behalf of each individual. The deductions are likely to amount to between 30% and 40% of each individual's gross salary. If the value of social benefits currently obtained by the full-time members

amounts to about £50 per week, then it can be seen that a minimum of about £70 per week per person must be paid, just to give the members the equivalent of their current real income. On top of this the co-op would have to pay another £8 per member per week as its contribution to NI. So, the co-op and its members are in a 'poverty trap' situation. The business will not survive if a wage of £70 per week is paid - yet if the co-op pays less than this then the workers will suffer a fall in living standards (from an already minimal level!).

There are ways out of the 'trap' for WICC. The government does offer a wage subsidy of £40 per week for one year for each job created by an unemployed person - the Enterprise Allowance Scheme. However, each worker must have available at least £1,000 and be prepared to invest this in the business. The members of WICC do not have any capital in cash and so are ineligible for the Scheme.

The other way out of the 'trap' is to borrow the working capital they need, and repay this loan from profits. It is likely that a Local Council or Enterprise Board would lend them the money. However, the danger in this is that they currently have no financial records which will give them the confidence to know that they can do enough profitable business to pay wages and repay the loan with interest.

The members have expressed a keenness to stop claiming social benefits even if they are no better off : since they are now working long hours for no financial gain, they would not be worse off either! However, can the business stand the cost?

5. Handling Disputes

There have been no serious disputes in recent time although soon after the co-operative started one member was asked to leave (by the other two members) because he was frequently letting them

down. When there are disagreements now, these tend to be over small issues and arise in particular when workers are tired. The disagreements are discussed and not allowed to build up.

6. Conclusion

The main features of WICC are -

- * it was formed by a small group of unemployed people - mostly of ethnic-minority origin - with no previous business experience;
- * only one of this group has had the commitment to continue with the project and she now has a strong leadership function;
- * the co-operative has developed a market for its product but is not making enough money to pay wages : or is creating its own working capital by non-payment of wages - (and they don't know which);
- * it doesn't have a legal structure but has developed a form of participative management, - with a Director;
- * it has generated high levels of commitment from those now involved - and the lack of pay and long hours ensure that new members must have a high level of commitment;
- * it faces a problem of how to get past 'the poverty trap' and be able to pay members a rate that gives them the equivalent real income to the social benefits they are now receiving from the government.

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ITALIAN NATIONAL STUDY

By

Stefano Zan
Associazione Ricerche
Organizzative e Sulla
Cooperazione (AROC)

Il rapporto generale é stato redatto
da Stefano Zan

Gli studi di caso sono stati redatti da:

Franco Bordoni

Simona Ragazzini

Carlo Romanelli

Stefano Toso

Titta Vadalà

A.R.O.C

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il caso italiano"

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of Human Relations.

Coordinatore : Stefano Zan

Hanno collaborato : Franco Bordoni, Marco Cani, Lucio Del Bianco,
Roberto Mallucelli, Simona Ragazzini, Carlo Romanelli, Stefano
Toso, Tittà Vadalà, Walter Williams

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Introduzione generale

Anche se si tratta di un fenomeno piuttosto consistente e consolidato nel sistema politico italiano, non è possibile stimare con precisione il "peso economico" della cooperazione in Italia.

Certo sono disponibili alcuni dati sia a livello nazionale che regionale, sia in generale che per settore, ma questi dati oltre che scarsamente significativi sono poco attendibili.

I dati nella tabella 1 e 2 riportano in assoluto ed in numero indice il numero delle cooperative esistenti in Italia dal 1951. Come si può notare si tratta di circa 100.000 cooperative, che rappresentano certamente una quota ragguardevole.

Ma se scomponiamo i dati scopriamo che oltre il 50% è costituito da cooperative di abitazione (housing coops) che, per loro natura, hanno vita breve e non implicano una "partecipazione" dei soci particolarmente attiva.

Inoltre i dati ufficiali sopra riportati non tengono conto che il numero delle cooperative di per sé è poco significativo in quanto non dà una idea della dimensione dell'impresa, e le stesse cifre non sono attendibili perché molto spesso le cooperative che cessano di esistere non vengono cancellate o vengono cancellate con molto ritardo.

Con queste avvertenze è possibile analizzare i dati della tab. 3 che, per il 1983, presenta la distribuzione del numero di

cooperative per settore e per area geografica.

Una ultima considerazione riguarda la adesione delle cooperative alle "centrali" (umbrella associations). Solo il 40 - 45% delle coops aderisce ufficialmente ad una delle centrali cooperative.

E' convinzione comune, ma non esiste nessuna conferma empirica e nessuna ricerca specifica in argomento, che le cooperative non aderenti non siano rilevanti in quanto poco significative sia da un punto di vista economico che da un punto di vista politico.

E comunque tutto il dibattito e le politiche della cooperazione fanno sempre riferimento alle cooperative aderenti alle centrali. Questo significa che le cooperative alle quali si fa riferimento normalmente sono circa 35-40 mila.

Se da una disamina puntuale di dati scarsamente attendibili che comunque forniamo in allegato, passiamo ad una stima della importanza e del peso della cooperazione nel sistema italiano, conviene fare alcune considerazioni di carattere generale.

Le centrali cooperative ufficialmente riconosciute dal ministero sono quattro: la Confederazione delle Cooperative Italiane (CCI), la Lega Nazionale delle Cooperative Mutue (Lega), L'Associazione Generale delle Cooperative Italiane (AGCI), L'Unione Nazionale delle Cooperative Italiane (UNCI) (di recente riconoscimento - (1982)-).

Tab.1

Società cooperative iscritte nello schedario generale
(consistenza alla fine di ciascun anno)

anni	consumo	prod. e lavoro	agricola	abitaz.	trasp.	pesca	mista	totale
1951	2.930	4.572	1.891	3.602	154	164	1.018	14.331
1952	3.410	4.336	2.199	4.708	170	183	1.100	16.106
1953	3.768	4.241	2.524	5.842	186	206	1.192	17.959
1954	3.971	4.338	3.013	8.039	207	244	1.308	21.120
1955	4.093	4.494	3.356	10.104	241	289	1.422	23.999
1956	4.204	4.617	3.607	11.600	249	323	1.513	26.113
1957	4.352	4.590	3.830	12.922	256	350	1.586	27.886
1958	4.404	4.506	3.987	14.143	251	388	1.562	29.241
1959	4.517	4.607	4.242	15.601	259	417	1.667	31.310
1960	4.591	4.585	4.560	16.106	265	423	1.734	32.264
1961	4.686	4.684	4.960	16.659	288	433	1.790	33.500
1962	4.696	4.759	5.602	17.339	312	443	1.862	35.013
1963	4.718	4.780	6.166	19.100	325	453	1.941	37.483
1964	4.698	4.694	6.881	23.270	332	458	1.984	42.117
1965	4.723	4.669	7.010	26.054	347	452	2.004	45.258
1966	4.690	4.719	7.336	27.122	370	459	2.048	46.744
1967	4.439	4.208	7.887	27.009	385	470	1.918	46.816
1968	4.412	4.256	8.268	27.110	396	488	1.917	46.847
1969	4.359	4.384	8.705	27.621	408	497	1.963	47.937
1970	4.334	4.370	8.943	27.717	433	491	2.009	48.297
1971	4.423	4.626	9.282	28.983	458	494	2.066	50.332
1972	4.015	4.139	8.932	28.576	494	492	1.923	48.573
1973	4.073	4.420	9.532	30.552	610	507	2.103	51.797
1974	4.076	4.860	10.079	33.415	663	526	2.366	55.985
1975	4.171	5.377	10.725	36.361	691	534	2.667	60.526
1976	4.212	5.893	11.287	38.684	732	564	2.980	64.352
1977	4.397	6.696	11.618	39.964	760	568	3.169	66.172
1978	4.592	7.854	12.527	42.424	820	599	4.771	73.587
1979	4.690	9.055	13.313	44.971	877	683	5.432	78.974
1980	4.775	10.140	14.105	47.321	941	682	6.219	84.183
1981	4.442	11.203	14.806	48.794	984	725	7.027	88.383
1982	4.969	12.536	15.622	50.873	1.018	716	7.566	93.671
1983	4.905	13.716	16.062	51.427	1.055	780	8.857	96.802

FONTE: Censis - Ministero del Lavoro.

Tab.2

Società cooperative iscritte nello schedario generale
(numeri indice:base 1951=100)

anni	consumo	prod. e lavoro	agricola	abitaz.	trasp.	pesca	mista	totale
1952	116,4	94,8	116,3	130,7	110,4	111,6	108,1	112,4
1953	128,6	92,8	133,5	162,2	120,8	126,6	117,1	125,3
1954	135,5	94,9	159,3	223,2	134,4	148,8	128,5	147,4
1955	139,7	98,3	177,5	280,5	156,5	176,2	139,7	167,5
1956	143,5	101,0	190,7	322,0	161,7	197,0	148,6	182,2
1957	148,5	100,4	202,5	358,7	166,2	213,4	155,8	194,6
1958	150,3	98,6	210,8	392,6	163,0	236,6	153,4	204,0
1959	154,2	100,8	224,3	433,1	168,2	254,3	163,8	218,5
1960	156,7	100,3	241,1	447,1	172,1	257,9	170,3	225,1
1961	159,9	102,4	262,3	462,5	187,0	264,0	175,8	233,8
1962	160,3	104,1	296,2	481,4	202,6	270,1	182,9	244,3
1963	161,0	104,5	326,1	530,3	211,0	276,2	190,7	261,6
1964	160,3	102,7	363,9	646,0	215,6	279,3	194,9	293,9
1965	161,2	102,1	370,7	723,3	225,3	275,6	196,9	315,8
1966	160,1	103,2	387,9	753,0	240,3	279,9	201,2	326,2
1967	151,5	92,0	417,1	749,8	250,0	286,6	188,4	323,2
1968	150,6	93,1	437,2	752,6	257,1	297,6	188,3	326,0
1969	148,8	95,9	460,3	766,8	264,9	303,0	192,8	334,5
1970	147,9	95,6	472,9	769,5	281,2	295,4	197,3	337,0
1971	151,0	101,2	490,9	804,6	297,4	301,2	202,9	351,2
1972	137,0	90,5	472,3	793,4	320,8	300,0	188,9	338,9
1973	139,0	96,7	504,1	848,2	396,1	309,1	206,6	361,4
1974	139,1	106,3	533,0	927,7	430,5	320,7	232,4	390,7
1975	142,4	117,6	567,2	1.009,5	448,7	325,6	262,0	422,3
1976	143,8	128,9	596,9	1.074,0	475,3	343,9	292,7	449,0
1977	150,1	146,5	614,4	1.109,5	493,5	346,3	311,3	468,7
1978	156,7	171,7	662,4	1.177,7	532,4	365,2	486,6	513,4
1979	160,0	190,5	704,0	1.248,5	569,4	416,4	533,5	557,0
1980	163,0	221,8	745,9	1.313,7	611,0	415,8	610,9	587,4
1981	165,2	245,0	783,1	1.354,6	638,9	442,1	690,3	616,7
1982	169,6	274,2	826,1	1.412,3	661,0	436,6	743,2	653,6
1983	167,4	300,0	849,4	1.427,7	685,1	475,6	870,0	675,4

FONTE: Censis - Ministero del Lavoro

Tab.3

Cooperative dell'Archivio anagrafico iscritte nello Schedario Generale della Cooperazione
al 31.12.1983

REGIONE	SEZIONE								TOTALE	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		Val. assol.	Valori %
	Consumo	Prod. e Lavoro	Agricola	Edilizia	Trasp.	Pesca	Mista Varie	C.R.A. Banche		
PIEMONTE	420	398	622	2.325	20	2	596	19	4.400	4,5
VALLE D'AOSTA	5	10	53	71	-	-	30	1	170	0,2
LOMBARDIA	1.507	1.080	893	7.206	77	20	1.265	113	12.161	12,6
TRENTINO A. ADIGE	290	146	373	582	1	-	253	184	1.829	1,9
VENETO	345	718	1.058	1.845	63	56	322	80	4.527	4,6
FRIULI V. GIULIA	196	298	581	552	5	11	132	40	1.815	1,9
LIGURIA	135	390	217	1.107	17	34	132	-	2.032	2,1
EMILIA ROMAGNA	501	1.000	2.669	1.693	115	23	1.344	63	7.408	7,7
<u>ITALIA SETTENT.</u>	3.399	4.040	6.506	15.381	298	146	4.082	490	34.342	35,5
TOSCANA	434	910	601	3.326	52	28	625	51	6.027	6,3
UMBRIA	65	288	263	565	17	12	56	9	1.275	1,3
MARCHE	117	292	517	1.120	17	35	333	26	2.457	2,5
LAZIO	150	1.192	843	10.684	111	53	692	47	13.812	14,3
<u>ITALIA CENTRALE</u>	806	2.682	2.224	15.695	197	128	1.706	133	23.571	24,4
ABRUZZO	47	279	401	1.208	28	18	113	18	2.112	2,2
MOLISE	8	36	142	251	2	1	15	4	459	0,5
CAMPANIA	117	2.638	1.228	5.631	119	81	360	36	10.211	10,5
PUGLIA	119	802	1.257	4.672	120	92	485	44	7.601	7,8
BASILICATA	29	286	286	865	18	-	85	17	1.586	1,6
CALABRIA	47	318	428	1.671	6	55	107	32	2.655	2,8
<u>ITALIA MERIDIONALE</u>	367	4.359	3.752	14.246	293	249	1.165	151	24.634	25,4
SICILIA	258	1.946	2.781	4.674	233	167	558	85	11.102	11,5
SARDEGNA	75	689	799	1.379	34	90	85	2	3.153	3,2
<u>ITALIA INSULARE</u>	333	2.635	3.580	6.053	267	257	1.043	87	14.255	14,7
<u>TOTALE ITALIA</u>	4.905	13.716	16.452	51.427	1.055	780	7.996	861	56.602	100,0
VALORI PERCENTUALI	5,1	14,2	16,6	53,1	1,1	0,8	8,2	0,5	100,0	

Esistono poi alcune altre associazioni cooperative non riconosciute dal Ministero in quanto di dimensioni ridotte (con meno di 1.000 cooperative aderenti) sulle quali si sa molto poco. Di particolare importanza (come vedremo più avanti) sembra essere il CENASCA che è un organismo che aggrega le cooperative di matrice CISL.

La prima associazione che nasce nel 1886 è la Lega delle cooperative che in quell'epoca era una struttura unitaria che aggregava al suo interno le cooperative promosse dai diversi attori politici che si richiamavano a dottrine liberali, cattoliche, socialiste, repubblicane.

Nel 1919 i cattolici lasciano la Lega e fondano la CCI. Il fascismo scioglie le centrali cooperative e crea una propria struttura autonoma. Nel dopoguerra vengono rifondate CCI e Lega e, nel 1952, social-democratici e repubblicani si distaccano dalla Lega dando vita all'AGCI.

L'UNCI invece è anch'essa di ispirazione cattolica e nasce dal distacco di alcuni dirigenti della CCI.

L'orientamento politico e ideale al quale si rifanno le Centrali cooperative è importante perché non solo sottolinea i legami delle diverse cooperative con la realtà politica (partiti - sindacati, governi - amministrazioni locali) ma anche perché rispecchia i settori di maggior presenza delle singole centrali.

La cooperazione cattolica che ha una concezione essenzialmente comunitaria della cooperazione ha una presenza particolarmente

significativa nel mondo rurale con netta predominanza nel settore del credito (cashe rurali e artigiane) e nel settore agricolo dove aggrega i piccoli proprietari terrieri.

La cooperazione di ispirazione socialista (e comunista) ha viceversa una connotazione decisamente più urbana ed ha i suoi punti di forza nelle cooperative di lavoro ed in quelle di consumo.

La cooperazione di ispirazione repubblicana si caratterizza invece per la sua spiccata concentrazione territoriale, nelle aree tradizionalmente forti del pensiero repubblicano (Romagna e Sicilia).

Legato direttamente alle convinzioni ideali e politiche è il tipo di diffusione della cooperazione. Anche se ormai da molti anni siamo in presenza di un graduale processo di meridionalizzazione è però vero che le cooperative più tradizionali, consolidate, di dimensione economica rilevante, si trovano nelle regioni del centro - nord.

Le regioni più cooperative sono, per la cooperazione cattolica il Trentino e la Lombardia; per quella socialista la Toscana e l'Emilia.

Il tipo di dati oggi disponibili non ci consente una disamina più precisa e attenta.

Se, al di là delle differenze territoriali e di appartenenza, vogliamo provare a stimare il peso economico della cooperazione possiamo dire quanto segue.

Le cooperative hanno una grande rilevanza nel settore agricolo dove aggregano, con strutture a monte e a valle della produzione, numerosissime piccole imprese contadine. Oltre al dato numerico che parla di oltre 16.000 cooperative l'unica informazione diretta che abbiamo è quella di una cooperativa ortofrutticola della Lega di Imola che associa il 50% delle imprese contadine esistenti nel comprensorio.

Nello stesso comprensorio opera una cooperativa della CCI che, in generale ed anche in Emilia Romagna, ha una presenza nel settore agricolo superiore a quella della Lega.

Non sembra quindi azzardata l'ipotesi che ritiene che circa l'80 - 90% delle imprese contadine aderisca ad almeno una cooperativa, realizzando una presenza tutt'altro che marginale.

L'altro settore di grande forza cooperativa è quello del consumo. Se sommiamo il fatturato delle 15 maggiori cooperative di consumo della Lega otteniamo il gruppo più consistente di tutta la distribuzione privata e pubblica italiana.

Nel campo delle cooperative di lavoro una presenza importante è quella nel settore delle costruzioni per il quale fonti cooperative stimano un peso dell'8% rispetto ad imprese pubbliche e private, sottolineando la tendenza delle cooperative di costruzione ad avere una dimensione media molto più elevata di quelle private.

Se in questi tre settori, oltre a quello dell'abitazione in generale e, per la CCI, quello delle casse rurali, la cooperazione ha un peso ed un ruolo nazionale di grande rilievo, in tutti gli altri settori il suo peso, almeno dal punto di vista dell'incidenza economica, è ancora marginale. Ciò nondimeno il dato interessante che emerge è la sua tendenza, negli ultimi 15 - 20 anni, a realizzare iniziative, limitate e significative, in settori non tradizionali (almeno per la cooperazione): trasporti, turismo, cultura, etc.

Gli stessi dati presentati in Tab.1 e 2 danno una idea delle "ondate" di sviluppo cooperativo nel corso degli anni.

I più significativi, oltre a quello del settore delle cooperative miste che è di difficile interpretazione perché è una categoria in buona parte residuale, e tenendo conto anche dei valori assoluti, sono quelli dell'agricoltura e della produzione e lavoro che seguono una crescita significativa negli ultimi anni, a testimonianza, in buona parte, dell'importanza che la cooperazione giovanile ha assunto in epoca recente.

Non deve peraltro confondere il dato contenuto della cooperazione di consumo che ha conosciuto a partire dagli anni '70 una fortissima crescita economica realizzatasi però attraverso processi di fusioni delle piccole cooperative in cooperative a larga base sociale.

Cooperative di lavoro

Se dal quadro complessivo passiamo ad analizzare le sole cooperative di lavoro il discorso non é molto più facile in termini quantitativi.

Le cooperative di lavoro, quelle cioè in cui i soci sono dipendenti ed i dipendenti soci, sono presenti in diversi settori, però non vengono rilevate in maniera distinta dal Ministero.

Per comodità di esposizione utilizzeremo la classificazione proposta dal Tavistock anche se, per l'Italia, costringe a qualche forzatura.

Cooperative tradizionali

Le cooperative di lavoro tradizionali sono presenti oltre che nel settore di produzione e lavoro anche:

nel settore agricolo con le cooperative di braccianti (10.000 soci/dipendenti in Emilia - Romagna per la Lega), nel settore dei servizi, del turismo, della cultura.

La vera forza è in questo caso rappresentata dalle cooperative di costruzione della Lega in Emilia - Romagna, dove operano anche i più grandi consorzi a dimensione nazionale.

Le altre cooperative di lavoro, sono in realtà presenti in settori molto differenziati e diffuse sul territorio (cooperative meccaniche, di vetrai, grafiche, di mobili, etc.) per cui anche

se rappresentano a volte singolarmente importanti realtà aziendali, di fatto hanno un peso limitato nel settore in cui operano.

Due eccezioni rilevanti sono rappresentate dalle cooperative meccaniche che hanno una forte concentrazione a Imola, e dalle cooperative bracciantili che hanno una forte concentrazione in provincia di Ravenna.

Il dato comunque economicamente più rilevante è quello della fortissima concentrazione di cooperative di lavoro tradizionali in Emilia - Romagna (aderenti alla Lega). In questo caso la cooperazione rappresenta una delle componenti principali dell'economia regionale. Nel 1984 l'ufficio studi della Lega sosteneva che ben il 60% del valore aggiunto prodotto da imprese con più di 20 addetti in Emilia Romagna era realizzato da imprese cooperative.

Stime del tutto impressionistiche dei dirigenti della Lega dicono che almeno il 70% della cooperazione di lavoro è concentrato in Emilia.

Dati certi non esistono. Esiste però una ricerca a campione nazionale che mette a confronto i dati di bilancio di alcune cooperative con quelli di imprese private e pubbliche che testimonia dell'importanza e del peso tutt'altro che marginale di molte singole cooperative. (L.N.C.M. 1982;1984)

Le cooperative di salvataggio (Rescue)

Se è vero che molte cooperative oggi considerate tradizionali nascono dal fallimento di aziende in crisi, è però vero che il fenomeno ha assunto una certa consistenza numerica ed uno specifico significato politico solo negli ultimi anni. Non esistono dati quantitativi precisi e specifici. Secondo una ricerca condotta dalla CISL nel 1978-80 esistevano 55 cooperative di questo tipo che impegnavano 4.223 lavoratori.

La maggior parte di queste aziende opera in Lombardia (23) e nel Veneto (20) e nel settore tessile (28) o meccanico (11).

Come segnala la stessa ricerca CISL questi dati non sono da considerarsi esaustivi, bensì indicativi comunque delle realtà più significative.

Essi sottolineano il fatto che questo fenomeno ha riguardato più il nord-Italia che il sud, più la Confederazione (CCI) che la Lega, più la CISL che la CGIL. (AA.VV., 1980)

Il fenomeno però, come spieghiamo meglio in sede di conclusioni è destinato a crescere con l'approvazione (febbraio 1985) di una legge che prevede iniziative per la costituzione di questo tipo di cooperative.

Cooperative emergenti

Le prime avvisaglie di cooperative emergenti si hanno negli anni '70 in particolare ad opera di ingegneri, architetti e medici.

Si tratta di giovani professionisti che da un lato rifiutano sia

la libera professione che l'inserimento in una grande struttura burocratica, dall'altro lato ricercano un modo nuovo e più collettivo di esercizio della professione stessa.

A questo tipo di cooperative (se ne contano nel 1980 circa un centinaio) si affiancano in anni più recenti cooperative più strettamente legate alle attività cosiddette di terziario avanzato ed operanti in particolare nel campo dell'informatica e del software.

Si tratta dunque, generalmente, di cooperative di dimensioni limitate (una decina di soci) con personale altamente scolarizzato e con forme e moduli organizzativi estremamente differenziati. Questo é dovuto al fatto che, trattandosi di una esperienza recente non si é ancora trovato un modello organizzativo ottimale in grado di contemperare esigenze, vincoli posti dalla legge, modalità ottimali di svolgimento dell'attività professionale, caratteristiche strutturali della forma cooperativa.

In realtà ci troviamo di fronte ad un processo di ricerca di nuove modalità di svolgimento dell'attività professionale che non ha ancora trovato una sua codificazione definitiva.

Del resto le stesse centrali cooperative, a tutt'oggi non sembrano dedicare una attenzione particolare a questo tipo di cooperative, tanto é vero che non esiste nessun tipo di censimento e di ricerca che faccia il punto su queste esperienze. Viene comunque considerato da tutti emblematico e significativo il caso della cooperativa Delta che presentiamo nella seconda parte del rapporto.

Cooperative giovanili

Sono un fenomeno significativo e recente che ha avuto impulso a seguito di una apposita legge (n.285) che prevedeva agevolazioni particolari per queste cooperative. Rimandando più avanti le considerazioni sul significato di questo tipo di cooperative e limitandoci in questa sede ad una stima quantitativa del fenomeno possiamo dire quanto segue.

Secondo una indagine campione della Lega del 1979 riferita a 508 cooperative giovanili su un totale (stimato) di circa un migliaio le cooperative si distribuivano per il 40% nel settore agricolo, per il 21% in quello delle produzione e lavoro, per il 15% in quello dei servizi e delle cooperative culturali, con una forte concentrazione al sud.

Infatti secondo il numero di cooperative si hanno:

17,32 % al nord

26,57 % al centro

56,11 % al sud e nelle isole

ed anche la distribuzione del numero dei soci è tendenzialmente omogenea. (Alagia 1980)

I dati del Ministero danno una rilevanza ancora maggiore al fenomeno e parlano di 2.016 coops giovanili con circa 50.000 soci nel 1980. Queste cifre parlano poi di 300 coops con 5.000 soci nel 1983.

Il dato va considerato con molta cautela ma è comunque

significativo della elevatissima mortalità che ha caratterizzato l'esperienza della cooperazione giovanile.

Nel chiudere questo tentativo di fornire una stima del "peso" della cooperazione in Italia, dobbiamo sottolineare ancora una volta la pessima qualità della informazione quantitativa disponibile.

Questo dipende da moltissime ragioni, soprattutto dal fatto che le rilevazioni economico-statistiche di base, spesso incoerenti, saltuarie, inattendibili e non confrontabili, non distinguono mai tra cooperative ed altri tipi di impresa.

Questo ci porta a dire che, anche con supplementi di indagine, non si otterranno, nel breve periodo, risultati molto più significativi.

Le tre centrali cooperative

Le centrali cooperative, che nel gergo italiano vengono definite strutture politico - sindacali (S.P.S.) sono parte estremamente importante della cooperazione italiana.

La loro struttura organizzativa, come risulta dagli organigrammi allegati, è molto simile; per comodità di espansione ci riferiamo, nelle righe che seguono, solo alla Lega delle cooperative, anche se molte delle considerazioni che faremo sono adottabili, con poche modificazioni, anche alle altre centrali.

Le S.P.S. si dividono in due grandi categorie: a) quelle territoriali b) quelle di settore.

Le S.P.S. territoriali associano tutte le cooperative presenti in una stessa area territoriale a livello provinciale, regionale, nazionale.

Le S.P.S. di settore associano le cooperative che operano all'interno di uno stesso settore merceologico a livello nazionale e regionale (e.g. consumo, alimentazione, produzione e lavoro, agricoltura, etc.).

Tutte queste strutture sono associazioni di I $\frac{1}{2}$ grado elette cioè direttamente dai delegati delle singole cooperative nel corso dei congressi ordinari che si svolgono generalmente ogni quattro anni.

Questo significa che la Lega Nazionale non é la federazione delle associazioni nazionali di settore e nemmeno la federazione delle associazioni regionali, bensì é l'associazione diretta delle cooperative operanti in Italia, anche se nei suoi organismi vengono anche eletti dirigenti e funzionari delle associazioni territoriali e di settore.

La struttura organizzativa delle S.P.S. é sempre identica e prevede (sé pure con qualche differenziazione nella terminologia):

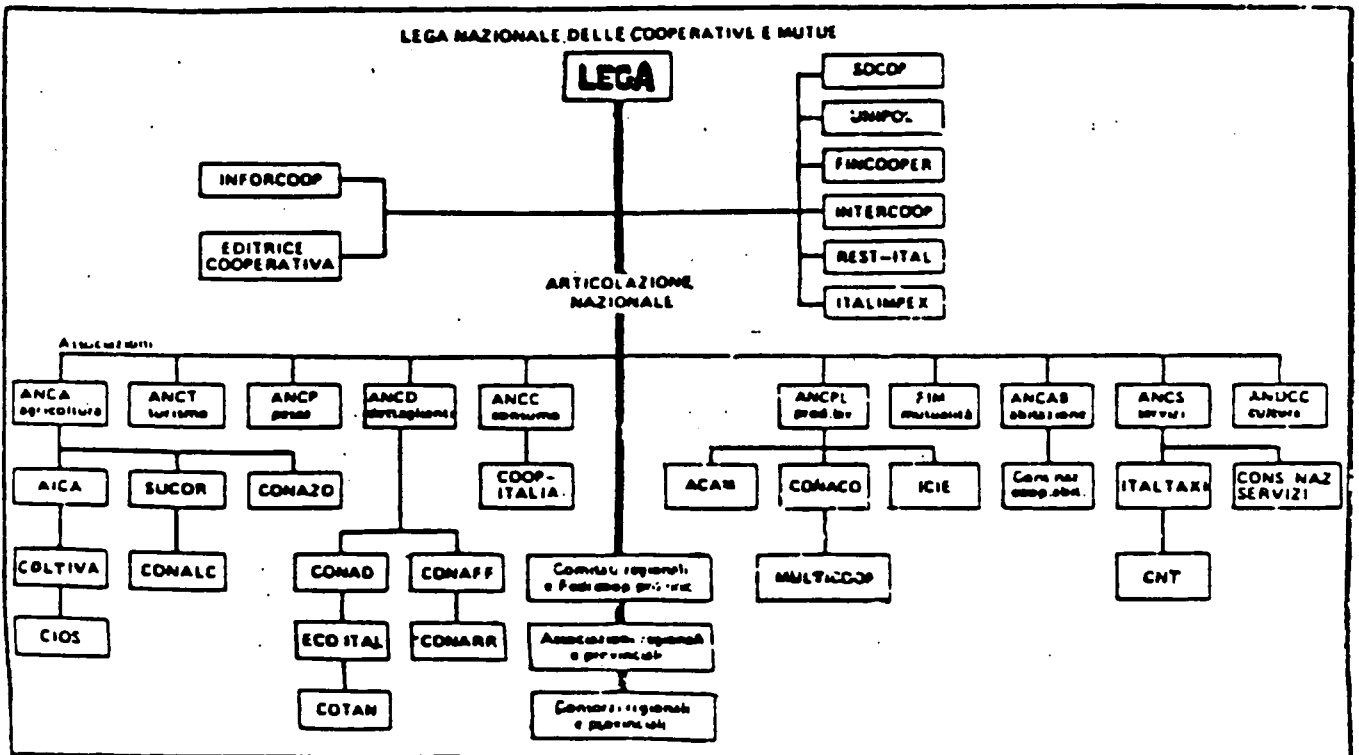
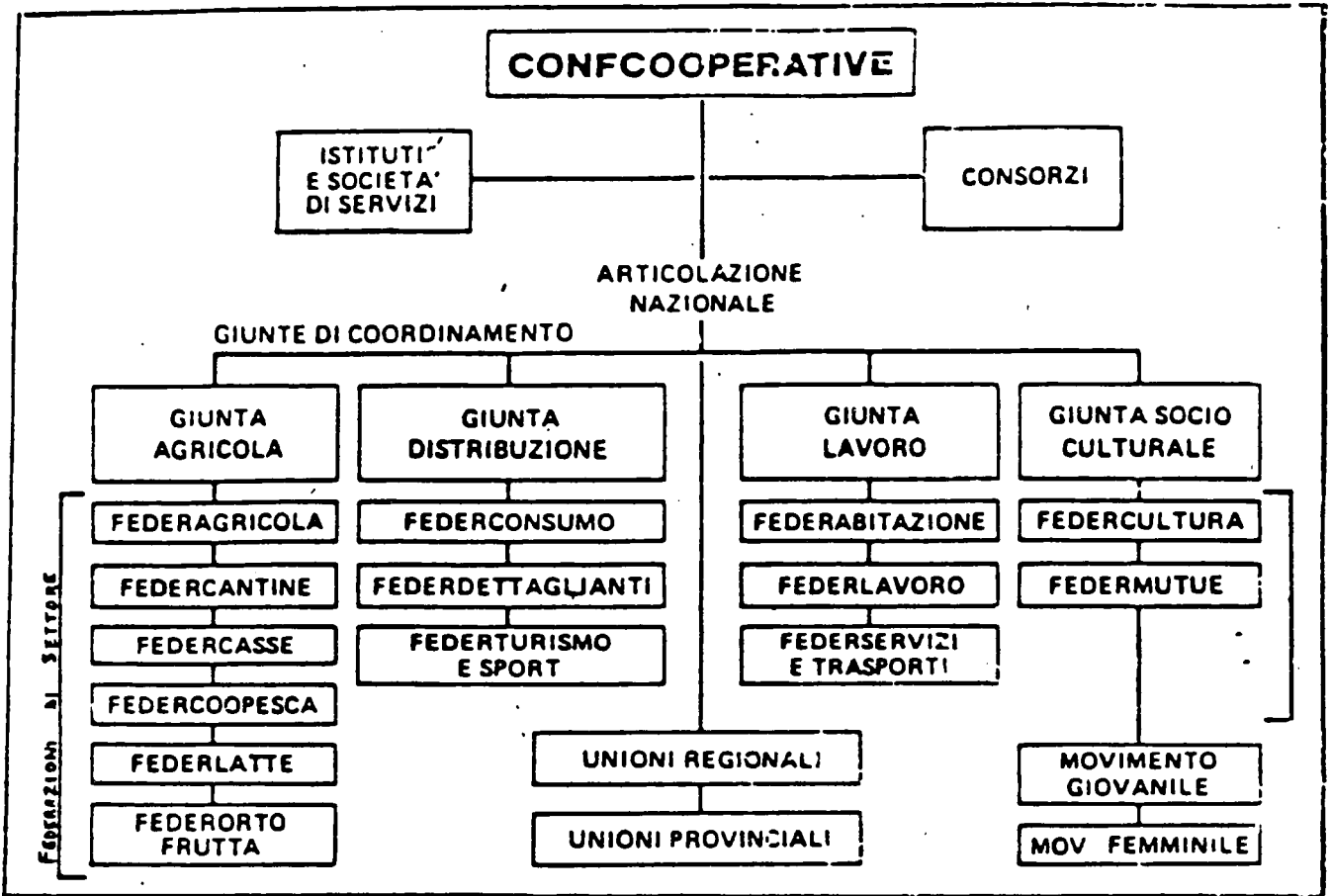
il congresso -- che elegge

l'assemblea generale -- che elegge

la direzione -- che elegge

la presidenza -- che elegge

il presidente



Mentre nell'assemblea e nella direzione sono presenti i delegati (presidenti) eletti dalle cooperative, nella presidenza siedono funzionari a tempo pieno che vengono definiti dirigenti politico-sindacali, vengono retribuiti direttamente dalle S.P.S. di appartenenza e, il più delle volte, provengono da esperienze precedenti all'interno dei partiti e dei sindacati.

Nel caso della Lega i dirigenti politico sindacali si identificano con i tre maggiori partiti (P.C.I.; P.S.I.; P.R.I.) secondo proporzioni stabilite di volta in volta dai congressi, proporzioni che devono venire rispettate nella collocazione di posti di responsabilità di tutte le S.P.S..

Accanto ai dirigenti politico sindacali operano pure dei funzionari, assunti direttamente dalle S.P.S. per lo svolgimento di compiti specifici, più, ovviamente il personale d'ordine (impiegati segretarie, dattilografe, etc.)

Sulla dimensione complessiva della Lega non esistono dati. L'unico dato a nostra disposizione si riferisce alla Lega dell'Emilia-Romagna che nel 1984 contava tra dirigenti, funzionari e impiegati sia territoriali che di settore circa 270 persone.

Le entrate delle associazioni sono rappresentate in via pressoché esclusiva dalle quote associative che le cooperative sono tenute a versare annualmente sulla base di una percentuale del giro d'affari (e quindi non solo in caso di raggiungimento di utile) fissata dai congressi di settore. Questa cifra viene poi ripartita tra le diverse associazioni territoriali e settoriali.

Le funzioni specifiche di ciascuna associazione non sono facili da ricostruire perché in assenza di un "organigramma" e di una precisa divisione di compiti derivante da una analisi organizzativa dell'intero sistema ed in presenza di forti differenze regionali legate a ragioni storiche, è impossibile una ricostruzione dettagliata avente valore universale.

E' possibile però ricostruire alcune linee di tendenza sufficientemente consolidate.

Mentre le associazioni territoriali svolgono funzioni di carattere generalista, le associazioni di settore svolgono funzioni di tipo più specialistico, anche se i verificano casi di sovrapposizioni.

Al di là di questa generale distinzione si possono identificare alcune funzioni proprie delle S.P.S.:

a) rappresentanza degli interessi: funzione propria e tipica di tutte le associazioni consiste in tutte le attività di lobbyng volte ad ottenere le migliori condizioni possibili dall'ambiente esterno (partiti, sindacati, governi locali, banche, parlamento, etc.)

b) funzione di controllo: é una funzione esplicitamente delegata dal Ministero del Lavoro alle centrali cooperative riconosciute e consiste nella revisione biennale dei bilanci delle cooperative associate

c) funzione di assistenza: è una funzione difficile da descrivere in dettaglio per la grande varietà di campi che può coprire e di forme che può assumere.

A titolo di esempio possiamo considerare una Federcoop (associazione territoriale a livello provinciale) dell'Emilia.

Questa attraverso i suoi dipendenti garantisce alle cooperative associate i seguenti servizi:

- fiscale tributario
- finanziario. (contratti con le banche)
- relazioni sindacali
- formazione
- selezione del personale
- legislativo

A volte poi le associazioni anziché erogare direttamente questi servizi alle imprese promuovono la nascita di cooperative, o consorzi, o società per operare ad esempio nei campi della elaborazione dati, della consulenza aziendale, della formazione manageriale.

La ricchezza dei servizi offerti uno degli elementi più significativi di differenza tra la Lega e le altre associazioni imprenditoriali (es. Confindustria)

d) promozione: è una funzione abbastanza recente che vede le S.P.S. operare in modo da promuovere la nascita di nuove cooperative, anziché limitarsi ad associare quelle nate per conto

proprio. La promozione assume particolare rilevanza o in area territoriale a debole presenza cooperativa (Mezzogiorno) o in settori "deboli" (es. turismo)

e) Coordinamento ed indirizzo

E' questa la funzione più complessa e difficile da delineare in quanto é un'attività di tipo politico-economico si manifesta innanzitutto nel coordinamento delle attività economiche delle singole cooperative in modo, ad esempio, da evitare la concorrenza diretta fra due o più cooperative. Questo significa innanzitutto agire come indicatore di conflitti. In secondo luogo significa delineare e proporre linee di sviluppo economico che abbiano rilevanza non solo economica per le singole imprese ma anche una rilevanza sociale, economica e politica complessiva per il ruolo della cooperazione nell'economia nazionale.

Tutto questo si concretizza nella strategia della Lega nel suo complesso, articolata poi per settori, strategia che viene delineata dai congressi e che, ovviamente, comprende ed assume le caratteristiche specifiche dell'agire cooperativo.

Accanto al ruolo delle S.P.S. che meriterebbe ulteriori approfondimenti in termini di ricerca, sia per la sua centralità e rilevanza per comprendere lo sviluppo della cooperazione italiana, sia perché negli ultimissimi anni si sono avviati interessanti processi di trasformazione, un peso altrettanto significativo è quello dei consorzi.

I consorzi a differenza delle S.P.S. sono strutture economiche create da più imprese cooperative al fine di ottenere, collettivamente, condizioni migliori di quanto ciascuna singola cooperativa potrebbe ottenere da sola, anche se non esistono ricerche sistematiche su questo argomento, possiamo però dire che esistono diversi tipi di consorzio.

Innanzitutto variano le dimensioni. Alcuni consorzi operano in ambito locale, altri a livello regionale, altri ancora a livello nazionale.

Esistono poi differenze di settore: costruzioni, consumo, agricoltura.

Una ulteriore tipologia si basa sul rapporto tra consorzio e fase del ciclo produttivo: avremo così consorzi a monte della produzione (ad esempio per gli acquisti collettivi o per la partecipazione a gare d'appalto) e consorzi a valle della produzione (ad esempio per la trasformazione e commercializzazione dei prodotti agricoli).

Già da alcuni anni stiamo segnalando la necessità di sviluppare una specifica ricerca per mettere ordine almeno concettualmente in questa parte così rilevante dell'esperienza cooperativa italiana.

Al momento però possiamo dire che la funzione principale dei consorzi è quella di realizzare economie di scala e aumento del potere contrattuale attraverso la gestione in comune di alcune funzioni che vengono esternalizzate dalle singole imprese. Per denotare la logica attraverso la quale si muovono i consorzi si

parla, in generale di strutture a "costi e ricavi" cioè non orientate a produrre un surplus, bensì orientate a svolgere un servizio in nome e per conto dei propri associati.

Se il consorzio risponde ad esigenze immediate e specifiche delle singole cooperative che si associano, va anche detto che esso svolge contemporaneamente una importante funzione di promozione cooperativa. Una cooperativa appena formata può infatti fin dall'inizio usufruire dei servizi offerti dal consorzio. Ed è proprio in questo spirito che la Lega ha promosso la creazione di un consorzio nazionale in ogni settore in cui opera.

I dirigenti del consorzio, formalmente sono eletti e/o nominati dal C.d.A. che riunisce i presidenti delle cooperative socie più significative, anche se di fatto molto spesso questi sono segnalati ed indicati dalle S.P.S..

Accanto ai consorzi di servizio, esistono anche alcuni casi di consorzi impresa, di strutture cioè che agiscono come vere e proprie imprese, accumulando profitti e non solo erogando servizi alle proprie associate. Esempi di questo tipo li abbiamo nelle costruzioni con il C.C.P.L. di Reggio-Emilia, e nel latte con il C.E.R.P.L. di Bologna.

Se é indubbia la funzione centrale che i consorzi hanno avuto in passato nella crescita della cooperazione italiana, negli ultimi anni si sono manifestate alcune tendenze che inducono alla riflessione.

Alcune delle più grandi cooperative, crescendo hanno riportato al loro interno funzioni che prima avevano delegato ai consorzi,

sostenendo che queste sono essenziali per il loro essere impresa a tutti gli effetti.

Questo da un lato ha creato alcuni problemi a qualche consorzio, dall'altro lato ha dato avvio ad una riflessione su quale dovrà essere in futuro il rapporto corretto tra impresa e consorzio. Senza contare che sempre più spesso viene messo in discussione il criterio dei "costi - ricavi" ritenuto da molti fuorviante rispetto ad una corretta gestione dei consorzi stessi.

Non esistendo un censimento né pubblico né ad opera delle centrali e dei consorzi di cooperative operanti in Italia, a puro titolo indicativo ci limitiamo a fornire le caratteristiche dell'ACAM, consorzio della Lega.

L'ACAM é un consorzio che si occupa di acquisti per le imprese socie in tutti i settori, anche se vi é una netta predominanza del settore delle costruzioni.

Sono socie dell'ACAM 427 cooperative di tutta Italia di cui 313 del settore costruzioni, 81 dei servizi e 33 di vari altri settori.

L'ACAM ha propri uffici decentrati in quasi tutte le regioni e nel 1984 ha realizzato contratti per 650 miliardi di lire.

Stato e cooperazione

Lo stato, dopo avere riconosciuto nell'art. 45 della Carta Costituzionale, l'importanza ed il ruolo sociale della cooperazione, ne regola l'attività attraverso la legge.

Per la verità le norme del codice civile che regolamentano l'impresa cooperativa sono molto simili a quelle che regolano la classica impresa di capitale con alcune rilevanti differenziazioni per quanto riguarda:

- limite minimo numero dei soci (almeno 9 persone)
- partecipazione nel capitale sociale
- amministrazione democratica
- ammissione nuovi soci
- ripartizione degli utili

In particolare la legge prevede che per usufruire delle agevolazioni e/o degli incentivi pubblici le cooperative debbono rispettare il principio della mutualità < 1) divieto di distribuzione degli utili in misura superiore alla ragione dell'interesse legale; 2) divieto di distribuzione delle riserve fra soci durante la vita sociale; 3) devoluzione in caso di scioglimento della società dell'intero patrimonio sociale, dedotto soltanto il capitale versato, a scopi di pubblica utilità>.

Gli incentivi e le agevolazioni possono essere di carattere generale o settoriale.

Nel primo caso si tratta per lo più di agevolazioni fiscali e

tributarie, oppure della possibilità di accesso ad un fondo di rotazione, costituito presso la Banca Nazionale del Lavoro.

Nel secondo caso si tratta di incentivi diretti previsti dalle politiche pubbliche nei diversi settori, quali l'abitazione, l'agricoltura etc., che sarebbe troppo lungo richiamare in dettaglio.

Senza contare che, sia sul piano generale che su quello di settore, operano anche le regioni, le quali tutte prevedono comunque una politica specifica di promozione cooperativa.

Non esistono studi approfonditi che consentono di valutare l'incidenza della politica pubblica sulle prestazioni economiche della cooperazione.

Anche se gli industriali parlano di agevolazioni eccessive, sul piano normativo e fiscale, sembrano convincenti le argomentazioni dei dirigenti cooperativi che sottolineano, a fronte di pochi e risibili privilegi, forti limiti, anche questi di legge, che di fatto impongono la sottocapitalizzazione delle cooperative.

La politica governativa nei confronti della cooperazione ha avuto elementi fluttuanti fin dall'inizio del secolo, testimoniati anche da una specifica produzione legislativa.

Negli ultimi anni sono di particolare significato due leggi. La prima dell'83 che consente di aumentare la quota di capitale che ciascun socio può versare. (Passata da 4 a 30 milioni per persona)

La seconda del 1985 che da un lato istituisce un fondo di rotazione per la promozione e lo sviluppo della cooperazione,

dall'altro lato istituisce un fondo speciale per dare contributi ai lavoratori di aziende in crisi che si costituiscono in cooperativa (cosiddetta legge Marcora).

Su questo tema si é sviluppato un acceso dibattito sia tra i partiti, ma più ancora tra le centrali sindacali e quelle cooperative.

Da un lato la CISL, il sindacato cattolico che si batteva perché il sindacato gestisse in prima persona e con proprie strutture tali fondi e fosse anche coinvolto direttamente nella promozione di nuove cooperative.

Dall'altro lato la C.G.I.L. il sindacato a maggioranza comunista che sosteneva il non coinvolgimento diretto del sindacato nella gestione dei fondi che dovevano viceversa essere gestiti dalle centrali cooperative o comunque da un ente pubblico.

Le forme organizzative dell'autogestione

In primo luogo possiamo affermare che la cooperazione rappresenta l'unico settore dell'economia in Italia in cui il tema della partecipazione del lavoratore alla vita dell'azienda costituisce contemporaneamente un valore specifico e caratterizzante e nel contempo un campo di sperimentazione concreta.

Difatti il sindacato italiano, almeno fino a tempi recentissimi, non solo non ha mai praticato concretamente, ma di fatto ha anche respinto sul piano ideologico, ogni forma più o meno diretta di coinvolgimento dei lavoratori nella vita dell'azienda, preferendo un ruolo di controparte in una logica di tipo negoziale-contrattuale. Anche nei confronti della cooperazione la posizione del sindacato è piuttosto timida.

In particolare la GGIL non ha mai spinto verso la creazione di cooperative per risolvere crisi aziendali, sostenendo che "la creazione di una cooperativa indebolisce l'unità di classe e trasforma i lavoratori in padroni" (AA.VV, 1980).

Pur se la posizione del sindacato comincia lentamente a modificarsi a partire dagli inizi degli anni '80, è certamente vero che l'unica esperienza significativa di partecipazione dei lavoratori alla vita dell'azienda, è rappresentata dalla cooperazione.

Detto questo bisogna riconoscere però che la valutazione della "partecipazione cooperativa" è avvenuta fino ad oggi più sul

piano ideologico e del dover essere che non sulla base di un'attenta e sistematica ricostruzione empirica.

Non esiste alcuno studio specifico su questo tema che analizzi il problema nella sua interezza, con riferimento ad un campione statisticamente significativo di cooperative partendo da un framework concettuale esplicito e condiviso.

Le fonti alle quali attingere per rilevare evidenze empiriche sono le più disparate:

- studi di caso
- convegni e seminari
- documenti congressuali
- osservazione partecipante
- interviste più o meno strutturate
- tesi di laurea

Sulla base di questa premessa possiamo dire quanto segue con riferimento prima alle strutture formali di partecipazione, e poi a quelle informali.

Le strutture formali di partecipazione

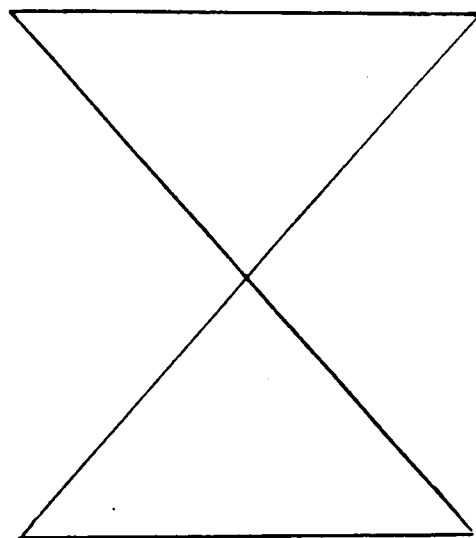
La struttura a clessidra

Tutte le cooperative rispettano gli adempimenti statutari e le norme legislative per quanto riguarda:

- assemblea annuale dei soci sul bilancio
- elezione del consiglio di amministrazione

- principio di una testa un voto

Per tutte le cooperative possiamo dunque parlare di una struttura formale di partecipazione a clessidra



Assemblea dei
soci

C.d.A.

Presidente

D.O.

Struttura
produttiva

in cui la dimensione sociale si realizza attraverso meccanismi elettorali di rappresentatività (elezioni del consiglio di amministrazione) e attraverso partecipazione assembleare (approvazione annuale del bilancio).

Su questa struttura puramente formale che consente di parlare di "partecipazione di azionisti" si sono sviluppati in molti casi esperienze di qualificazione della partecipazione che possiamo riassumere in:

- maggior numero di assemblee rispetto a quelle previste dalla

legge incentrate sostanzialmente su: a) verifica periodica sull'andamento della cooperativa; b) presentazione e discussione di piani poliennali di sviluppo.

Possiamo dire ad esempio che quasi tutte le cooperative di lavoro realizzano dalle tre alle quattro assemblee generali dei soci nel corso di un anno

- articolazione della assemblea generale in assemblea di zona, di reparto, basate quindi su sezioni soci che consentono una partecipazione più diretta grazie ad una condizione di piccoli numeri

- creazione di commissioni sociali quali espressione del C.d.A. che coinvolgono però altri soci su temi specifici della vita dell'azienda quali:

commissione finanziaria

" personale

" commerciale

" sociale

etc.

con compiti essenzialmente di istruzione e approfondimento di scelte che dovranno essere assunte dal C.d.A. Questo è quanto emerge con chiarezza da una tesi di laurea sulle strutture di partecipazione di una cooperativa di grandi dimensioni di Imola e da una ricerca condotta da Carboni sull'Edilter di Bologna (Carboni 1979).

Ma è del resto una strutturazione comune a molte altre cooperative.

- tentativi di "traduzione" in linguaggio più semplice del

bilancio che deve essere discusso e approvato dall'assemblea dei soci. Ad esempio la Coopsette di Reggio Emilia, grande impresa di costruzioni, ha predisposto un bilancio a fumetti, per presentarlo con maggior chiarezza e semplicità ai suoi soci, nel corso delle assemblee.

Tutti questi elementi, presenti singolarmente o congiuntamente in numerose cooperative di lavoro, sono un modo per rendere meno formale la partecipazione dei soci alla vita dell'azienda così come prevista dalla legge.

Possiamo altresì dire che nella maggioranza dei casi questo risolve il problema della partecipazione formale dei soci.

L'altra faccia della clessidra è rappresentata dalla struttura produttiva articolata in livelli gerarchici, funzioni, compiti del tutto analoghi a quelli delle imprese private, con chiara attribuzione dei compiti e delle responsabilità secondo uno schema rigidamente gerarchico e senza nessuna partecipazione dei lavoratori a livello di job. In un convegno pubblico tenutosi a Bologna nel 1982, un dirigente sindacale della CISL sosteneva con molto vigore che "non esisteva nessuna differenza tra la catena di montaggio di una cooperativa, e quella di una impresa privata"

Al di là dell'impianto formale tipico della maggior parte delle cooperative di lavoro, non esistono dati e informazioni precise circa il grado di partecipazione che si realizza a questo livello.

Sulla base delle evidenze empiriche disponibili possiamo dire

quanto segue.

Il grado di partecipazione dei soci a queste assemblee ha una grande variabilità.

Alcune cooperative realizzano le assemblee fuori orario di lavoro e registrano presenze significative (in alcuni casi dell'ordine del 90% dei soci). Questo sembra essere il caso soprattutto delle cooperative dell'imolese.

Altre cooperative hanno meccanismi formali di controllo della presenza dei soci: un numero eccessivo di assenze porta, ad esempio, alla perdita della qualità di socio o ad una riduzione del ristorno (In questo senso si muove ad esempio la C.M.B. di Carpi).

Altre cooperative pur realizzando l'assemblea fuori orario di lavoro incentivano la presenza dei soci con l'organizzazione, al termine dell'assemblea, di un pranzo o di una festa sociale. (C'è il caso di una grossa cooperativa che sorteggia fra tutti i partecipanti un viaggio premio per due alle Seychelles !!!)

La maggior parte delle cooperative però organizza le assemblee in orario di lavoro per garantirsi la presenza dei soci.

Ancora più difficile è valutare il ruolo della partecipazione a queste assemblee.

Si può certamente parlare: a) di una funzione informativa dell'assemblea in presenza di decisioni fortemente strutturate e difficilmente modificabili; b) di verifica del consenso dei soci nei confronti del vertice; c) di espressione di problemi specifici che stanno a cuore ai soci (es. occupazione - cassa

integrazione - salario). Da una ricerca a campione sui dirigenti delle cooperative della Lega dell'Emilia-Romagna (C.R.e.S.O 1983) emergeranno questi dati rispetto al ruolo delle assemblee, delle assemblee preparatorie, delle commissioni sociali.

Alla domanda: "Qual'è il ruolo svolto da.... nel prendere le decisioni ? si avranno le seguenti risposte:

Commissionari	Assemblea	Assemblee	
		parziali	sociali
Proposta	5.3 %	15.5	20.0
Espressione pareri tecnici	0.8	11.6	47.7
Decisioni di fatto	13.6	2.0	1.6
Presa d'atto	19.3	13.1	3.1
Ratifica	46.9	2.8	4.2
Valutazione-discussione	14.2	55.0	25.5
	<hr/>		
	100 %		

Questi dati, se da un lato confermano il diverso ruolo giocato dai diversi tipi di assemblea, confermano però anche che il potere decisionale reale è assai limitato.

Non si hanno notizie di assemblee che si sono rifiutate di votare il bilancio, mentre si hanno notizie di assemblee (rare) che non hanno rieleto i vecchi dirigenti anche se questi venivano

riproposti dal C.d.A. uscente, così come si hanno notizie (rare) di assemblee di soci autoconvocati che richiedevano precise spiegazioni e impegni agli organi dirigenti. Le informazioni di questo tipo sono esclusivamente verbali e ripesano su confidenze riservate di singoli dirigenti cooperativi, ma non sono assolutamente documentate in forma scritta.

Complessivamente possiamo dire però che nella maggior parte dei casi l'assemblea si risolve in una pratica ritualistica di affermazione del consenso al gruppo dirigente eletto. Questo del resto è la conclusione alla quale giunge anche Carboni nella già citata ricerca.

Nella stragrande maggioranza dei casi la partecipazione sostanziale si risolve nel processo di delega attraverso l'elezione dei consiglieri di amministrazione e si gioca tutta nel rapporto tra C.d.A. (membri eletti) e D.O. (managers assunti).

Ma su questo punto torneremo più avanti.

La struttura a clessidra ribaltata o struttura per comitati

In alcuni casi (il discorso vale in particolare per le cooperative della Lega di grandi dimensioni - es. principale la C.M.C.) le cooperative, non soddisfatte della partecipazione

basata sulla forma a clessidra, hanno proceduto ad un ribaltamento della clessidra cercando



di affiancare alla struttura produttiva una struttura sociale di partecipazione basata su compiti sociali.

Per ciascuna unità produttiva dell'azienda, guidata da un capo inserito formalmente nella 'line', è presente un comitato soci eletto dai lavoratori di quella specifica unità.

In questo caso i compiti del comitato sono di confronto con il capo e di controllo del suo operato su temi in questo caso molto più legati alla attività produttiva e quindi alla organizzazione del lavoro.

Si tratta quindi di una struttura formale di partecipazione estremamente complessa ed articolata che coinvolge un numero assai elevato di soci (solitamente operai qualificati) che fa capo per le sue attività ad una "direzione sociale" o, il più delle volte, alla funzione soci-personale dell'azienda.

Nella realtà anche in questo caso non si hanno riscontri sistematici sul funzionamento di questo meccanismo.

Sembra funzionare soprattutto su meccanismi di valutazione formale delle prestazioni dei singoli lavoratori (quindi qualifiche e retribuzioni - carriere) con scarsa incidenza però sui temi legati all'organizzazione quotidiana del lavoro ed al modo di produrre.

La struttura per comitati è probabilmente più importante per il tipo di consapevolezza che esprime, per la volontà esplicita di allargare anche formalmente la partecipazione dei soci che non per i risultati che essa produce. Molti di questi comitati vengono istituiti ma poi di fatto non sono in grado di funzionare ed operare nel tempo nonostante il supporto dell'ufficio soci-personale.

Ci sembra inoltre di rilevare, sul piano ideologico, una impostazione basata sul principio del controllo "politico" dei lavoratori sull'operato dei capi (tecnici e managers) che se indubbiamente fa parte della tradizione e della cultura operaia, è in realtà poco capace di cogliere le dinamiche reali tra capi e subordinati.

Su questo tema si sta aprendo un importante dibattito sul movimento cooperativo anche se al momento siamo solo agli inizi della riflessione.

La struttura assembleare

Esistono anche casi in cui la partecipazione dei soci si esprime formalmente a livello assembleare e cioè tutte le decisioni significative vengono prese dall'assemblea dei soci che si incontra con frequenza elevata.

In realtà è difficile dire quanto la struttura assembleare sia diffusa.

Certamente riguarda:

- cooperative di piccole dimensioni
- il più delle volte formate da giovani
- oppure cooperative di salvataggio
- il più delle volte nella fase iniziale del loro sviluppo.

In questo caso la convinzione ideologica radicale gioca un ruolo determinante nel rifiuto del principio della delega.

Molte cooperative giovanili prendono avvio su questo schema rifiutando anche il principio della suddivisione dei ruoli e puntando viceversa ad una rotazione dei ruoli. Non si conoscono però casi di successo sedimentati nel tempo ed il più delle volte anche le cooperative giovanili, nel corso della loro esistenza, si riavvicinano alla struttura tradizionale mantenendo peraltro una maggiore frequenza di assemblee.

Discorso analogo vale in molti casi anche per le cooperative di salvataggio in cui il clima di lotta e di solidarietà tende a mantenersi anche dopo l'avvio della gestione cooperativa in considerazione del fatto che molto spesso i managers di professione se ne sono andati e si cerca di ovviare alla mancanza di competenze specifiche con il coinvolgimento solidale di tutti.

Anche in questo caso sembra trattarsi di una fase (iniziale) del ciclo di vita che poi si assesta su uno schema più tradizionale.

Una importante eccezione è rappresentata da una cooperativa di tipografi di Verona (la C.L.G.) che opera con successo ormai da quasi dieci anni e che mantiene una struttura decisionale assembleare, con l'assemblea che si riunisce ogni settimana e con una struttura retributiva assolutamente egualitaria.

Una recente e interessante ricerca condotta dalla Fondazione Corazzin su 9 cooperative del Veneto e della Lombardia (coop rescue e emergenti) hanno permesso di individuare due tipologie di coalizioni che hanno svolto un ruolo centrale e propulsivo al momento della fondazione della cooperativa.

Il fatto che una cooperativa sia nata su pressione di una "coalizione pura" oppure di una "coalizione mista" ha delle forti implicazioni su tutto il comportamento successivo dell'impresa e quindi anche sulle modalità di partecipazione:

La tipologia a "coalizione pura" rappresenta una compagine che genera potenzialità rispetto all'obiettivo sociale che costituisce la vera scommessa e motivazione. Tratti caratteristici sono:

- forte egualitarismo nelle condizioni di lavoro, prevalenza iniziale del "ruolo di socio" sul ruolo di "prestatore di opera";
- patto sociale fondativo basato appunto sull'egualitarismo e sul controllo reciproco;
- legittimazione della leadership iniziale su base politica (garante del patto fondativo);
- scarsa divisione funzionale ed approssimatività nella identificazione dei ruoli e delle responsabilità produttive-gestionali;
- forte appiattimento gerarchico, scarso peso dei controlli esterni, fattori insiti nel patto fondativo; assenza di diritto alla sanzione se non da parte dell'assemblea;
- scarsa formalizzazione degli organi e del gruppo dirigente;
- stretto controllo di coerenza con il patto fondativo, sui

processo decisionali relativi alle scelte strategiche;

- irrilevanza dei processi decisionali relativi alle scelte sulle condizioni di lavoro in quanto già preconfigurati nel patto fondativo;

-attenuazione del conflitto per salvare la compagine.

La tipologia a coalizione mista rappresenta invece una compagine con elevata potenzialità rispetto all'obiettivo dell'efficienza economica, in parte a scapito di una dinamica sociale più partecipativa.

Tratti caratteristici sono:

- diversificazione, più o meno rilevante, dei ruoli ricoperti inizialmente; prevalenza del ruolo di "prestatore d'opera" su quello do socio;

- patto sociale fondativo sulla difesa dell'occupazione e su sotto obiettivi diversificati a seconda del ruolo ricoperto;

- legittimazione della leadership prevalentemente sulla base della competenza tecnica;

- divisione funzionale già presente nella fase di avvio e potenziata poi;

- formalizzazione del gruppo dirigente con ampia delega da parte dei soci;

- appiattimento gerarchico, diminuzione dei controlli diretti;

- accentramento del potere decisionale nel gruppo dirigente, che egemonizza il C.d.A., o separamento dello stesso fra diversi organismi configurati secondo un principio di poliarchia;

- scarsa partecipazione ai processi decisionali relativi alle scelte strategiche;
- rilevanza dei processi decisionali relativi alle scelte sulle condizioni di lavoro;
- conflitto periodicamente emergente sotto forma di parziali contrapposizioni al gruppo dirigente.

Le due tipologie sembrano dunque quasi antitetiche:

- elevato egualitarismo, partecipazione, controllo reciproco, indeterminazione dei ruoli, scarsa capacità strategica ed insufficienza nel primo caso;
- forte differenziazione, ampia delega, dialettica dei poteri (in qualche situazione) e rilevante capacità strategica nel secondo.

Il modello interpretativo fornito da questa ricerca è estremamente stimolante e soggettivo. Purtroppo il numero ed il tipo dei casi ai quali si riferisce non è sufficiente per una generalizzazione più complessiva.

Si tratta comunque di una ipotesi di ricerca che meriterebbe di essere ulteriormente verificata.

Prima di chiudere l'analisi delle strutture formali di partecipazione occorre fare riferimento ad una esperienza in corso (la C.M.B.) di Carpi che, pur operando isolata, a quanto ci risulta, è particolarmente significativa per il grado di

innovatività.

Si tratta di una cooperativa tradizionale (costruzioni) fondata agli inizi del secolo, con circa un migliaio di soci dipendenti, che ha avviato da circa due anni un processo di ricerca-intervento per ridefinire le modalità di partecipazione ai soci e che mira a realizzare un meccanismo di coinvolgimento attivo dei soci migliorando sia il funzionamento della struttura a clessidra sia realizzando forme di M.I.D. a livello delle unità produttive, senza passare attraverso una struttura per comitati. Per quanto il caso sia al momento isolato (ma già si pensa di estendere la ricerca-intervento ad altre cooperative) è particolarmente significativo per i temi che consente di toccare e quindi lo affronteremo nella seconda parte del rapporto nell'ambito dei case-studies.

Struttura informale di partecipazione

Le evidenze empiriche su questa dimensione sono ancora più lacunose e dobbiamo perciò limitarci a considerazioni di carattere generale ed il più delle volte impressionistiche.

Un primo dato che emerge dalle poche e frammentate ricerche disponibili è che mediamente esiste una esplicità anche se non entusiastica soddisfazione a lavorare in cooperativa.

I singoli soci intervistati in diverse occasioni dichiarano sempre che "comunque in cooperativa si sta meglio che in impresa

privata".

Ma si tratta il più delle volte di una percezione generale e indefinita legata più al clima organizzativo, all'atmosfera, che non a condizioni specifiche, salvo forse la sicurezza del posto di lavoro.

In questo caso giocano e giocavano soprattutto in passato, i rapporti faccia a faccia, la comune provenienza geografica e professionale, la comune identificazione partitica e sindacale.

Per quanto sia difficile da stimare esattamente non c'è dubbio che l'esistenza dei meccanismi e delle scadenze elettorali porta ad intrattenere relazioni tra i possibili eletti e gli elettori che tendono a rinforzare i legami di rappresentatività.

Così come è certamente vero che il C.d.A. è sempre fortemente preoccupato di mantenere legami con i soci e spesso richiede un livello di partecipazione e di presenza molto più elevata di quanto i soci stessi sono disposti ad esprimere.

I problemi particolari sorgono in questo caso (soprattutto nelle cooperative tradizionali) con riferimento alle nuove figure (giovani - tecnici - impiegati) che, non avendo vissuto tutte le fasi di sviluppo delle cooperative e presentando caratteristiche socio-anagrafiche e professionali diverse, tendono inevitabilmente a non riconoscersi nei rapporti faccia a faccia e nella tradizionale cultura dell'azienda.

A questo proposito possiamo rilevare una profonda differenza e sul piano ideologico e sul piano dell'esperienza concreta tra Lega e Confederazione.

Mentre la Confederazione sostiene che la partecipazione è possibile solo in cooperative di piccole dimensioni, la Lega sostiene che è possibile partecipare anche in presenza di grandi numeri.

Per gli uni la dimensione è un vincolo strutturale alla partecipazione, per gli altri è un vincolo apparente: attraverso una adeguata strutturazione organizzativa delle forme di partecipazione si può realizzare una partecipazione qualitativamente superiore dei soci.

Senza entrare nel merito di questa disputa, ormai vecchissima nel dibattito sulla cooperazione in Italia, possiamo dire che però ha rappresentato una delle basi più importanti per realizzare processi di sviluppo profondamente diversi tra Confederazione e Lega.

Mentre la Confederazione ha puntato a cooperative di piccole dimensioni realizzando così una struttura stellare, la Lega ha puntato su cooperative di medio-grandi dimensioni, realizzate attraverso processi di fusione, dando vita ad una struttura più integrata.

Se questo è innegabile sul piano delle realizzazioni concrete (dimensioni delle aziende) non esiste peraltro alcuna ricerca comparativa sugli effetti delle dimensioni sulla partecipazione ed il dibattito si sviluppa esclusivamente sul piano dei principi.

Non si può poi trascurare che lo sviluppo geografico e a macchia di leopardo della cooperazione ha di fatto esso stesso creato le condizioni strutturali favorevoli ad un tipo di evoluzione

(stellare) o all'altro (integrato).

Sempre a livello informale un ruolo estremamente importante è giocato dalla identificazione partitica e sindacale.

Non solo tutte le cooperative hanno una forte e specifica connotazione politica ma la struttura del partito o dei partiti e del sindacato è quasi sempre attiva ed operante all'interno della azienda.

Nel caso della Lega ad esempio esistono cooperative in cui tutti i dipendenti (compresi tecnici e managers) sono membri dello stesso sindacato (C.G.I.L.) e sono nel contempo membri più o meno attivi dello stesso partito.

Accade così che le questioni di maggiore rilievo per la vita delle aziende vengono discusse contemporaneamente a livello di struttura partecipativa della cooperativa, a livello di sezione sindacale, ed a livello di sezioni di partito, in cui i singoli giocano ruoli diversi e la loro presenza, autorevolezza ed autorità assume anche connotazioni diverse.

Nel caso della CCI assume invece più rilevanza il contatto ed il rapporto personale con alcuni dirigenti di partito che in molti casi sono stati promotori di cooperative.

I rapporti con il Management

Come abbiamo visto, nella maggioranza dei casi la partecipazione si esprime attraverso la delega ai consiglieri eletti dall'assemblea dei soci.

A questo punto diventa cruciale il rapporto tra consiglieri eletti e managers professionali.

Si tratta certamente di un tema di cruciale importanza che riguarda soprattutto le cooperative tradizionali e che è venuto assumendo particolare rilievo mano a mano che le cooperative si consolidavano, avevano successo sul mercato ed avevano quindi bisogno di figure altamente professionalizzate.

I due vertici della clessidra sono rappresentati dal presidente della cooperativa (eletto) e dal direttore generale (nominato), il primo rappresentante della struttura sociale, il secondo rappresentante della struttura produttiva.

Il rischio di una rottura tra le due dimensioni rappresenta una delle maggiori preoccupazioni, ed ha dato vita a diverse iniziative volte ad affrontare questo problema.

In particolare la Lega ha puntato nelle sue cooperative a unificare i vertici delle clessidra nella figura del "presidente operativo" cioè del presidente che svolge anche compiti di direttore generale e presiede oltre che il C.d.A. anche la D.O.

C.d.A. e D.O. tendono ad incontrarsi con molta frequenza ed i membri della D.O. partecipano senza potere di voto ai lavori del C.d.A..

La tendenza prevalente nelle cooperative della CCI è di far diventare socio il direttore generale che, in un secondo tempo, può poi divenire anche presidente.

Ma l'identificazione dei managers nei valori delle cooperative viene ricercata in primo luogo attraverso il processo di

socializzazione dei managers stessi.

Questi sempre più spesso provengono da imprese private, anche se le cooperative preferiscono fare crescere i dirigenti al proprio interno, ma comunque, il più delle volte, hanno orientamenti politici analoghi a quelli prevalenti nella cooperativa. Molto spesso vengono ricercati e selezionati in prima istanza dalla S.P.S. che garantisce una certa affinità elettiva sul piano culturale e politico.

In termini sostanziali non c'è dubbio però che il ruolo dei managers di professione nei processi decisionali delle cooperative diventa sempre più preponderante.

In parallelo si sviluppa una tendenza ad eleggere nel consiglio di amministrazione non più gli operai bensì gli impiegati ed i tecnici più qualificati al fine di realizzare una sorta di bilanciamento di poteri basato non solo sui ruoli formali ma anche sulle competenze specifiche.

Da una ricerca svolta per conto della Lega nel 1983, ricerca a campione sui dirigenti cooperativi dell'Emilia-Romagna emerge:

- che non esiste una drastica spaccatura tra membri del C.d.A. e della D.O.
- che le differenze esistenti, significative sul piano delle caratteristiche socio-anagrafiche, sono meno pregnanti e significative sul piano dei valori generali.
- che tutte e due le figure hanno un forte orientamento all'azienda, al ruolo dell'efficienza e del successo sul mercato, anche se questo è prevalente per i D.O.
- che comunque anche i D.O. tendono a differenziarsi quanto ad

orientamento di valore rispetto ai managers dell'impresa privata e si sentono fortemente identificati con il movimento cooperativo manifestando peraltro un atteggiamento più professionale che sociale. Alla domanda "Se domani per una qualsiasi ragione dovesse cambiare lavoro quale sceglierebbe ? ben il 61% dei membri delle Direzioni Operative - quindi managers di professione - rispetto al 52,3% dei membri (eletti) di Consigli di Amministrazione, sceglie una soluzione che comunque li mantenga all'interno del Movimento Cooperativo).

In ogni caso è sempre più esplicita la consapevolezza che le decisioni operative più significative vengono istruite e di fatto assunte dalla D.O. anche se il C.d.A. gioca un ruolo importante sia in termini di controllo sia soprattutto in termini di fissazione degli obiettivi e vincoli a forte valenza sociale.

Queste tendenze sono confermate anche da una ricerca dell'INCOOP sui sistemi di direzione nelle aziende cooperative condotta nel 1982 con interviste semistrutturate a dirigenti aziendali e del movimento cooperativo in Lombardia, Veneto, Emilia.

Tutti i dati a disposizione, come vedremo meglio anche in seguito, puntano comunque a confermare che in questo periodo di sviluppo della cooperazione italiana l'elemento cruciale e sul piano operativo e su quello ideale è rappresentato dai dirigenti e dai quadri intermedi e che la connotazione futura della cooperazione sarà determinata in buona parte dal ruolo che giocheranno queste figure.

Un caso particolare è rappresentato dalle cooperative di

salvataggio in cui molto spesso il gruppo di lavoratori, leaders del sindacato interno, che avevano guidato la lotta contro la vecchia proprietà, diventano di fatto i dirigenti della nuova cooperativa. Certamente vengono eletti nel C.d.A. ma spesso assumono anche funzioni dirigenziali operative. Dalle ricerche e dai case-studies disponibili emerge con molta chiarezza che anche in questo caso i managers sono figure cruciali per il successo della cooperativa. Nella maggior parte dei casi i managers se ne vanno prima o durante la crisi dell'azienda privata, e la cooperativa si trova di fatto ad iniziare la sua attività senza dirigenti. In altri casi alcuni dirigenti, il più delle volte per ragioni di ordine ideologico, rimangono e fanno parte del gruppo promotore. Ma anche in questo caso sorgono grosse difficoltà nella ridefinizione dei ruoli, compiti, responsabilità, stile di direzione nella nuova cooperativa.

Questo dato, che emerge chiaramente dalle esperienze fin qui condotte, ed è ben documentata dalle due tipologie: "coalizione pura e coalizione mista", elaborate dalla ricerca della fondazione Corazzin assumerà particolare rilievo ora che è stata approvata la legge nazionale che prevede agevolazioni finanziarie per i lavoratori che trasformano in cooperative aziende in crisi (Legge n. 49, febbraio 1985)

Organizzazione del lavoro

Su questo tema non sono disponibili informazioni specifiche.

Sono in corso due ricerche che in qualche modo potranno dare informazioni al riguardo.

La prima, condotta dall'Università Bocconi, attraverso questionario su 140 imprese della Lega volta a ricostruire i modelli di direzione delle imprese cooperative.

La seconda svolta dalla A.N.C.P.L. (Associazione cooperative di produzione e lavoro della Lega) sugli infortuni sul lavoro nelle cooperative.

In generale sembra si possa affermare:

- a) che non esiste una specificità cooperativa nell'organizzazione del lavoro
- b) che l'elemento di differenziazione (al di là delle strutture formali e informali di partecipazione) è rappresentato principalmente dal clima organizzativo che si traduce in :
 - c) minor tasso di infortuni
 - d) minor livello di assenteismo

Ma queste sono tutte considerazioni che si basano sul senso comune e non su dati certi e tantomeno su dati comparativi.

Considerazioni conclusive

Non c'è dubbio che la partecipazione sia legata al ciclo di vita nella cooperativa secondo un modello che possiamo ipotizzare, a livello strutturale come:

assemblearismo

struttura a clessidra

clessidra ribaltata

? coinvolgimento attivo

- Non esistono dati certi sull'influenza della partecipazione sulla produttività: esistono cooperative di successo altamente competitive con livelli elevati di partecipazione, esistono cooperative di successo con scarsi livelli di partecipazione, esistono cooperative in crisi e/o in difficoltà con buoni livelli di partecipazione.

Gli stessi dati elaborati da Derek Jones e dal suo gruppo sul rapporto tra partecipazione e produttività non sono particolarmente significativi da un punto di vista organizzativo perchè basati su indicatori formali (rapporto soci/dipendenti) scarsamente significativi.

- Le condizioni di sopravvivenza della partecipazione non sono chiare.

Se è indubbio che i momenti di crisi rafforzano la solidarietà di gruppo è anche vero che durante quei momenti funzionano meno i meccanismi formali di partecipazione.

Non sembra esserci dubbio che per le cooperative tradizionali di grandi dimensioni il fare funzionare a regime i meccanismi istituzionali di partecipazione rappresenta un investimento che deve essere programmato, deciso, gestito, e supportato.

Per le cooperative di salvataggio i meccanismi di partecipazione

rappresentano un importante contributo di solidarietà che occorre però verificare nel tempo.

Per le cooperative giovanili rappresentano un valore assoluto e caratterizzante, una scelta di vita, ma anche in questo caso occorre verificarne la capacità di realizzazione e tenuta nel tempo.

Per le cooperative emergenti non si sa assolutamente niente.

Per quanto riguarda gli sforzi volti ad incentivare la partecipazione possiamo fare queste considerazioni:

- sul piano ideale la partecipazione viene ancora e sempre presentata come valore caratterizzante l'esperienza cooperativa.
- sul piano operativo assistiamo ad ondate ricorrenti di interesse legate alle condizioni di salute delle cooperative ed alla possibilità di investire risorse su questi temi.
- Sul piano dei modelli organizzativi e delle conoscenze scientifiche relative a significato e forme della partecipazione siamo in presenza di concezioni e schemi abbastanza vecchi, naive e ideologici.
- Una certa ripresa dell'attenzione e dell'investimento su questi temi si sta manifestando in questi ultimi mesi sulla base soprattutto degli stimoli esterni (di gran moda) legati ai circoli di qualità, alla teoria Z, al modello giapponese, al total management, etc.

Tipi di impiego

Le origini: categorie e classi sociali

Fin dall'inizio della storia della cooperazione, e per certi aspetti come vedremo ancora oggi, le classi sociali che si aggregano in cooperativa sono o le più diseredate che ricercano in qualsiasi modo ed a qualsiasi condizione un lavoro per poter sopravvivere, oppure quelle di lavoratori già occupati che cercano attraverso la scelta cooperativa di difendere il loro posto di lavoro contro decisioni padronali di chiusura di impianti e stabilimenti.

Nel primo caso, le cooperative sono formate da manodopera non qualificata, con un numero di soci tendenzialmente assai elevato, e disponibile a svolgere qualsiasi tipo di lavoro, anche particolarmente disagiato, purchè garantisca la sopravvivenza fisica.

A questo gruppo appartengono direttamente le cooperative bracciantili delle origini, sviluppatasi soprattutto nella Pianura Padana, strettamente legate alle lotte contadine, alle battaglie per la terra e che, nei periodi di maggior fortuna all'epoca di Giolitti, verranno utilizzate per la realizzazione di grandi opere pubbliche: dalle bonifiche, agli acquedotti, alle strade etc..

In epoca più recente si è assistito ad un vero e proprio processo di specializzazione settoriale, per cui oggi le cooperative di braccianti sono quelle che operano in campo agricolo, gestendo

direttamente fondi in affitto da enti pubblici o da privati oppure coordinando e contrattando il lavoro bracciantile con le controparti private per i lavori agricoli a carattere stagionale. Nel settore dei "lavori pubblici" si sono costituite invece vere e proprie cooperative industriali, talvolta di rilevanti dimensioni, in grado di competere sul mercato con imprese private sia italiane che straniere. Basti pensare alla C.M.C. di Ravenna che trae le sue origini proprio dalle cooperative bracciantili di cui parlavamo prima e che oggi, oltre ad essere la più grossa e consistente cooperativa di lavoro con circa 4000 soci-dipendenti, è anche il secondo gruppo in assoluto nel settore quanto a fatturato, e svolge ormai la maggior parte del suo lavoro all'estero.

La storia e le caratteristiche di fondo di queste cooperative hanno fatto sì che esse fossero le più direttamente legate alle lotte del movimento operaio e contadino, le più chiaramente caratterizzate in senso di classe, e quindi contraddistinte da una più forte carica politica.

Nel secondo caso, quello delle cooperative che nascono subentrando nella gestione dell'azienda all'imprenditore privato, il numero dei soci è generalmente più limitato, mentre è maggiore la qualificazione e la professionalità.

I settori in cui si sviluppa questo tipo di imprese cooperative sono praticamente tutti i settori della produzione industriale per cui è difficile ricostruire, così come per i braccianti, uno o due settori particolari di sviluppo: si va dalle vetrerie, alle ceramiche, alle tipografie, alle concerie, alle imprese

meccaniche di vario tipo etc.

Anche queste cooperative sono fortemente legate alle lotte del movimento operaio, ma per certi aspetti rappresentano la fase conclusiva di lotte concentrate il più delle volte sulla sopravvivenza di una ben specifica azienda e sulla difesa dei posti di lavoro in quell'azienda. Per questi motivi talvolta i soci di queste cooperative sono stati considerati come una sorta di aristocrazia operaia o anche di "borghesia rossa".

Alla connotazione di classe e allo specifico impegno di lotta politica é legato il fatto che buona parte di queste imprese sono nate negli anni duri del dopoguerra e del periodo scelbiano o hanno assorbito quadri operai, espulsi dalle imprese private per le loro attività sindacali, i quali non hanno mai abbandonato il loro impegno politico di lotta sul lavoro e per il lavoro.

A questo gruppo vanno aggiunte le cooperative di lavoro sorte negli ultimissimi anni, che hanno coinvolto classi e categorie sociali sensibilmente diverse.

Si tratta infatti di cooperative che potremmo definire "di professionisti", di lavoratori cioè di elevata qualificazione professionale quali ingegneri, architetti, statistici, economisti, medici, attori etc., che si associano in cooperativa per garantirsi un lavoro, ma soprattutto per autogovernare le loro prestazioni professionali ed avere in questo modo un maggior potere contrattuale nei confronti della committenza. L'aspirazione principale è quella di poter incidere maggiormente sulle modalità di esercizio della propria professione, differenziandosi e innovando rispetto al modello tradizionale di

esercizio della libera professione. (Vedi a conferma di questo quanto emerge dallo studio di caso sulla cooperativa Delta)

Oltre ad essere nate in epoca più recente e attraverso l'aggregazione di categorie sociali diverse da quelle tradizionali, le cooperative di professionisti, dunque, si distinguono dalle altre cooperative di lavoro anche sul piano delle motivazioni che spingono i singoli ad associarsi.

Discorso in gran parte diverso é quello legato alle cooperative cosiddette giovanili, sviluppatasi in gran numero in seguito alla legge 285. Per queste cooperative sembra di essere tornati alle origini, ed in particolare alle cooperative bracciantili, dove l'elemento di fondo è la ricerca comunque di un posto di lavoro; di qui la loro presenza nei settori dell'agricoltura, dell'intervento pubblico, dei servizi sociali, dei beni culturali etc. spesso legata a specifiche iniziative di lotta degli stessi giovani. Con una grande differenza però che è data dall'alto grado di scolarità di questi soci che sono tutti diplomati e/o laureati.

L'attrazione ed il fascino che indubbiamente la cooperazione esercita sui giovani ha fatto nascere cooperative in tutti i campi ipotizzabili: dagli interpreti alle guide turistiche, ai gestori di campeggi, agli addetti alle riparazioni domestiche (idraulici, elettricisti, etc.) anche se spesso con carattere episodico e non sempre con sufficiente forza e determinazione per passare dalla fase volontaristica-spontaneistica degli inizi alla fase "industriale" di consolidamento dell'impresa cooperativa.

Lo schema riassuntivo che proponiamo rappresenta per certi

aspetti una sottoclassificazione delle cooperative di lavoro.

Tipo	categorie o classi	finalità principali	settori di attività
bracciantili	manovali operai non qualificati	ricerca di lavoro	agricoltura, lavori pubblici costruzioni
operaie	operai qualificati	difesa del posto di lavoro	vetrerie, tipografie, legno, meccanica, ceramica, ecc
professionali	Ingegneri, architetti, artisti, medic ,	diversa organizzazione del lavoro professionale	progettazione, teatro, cinema, medicina prev.
giovanili	giovani disoccupati	ricerca lavoro	agricoltura terziario

Dal quadro che abbiamo tracciato emerge da un lato, la grande vivacità ed elasticità della cooperazione di lavoro in grado di inserirsi in qualsiasi settore di attività in cui la componente principale non sia rappresentata dal capitale bensì dal lavoro; dall'altro, la difficoltà di individuare settori consistenti di sviluppo omogeneo per cui, se si fa eccezione per l'edilizia, per il settore delle costruzioni, e in parte per l'agricoltura, la storia della cooperazione di lavoro è in effetti storia di singole aziende ed in quanto tale difficilissima da ricostruire.

Le caratteristiche sociali così evidenziate influiscono

evidentemente sugli skills presenti all'interno delle singole cooperative.

Nel caso delle cooperative tradizionali, consolidate, di medio grandi dimensioni si può dire non esista un problema specifico di skill.

Nelle lontane origini il gruppo promotore della cooperativa era certamente un gruppo coeso anche sul piano professionale, tanto che si può parlare esplicitamente di cooperative di mestiere, così come del resto è ancora oggi possibile ricavare dalle denominazioni ufficiali: C.M.C. cooperative muratori e cementisti; C.M.B. cooperativa muratori e braccianti; Edilter cooperativa muratori edili e terraioli, etc.

Ma con l'evoluzione aziendale degli ultimi anni c'è stato un rapido processo di trasformazione della stratificazione aziendale con l'inserimento, spesso dall'esterno, delle competenze specialistiche necessarie, tanto è vero che oggi la struttura professionale di queste cooperative è del tutto simile a quella delle analoghe imprese private.

Il discorso invece è molto diverso per quanto riguarda le cooperative giovanili.

In questo caso l'elemento più significativo è quello della elevata scolarità dei soci, diplomati e laureati senza alcuna esperienza professionale diretta.

Il problema dello skill si pone sotto due prospettive diverse, a seconda del tipo di cooperative.

Le cooperative che operano in campi di attività vicini alle qualificazioni professionali dei soci (titolo di studio) quali le

cooperative di ricerca, di consulenza, di ingegneri, di medici hanno, almeno teoricamente, le competenze essenziali per svolgere il loro lavoro, mentre difettano di esperienza pratica (ad esempio nei rapporti con i clienti) e, soprattutto, di capacità contabile, amministrativa ed organizzativa.

In questo caso, almeno per quanto riguarda le funzioni contabili-amministrative, un grosso ruolo di supporto, assistenza e consulenza è giocato dalle S.P.S..

Mentre i problemi organizzativi vengono risolti spontaneamente nel tempo, magari rimettendo in discussione principi di totale egualitarismo, non divisione dei ruoli, rifiuto della specializzazione funzionale, della gerarchia, etc., c'è da considerare che comunque queste cooperative hanno un numero di soci sempre piuttosto contenuto (10-15 unità).

Diverso è invece il caso delle cooperative che nascono per garantire un lavoro qualsiasi ai propri soci indipendentemente dal loro titolo di studio.

L'esempio più rilevante è quello delle cooperative agricole che hanno messo a coltura terre prima incolte.

Molto spesso nessuno dei soci aveva alcun tipo di esperienza agricola nè a livello di studio nè tantomeno lavorativo ed in molti casi non erano nemmeno figli di agricoltori.

Dalle informazioni raccolte dalle poche ricerche disponibili si può dire che il problema è stato affrontato da un lato ricercando l'aiuto e la collaborazione diretta dei contadini vicini, dall'altro lato partecipando a corsi di formazione specifica

organizzati o dalle associazioni cooperative o dall'ente pubblico facendo ampio ricorso ai contributi del Fondo Sociale Europeo. (Questo é almeno quanto emerge dalla ricerca più ampia condotta su questi problemi, i cui risultati sono stati pubblicati da Venni e Sansò (1981)).

In questo caso il corso tecnico di formazione prende il sopravvento rispetto alle capacità ed alle competenze di tipo amministrativo per le quali valgono le considerazioni già fatte.

I problemi relativi alle competenze organizzative sono stati, il più delle volte, affrontati con un rifiuto dei modelli organizzativi tradizionali e la ricerca autonoma di modalità diverse di organizzazione tendenzialmente più egualitarie.

Se questo é il quadro, vago, generale, ricavabile dalle poche ricerche e dalle valutazioni dei dirigenti cooperativi, non c'è dubbio che proprio questa assenza di professionalità specifiche ed una certa ingenuità sulle dinamiche organizzative è stata una delle cause di fallimento di numerose cooperative giovanili.

Sarebbe viceversa interessante verificare come hanno affrontato il problema le cooperative che sono sopravvissute e quali trasformazioni hanno subito sul piano dell'articolazione organizzativa interna.

Formazione (training)

Tutte le S.P.S. si sono dotate di propri centri di formazione sia a livello nazionale che territoriale.

Occorre però tener presente che la formazione in Italia è di competenza principalmente dell'ente pubblico che la gestisce o direttamente (scuola) oppure delegandone la realizzazione alle varie associazioni (sindacali, di categoria, cooperative, etc.).

Più che vera e propria formazione di base i centri cooperativi tendono quindi a fare dell'aggiornamento professionale che, ovviamente, varia da settore a settore, per quanto riguarda i livelli di approfondimento.

Il campo amministrativo-contabile è quello nel quale questi centri hanno raggiunto ormai una consistente esperienza così come quasi tutti questi istituti organizzano regolarmente corsi di formazione per soci eletti consiglieri di amministrazione.

Per altri tipi di competenze vengono organizzati di volta in volta corsi ad hoc.

Quello che è significativo è che questi corsi, salvo casi eccezionali che prevedono incentivi diretti alle aziende, riguardano più cooperative operanti nello stesso settore.

E comunque, stando almeno alle dichiarazioni dei responsabili dei centri di formazione, è spesso un problema riuscire ad avere abbastanza partecipanti ai corsi soprattutto se non si prevedono incentivi diretti ai partecipanti e/o alle imprese. E' convinzione comune che le cooperative tendono ancora oggi a sottostimare l'importanza ed il ruolo della formazione e tendono a privilegiare in maniera spesso esclusiva il learning by doing.

In anni recenti un'attenzione particolare si è rivolta alla formazione manageriale con due tendenze molto evidenti e, in

parte, contraddittorie.

Da un lato l'avvio di propri uomini a corsi per managers organizzati dalle grandi università e dalle Business School, o comunque dalle grandi società private di consulenza e formazione. Dall'altro lato la realizzazione di corsi di "management cooperativo" nella convinzione che la specifica cultura cooperativa richieda un approccio particolare anche e soprattutto a livello di dirigenti di impresa.

L'impressione complessiva di un osservatore esterno che ha avuto modo di collaborare spesso con questi istituti è che ci sia una grande disparità tra le consistenti risorse (pubbliche) investite ed i risultati ottenuti con una eccessiva dispersione di iniziative, spesso ripetitive e che, in ogni caso, devono ricorrere a competenze esterne non solo per la realizzazione dei corsi (docenza) ma molto spesso anche per la loro progettazione.

Impiegati

Per quanto riguarda gli impiegati (white collars) delle cooperative, nonostante siano molto aumentati in questi anni, non esiste alcuna specifica ricerca o informazione su di essi.

Le informazioni impressionistiche disponibili ci consentono di dire che:

- gli impiegati sono tendenzialmente molto giovani, quasi sempre al loro primo impiego
- che non esiste una sensibile differenza (rispetto ad altri tipi

di imprese) tra uomini e donne

- che molto spesso gli impiegati assunti dalle cooperative sono figli di vecchi soci operai. Tanto è vero che molti statuti di cooperative prevedono esplicitamente che siano riservate priorità di impiego ai figli dei soci.

Un dato complessivo comune ad impiegati, operai, managers all'interno delle cooperative è quello di una elevata mobilità verticale che fa sì che persone molto giovani ricoprano incarichi di grande responsabilità (l'attuale presidente della C.M.C., cooperativa con 4.000 soci dipendenti, è un impiegato diventato presidente a soli 35 anni).

Questo fenomeno è dovuto da un lato al forte sviluppo della cooperazione in questi anni, dall'altro alla tendenza a promuovere, fin dove è possibile, il personale interno all'azienda piuttosto che far ricorso al mercato esterno.

Molte cooperative tradizionali di lavoro sono dunque caratterizzate oggi da un gruppo dirigente e da un gruppo intermedio molto giovane, ad elevata scolarità e da una base operaia piuttosto anziana.

Relazioni contrattuali

Per quanto riguarda i rapporti di impiego, elemento centrale di riferimento è il contratto collettivo nazionale di lavoro.

E' elemento di riferimento in quanto molto spesso cooperative

giovanili o di salvataggio non sempre riescono a rispettare le condizioni previste dal contratto in termini di retribuzione, orari, straordinari, ferie pagate, etc., mentre le cooperative consolidate si attengono strettamente al contratto con eventuali differenze migliorative, che vedremo meglio nel prossimo paragrafo.

Non esistono comunque, a livello di condizioni di impiego, differenze tra dipendenti soci e dipendenti non soci che vengono trattati tutti allo stesso modo.

Condizioni particolari di impiego, quali ad esempio il part-time sono presenti ma non in maniera significativa e differenziata rispetto ad altri tipi di imprese.

Generalmente il contratto nazionale è unico e cioè vale sia per le imprese private che per quelle cooperative.

In alcuni settori invece esiste un contratto nazionale specifico per le cooperative in parte diverso da quello per le corrispondenti imprese private (a livello nazionale consumo, alimentaristi, edili. A livello regionale metalmeccanici, braccianti, poligrafici).

Fino a non molto tempo fa, e nella maggior parte dei casi ancora oggi, esisteva comunque un contratto unico che ricomprendeva al suo interno operai, impiegati, quadri intermedi e dirigenti contrattato direttamente dal sindacato dei lavoratori.

Questo se da un lato testimonia della natura di classe della cooperazione di lavoro e di una tendenza fortemente egualitaristica, in anni recenti è entrato in contrasto con lo

sviluppo stesso delle aziende.

Sempre più di frequente le aziende devono far ricorso ai managers e dirigenti provenienti dall'esterno che richiedono livelli retributivi e inquadramenti normativi fortemente diversi da quelli previsti dai contratti.

Per molto tempo le cooperative hanno fatto fronte a questa situazione con contratti 'ad personam' e con un uso esagerato dei fringe benefits. Ma con l'aumentare dei casi questo ha creato non poche contraddizioni all'interno dell'impresa così come ha creato un forte malessere fra gli stessi dirigenti.

A fronte delle due possibili alternative:

- a) lasciare le cose come stanno
- b) accettare il contratto nazionale per dirigenti anche all'interno delle cooperative, rifiutate l'una per impraticabilità, l'altra per motivi di ordine ideologico, si è preferita una terza alternativa, quella della stipulazione di un contratto per "dirigenti cooperativi" contrattato sempre dai sindacati dei lavoratori e che si differenzia da quello per dirigenti privati.

E' un contratto che comunque sia sul piano retributivo che su quello normativo ha portato notevoli miglioramenti per i dirigenti cooperativi ed ha aumentato la forbice tra dirigenti e operai.

Questo contratto, che è frutto di un grosso impegno e dei dirigenti e del sindacato e delle associazioni e che ha dato vita ad un significativo dibattito politico per l'impatto che indubbiamente aveva sulla tradizionale cultura cooperativa, è per

ora operante, in chiave sperimentale, solo in Emilia Romagna con l'intesa di estenderlo poi a livello nazionale.

A due anni dalla sua applicazione, ed in assenza di dati e di rilevazioni certe, sarebbe oltremodo interessante verificare che uso è stato fatto della possibilità offerta dal contratto e che incidenza hanno avuto sulla struttura della cooperativa. Affronteremo almeno in parte questo tema con il caso C.M.B. anche se questo sarebbe un tema importante da approfondire a livello generale.

Sempre la C.M.B. è importante perchè è la prima cooperativa che ha firmato con il sindacato provinciale un accordo specifico per i quadri intermedi che riguarda sia i livelli retributivi che le condizioni di inquadramento.

Anche se al momento si tratta di un caso isolato è estremamente significativo sia perchè riguarda un tema di grande attualità politico-sindacale anche a livello di imprese private ed in presenza di un "movimento" di quadri intermedi che lotta per ottenere un riconoscimento giuridico e formale della propria specificità; sia perchè il risultato raggiunto è frutto di una intensa contrattazione con il sindacato e di un diretto coinvolgimento dei soci della cooperativa; infine perchè è indicativo di una tendenza a differenziare ulteriormente le figure operanti all'interno dell'impresa cooperativa anche sul piano formale e delle condizioni di impiego.

Un'altra tendenza che sta emergendo in questi anni, anche se ancora non macroscopica è quella che riguarda il fenomeno cosiddetto del "decentramento produttivo".

Anche in questo caso le informazioni disponibili sono molto scarse.

Sono comunque sempre più numerose le cooperative che decentrano all'esterno alcune lavorazioni non strategiche che vengono poi eseguite da artigiani o da cottimisti.

La situazione è in gran parte imposta da condizioni di mercato, di competitività, in considerazione del fatto che il costo del lavoro in cooperativa è estremamente elevato in quanto vengono rispettate tutte le condizioni normative e retributive di lavoro. Per le cooperative consolidate non risulta un ricorso diretto al lavoro nero o al lavoro sottopagato. Viceversa c'è questa innegabile tendenza, soprattutto nel settore delle costruzioni a decentrare all'esterno alcune lavorazioni.

Se fino a non molti anni fa, fine anni '70, esistevano sostanziali differenze strutturali di impiego tra cooperative ed imprese private, non c'è dubbio che in questi anni tali differenze si sono attenuate.

In particolare il riconoscimento ufficiale e formale di contratti diversi per dirigenti, quadri, operai così come i fenomeni di decentramento produttivo hanno sensibilmente inciso sulla tradizionale cultura operaia.

Allo stato attuale non esiste però alcuna ricerca sull'impatto di queste trasformazioni sulle caratteristiche delle cooperative e soprattutto sulle conseguenze dirette o indirette sul livello o tipo di partecipazione.

Retribuzioni e condizioni di lavoro

Se il contratto collettivo nazionale di lavoro è assunto come punto di riferimento generale per gli inquadramenti normativi e retributivi, è peraltro vero che esistono differenze tra retribuzione in cooperativa e impresa privata.

Anche in questo caso non esistono ricerche ufficiali precise e sistematiche ma, stando a quanto dicono i responsabili delle politiche del lavoro delle S.P.S. e ad alcuni documenti riservati a circolazione interna, è possibile dire quanto segue.

Operai

Il primo dato significativo per gli operai é quello di un loro affollamento nelle categorie (retributive) più alte previste dai contratti.

Questo di per sé consente una retribuzione maggiore dell'operaio coop rispetto ad un operaio privato.

A questo si deve aggiungere il contratto integrativo aziendale, anche se, a giudizio degli intervistati, il beneficio economico aggiuntivo che si realizza in questo modo è piuttosto limitato.

Ma l'elemento più significativo di differenza è rappresentato dalla stabilità del posto di lavoro soprattutto in alcuni settori quali quello agricolo e quello delle costruzioni in cui il problema della stabilità occupazionale è particolarmente sentito.

In caso di personale in esubero è prassi consolidata nel movimento cooperativo quella di riuscire a collocare i lavoratori presso altre cooperative. Anche su questo non esistono dati certi ma solo la testimonianza di casi di cooperative che si sono trovate a ridurre l'occupazione e che sono riuscite a farlo pilotando gli esuberanti verso altri impieghi.

Questo è stato vero fino agli inizi degli anni '80; in epoca più recente ci sono stati casi, peraltro il più delle volte concordati con il sindacato, di veri e propri licenziamenti.

Vale comunque la pena sottolineare che questa tendenza a guidare la mobilità dei lavoratori eventualmente in esubero presso altre occupazioni rappresenta un importante elemento di attrazione del lavorare in cooperativa rispetto alla impresa privata. E' altresì vero che, in presenza di un ristagno dei livelli occupazionali complessivi del movimento, questo crea una sorta di barriera all'entrata per le giovani leve.

Tutte queste considerazioni valgono ovviamente per le cooperative consolidate. Per le cooperative giovanili, così come lo è stato in passato per molte delle cooperative oggi di successo, è prassi piuttosto comune quella di sottoretribuire il lavoro dei propri soci-dipendenti per consentire alle cooperative di sopravvivere e di affermarsi. (Conferme di questa tendenza sono evidenti nelle già citate ricerche di Alagia, di Venni e Sansò, e sono peraltro confermate anche dal caso Delta)

Per le cooperative consolidate, anche in periodi di eventuale crisi, è ormai scarsamente in uso la prassi di non retribuire, ad

esempio, le ore di straordinario e le difficoltà contingenti vengono superate attraverso manovre finanziarie, oppure attraverso il ricorso alla Cassa Integrazione Guadagni (C.I.G.).

Il ricorso alla C.I.G. è peraltro ancora molto limitato e tra i soci delle cooperative è oggetto di grandi discussioni tendenti, il più delle volte, a rifiutare l'uso di questa possibilità offerta dalla legislazione nazionale.

Ci sono cooperative, anche di grandi dimensioni, che pur di non far ricorso alla C.I.G. e per garantire comunque il lavoro dei soci acquisiscono dei lavori in perdita.

Ci sono altre cooperative (vedi il caso C.M.B.) che, utilizzando normalmente la C.I.G. ed integrando la quota di salario erogata dalla C.I.G. con una quota aziendale in modo che il lavoratore non perda niente del suo salario anche quando non lavora, riescono a realizzare buoni utili.

In questo caso il tema centrale del dibattito tra i soci nel corso delle assemblee è proprio questo. Molti soci vorrebbero ridurre in maniera sensibile gli utili ma garantire comunque il lavoro per tutti. Ed è questo probabilmente il nodo più critico oggi sul piano sociale conseguente alle trasformazioni in corso nelle grandi cooperative di costruzione.

Impiegati

Dati attendibili non ne esistono.

Ma se consideriamo la giovane età media degli impiegati è

probabile che questo comporti una (relativa) minor retribuzione degli impiegati rispetto alle imprese private.

A questo però bisogna aggiungere la forte mobilità verticale interna presente in tutte le cooperative che comporta evidentemente anche scatti retributivi.

E' convinzione comune di tutti gli intervistati che la "carriera" in cooperativa offra più possibilità e sia più veloce sia per gli impiegati che per i quadri intermedi e dirigenti anche perché esiste una buona mobilità, guidata dalle S.P.S., tra le aziende del movimento.

Dirigenti

Fino ad epoca molto recente i dirigenti (managers, tecnici altamente professionalizzati, etc.) erano sensibilmente meno retribuiti in cooperativa rispetto all'impresa privata. Tanto che dalla fine degli anni '70 in poi questo ha rappresentato uno dei temi centrali del dibattito politico all'interno del movimento.

Un documento interno della Lega di alcuni anni orsono parla di un rapporto di 1 ad 1,5 tra retribuzione minima e massima all'interno delle cooperative.

Ma la spinta a modificare e ad aumentare le retribuzioni non è venuta tanto dall'eccessivo appiattimento interno quanto piuttosto da:

a) la quasi impossibilità di acquisire risorse qualificate dal

mercato per eccessive differenze retributive che non potevano venir colmate neanche da un ricorso consistente ai fringe benefits, peraltro non molto ben visti dai soci

b) la tendenza di molti giovani quadri ad abbandonare le cooperative, dopo essersi fatta una buona esperienza professionale, per andare a lavorare in imprese private.

Tutto questo ha portato negli ultimi anni ad un sensibile aumento delle retribuzioni dei quadri dirigenti delle cooperative e oggi il rapporto 1 a 1,5 si è spostato verso l'1 a 3. Se questo consente discreti spazi di manovra per figure dirigenti intermedie o per giovani ad alta qualificazione scolastica, è ancora assolutamente non competitivo per le figure di primo piano dell'azienda e soprattutto per figure professionali che abbiano già maturato all'esterno una elevata esperienza e qualificazione. Questa è una delle ragioni principali che spiega perchè l'età dei dirigenti cooperativi è tendenzialmente molto bassa.

Quanto alle condizioni di lavoro, anche qui per grandi stime, sembra di poter dire che esiste una notevole disponibilità delle aziende a favorire la formazione e l'aggiornamento dei propri quadri e dirigenti anche facendo ricorso a centri esterni alla cooperazione.

Gli orari di lavoro sono abbastanza pesanti e la disponibilità all'impegno fuori orario è caratteristica e requisito indispensabile per occupare i posti di maggiore responsabilità.

Ma un dato importante, mai messo in evidenza dai dirigenti, è la pressoché totale sicurezza del posto di lavoro.

Si può dire che da questo punto di vista i dirigenti cooperativi (presidenti e/o managers) al pari e forse più dei soci operai godono di una pressochè totale sicurezza del posto di lavoro.

Anche presidenti che sono stati responsabili diretti del fallimento della loro cooperativa non vengono mai licenziati, ma vengono riciclati presso altre cooperative ed il più delle volte con incarichi di responsabilità per le quali hanno già dimostrato di essere inadatti. Per le cooperative vale senza dubbio alcuno il principio di Peter, sostenuto per di più dalla possibilità di essere occupati, attraverso la mediazione delle S.P.S., in numerose aziende.

Lo stesso contratto per dirigenti cooperativi operante per ora solo in Emilia-Romagna, a differenza ad esempio del contratto per dirigenti privati, prevede procedure così complesse e farraginose per il licenziamento di un dirigente che è facile prevedere che non verrà mai utilizzato.

Questo è un nodo estremamente critico nella gestione delle cooperative che riguarda soprattutto le crisi di aziende cooperative.

La responsabilità non è mai personalizzata: da un lato ricade sull'intera azienda, esprimendo in questo caso una diretta partecipazione dei soci ed un loro diretto coinvolgimento nella crisi, dall'altro viene riassorbita dalle S.P.S. che ricercano soluzioni che hanno come prima valenza la garanzia dell'occupazione per tutti e, in primo luogo, per i dirigenti.

In assenza di qualsiasi ricerca sull'argomento ma in presenza, negli ultimi anni, di alcune significative crisi aziendali,

sarebbe oltremodo interessante verificare come il problema della responsabilità e della soluzione della crisi viene affrontata. (Su questo tema è in corso una tesi di Laurea sulla crisi delle cooperative del ravennate).

Ma non c'è dubbio che la stabilità del posto di lavoro per i dirigenti è, accanto ed in contrasto con le condizioni retributive, l'elemento di maggior differenziazione tra cooperative e imprese private.

Non esistono invece informazioni per quanto riguarda le retribuzioni nelle cooperative cosiddette emergenti e per questo ci rifaremo allo studio di caso (Delta).

Però il problema retributivo è stato l'elemento principale che negli ultimi anni ha portato ad una trasformazione delle cooperative di professionisti (ingegneri e architetti, medici, ricercatori etc.).

Nate come cooperative di lavoro in cui tutti i dipendenti erano soci ed avevano una retribuzione mensile "contrattuale", negli ultimi anni esse o si sono sciolte, o hanno ridotto notevolmente il numero dei soci, oppure ancora si sono trasformate in cooperative di servizio. In questo caso il socio agisce come libero professionista avendo in comune (in cooperativa) con gli altri i servizi generali (sede, segreteria, telefono, contabilità, etc).

Le condizioni di lavoro e retributive sono contrattate a vari livelli con il sindacato (nazionale, regionale, provinciale, di

azienda).

In alcune cooperative, in particolare quelle con struttura per comitati, è ormai diffusa la pratica di avere sistemi di valutazione delle posizioni e delle prestazioni formalizzati dall'azienda. In questi casi (C.M.C. - C.M.B. - Coopsette) la valutazione periodica dei singoli, a tutti i livelli, non viene effettuata solo dal capo, ma viene discussa e verificata con gli stessi interessati, con il sindacato interno e dà vita ad un complesso processo di partecipazione che coinvolge tutte le fasce aziendali dalla base al vertice e rappresenta probabilmente il momento più alto di partecipazione dei soci alla vita dell'azienda.

Ristorno

Il ristorno rappresenta l'elemento strutturale di maggior differenza tra impresa privata e impresa cooperativa.

Anche su questo tema non esistono dati precisi ma solo informazioni sporadiche anche perchè le condizioni variano di anno in anno e da zona a zona.

Il ristorno può essere considerato come quella parte degli utili che non viene reinvestito dall'azienda bensì viene redistribuito ai soci sulla base delle ore lavorate, come una sorta di retribuzione posticipata. Tenendo presente che è lo statuto a stabilire in che percentuale massima possono essere ripartiti gli utili, la ripartizione dei residui attivi del bilancio di una

ipotetica cooperativa potrebbe essere:

- riserva legale (obbligatoria) 20%
- riserva statutaria 40%
- fondo mutualistico 25%
- remunerazione capitale sociale 3%
- distribuzione ai soci (ristorno) 12%

La tendenza di molte cooperative è quella di reinvestire tutti gli utili nella impresa.

Altre cooperative tendono ad utilizzare queste cifre per attività sociali, culturali - ricreative, collettive.

Altre tendono a dare un valore sostanzialmente simbolico al ristorno (sull'ordine delle 200.000 mila lire all'anno) che vengono erogate sotto forma di piccolo regalo, ad esempio in occasione del natale.

Esistono però alcune cooperative, soprattutto quelle meccaniche concentrate nella zona di Imola, che distribuiscono un ristorno tutt'altro che simbolico (alcuni milioni annui) ai propri soci, peraltro andando contro alle indicazioni delle S.P.S. che vedono nel ricorso al ristorno in termini non simbolici un pericolo di spaccatura del movimento cooperativo, il rischio di una divisione tra cooperative di successo e cooperative in difficoltà, e infine un prevalere degli interessi materiali sugli interessi ideali dei soci.

Benefici non finanziari

Tutte le cooperative consolidate hanno una attività interna di erogazione - organizzazione di iniziative ricreative - culturali - sociali per i propri soci ed i loro famigliari .

Questo del resto fa parte della tradizione della cooperazione italiana.

Le cooperative edilizie ad esempio realizzano condizioni di favore (prestiti) ai propri soci, per l'acquisto della casa.

Tutte le cooperative erogano borse di studio o regalano libri per i figli dei soci.

Moltissime sono proprietarie di case di vacanza per i soci o organizzano direttamente soggiorni e viaggi vacanza per i soci familiari.

Non solo ma molte cooperative sono centri di aggregazione di attività sportiva, circoli culturali, attività ricreativa sia per i soci attuali ma anche per i soci pensionati.

Anche in questo caso è difficile quantificare il fenomeno ma é certamente molto diffuso ed in molti casi consistente.

Relazioni industriali

Il rapporto cooperazione sindacato è un rapporto estremamente complesso fin dalla sua origine.

In termini estremamente generali possiamo dire che il sindacato, almeno fino ad epoca assai recente, non ha mai dato molto peso, spazio, importanza alla cooperazione.

Fino grosso modo alla fine degli anni '70, a fronte di situazioni di aziende in crisi, il sindacato ha sempre puntato a soluzioni che vedessero impegnati nuovi imprenditori privati o, meglio ancora, pubblici.

Solo se queste alternative non si dimostravano praticabili e solo dietro pressione insistente dei lavoratori interessati, il sindacato puntava alla costituzione di una cooperativa.

Le ragioni di questa resistenza del sindacato a formare cooperative erano di tipo essenzialmente ideologico legate agli interessi dell'organizzazione.

Da un lato c'era la convinzione che la creazione di una cooperativa avrebbe rotto il fronte di lotta dei lavoratori indebolendo il loro potere contrattuale complessivo.

Dall'altro lato c'era una scarsa convinzione sulle capacità imprenditoriali dei lavoratori e sulla possibilità che essi avevano di gestire economicamente una azienda che versava in gravi difficoltà economiche, gestionali, finanziarie.

Infine esisteva la preoccupazione di ridurre la propria area di

influenza nel momento in cui la cooperativa, costituitasi, avrebbe ben presto cominciato a gravitare intorno ad una centrale cooperativa riducendo così i suoi legami diretti con il sindacato stesso.

Nel passato, almeno fino agli anni '60, erano di fatto le cooperative che sostenevano anche economicamente le lotte sindacali, tanto è vero che per molti anni le cooperative venivano considerate le "salmerie" del movimento operaio e sindacale.

Nelle stesse elaborazioni teoriche e nei congressi delle grandi centrali sindacali la cooperazione ha sempre trovato poco spazio. Così come sono sempre stati del tutto saltuari ed episodici i rapporti formali tra centrali cooperative e centrali sindacali. Solo nel 1977, dopo che il governo (a guida democristiana) aveva promosso un incontro tra le tre centrali cooperative, le confederazioni sindacali CGIL, CISL e UIL organizzano il primo incontro ufficiale con le stesse.

Anche se alcuni storici individuano molti elementi di omogeneità tra sindacato e cooperativa la realtà stà a dimostrare che sia sul piano ideologico, che sul piano delle esperienze concrete, esiste una notevole distanza tra questi due attori.

Le cose cominciano ad assumere una piega diversa sul finire degli anni '70 a seguito di alcuni fenomeni.

- Intanto proprio sulla fine degli anni '70 vengono create su spinta diretta dei lavoratori, tutti appartenenti al sindacato, un certo numero di cooperative sulle ceneri di aziende (private e/o pubbliche di media e grande dimensione) in crisi.

Il fenomeno è particolarmente rilevante in Lombardia e vede coinvolto e attivo soprattutto il sindacato cattolico della CISL. Una volta costituite, queste cooperative mantengono un qualche legame, più di tipo affettivo che strutturale, con il sindacato e nella maggior parte dei casi aderiscono alla CCI.

- Negli stessi anni il fenomeno della disoccupazione giovanile esplose nella sua drammaticità e sia in modo autonomo e spontaneo, sia molto spesso con legami diretti con il sindacato, i giovani si riuniscono in leghe di disoccupati, che vedono nella cooperazione nuove possibilità di risolvere i loro problemi occupazionali.

- In questo clima, e sulla spinta di queste esperienze che anche se non entusiasmanti nei risultati sembrano però essere l'unica alternativa praticabile con qualche possibilità di successo, lo stesso governo comincia ad elaborare e preparare progetti di legge (0,50 - legge Marcora) che vedono nella cooperazione la modalità principale per affrontare i problemi della disoccupazione e delle aziende in crisi ed uno degli strumenti più duttili per creare nuova occupazione.

L'atteggiamento del sindacato verso la cooperazione, seppure in

maniera graduale e non sempre esplicita, comincia a mutare e, soprattutto la CISL, si dimostra particolarmente sensibile a questo problema.

La CISL, anche se in modo non esplicito e pubblico, dà l'avvio ad una consistente attività formativa a favore dei propri dirigenti e funzionari sindacali in previsione dell'approvazione della legge cosiddetta Marcora, contenente misure per la salvaguardia del livello occupazionale delle imprese private in crisi mediante la loro trasformazione in cooperative.

Nello stesso tempo si rivitalizza il CENASCA associazione di cooperative promosse o che si riconoscono nella CISL.

Così come si pensa alla creazione diretta di una struttura di servizio alle imprese cooperative gestita in proprio.

Tutto questo, se da un lato testimonia il nuovo interesse del sindacato per la cooperazione, non rende più facili i rapporti con le centrali cooperative ed in particolare con la CCI che si considera per storia, tradizione, ma anche per struttura organizzativa e di supporto, l'unico o almeno il principale attore titolato ad associare e promuovere cooperative.

La CGIL è molto più lenta a muoversi su questi temi e l'unico segnale di un certo rilievo è la costituzione, insieme alla Lega, del Coopsind, una struttura di formazione particolarmente rivolta alla formazione di giovani operatori nel sud.

Il risultato di questi processi, molto recenti e per molti versi ancora in corso, è da un lato un crescente interesse, anche e

soprattutto sul piano ideologico, del sindacato per la cooperazione quale strumento per la difesa e la creazione di una nuova occupazione. Dall'altro lato una certa freddezza delle centrali cooperative che si vedono attribuire compiti e responsabilità che non sanno se ed in che misura saranno in grado di rispettare a fronte di aspettative sempre crescenti.

Di fatto, ma questa è cronaca di questi giorni e non ancora storia, è in atto un vero e proprio gioco di potere sia sul piano ideale e politico, ma anche e soprattutto sul piano organizzativo e finanziario su chi sarà chiamato a gestire in prima persona questi processi.

Sarà interessante verificare, proprio nei prossimi mesi, come inciderà sull'atteggiamento del sindacato e sui rapporti cooperative-sindacato l'approvazione del progetto di legge Marcora divenuto operante nel febbraio del 1985.

Dal punto di vista della gestione quotidiana dei rapporti sindacato - impresa cooperativa, oltre alle considerazioni fatte nei precedenti paragrafi vale la pena sottolineare alcuni punti.

Il sindacato è presente in tutte le cooperative con la propria struttura interna (consiglio di fabbrica) ed è non solo accettato ma anche ricercato dalla dirigenza della cooperativa.

Anche se a livello di seminari, congressi, convegni a volte alcuni operatori sostengono la inutilità teorica e logica del sindacato che organizza lavoratori che sono, in quanto soci, al contempo proprietari, (Sempre nella già citata ricerca sui dirigenti cooperativi dell'Emilia-Romagna, alla domanda

volutamente provocatoria "ha senso il sindacato nella cooperativa?" ben il 23,8% dei dirigenti - eletti o nominati, rispondeva negativamente.) di fatto la presenza del sindacato è ampiamente diffusa e viene legittimata sulla base di due considerazioni principali.

a) la prima é quella del mantenimento di uno stretto contatto con la classe operaia impiegata in altre aziende e viene quindi concepita come elemento di solidarietà, coinvolgimento, contatto con gli altri lavoratori

b) la seconda é quella di un ulteriore meccanismo di garanzia a tutela dei soci di fronte a rischi di "autosfruttamento" del resto sempre presenti in momenti di crisi.

Si può dire che in generale, sia a livello nazionale, che regionale, che aziendale, le cooperative dimostrano una grande disponibilità sia per quanto riguarda i rapporti contrattuali, sia per quanto riguarda la presentazione e la discussione di piani di sviluppo delle aziende o dei diversi settori.

Molto spesso gli stessi sindacati "sperimentano" con le cooperative accordi contrattuali che poi vengono riproposti a livello di aziende private.

Inoltre, negli esempi che abbiamo già citato dei contratti per dirigenti e per quadri intermedi, il rapporto tra cooperazione e sindacato è stato un rapporto certamente difficile e complesso che ha prodotto però dei risultati tangibili anche su materie (quadri intermedi) che a livello di aziende private non sono ancora riuscite a trovare uno sbocco negoziato tra le parti.

All'interno di questo quadro generale possiamo però evidenziare alcuni elementi critici.

Da un lato, e l'impressione è riportata da interviste effettuate a direttori del personale delle imprese cooperative, c'è un giudizio tendenzialmente critico sulle capacità del sindacato di rapportarsi in maniera moderna con la specificità dell'impresa cooperativa.

L'accusa che viene rivolta al sindacato è in sostanza quella di una carenza di "cultura industriale" e del prevalere di posizioni rivendicative generali che creano rigidità alla vita dell'impresa, mentre vengono sottovalutati problemi ben più rilevanti per la vita dell'azienda e per le prospettive future dei lavoratori.

Il caso più tipico è rappresentato dalla cosiddetta "prima parte dei contratti" frutto delle lotte condotte dai lavoratori negli anni '70 e che imponevano, per contratto, a tutte le imprese di delineare ed esplicitare le linee di sviluppo dell'azienda per il futuro e le relative implicazioni in termini di investimenti, occupazioni, organizzazione del lavoro.

Mentre le imprese private hanno sempre opposto una dura resistenza a questa clausola, le cooperative si sono mostrate disponibili a fornire periodicamente ai sindacati queste informazioni.

Ma l'opinione comune a tutti i responsabili del personale incaricati delle relazioni industriali è che i sindacati non abbiano poi saputo fare alcun uso di queste informazioni e non

siano mai entrati nel merito delle cose, proprio per carenza di "cultura di impresa" o, peggio ancora, per disinteresse.

La seconda osservazione riguarda la gestione dei conflitti interni alle cooperative ed il relativo rapporto con i sindacati. Anche su questo tema non esistono ricerche specifiche ma è possibile individuare alcune tendenze generali.

Le cooperative, il più delle volte compresi i dirigenti, tendono ad aderire agli scioperi di carattere generale in termini di solidarietà.

Si sono dati casi, anche se rari e comunque limitati nel numero di ore perse, di scioperi promossi dal sindacato all'interno di singole cooperative per rivendicazioni che i dirigenti non volevano accettare .

Nelle situazioni di crisi aziendali gravi che comportano anche il licenziamento di lavoratori, il più delle volte é la stessa cooperativa che ricerca il confronto con il sindacato e collabora con esso per la ricerca di soluzioni occupazionali alternative.

In questi casi (se ne sono verificati alcuni significativi in Emilia nel corso del 1984) la situazione viene risolta attraverso un confronto ed una negoziazione tra cooperative, sindacato e S.P.S.

Si danno anche casi, per la verità rari (uno è avvenuto sul finire del 1984 a Bologna) di conflitto duro tra sindacato e cooperativa per la chiusura di una cooperativa in crisi. La

soluzione del conflitto, che si esprime attraverso scioperi e occupazione dell'azienda, viene ricercata in prima istanza tra sindacato e S.P.S.. Ma se questi non riescono a risolvere il conflitto é facile che questo venga portato all'interno dei partiti ai quali viene riconosciuto il ruolo di mediatore in quanto sia sindacato che dirigenti cooperativi si riconoscono nello stesso (o negli stessi) partiti.

Come si può notare nelle considerazioni fin qui condotte il rapporto cooperazione e sindacato è un rapporto complesso e certamente non lineare. Il dato più significativo che emerge è però il modificarsi di questo rapporto a partire dalla fine degli anni '70.

Le linee di sviluppo e le trasformazioni che esso porterà sia sul piano teorico dell'elaborazione politica ed ideale che su quello delle esperienze non sono ancora chiare ma rappresentano uno dei grandi temi di riflessione, e quindi anche di studio e di ricerca per i prossimi anni.

I temi del dibattito sulla cooperazione

Per inquadrare i temi del dibattito sulla cooperazione in Italia occorre ricordare alcune specificità della esperienza italiana

a) presenza significativa della cooperazione in diversi settori:

distribuzione

abitazione

costruzioni

credito

servizi

agricoltura

b) presenza territoriale abbastanza diffusa anche se con concentrazioni significative in alcune zone:

Emilia-Romagna

Trentino

Lombardia

Toscana

c) coinvolgimento diretto e indiretto di tutte le forze politiche in esperienze cooperative

d) sostanziale solidità nel tempo delle cooperative

e) dimensioni medio e medio-grandi delle cooperative

Alla luce di queste caratteristiche strutturali della cooperazione, possiamo individuare nei seguenti punti i temi centrali del dibattito odierno sulla cooperazione:

- 1) Cooperazione quale terzo settore dell'economia
- 2) Struttura delle imprese, trasformazione e capitalizzazione
- 3) Cooperazione, occupazione e mezzogiorno
- 4) Ruolo delle S.P.S. e dei consorzi
- 5) Ruolo sociale della cooperazione

1) Cooperazione quale terzo settore dell'economia

La presenza di un forte movimento cooperativo articolato a livello settoriale e territoriale e con diverse ispirazioni ideali e politiche ha fatto sì che in Italia si sia sempre posto il problema del ruolo della cooperazione nel sistema politico-economico complessivo.

Cattolici e socialisti, liberali e repubblicani sono stati e sono portatori di diverse visioni della cooperazione e dello spazio che essa doveva e poteva occupare nell'economia.

Una ricostruzione attenta di queste dinamiche è fuori dall'economia di questo lavoro, ma su questo tema esiste una ricca bibliografia soprattutto per il periodo che va fino alla seconda guerra mondiale.

Nel dopoguerra, fatto salvo il dibattito alla Costituente, la cooperazione riprende il suo sviluppo senza suscitare particolari considerazioni fino a circa la metà degli anni '70.

Le cooperative, normalmente di piccole dimensioni, vengono

considerate come una forma di solidarietà economica e sociale, che di fatto svolgono un ruolo marginale nell'economia, occupando le posizioni interstiziali lasciate libere dallo sviluppo capitalistico.

Solo nel settore agricolo, il più ignorato dagli studiosi, possiamo dire che la cooperazione ha una presenza strutturale e diffusa tanto è vero che le stesse riforme agrarie varate dal governo portano deliberatamente alla creazione di nuove cooperative.

Andando per rapidissimi tagli arriviamo alla svolta degli anni '70 in cui, a fronte della crisi in cui versano imprese pubbliche e grandi imprese private, la cooperazione dimostra una grande vitalità che si esprime in:

- consolidamento (attraverso fusioni) delle cooperative che assumono dimensioni medio e medio grandi
- crescita di fatturati, dei redditi, degli investimenti
- sviluppo dell'occupazione
- diffusione nei diversi settori
- aggregazione anche dei ceti medi e dei piccoli imprenditori familiari

Qualcuno parla esplicitamente di cooperazione forza anticrisi e lo stesso governo pensa alla cooperazione come ad un attore che può affrontare alcuni problemi tipici dell'economia italiana:

occupazione

sviluppo del mezzogiorno

aziende in crisi

E' il momento più alto, sulla fine degli anni '70, del peso politico della cooperazione che mette a punto la sua strategia partendo da posizioni di forza in alcuni settori quali l'agricoltura, il consumo, le costruzioni.

E la strategia politica della cooperazione si esprime come "terzo settore" dell'economia a fianco del settore pubblico e di quello privato caratterizzato da una imprenditorialità diffusa che vede interagire la cooperazione, con gli artigiani ed i piccoli operatori commerciali.

Senza pretendere di rappresentare quindi, nemmeno sul piano teorico e ideologico, una alternativa radicale al capitalismo privato e pubblico la cooperazione si colloca con pari dignità tra le altre forze economiche rifiutando e nei fatti e nelle elaborazioni teoriche un ruolo marginale, che in alcuni settori non ha oggettivamente più, e presentandosi invece come forza fortemente innovativa che gioca le sue capacità di trasformazione sulla imprenditorialità diffusa e che, proprio grazie ai successi registrati, si sente titolata ad affrontare alcuni dei nodi cruciali dello sviluppo economico italiano.

Non un ruolo radicale-alternativo, non un ruolo dimostrativo ma marginale, bensì una presenza effettiva caratterizzata da un modo diverso di essere impresa.

I risultati di questa elaborazione strategica della cooperazione italiana che ne fanno un caso unico nel panorama

europeo-occidentale non si fanno attendere.

Nessuno pensa più che la cooperazione sia un fatto marginale tanto è vero che gli stessi industriali si scagliano sempre di più contro le agevolazioni, fiscali, finanziarie e politiche che faciliterebbero la crescita e la competitività delle cooperative. Il governo vara una legge (L.285) per la cooperazione giovanile volta a favorire la nascita di cooperative tra giovani i cui risultati, oltre alla effettiva costituzione di numerose cooperative, soprattutto al sud, sono per molti versi deludenti e rappresentano oggetto di riflessione e dibattito in questi mesi.

Lo stesso governo, anche su pressione dei sindacati, mette mano a due disegni di legge: uno per la creazione di un fondo di solidarietà attraverso il quale promuovere lo sviluppo di attività imprenditoriali (cooperative) al sud (lo 0,50); l'altro, divenuto legge nel febbraio 1985, per concedere, da un lato agevolazioni ai lavoratori che si costituiscono in cooperativa per salvare le loro aziende in crisi, dall'altro finanziamenti agevolati a cooperative con specifici progetti di investimento.

Al di là delle dichiarazioni di intenti e delle affermazioni di principio ci sembra si possa dire che la cooperazione italiana di oggi è caratterizzata da un forte dualismo:

Da un lato la cooperazione cosiddetta tradizionale rappresentata da un certo numero di aziende presenti in diversi settori con forte competitività nei confronti delle altre imprese.

Dall'altro lato la cooperazione cosiddetta "nuova" delle

cooperative di salvataggio, giovanili, sociali, in forte movimento, con aziende che nascono e muoiono nel giro di pochi mesi e con progetti sempre più concreti e fiduciosi nelle possibilità della cooperazione di risolvere i grandi problemi sociali.

In realtà oggi come oggi i due tipi di cooperazione hanno problemi e suscitano riflessioni di natura fortemente differenziata, come vedremo meglio tra poco.

A cavallo di queste due anime della cooperazione, una tradizionale, consolidata, storica e di successo, l'altra emergente, giovane, magmatica e che rappresenta più una scommessa per il futuro che non una certezza, stanno le strutture politico sindacali, il movimento cooperativo e, per molti versi il sindacato.

2) Struttura delle imprese, trasformazione, capitalizzazione

La crescita delle grandi cooperative (in particolare nel settore delle costruzioni, ma non solo) è andata ben al di là di quanto il legislatore aveva mai ipotizzato e tutta una serie di norme e considerazioni poste a suo tempo per garantire e tutelare la specificità della cooperativa stanno dimostrandosi come vincoli al suo futuro sviluppo.

Il problema principale è rappresentato dalla perenne sottocapitalizzazione delle imprese che nonostante abbiano praticamente reinvestito tutti i loro utili si trovano a disporre

di un capitale non sufficiente a coprire il volume di produzione che sono in grado di realizzare e collocare, il che le costringe ad indebitarsi con le banche.

Su spinta e pressione di queste cooperative, poche, ma di successo e di grande rilevanza politica ed economica, stanno nascendo una serie di proposte che, se attuate, porterebbero modificazioni significative alla natura giuridica e sociale dell'impresa cooperativa.

Queste proposte, ancora in fase di elaborazione e di messa a punto mirano a:

- eliminare il limite della quota di capitale che ciascun socio può versare
- eliminare il tetto di interesse che la cooperativa può riconoscere sul capitale
- eliminare il limite massimo di denaro che il socio può prestare alla cooperativa
- eliminare il limite massimo di interesse che può essere riconosciuto sul denaro prestato.

Le proposte più avanzate arrivano a prevedere la possibilità diretta per la cooperativa di emettere obbligazioni e/o di essere quotate in borsa.

Problema particolarmente sentito dalla Lega è anche quello di dotarsi di una struttura finanziaria, una vera e propria banca per trovare canali di accesso più semplici e diretti a fonti finanziarie.

Per la Confederazione questo problema non si pone perchè le

cooperative "bianche" possono contare su una fitta rete di Casse rurali ed artigiane.

Le proposte relative alla "capitalizzazione" delle imprese nascono da due considerazioni.

In primo luogo la constatazione delle crescenti esigenze finanziarie di imprese cooperative che, in molti casi, si sono già trasformate in gruppi economici che controllano pacchetti azionari di società per azioni promosse dalla stessa cooperativa o sotto forma di consorzio a joint-venture con altre imprese private per la realizzazione di "grandi lavori" in Italia e all'estero e che comportano non solo grandi capacità organizzativa ma anche grande disponibilità ed elasticità finanziaria.

In secondo luogo la constatazione della capacità che le cooperative di consumo, ma non solo queste, hanno di raccogliere risparmio da soci e la convinzione che in condizioni adeguate la cooperazione sarebbe in grado di raccogliere una quota ancora maggiore di risparmio da indirizzare immediatamente ad attività produttive superando in questo modo la intermediazione bancaria ritenuta eccessivamente parassitaria.

Questo punto rappresenterà indubbiamente uno dei nodi centrali dello sviluppo cooperativo anche per il legislatore.

Sul piano sociale il risvolto più significativo dei "grandi lavori" è rappresentato dalla perdita crescente di carattere

localistico ed operaio dell'impresa che tende ad assumere sempre più carattere di general contractor . Cresce la rilevanza strategica dei quadri e dei tecnici mentre diminuisce, anche sul piano occupazionale, quella dei lavoratori addetti alla produzione dando vita ad una forte tensione sociale.

Il comportamento delle cooperative di fronte a questo problema, comune a tutte e particolarmente delicato, è abbastanza differenziato. Alcune puntano consapevolmente ad una riduzione guidata della manodopera, altre pongono l'occupazione come un vincolo e arrivano ad assumere lavori in perdita. In ogni caso questo è il tema di fondo per queste cooperative, una sorta di "paradosso sociale del successo", che dovrà essere gestito, in un modo o nell'altro nei prossimi mesi. Su questo tema ritorneremo affrontando il caso della C.M.B.

3) Cooperazione, occupazione e Mezzogiorno

Se fino a pochi anni fa l'occupazione era considerata la funzione obiettivo specifico delle imprese cooperative oggi le posizioni su questo problema sono molto più differenziate.

Da un lato le grandi cooperative tradizionali, vuoi per le trasformazioni tecnologiche, vuoi per le trasformazioni organizzative, hanno cessato da tempo di creare nuova occupazione e, soprattutto a livello operaio, hanno di fatto iniziato un processo di riduzione della occupazione attraverso il blocco del turn-over.

L'occupazione, sempre considerata come valore non è più concepita

né come obiettivo principale né tantomeno come vincolo. Questo per le grandi cooperative.

Viceversa si guarda con molta attenzione alla cooperazione quale occasione di job creation o attraverso il salvataggio di aziende in crisi o attraverso la creazione di nuove imprese soprattutto fra i giovani.

Non è possibile allo stato attuale dimostrare, dati alla mano, se e in che misura la cooperazione negli ultimi anni abbia creato nuova occupazione.

I dati riportati dalla già citata ricerca CISL e confermati per altro in buona parte da una ricerca Inecoop fanno infatti riflettere. Anche le cooperative di salvataggio tendono nel breve e medio periodo a ridurre l'occupazione come dimostra il caso di alcune cooperative campione:

Centenari Zinelli	da 400	a	210	lavoratori
C.L.G.	" 80	a	60	"
Texrose	" 956	a	360	"
Clems	" 350	a	158	"
Esco	" 360	a	200	"
W.M.T.	" 120	a	45	"
Safit	" 120	a	45	"
Zetronic	" 750	a	550	"
Nuova Capeco	" 380	a	275	"

(AA.VV., oggi l'autogestione)

Il numero delle cooperative è certamente aumentato ma molte di queste occupano poche persone, sottoretribuite, ed hanno vita breve.

Altre, viceversa, sia giovanili che di salvataggio hanno dimostrato una certa capacità di sopravvivenza e sviluppo. Qualsiasi stima sarebbe al momento azzardata in assenza di uno specifico censimento.

Possiamo però dire che, in questo caso, sindacati e governo sembrano più convinti delle centrali cooperative della possibilità di crescita e diffusione di queste esperienze.

IL problema di fondo è rappresentato dalle strutture di supporto finanziarie e gestionali che dovrebbero appoggiare la prima fase di vita delle nuove cooperative.

In questa direzione, ma ancora in modo occasionale e pionieristico si stanno muovendo sia le centrali cooperative che i sindacati realizzando corsi di formazione per la creazione di figure che possano gestire il passaggio dalla azienda in crisi alla cooperativa. Così come le centrali cooperative stanno promuovendo la costituzione di reti di servizio a supporto delle nuove cooperative. Questo discorso assume particolare significato per il sud d'Italia nel quale i problemi occupazionali sono particolarmente gravi. Sia le centrali cooperative che i sindacati attribuiscono particolare importanza alla cooperazione nel Mezzogiorno e si stanno attrezzando per realizzare iniziative di supporto alla nascita di nuove cooperative. Nella stessa direzione si muove il governo che sta predisponendo un piano per lo sviluppo cooperativo giovanile nel Mezzogiorno. Ma anche su questo non esistono dati quantitativi aggiornati ed attendibili. Resta però un elemento centrale del dibattito politico-attuale che, forse per la prima volta in Italia vede convergere

l'interesse del governo, del movimento cooperativo, del movimento sindacale.

4) Ruolo delle strutture politico sindacali e dei consorzi

Caratteristica tipicamente italiana della cooperazione è quella di riunire all'interno della stessa struttura politico-sindacale cooperative operanti nei settori diversi realizzando così, almeno a livello associativo, una integrazione fra tutte le cooperative operanti in tutti i settori.

I compiti di queste associazioni vanno ben al di là delle tradizionali funzioni di rappresentanza degli interessi e, tradizionalmente, coprono aree quali:

- l'assistenza e l'erogazione dei servizi alle imprese
- il coordinamento delle politiche commerciali e di sviluppo
- il controllo
- la promozione di nuove cooperative

Il dibattito attuale è relativo al ruolo che devono giocare le S.P.S. secondo tre principali modalità:

- rappresentanza degli interessi
- erogazione dei servizi
- guida dello sviluppo

E' difficile individuare sinteticamente le tendenze emergenti, ma è certo che questo rappresenta uno dei temi più significativi per lo sviluppo della cooperazione nei prossimi anni: da un lato le

grandi cooperative tendono ad accentuare la loro autonomia, dall'altro lato le piccole e nuove cooperative richiedono strumenti di supporto e di servizio sempre più numerosi e sofisticati.

In alcuni casi le S.P.S. danno vita in proprio a strutture di servizio, in altri casi si dà vita a cooperative di servizio nei settori avanzati che forniscono servizi reali alle imprese.

In ogni caso è da sottolineare come, in questo campo sia praticamente del tutto assente l'ente pubblico e come molte difficoltà derivino dal carattere ancora prevalentemente politico (e partitico) delle strutture associative.

Discorso in parte analogo vale per i consorzi di cooperative nati nel passato per realizzare economie di scala e maggior potere contrattuale nei confronti di terzi. I consorzi erano concepiti come strutture di servizio a costi e ricavi mentre l'autonomia imprenditiva rimaneva alle singole cooperative.

In realtà nel corso degli ultimi anni lo sviluppo dei consorzi ha avuto un andamento contraddittorio.

Da un lato alcune cooperative, crescendo, hanno internalizzato le funzioni che prima avevano delegato ai consorzi aumentando la loro autonomia e non riconoscendo più legittimità e utilità ai consorzi.

Dall'altro lato alcuni consorzi hanno aumentato notevolmente la loro capacità imprenditiva, diventando i veri attori economici, i veri imprenditori relegando le cooperative associate a semplici funzioni produttive.

Se queste sono le macro-tendenze più evidenti bisogna però dire che le conoscenze e le ricerche sui consorzi sono pressochè inesistenti e questo è sorprendente perchè, almeno nel caso italiano, i consorzi rappresentano, da un punto di vista economico l'asse portante della realtà cooperativa in settori quali l'agricoltura, il consumo, le costruzioni.

E' nostra convinzione che il tema dei consorzi è l'anello mancante più rilevante per capire a fondo cosa è la cooperazione in Italia e soprattutto per verificare quali sono le sue linee di sviluppo nel prossimo futuro.

5) Ruolo sociale della cooperazione

Non si può pensare alla cooperazione italiana come ad un tutto unico o ad un qualcosa fortemente omogeneo.

Il ruolo sociale della cooperazione si gioca su più piani rispetto a quelle che Stern definisce "policy agendas"

Managing decline

La cooperazione è concepita, in questo caso come una modalità per rendere socialmente meno difficoltoso il declino di settori in crisi.

Per quanto riguarda l'esperienza italiana possiamo fare riferimento a tre grandi filoni

a) cooperative di salvataggio di imprese in crisi. Al di là dei casi verificatesi in questi ultimi anni, per la verità non molto

numerosi, il discorso diventerà particolarmente cruciale nei prossimi mesi ed anni quando diventerà operativa la cosiddetta legge Marcora.

b) cooperative giovanili volte a garantire una occupazione qualsiasi a giovani che non riescono ad inserirsi nei tradizionali mercati di lavoro

c) Cooperative operanti nell'ambito dei servizi sociali. La crisi della struttura di Welfare punta infatti alla gestione in forma cooperativa di servizi che prima venivano erogati direttamente dall'ente pubblico.

Se le cooperative vengono concepite come un mezzo utile ed efficace per gestire il declino, occorre però chiedersi dove risiede la loro maggiore competitività rispetto al privato e al pubblico.

Da un lato si scommette su una maggiore "capacità imprenditoriale" rispetto a forme di conduzione in cui sia privato che pubblico hanno fallito.

Da un altro lato si scommette sulla rigenerazione derivante da un coinvolgimento diretto e da una responsabilità diretta dei singoli rispetto a forme di rigidità organizzativa e di diffuso disinteresse presente a livello di impresa privata e di struttura pubblica.

Dall'altro lato ancora però si conta in una diluizione nel tempo delle scelte più difficili contando in buona parte anche sullo autosfruttamento dei singoli.

Sarà quindi da verificare, in un secondo tempo, se la

cooperazione è forma imprenditoriale innovativa, date certe condizioni, oppure se è solo un metodo socialmente più accettabile per prolungare nel tempo il declino finale di certe imprese o strutture di servizio.

Personalmente credo occorra prestare attenzione alle dimensioni imprenditoriali che ciascuna di queste esperienze può esprimere anche in termini innovativi, rifuggendo viceversa da quelle forme cooperative che senza avere alcun carattere di impresa si configurano semplicemente come forma collettiva di (auto) gestione del solo fattore lavoro.

Un discorso a parte occorre fare per quelle forme di iniziativa a sostegno sociale, di tipo interstiziale, che vanno sotto la categoria generale del volontariato e che, se pure rilevanti in un ottica sociale, non hanno una spiccata rilevanza economico-imprenditoriale.

Economic Regeneration

La cooperazione é concepita in questo caso come forma organizzativa fortemente innovativa e competitiva.

Nel caso italiano abbiamo almeno due filoni interessanti:

a) il primo è rappresentato dalle cooperative cosiddette tradizionali, che dimostrano di poter competere ad armi pari con altre imprese quando addirittura non sono in grado di dare vita ad un'impresa assolutamente innovativa.

Il significato di queste esperienze, certamente molto numerose in

Italia è particolarmente rilevante sotto almeno due profili:

- Il primo è quello della "impresa sociale", impresa in cui è sempre meno chiara e personalizzata la figura dell'imprenditore ma prevale viceversa una sorta di "imprenditore collettivo" pubblico o privato che sia. In questo caso l'esperienza di gestione di grandi imprese, in cui il "proprietario" non è un singolo azionista o lo stato ma è ancora una molteplicità di soggetti sociali con propri valori ed obiettivi, é particolarmente significativa ed in linea con le tendenze in atto non solo nel settore cooperativo.

- il secondo è quello relativo alle esperienze cooperative di gestione delle risorse umane che le grandi imprese private stanno riscoprendo a partire dai successi dell'economia giapponese

b) il secondo filone è rappresentato dalle cooperative cosiddette emergenti che raggruppano in unità di piccole dimensioni tecnici estremamente professionalizzati.

In questo caso la cooperativa sembra essere una risposta innovativa rispetto alle altre due modalità organizzative possibili: da un lato la libera professione, dall'altro la grande organizzazione gerarchica.

La cooperativa in questo caso si configura ancora come imprenditore collettivo attraverso il quale i soci mantengono il controllo non solo sulle loro competenze specifiche ma anche

sulle modalità di vendita a terzi di queste competenze.

Societal transformation

La cooperativa è qui concepita come modo diverso ed alternativo di lavorare che consente la realizzazione di valori sociali universali; ed è quindi legata, il più delle volte a movimenti sociali, (ecologia, movimenti per la pace, etc.)

Nel caso italiano non si può dire che la cooperativa rappresenti una soluzione tipica. Probabilmente la rete più consistente di cooperative di questo tipo è rappresentata dalle cooperative costituite dagli studenti universitari cattolici.

Una delle ragioni di questo numero limitato di cooperative è probabilmente dovuto alla legge italiana che dà ampie possibilità di realizzare questi obiettivi sociali attraverso una diversa forma giuridica che è quella dell'associazione.

In questo caso esistono numerosissime associazioni volontarie (ecologi, naturalisti, ambientalisti, etc.) che gestiscono in proprio anche attività economiche e commerciali a favore dei propri soci.

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Tabelle dati quantitativi

Le tavole che seguono si riferiscono, dove non altrimenti specificato a dati forniti dal Ministero della Previdenza Sociale (Direzione generale della cooperazione) e loro elaborazioni.

In particolare si riferiscono alle cooperative e ai loro consorzi iscritti nello "Schedario generale". Nel novero degli enti iscritti in tale Schedario non risultano compresi i consorzi di cooperative ammissibili ai pubblici appalti.

Vi sono invece compresi d'ufficio tutti gli enti iscritti nei registri prefettizi o regionali, le banche popolari, le Casse rurali ed artigiane e le cooperative di assicurazione.

L'iscrizione a questo schedario è necessaria per il godimento delle agevolazioni previste dalle leggi nazionali e regionali.

Seguono in allegato N° 5 tabelle

Società cooperative che nel 1983 hanno depositato l'atto costitutivo ai fini della pubblicazione nel Bollettino Ufficiale delle Società Cooperative - B.U.S.C.

REGIONE	SEZIONE								TOTALE	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		Val. assol.	Valori %
	Consumo	Prod. e Lavoro	Agricola	Edilizia	Trasp.	Pesca	Flete Varie	C.R.A. Banche		
PIEMONTE	6	69	31	52	1	-	67	-	225	3,5
VALLE D'AOSTA	-	3	2	3	-	-	6	-	14	0,2
LOMBARDIA	30	155	15	365	4	1	165	3	738	11,4
TRENTINO A. ADIGE	1	20	7	6	-	-	29	-	63	1,0
VENETO	9	65	35	65	4	1	70	2	251	3,9
FRIULI V. GIULIA	4	45	10	16	2	-	18	-	95	1,5
LIGURIA	1	51	29	38	3	2	14	-	138	2,1
EMILIA ROMAGNA	4	62	46	30	13	1	140	-	296	4,6
ITALIA SETTENT.	55	470	175	575	27	5	509	5	1.821	28,2
TOSCANA	13	94	24	92	4	1	87	-	15	4,9
UMERIA	3	42	10	11	1	-	1	-	10	1,1
MARCHE	2	43	16	66	3	-	56	-	196	3,0
LAZIO	50	262	55	199	4	6	154	-	730	11,3
ITALIA CENTRALE	68	441	105	360	12	7	308	-	1.309	20,3
ABRUZZO	12	17	32	48	6	-	17	-	162	2,5
MOLISE	2	9	11	13	-	-	4	-	39	0,6
CAMPANIA	9	355	110	276	17	7	52	2	829	12,4
PUGLIA	13	114	101	178	15	5	60	-	508	7,3
BASILICATA	3	60	13	49	2	-	27	2	164	2,5
CALABRIA	5	71	52	71	2	3	11	1	220	3,4
ITALIA MERIDIONALE	48	567	319	635	42	15	151	5	1.522	29,6
SICILIA	69	357	183	401	16	10	192	1	1.225	19,1
SARDEGNA	9	80	29	29	1	3	14	-	165	2,6
ITALIA ISOLARE	78	137	212	430	17	13	206	1	1.354	21,7
TOTALE ITALIA	245	2.015	811	2.008	98	40	1.214	11	6.446	100,0
VALORI PERCENTUALI	1,9	31,3	12,6	31,2	1,3	0,6	18,6	0,2	100,0	

Variazione della distribuzione territoriale
(Cfr. fenomeno della "meridionalizzazione")

AREE GEOGRAFICHE	1972		1983		
	v. a.	%	v. a.	%	%
Italia settentrionale	20.093	41,4	34.342	45,5	- 5,9
Italia centrale	14.189	29,2	23.571	24,4	- 4,8
Italia meridionale	8.259	17,0	24.634	25,4	+ 8,4
Italia insulare	6.032	12,4	14.255	14,7	+ 2,3
T O T A L E	48.573	100	96.802	100	-

Le centrali secondo i dati ufficiali
(andamento della distribuzione territoriale)

Valori Assoluti	CCI		Lega		AGCI		UNCI		TOTALE	
	'72	'83	'72	'83	'72	'83	'72	'83	'72	'83
Italia settentr.	5.621	10.668	4.824	6.965	723	1.414	-	376	11.168	19.423
Italia centrale	1.304	4.080	1.630	3.849	476	1.095	-	318	3.410	9.342
Italia meridion.	1.081	3.491	836	2.706	462	1.603	-	473	2.379	8.273
Italia insulare	2.379	4.076	896	2.105	346	677	-	250	3.631	7.108
T O T A L E	10.385	22.315	8.186	15.625	2.007	4.789	-	1.417	20.578	44.146

Valori %	CCI		Lega		AGCI		UNCI		TOTALE	
	'72	'83	'72	'83	'72	'83	'72	'83	'72	'83
Italia settentr.	54,2	47,8	58,9	44,6	36,0	29,5	-	26,5	54,2	44,0
Italia centrale	12,5	18,3	19,9	24,6	23,7	22,9	-	22,5	16,6	21,2
Italia meridion.	10,4	15,6	10,2	17,3	23,0	33,5	-	33,4	11,6	18,7
Italia insulare	22,9	18,3	11,0	13,5	17,3	14,1	-	17,6	17,6	16,1
	100	100	100	100	100	100	-	100	100	100

Le centrali secondo i dati ufficiali
(andamento della distribuzione settoriale)

Valori Assoluti	CCI		Lega		AGCI		UNCI	
	'72	'83	'72	'83	'72	'83	'72	'83
Consumo	1.383	1.776	1.243	2.206	144	188	-	34
Prod. e Lav.	1.130	2.677	1.279	3.538	309	978	-	58
Agricola	3.619	6.423	1.536	2.693	345	628	-	182
Abitazione	2.977	8.654	2.600	5.302	1.013	2.539	-	1.054
Trasporto	138	223	116	215	58	93	-	4
Pesca	335	422	83	134	31	68	-	4
Mista	803	2.140	429	1.537	107	295	-	81
TOTALE	10.385	22.315	8.186	15.625	2.007	4.789	-	1.417

Valori %	CCI		Lega		AGCI		UNCI	
	'72	'83	'72	'83	'72	'83	'72	'83
Consumo	13,3	7,9	15,2	14,1	7,2	3,9	-	2,4
Prod. e Lav.	10,9	12,0	15,6	22,6	15,4	20,4	-	4,1
Agricola	34,8	28,8	18,8	17,2	17,2	13,1	-	12,8
Abitazione	28,7	38,8	31,8	33,9	50,5	53,0	-	74,4
Trasporto	1,4	1,0	1,4	1,4	2,9	2,0	-	0,3
Pesca	3,2	1,3	1,0	0,9	1,5	1,4	-	0,3
Mista	7,7	9,6	5,2	9,8	5,3	6,2	-	5,7
TOTALE	100	100	100	100	100	100	-	100

Un esempio del peso relativo delle centrali sia sul numero delle cooperative che su quello dei soci e dei dipendenti.

Numero di cooperative, di soci, di occupati, per settore,
in Emilia Romagna al 31.12.1978

settore	1978			1977			1976		
	Lega	Unione	AGCI	Lega	Unione	AGCI	Lega	Unione	AGCI
agricoltura	700	1.224	162	136.000	99.970	17.043	28.327	9.392	5.079
prod. e lavoro	177	159	39	33.000	4.488	851	32.945	4.033	1.370
abitazione	183	405	164	74.750	22.958	7.117	-	-	9
consumo	45	60	38	215.000	35.875	7.542	3.000	310	169
cultura	265	108	78	51.000	4.239	6.402	255	18	11
credito	3	46	2	4.000	15.915	1.524	90	591	154
altre (trasporti, servizi)	402	105	14	66.398	11.634	458	19.771	1.949	489
totale	1.775	2.127	547	580.548	195.079	40.937	84.388	16.293	7.281
Totale generale		4.449			816.164			107.962	

FONTE: L. Avellini e M. Palazzi, L'Emilia Romagna: una regione, Zanichelli, Bologna 1980, p. 96.

Elenco case-studies

Elenco delle cooperative che hanno costituito oggetto di singoli studi di caso e che sono stati pubblicati. I livelli di approfondimento e di dettaglio sono estremamente differenziati e non omogenei.

Cooperative tradizionali:

- la "Costruttori" di Argenta,
- la "Nova" di Roma,
- la "Edile Sardegna",
- l'"Edilfornaciai" di Castenaso,
- l'"Edilter" di Bologna,
- la "C.M.C." di Ravenna,
- la "SACMI" di Imola,
- la "Copart" di Limite sull'Arno,
- la "Fonditori" di Modena,
- la "C.R.C." di Reggio Emilia,
- la "Edilcoop" di Crevalcore,
- la "Muratori Fogliense" di Sassocorvaro,
- la "coop Facchini" di Iesi,
- l'"Ascolana calzaturiera" di Ascoli Piceno,
- la "C.G.C." di Senigallia,
- la "Gino Tommasi" di Ancona,
- la "Coop Imperia" di Camerano,
- la "Cabel" di Curno (BG),
- la "C.M.B." di Carpi (MO),
- la "C.I.R." di Imola (BO).

Cooperative rescue :

- la "Centenar Zinelli",
- la "Clems",
- la "C.L.G. di Verona",
- la "Cooperativa Ceramica Industriale" di Laveno Verbano,
- la "Texrose" di Agrate Brianza (MI),
- la "Comaco",
- la "Nuova Leo" di Torino,
- la "Nuova tre Re",
- la "Nuova Tubital" di Marghera (VE),
- la "Nuova Lamital" di Cuneo,
- la "Nuova Salco",
- la "Produzione Serramenti Dolcini",
- la "Nuova Reguitti" di Agnosine (BS),
- la "Minucoop", Albagnasego (PD),
- la "Cooptronic" di Padova,
- la "W.M.T." di Torino,
- la "Zetronic" di Padova,
- la "SIAC" di Renna S. Giovanni,
- la "C.I.D.A.G." di Panarello (GE),
- la "Nuova Utensileria Italiana" (GE).

All'interno di alcune ricerche più generali sulle cooperative giovanili (sociali o emergenti), sono state studiate le seguenti cooperative:

- la "coop agrozootechnica" di Itri,
- l'"Agrofuturo" di Foggia,
- la "Carminè Giorgio" di Minervino Murge,
- la "coop "Il Forteto" di Barberino del Mugello,
- la coop "Gellia" di Agrigento,
- la "Cogest" di Terni,
- la "Fresia" di Roma,
- la coop "Ipotesi" di Napoli,
- la "Colens" di Catania,
- la "Nuova Medicina" di Enna,
- la coop "Studi zoologici e ambientali" di Roma,
- la "Nautia" di Roma,
- la coop "Alce Nero" di Urbino,
- la "Agricoltura nuova",
- la "Primo maggio agricolo".

La cooperativa Delta

Introduzione

La cooperativa scelta come "case study" delle cooperative emergenti è la Delta di Trento.

E' nata nel 1980 da un gruppo di 9 persone provenienti da una precedente esperienza in un'altra cooperativa, la Corist.

Quest'ultima, era sorta nell'ambito della legge 285 e si occupava principalmente di ricerche, di rilevazioni statistiche, sistemazioni di archivi e biblioteche. I suoi principali clienti erano gli enti pubblici locali.

Il distacco dei nove soci, che poi costituirono la Delta, fu dovuto alla diversità di prospettive sullo sviluppo della Corist; mentre per alcuni, il lavoro in cooperativa, costituiva solo una possibilità di guadagno in attesa di un'occupazione definitiva, per altri (i futuri Delta) c'era l'intenzione di operare in modo che essa stessa potesse trasformarsi in fonte di occupazione stabile. L'incompatibilità degli obiettivi portò alla inevitabile uscita di nove soci; nasce quindi la Delta la cui attività ricalcava, sia per tipo di commesse, che per cliente, quella della Corist. Poichè i soci fondatori erano concordi sul fatto che ci si sarebbe dovuti orientare allo sviluppo delle attività più attinenti alle professionalità del gruppo, tra cui prevalevano i laureati in ingegneria elettronica, si cercò fin

dall'inizio di inserirsi nel settore dell'informatica proponendo ai già clienti anche questo tipo di servizio. In questa direzione si fece la scelta di concentrare gli sforzi economici, oltre che professionali, su questo settore. La strategia é risultata vincente e ha permesso di cogliere le opportunità di mercato offerte da un settore ancora poco sviluppato, ma dalle notevoli possibilità (soprattutto gli inizi degli anni '80). Il grande successo registrato è misurabile dal fatturato raddoppiato di anno in anno.

Sempre legato a questo settore é il singolare sviluppo realizzato all'esterno della Delta: tramite il contributo che Delta ha dato alla costituzione di due cooperative, di cui fanno parte alcuni dei propri soci si é creata una forma di integrazione verticale per decentramento. Infatti la prima di queste cooperative si occupa di consulenza su sistemi informativi (quindi attività a monte rispetto alla software house), l'altra offre servizi di inserimento dati su programmi e formazione per gli utilizzatori finali dei computers (quindi attività a valle della software house).

Al di là dell'aspetto strategico-commerciale di questa iniziativa che ha portato alla nascita delle due cooperative, bisogna coglierne anche il significato promozionale: si inserisce infatti tra le numerose iniziative per la promozione della cooperazione e dei suoi principi che Delta svolge attivamente nella regione in cui opera.

Descrizione della cooperativa

Come si vede dalla ripartizione del fatturato '84 (vedi tav.1) la struttura produttiva prevede tre linee di prodotti.

La quota dei "Diversi" comprende quelle attività caratteristiche della fase iniziale della cooperativa e che, per scelta dei suoi fondatori, si va gradualmente riducendo, infatti non esiste per questo settore attività commerciale propria, ma si fanno interventi solo su richiesta valutandone l'opportunità di volta in volta. Nell''84 per esempio il fatturato realizzato corrisponde ad un unico prestigioso lavoro, commissionato dalla Provincia, sulla cooperazione nella Regione.

Per il settore "Tecnico" invece si sta cercando di far promozione sia nei confronti delle imprese che del settore privato puntando, in particolare, sul risparmio energetico. Contrariamente al settore "Diversi", il settore "Tecnico", nonostante in termini di fatturato abbia un peso pressoché uguale, rientra nelle strategie di sviluppo della Delta.

Il settore dell'"Elettronica", come dimostrato anche in termini di fatturato, é attualmente quello caratteristico della Delta.

La struttura organizzativa attualmente prevede a fronte dei settori produttivi una funzione commerciale e un'amministrazione centrale. Ciascuna di queste aree ha come responsabile un socio.

(Vedi organigramma tav.2)

C.4

Tav.1

Percentuale sul fatturato totale della Cooperativa dei singoli settori di attività al 31/12/1984

Elettronica 87,7%

Tot. 753.297.096

Tecnico 5,7%

Tot. 49.316.944

Diversi 6,6%

Tot. 56.729.363

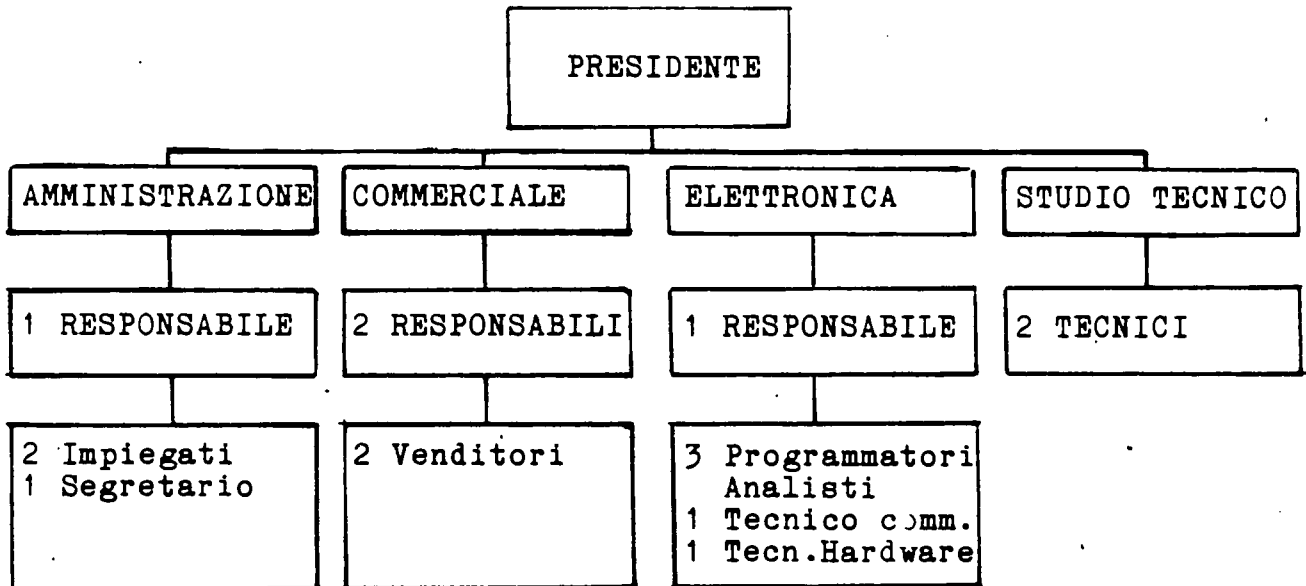
859.343.403

100%

TAV.2

L'organizzazione interna

La struttura attualmente formalizzata della Cooperativa prevede il seguente organigramma:



per un totale di 17 persone di cui sono soci della Cooperativa:

- Il Presidente
- Il Responsabile dell'amministrazione
- I Responsabili del settore commerciale
- Il Responsabile del settore elettronica
- Un Impiegato dell'Amministrazione
- Un Venditore

Tipi di impiego

Le cooperative emergenti sono caratterizzate dalla presenza tra i lavoratori di un livello elevato di scolarità. Così accade anche in Delta sia tra i soci, che tra i dipendenti.

I soci fondatori ancora attivi in Delta (5 dei 9 iniziali) sono tutti laureati: tre in ingegneria elettronica, uno in economia e commercio ed uno, una donna in sociologia. Dei tre soci entrati successivamente altri due sono laureati in ingegneria (elettronica e civile) ed una donna è geometra.

L'età media di questi soci è di 30 anni e come si è visto la presenza femminile non è particolarmente elevata.

Un discorso a parte merita l'ultimo dei soci entrato in Delta, infatti le sue caratteristiche risultano "anomale" sia per l'età (52 anni), per il titolo di studio, che infine per la professionalità che esprime. In realtà la scelta è ricaduta su questa persona perchè rispondeva all'esigenza particolare che si era manifestata con l'apertura di una nuova sede di vendita hardware a Rovereto. La distanza e la particolare attività della nuova sede richiedevano, per dare le necessarie garanzie, la presenza di una persona che avesse una specifica esperienza nel commercio e che fosse in grado di gestire ed assumere fin dall'inizio la completa responsabilità.

Quest'ultimo caso descritto ed un'altro episodio precedente hanno messo in rilievo l'esigenza di considerare un altro criterio di scelta dei soci cioè la presenza degli skills necessari. Anche se, dichiara il presidente, questo non può far prescindere dal

criterio preferenziale sulle caratteristiche personali, la posizione oramai raggiunta sul mercato richiede la presenza di professionalità già collaudate che garantiscano la continuità dello standard qualitativo che contraddistingue Delta.

Fatte quindi queste eccezioni, come per tutti i soci fondatori la massima parte degli attuali soci ha trovato in Delta la prima esperienza continuativa di lavoro.

La tendenza generale era, come si é detto, di indirizzare l'attività in modo da garantire l'utilizzo dei soci in base alla specifica formazione. Ma poi in qualche caso le necessità insorte, con l'evoluzione della cooperativa verso una struttura funzionale, hanno reso necessario il riorientamento di alcune delle professionalità interne.

In questi casi un intervento di formazione è stato ovviamente necessario; inizialmente si sono seguiti i corsi di livello più elementare organizzati dalla Federazione, poi quelli di enti esterni al Movimento. In Delta però il ricorso alla formazione non é preso in considerazione solo in situazioni particolari, come il riorientamento di professionalità, ma viene adottato come processo continuo di aggiornamento. Vi fanno ricorso indistintamente soci e dipendenti, a tutti i livelli dell'organizzazione, non escluso il presidente stesso.

Normalmente gli enti scelti a questo scopo sono esterni al movimento cooperativo in quanto la Federazione non offre formazione ai livelli richiesti e per le esigenze sentite. Un'attenzione particolare viene rivolta ai corsi organizzati dalle case di hardware di cui Delta é concessionaria.

Gli otto dipendenti presenti attualmente hanno anch'essi un livello di scolarità piuttosto elevato. Vi sono due addetti donne, diplomate, che svolgono servizio di segreteria per tutti i settori, mentre gli altri sei sono tutti impegnati nel settore informatico e tra loro troviamo due periti elettronici e quattro laureati in matematica.

Sono tutti molto giovani e, fatta eccezione per uno dei due periti in precedenza operaio in una industria, hanno fatto in Delta la prima esperienza di lavoro al termine del loro corso di studio. Quasi tutti sono in cooperativa da poco tempo cioè da quando la Delta è stata in grado di sostenerne l'onere. A questo proposito c'è da precisare che in prevalenza sono stati assunti con contratti particolari come quelli di "formazione-lavoro", contratti che sia dal punto di vista dei contributi, che della retribuzione sono molto meno onerosi per il datore di lavoro. Questo tipo di contratto è biennale e alla sua scadenza viene sostituito dal normale contratto della categoria, questa infatti è la prospettiva che in Delta porterà i dipendenti ad essere inquadrati nell'ambito del contratto nazionale del commercio.

Per quanto riguarda le mansioni attualmente svolte dai dipendenti si è visto che sei operano nel settore informatica, quattro con funzione di programmatori mentre due hanno ruoli più articolati e di maggiore responsabilità. In particolare ad uno di essi, che è in Delta da oltre due anni, vengono affidati completamente i progetti di cui si occupa e li gestisce autonomamente compreso il rapporto col cliente.

Retribuzioni e condizioni di lavoro

La retribuzione e la definizione del contratto dei dipendenti farà riferimento alle corrispondenti categorie nazionali del commercio.

Sono inoltre previste, anche se a tutt'oggi non sono ancora particolarmente sviluppate, forme di incentivi non finanziari come convenzioni di acquisto con altre cooperative e la destinazione di risorse finanziarie per l'aggiornamento professionale.

L'Assemblea intende attivare anche una serie di iniziative sociali riguardanti il tempo libero e le vacanze rivolte indistintamente ai soci e ai dipendenti.

Il livello di retribuzione dei soci si è stabilizzato solo dall'84 poiché per far fronte alle esigenze di capitalizzazione, si è fatto ricorso all'autofinanziamento. Risulta difficile fare un confronto con le retribuzioni di mercato in quanto è caratterizzato da oscillazioni molto ampie in funzione anche della dimensione e del tipo di struttura.

Per quanto riguarda la determinazione delle retribuzioni dei soci si rileva un fatto singolare: è stata rigorosamente formalizzata una struttura di differenziali retributivi che viene descritta in un regolamento interno approvato dall'Assemblea nel 1982. Il regolamento definisce 3 "livelli di soci" in base al livello dell'organizzazione nel quale il socio esplica la propria funzione e responsabilità (a livello 1° della propria attività, 2°

del settore in cui opera, 3° della cooperativa nel suo complesso). Il "livello" di appartenenza determina la retribuzione oraria, sulla base di questa vengono applicate una serie di parametri percentuali di aggiustamento, il passaggio da un livello a quello successivo comporta un aumento sulla propria base oraria del 5%, inoltre per ciascun anno trascorso in cooperativa come socio é previsto un incremento del 2%.

L'Assemblea decide in merito al livello nel quale si colloca il socio e determina la paga oraria di base per ciascun livello. Oltre questi criteri generali é previsto, e attuato, che l'Assemblea decida gli ulteriori aggiustamenti della retribuzione dei singoli soci, questo perché vi sia sempre equilibrio tra la retribuzione percepita e l'effettivo impegno rispetto alle proprie responsabilità. Come confermano i soci stessi é una procedura che a volte comporta un notevole sforzo, ma nonostante tutto é ritenuta essenziale non solo per garantire l'equilibrio ma anche per incentivare la partecipazione e la crescita professionale.

E' opportuno precisare che a questo rigore formale del sistema di determinazione della retribuzione non corrispondono grosse differenze retributive infatti la differenza tra retribuzione max e min é di circa 100.000 lire sia tra i soci che tra i dipendenti, inoltre é interessante il fatto che in più casi i dipendenti ancora oggi, nonostante il notevole recupero della retribuzione dei soci, percepiscono uno stipendio maggiore.

Strutture ed evoluzione delle forme di partecipazione

Un aspetto da evidenziare nella struttura è la presenza della quota elevata di dipendenti non soci, sono infatti 8, su un totale di 17.

Questa non é certo una caratteristica tipica delle cooperative emergenti ma rispecchia una scelta esplicita fatta dai soci fondatori: sono stati imposti una serie di vincoli ai quali attenersi per l'entrata di un nuovo socio. Ciò spesso ha fatto preferire l'assunzione di dipendenti al rischio di acquisizione di nuovi soci che non rispondessero alle caratteristiche richieste.

I vincoli sostanzialmente riguardano:

- 1) la capacità di autogestione e di coordinamento della propria attività nel proprio settore o nei settori su cui sarà impiegato
- 2) la predisposizione al lavoro di gruppo
- 3) dimostrare impegno, responsabilità e coinvolgimento nei confronti di tutta l'attività della cooperativa a prescindere dal settore in cui si opera
- 4) disponibilità a versare alla cooperativa una cifra pari ad una quota del capitale ammortizzato.

La scelta del nuovo socio, come afferma il presidente, viene fatta dando preferenza ai dipendenti perché hanno avuto modo di dimostrare di possedere i requisiti necessari. Ciò in realtà a tutt'oggi non si è ancora verificato infatti i quattro nuovi soci provengono dall'esterno.

I vincoli determinano inoltre il fatto che l'entrata di un nuovo socio avvenga solo ad un certo livello della struttura con l'esclusione totale dei livelli operativi. Questi limiti sono stati posti per garantire la massima omogeneità tra i soci in termini di grado di responsabilità. Ciò effettivamente determina un sostanziale equilibrio nei rapporti e la conseguente esistenza di un gruppo omogeneo tra i soci che consente il massimo livello di partecipazione.

Risulta evidente, dopo quanto detto, che l'analisi delle modalità di partecipazione non può che procedere su due livelli quello dei soci e quello dei dipendenti non soci.

Per i soci la partecipazione in origine costituiva un fatto spontaneo, un processo continuo nell'ambito della loro attività.

Frutto senz'altro della precedente esperienza, della volontà e dell'impegno comune perché la cooperativa diventasse la loro occupazione stabile, ma non solo questo, come infatti sostengono i soci fondatori, è fondamentale

la comune convinzione dell'idoneità dello strumento cooperativo per esprimere al meglio le loro professionalità.

All'inizio l'Assemblea costituiva l'organo a cui veniva demandata ogni decisione e la definizione degli obiettivi a qualunque livello dell'organizzazione.

La crescita del volume d'affari, e la conseguente specializzazione funzionale, ha portato un aumento dell'impegno di ciascuno in attività specifiche spesso svolte fuori sede.

La nuova struttura funzionale richiedeva quindi una maggiore formalizzazione delle procedure di partecipazione.

Attualmente il C.d.A. che coincide con l'Assemblea, visto il numero contenuto di soci, si riunisce ogni quindici giorni. In questa sede sono oggetto di discussione gli argomenti di interesse generale per la cooperativa e la definizione degli obiettivi generali di settore.

Oltre l'Assemblea in Delta é previsto un altro momento di partecipazione, anche se non formalizzato quanto il primo, che si svolge con una frequenza maggiore ed é il cosiddetto "incontro di settore". A questo partecipano i responsabili, il presidente, se da questo richiesto, e gli altri soci del settore. Oggetto di queste riunioni sono le decisioni riguardanti la gestione corrente e le strategie di settore.

Come é stata definita dal presidente, la partecipazione dei soci é "totale" e viene indicata dai soci stessi come uno degli elementi determinanti per il successo della cooperativa.

Questo ruolo della partecipazione viene riconosciuto sia per il passato che in prospettiva. Infatti é grazie al coinvolgimento e all'unità di obiettivi che, nei primi tre anni di vita della cooperativa, si sono potute mantenere remunerazioni minime permettendo, con l'autofinanziamento, la capitalizzazione necessaria all'attività di software; ma anche in prospettiva la partecipazione viene considerata un elemento importante perché necessario ad attivare l'impegno di tutti e a rendere sfruttabili al massimo le capacità professionali di ciascuno.

Come si é già più volte sottolineato il peso numerico dei dipendenti sulla struttura organizzativa di Delta é attualmente consistente. La maggior parte delle assunzioni risale all'84 ma

era già stato previsto dai soci quale sarebbe dovuto essere l'inquadramento dei dipendenti e, in funzione dell'idea che questi dovessero costituire il bacino al quale attingere i nuovi soci, quali forme dirette e indirette di partecipazione sarebbero dovute essere attivate.

Nei fatti l'evoluzione della Delta non ha ancora visto concretizzate queste intenzioni.

La fase di affermazione sul mercato é stata caratterizzata da condizioni di lavoro "esasperate" non solo per i soci, che hanno a volte praticamente rinunciato alla retribuzione e si sono costretti a pesanti orari di lavoro, ma in molti casi anche per i dipendenti. Soprattutto a coloro che sono in cooperativa da più tempo i soci hanno richiesto collaborazione attiva, notevole impegno in termini di orario, caricarsi di responsabilità nei confronti della cooperativa per lo svolgimento, spesso in modo completamente autonomo, di singole attività o progetti.

Questi fatti per i dipendenti sono gratificanti e generalmente questi manifestano soddisfazione per le condizioni di fiducia e lo spirito di collaborazione nel quale svolgono il proprio lavoro senza quei rigidi vincoli di orario che esistono in altre strutture private.

Ora Delta stà consolidando una sua posizione e ciò le consente di rivolgere attenzione e risorse ai problemi di struttura interna. In questi ultimi mesi é stata sollecitata in questo senso dalle pressioni provenienti dai dipendenti che hanno portato ad un intenso dibattito interno. I dipendenti hanno infatti manifestato l'esigenza del riconoscimento degli impegni sostenuti e

sostanzialmente un'applicazione dell'ipotesi di inquadramento contrattuale. In realtà ciò che sembrano celare queste rivendicazioni economiche é la sensazione che per loro si stia allontanando la possibilità concreta di diventare soci e quindi di coinvolgimento anche nelle scelte oltre che nelle responsabilità.

L'intenso processo di capitalizzazione di questi anni ha portato la quota di capitale da versare a crescere in modo rilevante fino a portare la cifra per il nuovo socio ad alcune decine di milioni.

E' indubbio che questa cifra costituisce una consistente barriera all'entrata nonostante le previste dilazioni con piani di ammortamento e la remunerazione del capitale versato.

A seguito di queste considerazioni si é avviato un processo di forte sensibilizzazione dei soci nei confronti della partecipazione dei dipendenti.

In Delta rimane convinzione unanime l'essenzialità del coinvolgimento finanziario uguale per tutti, seppur riconosciuto pesante, perché consente da un lato il riconoscimento dei sacrifici fatti dai soci fondatori, dall'altro la migliore integrazione dei nuovi soci. Non volendo quindi rinunciare a questo principio l'impegno dei soci si é concentrato sullo studio di altre forme intermedie di partecipazione.

Raccogliendo l'esperienza, o le idee, che su questo argomento vanno prendendo consistenza nel movimento cooperativo sia in Italia che all'estero, in Delta si é giunti alla definizione di qualche ipotesi, tutte ancora in fase di valutazione, qualcuna

anche sotto l'aspetto delle possibilità legali di realizzazione. Essenzialmente le ipotesi attualmente allo studio sono riconducibili a tre:

la prima é legata al fatto che sia concesso alle cooperative di emettere obbligazioni, in questo caso l'acquisto di obbligazioni da parte del dipendente costituirebbe un primo passo verso la partecipazione diretta

la seconda ipotesi é di coinvolgere i dipendenti tramite l'acquisto di azioni di aziende di cui la cooperativa possiede pacchetti azionari

l'ultima ipotesi si riallaccia all'esperienza tedesca in cui l'esigenza di coinvolgimento e partecipazione diffusa hanno portato a legalizzare la presenza di soci di diverso livello a cui corrisponde un diverso potere di voto.

Tutte queste iniziative rientrano nell'applicazione del vincolo espresso dai soci sulla partecipazione finanziaria. Anche sul vincolo della omogeneità di responsabilità e quindi di professionalità sono stati studiati incentivi perché i dipendenti si avvicinino alla possibilità di diventare soci. Ciò viene realizzato sia con l'autonomia operativa che consente di esprimere la propria professionalità, sia con il finanziamento per corsi di aggiornamento professionali.

Temi specifici

Ad esclusione degli ultimi due soci entrati in cooperativa, le professionalità esistenti derivano essenzialmente dagli studi svolti e dalla successiva esperienza fatta in Delta.

Solo recentemente, appunto con l'entrata degli ultimi due soci, si è sentita l'esigenza di ricercare skills e attitudini professionali già collaudate. Questa tendenza però, come dichiara il presidente, non potrà mai ignorare i vincoli già descritti: rimarrà sempre essenziale per il nuovo socio la reale adesione agli ideali cooperativi condivisi in Delta.

Per i soci fondatori infatti la società cooperativa costituisce, soprattutto per attività di tipo professionale, la migliore alternativa. In particolare rispetto alla grande software house privata la cooperativa consente di esprimere le proprie professionalità senza quei vincoli che presumibilmente esistono in fatto di orari, rispetto dei rapporti gerarchici, mancanza di identificazione negli obiettivi aziendali. Rispetto allo studio professionale invece consente di operare in una struttura dalle dimensioni sufficienti a garantire il livello di completezza ed articolazione che il servizio offerto richiede.

A fronte di queste convinzioni viene messa in evidenza dal presidente una difficoltà che in generale incontrano tutte le cooperative, ma che diventa maggiore per quelle che cercano di inserirsi in mercati innovativi come quello dell'informatica: è ancora diffusa una certa diffidenza sulla preparazione professionale e quindi sul livello qualitativo dei servizi

offerti dalle cooperative.

Delta ha superato l'ostacolo facilitata in questo dall'opportunità di dimostrare le proprie capacità nell'ambito degli enti pubblici locali e una volta affermata come marchio di qualità é stato molto più facile allargare il mercato al settore privato.

Nei confronti della concorrenza é riuscita ad imporre la propria immagine, ciò ha consentito l'apertura di contatti e rapporti di collaborazione con alcune strutture private, che in futuro potrebbero portare alla creazione di una locale associazione di settore.

I rapporti con la Confederazione non sono considerati particolarmente utili al superamento delle difficoltà che la cooperativa ha incontrato o può incontrare. Il suo ruolo sembra limitarsi alla rappresentanza politica. L'affermazione assume un significato particolare in considerazione del fatto che il presidente della Delta é membro del Consiglio della Federazione regionale della Confederazione. La critica mossa da Delta é di non avere sviluppato iniziative per incentivare i possibili rapporti commerciali tra associate.

Alcune particolari iniziative prese da Delta dimostrano quanto siano intensi i rapporti e le interrelazioni con l'ambiente in cui opera. Attualmente ha instaurato rapporti di collaborazione con l'Università di Padova per lo studio e la ricerca sul risparmio energetico, questa iniziativa é stata presa nell'ambito delle strategie di sviluppo dello "studio tecnico" e costituirà anche un qualificante contributo per la immagine di Delta in

questa sua nuova area di attività. Nel settore dell'informatica ha contribuito alla nascita di altre due cooperative come già descritto precedentemente. Inoltre sempre nell'ambito delle attività promozionali per la cooperazione si occupa attivamente, sia in collaborazione con la Confederazione che con attività proprie, della diffusione dei principi cooperativi soprattutto tra i giovani.

La cooperativa Nuova Reguitti

Cap. I - Breve introduzione e storia della cooperativa.

Nel 1976 la F.lli Reguitti S.p.A., azienda leader nel settore dei mobili da giardino e degli articoli casalinghi in legno, conosce una grave crisi aziendale derivante da alcuni errori nella gestione manageriale e finanziaria. Dopo circa tre anni di amministrazione controllata, non presentandosi alcun privato imprenditore, un gruppo di dipendenti (operai ed impiegati) propongono la costituzione di una cooperativa che rilevi il marchio, gli immobili e gli impianti dell'impresa privata al fine di proseguirne l'attività. L'obiettivo di questa iniziativa era di salvaguardare innanzitutto il posto di lavoro ed, in secondo luogo, il patrimonio tecnologico e culturale dell'impresa.

A questo proposito non è superfluo accennare, seppur brevemente, al contesto geografico, storico e sociale in cui era inserita la Reguitti S.p.A. poichè esso concorre a determinare alcune caratteristiche essenziali dell'impresa cooperativa sorta sulle rovine di quella privata.

Lo stabilimento in cui opera la Nuova Reguitti si trova ad Agnosine, paese dell'alta Valsabbia, in provincia di Brescia. La valle anzidetta (con una popolazione di circa 33.000 abitanti) è una delle tre valli del territorio bresciano ed è composta da due

aree nettamente distinte, quella pedemontana, rivolta verso Brescia e il lago di Garda, e quella montana, con caratteristiche più simili a quelle delle zone alpine, in cui si trova Agnosine. La seconda delle due è stata caratterizzata nel ventennio 1950/1970 da un forte sviluppo industriale nei settori siderurgico, metalmeccanico e del legno con la presenza di una decina di aziende (fra cui la Reguitti) di dimensioni consistenti - più di 100 addetti - e numerose altre artigianali.

Questo sviluppo industriale potrebbe apparire a prima vista sorprendente o quanto meno di difficile spiegazione vista la conformazione decisamente montuosa del territorio e i non certo agevoli collegamenti della rete viaria e ferroviaria nazionale. Tale sviluppo ha inoltre accentuato, anziché eliminare, alcuni elementi di squilibrio quali la concentrazione delle localizzazioni industriali in singole zone del fondovalle ed un alto pendolarismo che spesso anticipa l'emigrazione definitiva.

Tuttavia proprio questo costante fenomeno migratorio spiega almeno in parte la presenza di un 'humus' culturale ed artigianale che ha favorito enormemente lo sviluppo dell'industria del legno. Non sembra eccessivo infatti far risalire il patrimonio tuttora esistente di conoscenze nel campo della lavorazione del legno ai ripetuti contatti che gli artigiani della Valsabbia ebbero, fin dal basso Medio Evo, con i maestri veneziani della scultura e dell'intarsio. Da quelle esperienze, ad esempio, alcuni intagliatori di legno, tornati nella terra d'origine, svilupparono nel Seicento una originalissima scuola di scultura lignea.

E' all'interno di questa 'cultura del legno' che nasce ad Agnosine nel 1926, ad opera di Aristide Reguitti, l'azienda omonima la quale si dedica alla produzione di articoli in legno per la casa con una struttura artigianale (7 persone) ed un laboratorio situato al pianterreno della stessa abitazione del proprietario. Col passare degli anni le dimensioni dell'azienda superano gli ambiti artigianali (dai 59 dipendenti del 1946 si arriverà ad un massimo di 609 nel 1976) mentre contemporaneamente si verifica un'apertura della produzione ai mercati esteri. La Reguitti inizia inoltre a produrre mobili da giardino ed allaccia rapporti di collaborazione con i migliori designers del settore, arrivando ad esprimere col tempo uno stile 'Reguitti' che sintetizza e riassume l'elevata qualificazione professionale dei lavoratori dell'azienda. Il marchio 'Reguitti' diviene un riferimento obbligatorio dell'industria bresciana ed acquista altissima notorietà sul mercato finale grazie all'ottima qualità dei propri prodotti.

All'inizio della seconda metà degli anni settanta sopraggiunge però la crisi dell'azienda. Le cause che la determinano sono di varia natura: da un lato la crisi economica, culminata nella recessione del biennio '74/'75 crea notevoli difficoltà sul mercato finale, dall'altro il piano di ristrutturazione steso da alcuni managers che hanno sostituito l'ormai novantenne proprietario dell'impresa determina un dissesto gestionale e finanziario. Nel 1977 la Reguitti viene sottoposta all'amministrazione controllata ed in quel periodo di grande incertezza, terminato nella primavera del 1979, si verifica una

drastica riduzione dell'occupazione: oltre all'intero gruppo dirigente escono dall'azienda numerosi operai e diversi quadri intermedi.

Viste le condizioni socio-economiche della Valsabbia, la liquidazione della Reguitti pone i dipendenti (ridottisi nel frattempo a 250 unità) di fronte alla prospettiva del pendolarismo o dell'emigrazione. Si fa strada allora, come unica realistica alternativa, l'idea della costituzione dell'impresa cooperativa al fine di difendere il già ridotto livello occupazionale, nella convinzione che la crisi sia da attribuirsi ad un'errata conduzione manageriale. Si ritiene cioè che l'esperienza tecnologica e la conoscenza dei processi di lavorazione del legno siano un patrimonio non andato disperso, che gli impianti non mostrino segni di obsolescenza, e soprattutto che il prestigio del marchio Reguitti, seppur affievolito presso il settore della distribuzione a causa dei ritardi nelle consegne o altri disservizi, sia rimasto inalterato presso i consumatori finali.

In assenza di acquirenti privati e pur non potendo vantare esperienze di tipo cooperativo, il timore delle conseguenze che la liquidazione di un'impresa di così ampie dimensioni avrebbe provocato sul tessuto sociale della Valsabbia spinge 220 dipendenti, dei 250 rimasti, a costituirsi in società cooperativa. L'intero processo di fondazione viene seguito ed appoggiato dalla Confederazione delle Cooperative Italiane (CCI) e dalle forze sindacali, presenti nell'azienda preesistente in un gruppo che si fa appunto promotore dell'iniziativa. Si deve

peraltro notare che già durante l'amministrazione controllata era sorta all'interno dell'azienda la proposta di costituirsi in cooperativa: l'atteggiamento perplessso del sindacato, anche della componente CISL, di fatto ritardò quella scelta.

Al momento della costituzione la manodopera è prevalentemente femminile mentre sono presenti, a livello professionale, operai, impiegati di medio-basso livello e tecnici intermedi.

Fin dalla nascita il vincolo dimensionale (la salvaguardia del posto di lavoro per 220 soci/dipendenti) si è rivelato l'elemento più rilevante nel definire gli indirizzi e la complessità dell'azione di rilancio dell'azienda. Si dovevano infatti individuare mercati e strategie commerciali capaci di assicurare l'efficienza di una struttura aziendale data indipendentemente dalle condizioni di mercato. In sostanza il livello dell'occupazione è stato assunto, al tempo stesso, come obiettivo e vincolo rispetto al quale si sono ridefinite tanto la strategia produttiva quanto quella commerciale.

Accanto a questo, che è divenuto il punto maggiormente critico dello sviluppo della Nuova Reguitti, i principali problemi affrontati nella fase di trasformazione da impresa privata a cooperativa sono stati di ordine finanziario e relativi alla formazione cooperativa e professionale. I primi hanno riguardato le difficoltà ad acquisire gli immobili e gli impianti della vecchia azienda (1), i rapporti con le aziende di credito, la carenza di capitale per l'avvio della produzione (acquisto materie prime, etc.). I secondi invece erano relativi, oltre all'assenza di una sia pur minima formazione cooperativa, alle

difficoltà di ricomposizione di un'organizzazione del lavoro in grado di assicurare competitività ai propri prodotti.

Nonostante tuttora i problemi di ordine finanziario, della formazione cooperativa e dei rapporti con gli enti pubblici rimangano i principali nodi da sciogliere, la Nuova Reguitti, a sei anni dalla nascita, sta uscendo dalle prime gravi difficoltà ed in virtù anche di una non irrilevante riduzione dei soci/dipendenti, avvenuta peraltro in modo spontaneo (2), sembra indirizzata al recupero di ulteriori quote di mercato ed alla proposta di nuovi articoli.

Si può infine ricordare che la cooperativa ha conservato in gran parte la collocazione di mercato della gestione precedente, affiancando però alle due tradizionali linee di prodotti (articoli casalinghi in legno e mobili da giardino) quelle nuove dei mobili per la prima infanzia e dei mobili casalinghi 'poliservizio'.

(1) Tali difficoltà sono tuttora presenti sebbene di recente la Regione Lombardia abbia concesso un finanziamento di un miliardo per l'acquisto di una parte dello stabilimento.

(2) Delle modalità con cui si è giunti a tale riduzione si dirà più avanti.

Cap. II - Descrizione della cooperativa.

L'attuale schema organizzativo della Nuova Reguitti può essere ricondotto ad uno schema a clessidra in cui si ha una netta distinzione fra dimensione sociale e dimensione tecnica dell'impresa. Rimandiamo al capitolo successivo la descrizione dei modi in cui si sono evolute le strutture formali di partecipazione, considerando per ora esclusivamente la parte della clessidra relativa alla dimensione produttiva.

Quest'ultima ricalca, nella sostanza, le forme assunte in precedenza dalla Reguitti S.p.A.: la cooperativa ha infatti ricreato una struttura ramificata di rapporti funzionali e produttivi non dissimile da quella preesistente. Al di sotto del vertice rappresentato dal direttore generale sono presenti il direttore amministrativo (responsabile degli acquisti, dell'amministrazione, della contabilità e del centro elettronico), il direttore commerciale (responsabile delle vendite in Italia e all'estero) e il direttore tecnico (responsabile della produzione, dei progetti, dei magazzini e degli impianti).

Presso le singole unità produttive non esiste alcuna specificità nell'organizzazione del lavoro (rotazione nelle mansioni, etc.) rispetto alle imprese dello stesso settore. Diversi fattori non hanno probabilmente consentito di pensare, nè tanto meno di realizzare, esperienze originali nell'organizzazione del lavoro. Si pensi, infatti, alle elevate dimensioni assunte dalla cooperativa fin dall'inizio, alla collocazione di mercato

(rapporto diretto con il consumatore finale attraverso proprie autonome strutture commerciali, ampia gamma di prodotti rivolti a segmenti di domanda diversificati) ed alla necessità di appropriarsi al più presto di specifiche tecniche gestionali e di rimpiazzare competenze rimaste vacanti.

L'attuale distribuzione dei soci lavoratori per inquadramento contrattuale e classi d'età è esposta nella tabella seguente:

	A	B	C	D	E	Totale
	-21	21-30	31-40	41-50	oltre 50	.
Dirigenti			1	1		2
Impiegati Amministrativi	1	1	6	2		10
Impiegati Tecnici			8	3	1	12
Impiegati Commerciali		1	2	1		4
Impiegati Generici				1		1
Intermedi			2	1		3
Operai Specializzati		3	9	19	5	36
Operai Qualificati	1	32	13	6	5	57
Operai Generici	3	4		2		9
Totale	5	41	41	36	11	134

Relativamente alla qualificazione professionale dei soci, la Nuova Reguitti può vantare la lunga tradizione dell'industria del legno della Valsabbia ed il consolidato prestigio del marchio Reguitti. Non a caso esistono, all'interno dell'impresa, alcune spiccate professionalità a livello di singoli operai sebbene sia tuttora carente la qualificazione professionale degli impiegati.

Nell'arco dei sei anni trascorsi dalla nascita ad oggi, pur all'interno di una riduzione in termini assoluti della base sociale, il rapporto impiegati/operai è andato aumentando. Questo andamento sembrerebbe confermare la non elevata professionalità

della componente impiegatizia (rispetto a quella operaia): a parità di dubbi sulle prospettive dell'impresa cooperativa, gli impiegati sono più restii degli operai ad abbandonare tale esperienza poichè la loro minore qualificazione renderebbe estremamente più difficile trovare un nuovo impiego.

Durante il primo anno di vita (1980) furono peraltro istituiti una serie di corsi teorico-pratici allargati a tutti i soci e tenuti dai vari responsabili interni per gli operai e da una società di consulenza per gli impiegati. Questi corsi, finanziati dal Fondo Sociale Europeo e comprendenti anche una parte di formazione cooperativa, sono stati poi ripetuti per i soci (impiegati, dirigenti) entrati successivamente in azienda.

Per quanto riguarda i rapporti d'impiego, il riferimento è al contratto collettivo nazionale di lavoro. E' stato tuttavia eliminato il livello salariale dell'ultima categoria. Rispetto alle retribuzioni del settore privato, i salari degli operai e degli impiegati sono leggermente inferiori non essendo previste forme di integrazione aziendale o premi di produzione. Non vengono nemmeno praticate forme di retribuzione posticipata come il ristorno.

Il livello retributivo dei dirigenti, anch'esso riferito al contratto nazionale, supera il minimo contrattuale sebbene rimanga sensibilmente minore di quelli vigenti nel settore privato. Non esistono infatti contratti individuali comprendenti forme d'integrazione o 'fringe benefits'.

Il differenziale tra il livello minimo e quello massimo delle retribuzioni è di 1 a 2,5 circa. Sono assenti inoltre benefici

non finanziari quali attività ricreative, borse di studio per i figli dei soci, viaggi vacanza, etc.

Le condizioni di lavoro relative alla sicurezza, all'igiene, etc. sono sostanzialmente le stesse di quelle delle imprese private.

L'elevata stagionalità dei mercati in cui opera la cooperativa ha richiesto periodicamente il ricorso allo straordinario. Normalmente non più del 60% dei soci ha accettato di farlo; sono stati, comunque, estremamente pochi coloro i quali non hanno voluto essere retribuiti.

Cap. III - Analisi dell'evoluzione delle modalità, degli strumenti e delle strutture di partecipazione dalla nascita ad oggi.

Come si è accennato in apertura del capitolo precedente, l'attuale schema organizzativo della Nuova Reguitti assume la classica forma della clessidra con una netta separazione tra dimensione sociale e dimensione produttiva.

Tale schema organizzativo è stato attuato pressoché fin dall'inizio a causa di alcune caratteristiche strutturali già presenti all'atto della nascita della cooperativa. L'elevato numero di soci/dipendenti e l'oggettiva impossibilità d'impostare dei rapporti faccia a faccia, la tecnologia relativamente complessa, la diversificazione dei prodotti e l'immediata necessità di ridefinire una propria strategia commerciale, oltre che produttiva, hanno comportato la negazione di quella fase iniziale di crescita, nell'ipotetico 'ciclo di vita' della cooperativa, in cui si verifica viceversa, per le contenute dimensioni dell'impresa, per la semplicità della tecnologia e della produzione, etc., un'automatica, diffusa partecipazione e l'interscambiabilità dei ruoli.

La stessa complessità della situazione aziendale ereditata e la prospettiva del pendolarismo e dell'emigrazione, ove la scelta dell'autogestione fosse fallita, hanno spinto la cooperativa a superare velocemente alcune forme iniziali di assemblearismo.

Esse si sono verificate esclusivamente nel primo anno di vita allorchè, essendo delegata ad una consulenza esterna la funzione manageriale, ogni riunione del C.d.A. veniva allargata a commissioni esterne (formate dai primi non eletti) le quali, pur dotate di solo potere consultivo, finivano per esercitare una notevole influenza sulle decisioni del Consiglio stesso.

Questo clima organizzativo viene superato fin dalla metà del 1980: nel giugno di quell'anno viene nominato il primo direttore generale e si definisce un rigido schema a clessidra che non prevede alcuna coincidenza tra il C.d.A. e la direzione operativa. La ricerca e la scelta del management, formalmente eseguita dal C.d.A., viene condotta con la fattiva collaborazione di una consulenza esterna, alla quale si deve l'elaborazione dello studio di fattibilità, e dell'Unione Provinciale (la struttura politico-sindacale territoriale, a livello di provincia, della CCI). L'intendimento che animò quella scelta (e quelle successive) era quello di verificare, oltre alle conoscenze tecniche, una reale adesione ai valori cooperativi ed una forte motivazione verso un'esperienza di quel genere, così da evitare contrapposizioni del tipo 'muro contro muro' tra i due vertici della clessidra (3).

I fattori che hanno determinato la creazione dello schema organizzativo a clessidra hanno inciso fortemente sia nel rapporto esistente tra le due facce della clessidra stessa, sia sul grado di partecipazione dei soci.

Rispetto al primo punto si è verificata un'accentuata formalizzazione del gruppo dirigente, a cui è stato delegato il

compito di definire la strategia aziendale. Se tale netta attribuzione di responsabilità ha forse costituito un fattore di successo rispetto alle difficoltà incontrate sulla strada del risanamento, ciò ha probabilmente favorito uno spinto accentramento del potere decisionale presso la direzione operativa. Non esiste inoltre alcuna sovrapposizione tra il C.d.A. e la D.O., tanto meno nelle persone del presidente della cooperativa (che a livello produttivo ricopre la funzione di capo reparto) e del direttore generale. Si può osservare comunque che prima di occupare l'attuale ruolo, il direttore generale aveva ricoperto la veste di vice-presidente (e di responsabile amministrativo). A sua volta l'attuale direttore amministrativo è stato presidente della cooperativa dalla nascita di quest'ultima fino all'inizio del 1985.

L'attuale C.d.A. è composto di 11 membri (5 impiegati, 6 operai) tutti eletti dall'assemblea generale. Le due precedenti elezioni sono state invece caratterizzate da una sorta di 'consultazione primaria': un terzo dei componenti veniva eletto a livello dei singoli reparti e solo la quota restante dall'assemblea generale. Questo sistema intendeva garantire una consistente presenza di operai all'interno del C.d.A..

Riguardo al secondo punto, relativo al grado di partecipazione dei soci, si deve innanzitutto sottolineare che il coinvolgimento diretto dei membri, a causa delle caratteristiche strutturali dell'impresa, non si è mai potuto realizzare meccanicamente. Il perseguimento della partecipazione si è quindi posto come un vero e proprio problema organizzativo, non risolvibile automaticamente

e in via di fatto. Questo problema è tutt'ora aperto.

La partecipazione avviene, in primo luogo, in occasione dell'approvazione del bilancio e durante le 2-3 assemblee generali che si tengono periodicamente ogni anno. Nel tentativo di integrare queste forme spesso ritualistiche si è fatto ricorso a bollettini sull'andamento della gestione aziendale, redatti dalla Direzione, al fine di aumentare il flusso di informazioni a disposizione dei soci/dipendenti. E' invece fallito in passato il tentativo, promosso in prima persona dall'allora presidente, di dare vita ad una 'cooperativa culturale'. Essa, attraverso la sensibilizzazione dei soci ai temi della cooperazione, avrebbe dovuto consentire una partecipazione maggiormente attiva e consapevole alla vita generale dell'impresa.

Di recente, parallelamente al riassorbimento di una grave perdita di gestione che nel 1982 aveva messo in dubbio l'esistenza della cooperativa, si è giunti all'elaborazione, e alla parziale attuazione, di alcuni esperimenti tesi a qualificare la partecipazione:

- 1) dall'aprile 1985 si tengono incontri settimanali fuori orario presieduti dal direttore generale. A queste riunioni, di carattere generale, partecipano per ora non più di 15-20 soci.
- 2) E' in programma la modificazione delle assemblee di reparto (nelle quali i lavoratori vengono messi al corrente, attualmente, della situazione aziendale nel suo complesso) con lo scopo di giungere a budget di reparto redatti dal reparto stesso, in stretto collegamento con la funzione commerciale. I soci/lavoratori verrebbero informati di tutta una serie di dati

relativi al proprio reparto, riguardanti i costi, gli indici di produttività, l'assenteismo, etc. così da poter definire essi stessi i propri obiettivi di produzione.

3) Un ulteriore progetto dell'attuale direttore generale riguarda l'introduzione di un 'operatore sociale', retribuito in parte dall'Unione Provinciale, con il compito di sensibilizzare i soci sul significato e la portata del lavoro in cooperativa. Questa nuova figura, ancora da definire nei dettagli, dovrebbe operare, due giorni alla settimana, direttamente sul posto di lavoro a fianco dei soci.

Il superamento della fase maggiormente critica sul piano economico-aziendale dovrebbe favorire la realizzazione dei progetti anzidetti: è opinione condivisa, tanto dal direttore generale quanto dall'ex-presidente, che l'ancora insoddisfacente livello di partecipazione dipenda in gran parte dal fatto che fino ad oggi la scelta dell'autogestione ha significato per i soci della Nuova Reguitti condividere fundamentalmente dei sacrifici. Sebbene ciò inizialmente si riveli un fattore di coesione, il suo protrarsi nel tempo non può che determinare disaffezione e rigetto verso la scelta stessa.

Per quanto riguarda, infine, alcuni indicatori indiretti della partecipazione quali l'assenteismo e il livello degli infortuni sul lavoro, le informazioni raccolte non indicano sostanziali differenze rispetto ai livelli della precedente impresa privata.

Si ricordi inoltre che la Nuova Reguitti aderisce alla Confederazione delle Cooperative Italiane (CCI) ed è presente nel Comitato direttivo dell'Unione Provinciale tramite il direttore

generale e il direttore amministrativo. La cooperativa partecipa anche alle attività organizzate e promosse periodicamente dal CENASCA.

(3) Tale preoccupazione era tanto maggiore quanto più si consideri che la cooperativa ha costituito la propria direzione operativa assumendo managers le cui esperienze si limitavano a precedenti impieghi in aziende private.

Cap. IV - Temi specifici.

Rapporti con il sindacato.

Come si é già accennato nel capitolo I, le forze sindacali hanno svolto un ruolo di assoluto primo piano nella costituzione della Nuova Reguitti. Se nel periodo dell'amministrazione controllata la loro non convinta adesione alla scelta dell'autogestione aveva di fatto ritardato la scelta stessa, il successivo sostegno all'iniziativa, è stato altrettanto decisivo per segnare le sorti della vecchia azienda privata. A tal riguardo nessuna difformità di atteggiamento vi é stata tra le diverse componenti: anche la CGIL, in generale meno sensibile al tema della cooperazione come strumento di difesa dell'occupazione, ha con vigore sostenuto la scelta cooperativa.

In seguito il sindacato non è stato più ufficialmente presente all'interno dell'impresa se non con il tesseramento. Non esiste infatti il consiglio di fabbrica e gli eventuali conflitti aziendali vengono gestiti e risolti dal C.d.A.. All'interno di quest'ultimo le forze sindacali sono indirettamente rappresentate dai membri iscritti, i quali tuttavia operano nella veste di socio.

Dalla nascita ad oggi l'adesione al sindacato, mediante il tesseramento, non ha presentato sostanziali modifiche in termini percentuali: attualmente sono iscritti, all'una o all'altra componente, circa una trentina di lavoratori.

Volendo definire l'attuale rapporto fra la cooperativa ed il

sindacato possiamo dire che si tratta di un legame più affettivo che strutturale o, per usare l'espressione del direttore generale, di un "rapporto di buon vicinato".

La Nuova Reguitti ha sempre consultato il sindacato ogni qualvolta si presentavano situazioni aziendali particolarmente delicate. Nel 1984 ad esempio la cooperativa optò per la C.I.G. ordinaria dopo aver constatato l'opposizione della componente CGIL alla richiesta della C.I.G. speciale. Il ricorso all'Istituto suddetto é cessato nel 1985.

Mutamento culturale: dalla 'contrattazione' alla 'cooperazione'.

La Nuova Reguitti costituisce probabilmente un caso emblematico di cooperativa 'rescue', ossia di cooperativa sorta innanzitutto per salvaguardare l'occupazione dei lavoratori dell'industria privata in crisi. La localizzazione dell'impresa e, in generale, le condizioni socio-economiche della Valsabbia non consentivano infatti altra alternativa al lavoro in cooperativa che il pendolarismo o l'emigrazione. Indipendentemente dalle motivazioni più intime che hanno animato i promotori, la scelta dell'autogestione appare all'osservatore esterno come un percorso obbligato, una via necessariamente da percorrere escludendo la quale non solo si sarebbe disperso un grande e prestigioso patrimonio di conoscenze ed esperienze ma, di più, si sarebbe ridotto, e in termini quantitativamente rilevanti, il livello della occupazione della Valsabbia.

L'aspetto interessante ed anche apparentemente paradossale (per gli interrogativi che apre sul ruolo delle cooperative 'rescue') è però il seguente: sebbene la nascita della Nuova Reguitti abbia garantito l'occupazione di una quota elevata di forza lavoro sia in termini assoluti (220 dipendenti) che relativi (al momento della ufficializzazione della crisi la Reguitti ne contava 250), ciò nondimeno il risanamento economico-finanziario dell'impresa ha comportato, in sei anni, un calo non indifferente dell'occupazione. Attualmente il numero dei soci (sostanzialmente uguale a quello dei dipendenti) è infatti di 134: la contrazione è stata circa del 40%.

Assieme a questo dato, una sia pur cauta riflessione non può prescindere dalle modalità specifiche con le quali la Nuova Reguitti ha ridotto la propria base sociale.

A soli tre anni dalla nascita, l'impresa sconta nel 1982 una perdita d'esercizio di oltre 570 milioni di lire. Questo passivo, superando il capitale sociale, rende immediatamente necessario un aumento del valore patrimoniale della cooperativa. Il C.d.A. propone allora (oltre allo sfasamento tra anno solare ed anno sociale, causa l'elevata stagionalità dei mercati in cui è inserita l'azienda) l'aumento, da 1.800.000 lire a 7 milioni, della quota minima di capitale sociale sottoscritta da ciascun membro. Tale operazione si sarebbe svolta nell'arco di tre anni mediante trattenute sulle retribuzioni mensili dei singoli soci. Dopo un'assemblea generale, che non sortisce alcun effetto se non quello di evidenziare una sessantina di rifiuti alla proposta di ricapitalizzazione, il presidente decide di contattare

personalmente i soci nel tentativo di convincerli ad effettuare quell'operazione. A questi contatti segue una seconda definitiva assemblea generale che, approvando la proposta del C.d.A., registra il voto negativo di soli 16 soci.

La maggior convinzione, manifestata nella seconda assemblea generale, sulla praticabilità dell'esperienza cooperativa e sull'utilità del sacrificio finanziario richiesto è però del tutto apparente. Progressivamente si verifica una costante contrazione, sì spontanea ma certamente rilevante, della base sociale che riduce il numero dei soci/lavoratori da 196 alla fine del 1982 a 134 nel giugno del 1985: il singolo riscontro anagrafico potrebbe confermare, secondo l'ex-presidente, che la sessantina di defezioni coincide all'incirca con coloro che inizialmente si erano opposti all'operazione di ricapitalizzazione.

Oltre a questo, un altro dato ci pare meritevole di attenzione. Il risanamento finanziario ha penalizzato maggiormente la manodopera femminile: a fronte di un rapporto donne/uomini favorevole alle prime al momento della costituzione, già nel marzo 1984 prevale la componente maschile. L'aumento della quota sociale ha forse indotto le famiglie in cui il socio della cooperativa era la moglie ad abbandonare la scelta rischiosa dell'autogestione

La tabella seguente riassume quanto sopra.

anni	fatturato aziendale lordo (in migliaia di L.)	N° soci/lavoratori a fine periodo	utile d'esercizio (in migliaia di L.)
1980	6.356.064	199	+ 30.089
1981	8.749.999	198	+ 74.586
1982	8.154.186	196	- 573.334
1983	10.670.683	169	+ 10.079
'83-'84	10.554.861	148	+ 64.815
'84-'85 ^{oo}	10.100.000	134

^{oo}: previsioni

La tendenza alla riduzione della base sociale pare destinata ad arrestarsi.

Come si è già accennato nel capitolo I, le prospettive dell'impresa sono al momento positive: la Nuova Reguitti, grazie anche al calo dell'occupazione connesso al risanamento finanziario, ha verosimilmente superato le gravi difficoltà iniziali. Se ciò ha contribuito a dissipare le perplessità dei soci rimasti in merito alla validità economica della scelta cooperativa, non ci si può al tempo stesso nascondere, afferma l'ex-presidente, che "si è determinato in coloro che se ne sono andati un disamore verso la scelta dell'autogestione". Il problema della dimensione 'ottima' dell'impresa (acuito dal fatto

che una delle parole d'ordine con cui nasce la cooperativa é 'o tutti o nessuno') e della sua solidità finanziaria sembra quindi porsi in antitesi all'obiettivo, classico delle cooperative di salvataggio, della difesa del posto di lavoro. Lo scopo di creare un'alternativa alla disoccupazione paradossalmente richiede, per queste imprese autogestite, un'elevata elasticità occupazionale non solo verso l'alto quanto, piuttosto, verso il basso; non esclusivamente all'atto della costituzione quanto, e a maggior ragione, in seguito nell'arco della propria vita. Il caso della Nuova Reguitti é significativo: il superamento di alcune grosse difficoltà aziendali, una volta avviata l'autogestione, ha determinato un ridimensionamento dell'occupazione, proposto ed approvato democraticamente dai soci, probabilmente irrealizzabile (a meno di fortissime tensioni sociali) in un'impresa privata di analoghe dimensioni.

Un'ultima considerazione sul rapporto tra vitalità economica e presenza dell'impresa sul mercato da un lato, e raggiungimento della solidità finanziaria e del livello occupazionale compatibile con quella presenza dall'altro.

Secondo l'attuale direttore generale, la capitalizzazione dell'impresa, ed in particolare le forme in cui essa é garantita, é solamente una condizione necessaria, non certo sufficiente per il successo della scelta cooperativa. A suo parere la presenza della legge n° 49/1985 (altrimenti detta legge Marcora), al momento della crisi finanziaria dell'impresa nel 1982, avrebbe sicuramente consentito di evitare l'uscita di gran parte dei soci ma probabilmente, visto il carattere assistenziale del ricorso al

Fondo speciale per gli interventi a salvaguardia dell'occupazione (tale Fondo prevede solo contributi a fondo perduto), avrebbe ritardato la soluzione del problema della dimensione ottimale dell'impresa. "Attenzione a non utilizzare la cosiddetta legge Marcora come alibi o tampone di situazioni aziendali non risolubili esclusivamente sul piano finanziario" afferma il direttore generale. Egli, in sostanza, sostiene che la Nuova Reguitti, facendo di necessità virtù, ha risolto i propri problemi aziendali contando solo sulle proprie forze. Ciò ha però posto solide e durature basi tanto per un'espansione economica dell'impresa, quanto per l'elaborazione e la realizzazione di nuove forme partecipative.

IL CASO C.M.B.Paragrafo 1CENNI STORICI

La Cooperativa Muratori e Braccianti di Carpi (che da questo momento sarà chiamata semplicemente CMB) ha la sua sede in Carpi, in Provincia di Modena, In Emilia Romagna, nell'Italia del Nord. Le sue origini rappresentano un caso classico nella storia delle Coop di Produzione e Lavoro, che definiamo qui "tradizionali".

Infatti le due Coops che hanno dato poi origine alla CMB - la Coop Braccianti di Carpi e la Coop Muratori di Carpi, nate rispettivamente nel 1904 e nel 1908 - sin dalla fondazione ebbero lo scopo di aggregare i lavoratori delle classi sociali più disagiate, spesso costretti a vivere in condizioni di vera e propria indigenza e quindi bisognose di organizzarsi per poter acquisire qualsiasi tipo di lavoro. Più esattamente, é possibile dire che questo scopo caratterizzò in modo più significativo la Coop Braccianti, e sin dall'inizio associò 112 lavoratori dediti principalmente all'agricoltura, con un'occupazione per lo più di tipo stagionale, con la tendenza immediata però, ad impiegare anche lavoratori non Soci in base alle caratteristiche ed esigenze dei lavori. La Coop Muratori (14 Soci) nacque invece con

obiettivi più vicini alla resistenza sindacale: come scrisse un Socio su un giornale locale dell'epoca, "suo scopo é di assumere direttamente dai padroni il lavoro senza l'intervento dei capi-mastri...", nell'intento in questo modo di contrapporsi al padronato combattendo questa modalità di "mediazione di uomini".

Si trattava di superare la concorrenza sul mercato del lavoro tentando di arrivare ad una sorta di monopolio della forza lavorativa, ottenendo in questo modo condizioni di lavoro più dignitose.

Questo era naturalmente un grande problema sociale e non a caso l'interlocutore immediato delle Coop fu proprio l'Ente locale, al quale si offrì la possibilità di frenare in qualche modo le tensioni sociali originate dalle condizioni disastrose della forza lavoro. La tendenza era infatti quella di creare occasioni occupazionali attraverso lavori pubblici: costruzioni di strade, ponti, arginatura dei fiumi, acquedotti, opere di bonifica, lavori di sistemazione ferroviaria.

E' quindi possibile individuare due principali significati caratterizzanti la storia di queste due Coops, uno di tipo economico-sociale, l'altro di tipo rivendicativo-sindacale.

Tra l'altro, il processo di consolidamento di questi elementi caratteristici non poteva non dare i suoi frutti sul piano dell'organizzazione economico-amministrativa; le cooperative dovettero cominciare a programarsi, conoscere il mercato, differenziarsi in modo funzionale, divenire, in altre parole, delle imprese economiche con una propria caratteristica struttura

funzionale.

Il regime fascista, che nelle zone di origine della Coop agì con particolare violenza, tutto protese alla ricerca di efficaci meccanismi di controllo tipici dei regimi totalitari, se da un lato disperse in gran parte gli elementi solidaristici ed annullò i meccanismi partecipativi e democratici propri della cooperazione, dall'altro forse ne esaltò le caratteristiche più propriamente "d'impresa".

Con ciò si vuole dire che sicuramente mutò in senso negativo la partecipazione dei Soci alle decisioni strategiche e gestionali dell'impresa, sclerotizzandosi e ritualizzandosi in meccanismi burocratici secondo i dettami classici della dittatura di massa. Tuttavia il regime individuò nella cooperazione un'opportunità di risoluzione delle tensioni sociali che le condizioni delle classi sociali più disagiate determinavano, creando allo scopo occasioni occupazionali spesso "ad ogni costo". E' nel periodo fascista infatti che la Coop Braccianti e la Muratori iniziarono a portarsi su altri mercati sfuggendo così ad una logica drasticamente localistica, ed a dati disponibili si vede che la Coop Braccianti chiude in attivo tutti gli anni della "grande crisi" (1929-1940).

E' possibile affermare che in quel periodo "...il modello sociotecnico di funzionamento delle cooperative non é mutato sotto la dittatura fascista. Si assiste piuttosto ad una sostituzione dei fattori che ad una loro scomparsa, e quelli nuovi paiono assumere ruoli identici ai primi. Si pensi al ruolo

del Podestà non dissimile, funzionalmente, a quello della leadership precedente..." (Sapelli, 1983).

L'avvento della Repubblica segnò anche il ritorno delle due Coops nell'alveo dell'organizzazione del Movimento Operaio. Quegli anni segnarono anche una rapidissima crescita delle imprese, la cui spiegazione va ricercata nella capacità di sfruttare le opportunità di lavoro create dalla ricostruzione post-bellica. Ecco che, allora, i lavori vengono concentrati soprattutto nell'edilizia e nei grandi lavori pubblici, per eseguire i quali vengono create grandi strutture consortili a livello regionale e nazionale, elemento di integrazione e di fondazione di quel "sistema integrato di imprese cooperative", che coinvolse anche la "Muratori" e la "Braccianti", contribuendo al loro processo di sviluppo.

In questo processo di crescita, di ricerca di nuovi mercati (che impose di adeguare le dimensioni ai livelli di investimenti richiesti), di aumento dei livelli di integrazione a livello di Movimento, vanno ricercati i motivi che hanno portato le due Coops all'unificazione, peraltro caldeggiata e voluta anche a livello della Lega Nazionale Cooperative e Mutue, la centrale Cooperativa a cui fa capo la CMB, che a metà degli anni '70 si impegnò a promuovere la cosiddetta "politica delle fusioni" tra imprese cooperative.

Il 1° gennaio 1977 naque così ufficialmente la CMB di Carpi, dalla fusione tra la Coop Muratori e la Coop Braccianti. Il resto é cronaca di questi giorni.

Paragrafo IIDescrizione della cooperativa

Caratteristiche generali

La CMB di Carpi é una coop di produzione e lavoro di dimensioni medio-grandi con un totale di 806 occupati al 30/04/1985, dei quali 588 Soci e 218 ausiliari. Di questi 806 occupati, 634 sono operai e 172 sono impiegati. L'andamento della situazione occupazionale evidenzia una costante diminuzione del totale degli occupati a partire dal 1977, anno di costituzione della Cooperativa, da attribuire unicamente al calo degli operai dovuto alla grave crisi che ha investito il settore delle costruzioni all'inizio degli anni '80 (se si pensa che gli operai erano 1040 nel 1978, si registra un calo del 39%). Il fenomeno é piú accentuato a partire dal 1981, anno in cui la Coop decide il blocco delle assunzioni degli operai. La tendenza opposta caratterizza invece l'occupazione impiegatizia che per effetto della piú complessa diversificazione funzionale e quindi del necessario sviluppo della tecnostruttura, é incessantemente aumentata dal 1978 (172 unitá rispetto alle 104 del 1978). Si analizzeranno in un secondo momento le tensioni sociali che questo trend occupazionale ha generato all'interno della Coop. Il

personale femminile é costantemente aumentato dal 1978 (13 unità) al 1985, anno nel quale si sono raggiunte le 46 unità, ed é occupato nella grande maggioranza dei casi con mansioni di carattere impiegatizio. Le donne occupate con mansioni operaie sono 7 di cui 4 ferraiole, una gruista, e tre addette alla mensa aziendale. Per le donne, che sono tradizionalmente penalizzate a livello dell'intero Movimento Cooperativo, le possibilità di carriera all'interno dell'azienda sono tutte da verificare: attualmente, soltanto una risulta avere la qualifica di "Quadro Intermedio".

Per quanto riguarda le fasce di età ed i livelli di scolarità, la CMB sembra riflettere, anche se con toni sicuramente meno accentuati rispetto ad altre realtà cooperative corrispondenti, un fenomeno tipico delle Coops tradizionali. Si notano infatti il gruppo Dirigenti - Quadri Intermedi di età relativamente giovane e con una discreta scolarità (il 31,5% ha il diploma di Scuola Media Superiore il 13,4% é provvisto del diploma di Laurea), ed il gruppo operaio di età abbastanza elevata (il 40% ha oltre 50 anni) e con livelli di scolarità decisamente bassi (l'80% ha al massimo la licenza elementare). Questo fenomeno di differenziazione tra Managers e base operaia avrà presumibilmente uno sviluppo accelerato nei prossimi anni, se si considera che il 91% degli impiegati é compreso nella fascia tra i 18 ed i 40 anni e l'81% possiede il diploma medio superiore o la laurea.

Per comprendere la varia realtà della CMB é utile ricordare anche le tradizionali aree geografiche in cui l'impresa da tempo opera,

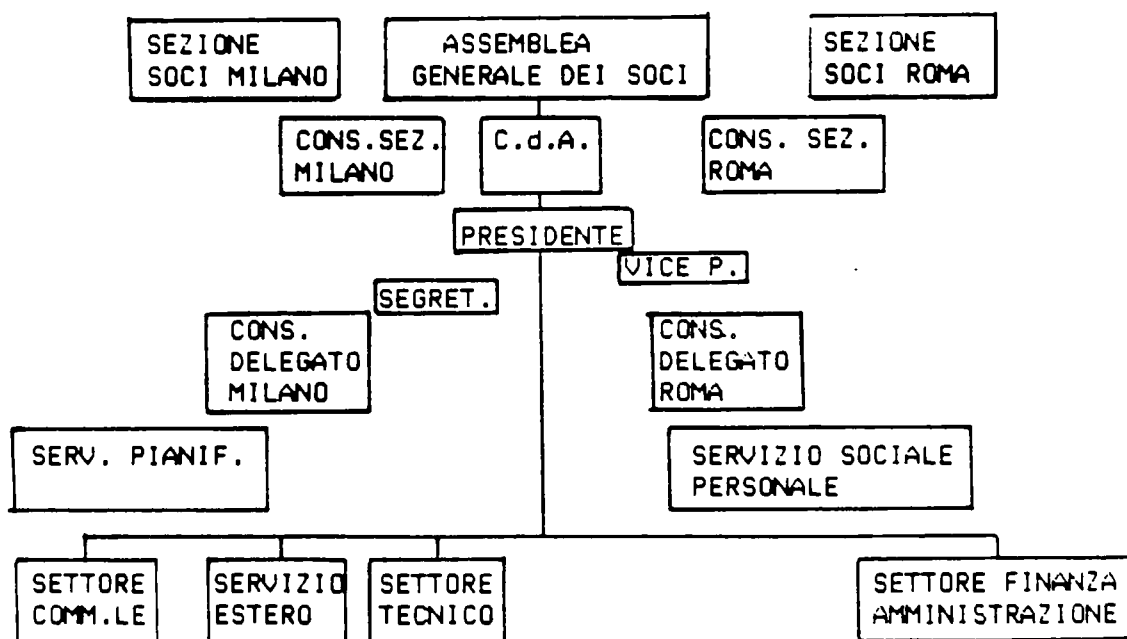
e dove sono sorti organismi sociali che, come vedremo, hanno una grande importanza nelle dinamiche dei processi partecipativi. Oltre a Carpi, ove ha sede la Coop, essa é presente in maniera massiccia ed organizzata a Milano e a Roma, oltre ad avere occasionalmente cantieri aperti in varie zone d'Italia. La presenza più massiccia della CMB fuori sede é a Roma dove, tra operai ed impiegati occupa 224 persone, in pratica il 28% del totale degli occupati. E' possibile immaginare come un nucleo così consistente fuori dalla sede, dove la Coop tradizionalmente é cresciuta ed ha sviluppato la propria cultura politica ed organizzativa, abbia spesso dei problemi di integrazione con il resto dell'impresa. Da qui la necessità, per i dirigenti, di ricercare appunto forme di integrazione tra le diverse aree di intervento, pur tenendo conto delle specifiche realtà locali. Nell'area di Milano sono occupate 102 persone e la caratteristica della presenza della CMB in questa area é che va sempre più assumendo la configurazione di un vera e propria impresa generale di costruzioni, ricorrendo sempre più a forme di subappalto nell'esecuzione delle commesse.

Integrando i dati sull'occupazione e la distribuzione del personale con le caratteristiche organizzative della CMB, bisogna partire dalla considerazione che la struttura organizzativa a tutt'oggi é di tipo funzionale, anche se é in progetto il passaggio ad una struttura di tipo divisionale da realizzarsi nel periodo di circa due anni. Le funzioni individuate, con il rispettivo numero di addetti, sono:

- a) - la Funzione Tecnico-produttiva, con 716 addetti;
- b) - la Funzione Commerciale, con 24 addetti;
- c) - la Funzione Amministrativa, con 33 addetti;
- d) - la Funzione Soci-personale con 24 addetti;
- e) - la Funzione Pianificazione, Controllo, Organizzazione, con 12 addetti.

Il Presidente, il Vice-Presidente, due del C.d.A., insieme i responsabili delle varie funzioni, formano la Direzione Operativa (9 membri).

A loro volta le Funzioni, oltre ai vari servizi previsti al loro interno, sono suddivise per "aree di intervento" (Sede, Milano, Roma). Naturalmente, la funzione più colpita dalla diminuzione fisiologica dell'occupazione registrata negli ultimi anni é la funzione Tecnico-produttiva, date le caratteristiche dell'impresa. Nella Fig. n° 1 sono illustrate le caratteristiche fondamentali suddette della struttura formale della CMB.



Il calo progressivo dell'occupazione (senza peraltro che la CMB abbia mai ricorso al licenziamento) insieme con una miglior politica di acquisizione dei lavori (commessa dal ad alta remuneratività, grandi lavori in Consorzi con altri, etc.), hanno consentito alla CMB di conseguire dei risultati economici che, considerando la crisi generalizzata del settore, si possono definire soddisfacenti. Il monte lavori è costantemente aumentato a partire dal 1978, e solo nel 1984 ha subito un calo rispetto al 1983, passando da 81 miliardi di lire a 77 miliardi. Anche l'utile risultante dal bilancio annuale consuntivo é sempre in aumento sino al 1983 (4 Miliardi e 500 Milioni di lire); nel 1984 la stima, non essendo ancora approvato il Bilancio é di un Miliardo e 600 Milioni ed il calo viene imputato alle difficoltà che la CMB ha incontrato nell'esecuzione di una commessa che prevedeva la costruzione di una diga in Mozambico, ed agli alloggi costruiti direttamente dalla cooperativa e non ancora venduti.

Momenti e modalità di partecipazione

In una Coop dalla storia complessa quale é la CMB, nella quale sono in atto processi che investono "in toto" la struttura sociale, la partecipazione rappresenta un valore ideale ad un problema presente. E' per questo che é in fase operativa un progetto sulla partecipazione centrato su esperimenti di microdemocrazia industriale (M.D.I.) a livello delle unità produttive, del quale si parlerà in un apposito paragrafo.

Prescindendo quindi, per il momento, da questa situazione sperimentale, é possibile dire che all'interno della C.M.B. funziona un modello classico di partecipazione "a clessidra" che si esplica nei momenti fondamentali della discussione dei bilanci preventivo e consuntivo, nella discussione delle direttive politiche della Lega Nazionale Cooperative e Mutue, nell'elezione del C.d.A. a livello di Assemblea generale dei Soci, nelle assemblee di cantiere e d'ufficio a livello di struttura produttiva.

Tuttavia, il grado di partecipazione é fortemente mutato in questi ultimi anni. Sino al 1981-82 la delega nei confronti del gruppo dirigente era molto ampia, ed i livelli di partecipazione istituzionale attorno al 50% (e del 30% nelle riunioni di carattere operativo). Dal 1982, per i motivi che vedremo in seguito, i livelli di partecipazione sono molto aumentati. Si può dire che la partecipazione si manifesta tradizionalmente in due modalità:

a) partecipazione "di carattere istituzionale" (3 o 4 Assemblee generali annue, sui temi sopramenzionati);

b) altre occasioni di partecipazione: assemblee di produzione o di ufficio, dove avviene il dibattito reale e la ricerca del consenso sulle linee generali sulle quali si muove la Coop. Usualmente sono 6 o 7 riunioni all'anno nella zona di Carpi per la preparazione e discussione del bilancio, tre a Roma, una a Milano.

Solitamente, nelle riunioni di cantiere la partecipazione é quasi totale.

C'è da dire che la base sociale anziana ed operaia assicura dei livelli di partecipazione molto più elevati rispetto a giovani ed impiegati, che hanno una visione assai meno ideologica della Coop. I giovani si preoccupano molto più della loro vita professionale che degli aspetti complessivi della Coop. Anche il livello di scolarità sembra avere un rapporto inverso con il grado di partecipazione, probabilmente perché la tecnostuttura (che da sempre "partecipa meno") é più scolarizzata della base sociale "tradizionale". Naturalmente però, non é tanto un problema di scolarità, quanto di integrazione.

Per quanto riguarda il rapporto dimensione dell'impresa/partecipazione, nel caso della CMB non sembra trovare molto credito l'opinione - diffusa a livello delle altre centrali cooperative ma presente anche all'interno della Lega - che l'aumento dimensionale porti automaticamente ad un calo della partecipazione. Si ritiene che questa sia una visione troppo

semplificistica del problema, perché la partecipazione non va intesa soltanto come un "fatto ideologico", ma come modello di gestione culturale dell'impresa.

E' interessante notare come, all'interno della CMB, il momento ricreativo venga utilizzato anche come modalità per favorire l'aumento della partecipazione. E' provato infatti che, ad esempio, la "cena sociale" dopo un'assemblea essendo di per sé un momento di integrazione e identificazione permette di aumentare considerevolmente il livello di partecipazione. L'interpretazione dei responsabili delle attività sociali della CMB é che l'attività di carattere ricreativo, sportivo, culturale avendo sempre una partecipazione altissima, favorisce l'identificazione con l'impresa e quindi, indirettamente, la partecipazione attiva. Gli argomenti che fanno registrare i più elevati livelli di partecipazione in CMB sono solitamente l'andamento della produzione e la sicurezza sul lavoro, cioè quegli argomenti che investono in modo immediato la posizione del lavoratore nella sua quotidianità. Grande partecipazione hanno avuto anche le riunioni sulla "politica dei Quadri", discussa anche a livello delle unità produttive, nei momenti della progettazione e della definizione operativa.

Per quanto riguarda invece la partecipazione ai vari livelli é possibile schematizzarla nel modo seguente:

a) a livello di job , vi sono le riunioni di produzione, ma soprattutto le sperimentazioni attivate con il progetto in corso, su temi e con modalità che vedremo.

b) a livello dell'impresa , la partecipazione si esplica; come abbiamo visto, nelle riunioni di carattere istituzionale (Bilancio, Statuto della Coop, Discussioni delle Tesi Congressuali, etc.);

c) a livello di settore la CMB, operando nel settore produzione e lavoro, è membro dell'Associazione Nazionale Coop di Produzione e Lavoro, che ha articolazioni a livello Regionale e Nazionale. Ha i suoi momenti istituzionali nei congressi che si tengono ogni tre o quattro anni.

d) a livello di struttura consortile , la CMB ha un managers (generalmente il Presidente o il Responsabile della Funzione Commerciale) membro del C.d.A. del consorzio. Le figure destinate a rappresentare la Coop nei Consorzi sono queste perchè queste sono "strutture di servizio" per l'acquisizione di lavoro e non delle strutture politico-sindacali, e quindi non è necessario un particolare processo politico di "investitura".

e) a livello di Centrale (Lega) , la partecipazione avviene a livello istituzionale con la discussione delle "Tesi congressuali", tramite una procedura che prevede prima la discussione in C.d.A., poi a livello di unità produttiva, infine a livello di Assemblea Generale. Alle Assemblee della Lega partecipa una delegazione di Soci proporzionale alla consistenza della CMB in seno alla Centrale.

Il grado di controllo esercitabile dall'Assemblea dei Soci si manifesta, in teoria, con il potere di veto. Si dice in teoria

perché, nella realtà della CMB, non é mai accaduto che l'Assemblea dei Soci abbia bocciato una proposta del C.d.A.. Questo organismo é composto da Soci appartenenti alla "produzione" e alla "struttura". Per la sua formazione, in CMB c'è una norma "non scritta", in base alla quale i managers non possono essere eletti. Il C.d.A. é composto quindi da Quadri Intermedi, operai ed impiegati, con un fenomeno di progressiva scomparsa dei Quadri Operai. Questo perché gli operai eletti nel C.d.A. sono solitamente dei leaders della base operaia che sempre più difficilmente accettano di far parte di un organismo che negli ultimi anni ha dovuto fare delle scelte spesso sfavorevoli alla componente operaia (blocco delle assunzioni, ricorso alla Cassa Integrazione, etc.). Le riunioni di cantiere ed i momenti di partecipazione organizzata in genere hanno invece potere consultivo.

Queste per la storia stessa della Coop, per il suo sistema di comunicazioni formale ed informale che mira a ricercare il consenso a livello delle unità produttive prima di presentare a livello istituzionale le scelte più importanti per la vita della Coop. E' quindi proprio a questo livello che la discussione é più vitale ed il confronto con i Soci sulle scelte d'impresa più significativo.

Livelli professionali

Come si é visto nel I° paragrafo, sin dalle origine le due coops che hanno in seguito dato origine alla CMB, si configurarono in

un caso come vera e propria "cooperativa di mestiere" (la Coop Muratori, i cui soci disponevano di una specifica professionalità), e nell'altro (la Coop Braccianti) come una coop sorta per occupare lavoratori non qualificati, soggetti a condizioni di vita particolarmente disagiate, disposti ad accettare praticamente qualsiasi lavoro. Naturalmente da allora le condizioni sono mutate notevolmente, e la specializzazione nei lavori di edilizia pubblica, l'acquisizione di "grandi lavori" in Italia ed all'estero, hanno portato la CMB a divenire un'impresa generale di costruzioni (General Contractor) con particolari esigenze per quanto riguarda i livelli di professionalità dei Soci. Un'impresa come la CMB, se vuole reggere l'impatto con il mercato odierno, deve necessariamente disporre di una struttura professionale analoga a quella delle imprese private. Ciò che è diverso è la modalità di acquisizione della professionalità. Normalmente, i soci entrano in CMB con livelli di professionalità quasi nulli, dato che l'ingresso in Coop avviene solitamente a titolo di "prima assunzione".

Gli operai che entrano in Coop con una professionalità già acquisita vengono assunti per svolgere mansioni molto particolari che richiedono competenze altamente specialistiche (è il caso, ad esempio, dei saldatori di grandi condotte), ma sono molto rari. Ciò significa che la crescita professionale dell'operaio avviene all'interno della Coop. Il discorso è molto diverso per i tecnici di alto livello ed i managers che spesso giungono in CMB con una professionalità già acquisita, anche in relazione all'elevata

mobilità esistente all'interno del Movimento Coop (il discorso interessa particolarmente i Managers). Buona parte dei Quadri Intermedi viene invece o "formata" all'interno oppure assunta dall'esterno prescindendo dai "circuiti professionali" del Movimento Coop. C'è da dire che, per la particolarità del settore in cui opera la CMB, il concetto di "mestiere" ha ancora un senso a differenza per esempio, dell'industria meccanica dove la parcellizzazione divide livelli di inquadramento e professionalità. In CMB l'inquadramento avviene in base alla professionalità con modalità che si vedranno in seguito.

I percorsi formativi vengono progettati dall'interno e sono legati soprattutto a processi di cambiamento organizzativo. Le occasioni formative degli operai sono legate a momenti professionali specifici, mentre la formazione dei dirigenti avviene quasi sempre all'esterno, affidandosi alla consulenza di Istituti di formazione privati, anche se l'impegno e l'intervento in questo campo è giudicato ancora insufficiente. Scarsamente utilizzate sono le strutture formative del Movimento Coop, che vengono considerate decisamente di bassa qualità. All'interno della Coop sono stati avviati anche una decina di contratti di formazione e lavoro per giovani geometri da inserire nella struttura produttiva e per alcune posizioni di segretarie. Non si hanno notizie di qualsiasi altro tipo di contratto individuale.

Condizioni retributive e di lavoro

Il problema delle retribuzioni verrà affrontato in modo più approfondito nel paragrafo che tratterà della particolare situazione contrattuale della CMB, che é per certi aspetti un caso unico a livello nazionale. In generale si può dire che le condizioni retributive rispetto all'impresa privata sono competitive per i bassi livelli, non competitive per i livelli medio-alti, assolutamente non competitive per i Dirigenti. L'andamento delle retribuzioni in CMB rispetto al mercato esterno può essere esemplificato dalla figura seguente:

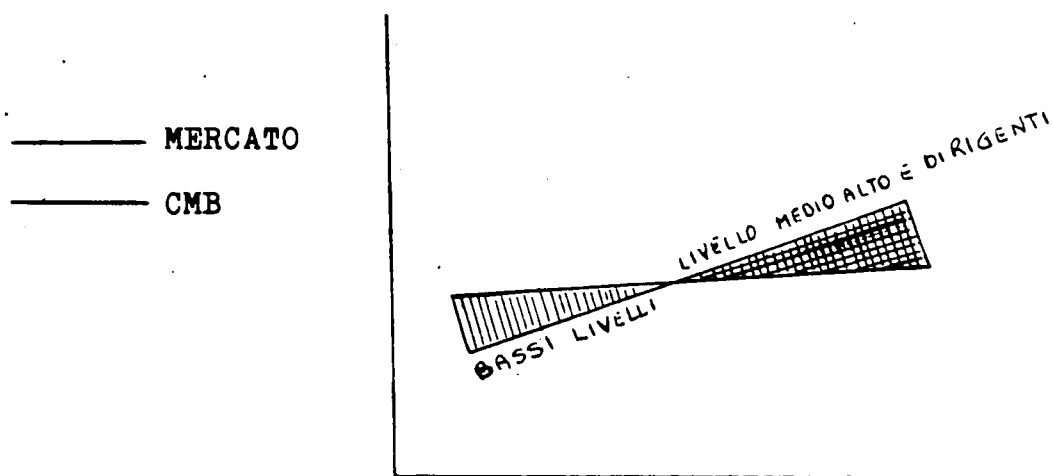


Figura N° 2

La CMB retribuisce adeguatamente i neolaureati, i diplomati di

prima assunzione, il personale impiegatizio d'ordine, nonché il personale di segreteria. Il problema maggiore riguarda quindi i Quadri Intermedi ed i Dirigenti, nonostante dal 1984 siano in vigore due accordi contrattuali distinti per Quadri e Managers che migliorano notevolmente la situazione retributiva di queste due fasce. Si pensi che fino al 1979 il Presidente della CMB era contrattualmente un impiegato al quale veniva assegnato il massimo previsto dal Contratto Collettivo Nazionale di Lavoro (CCNL) mentre oggi, grazie alla contrattazione interna è un Dirigente che percepisce circa 20 Milioni lordi in più rispetto al minimo previsto dal Contratto Nazionale Coop Dirigenti.

Delle motivazioni e dei significati di queste forme di contrattazione, nonché delle modalità di determinazione dei differenziali retributivi ci si occuperà in uno specifico paragrafo.

Non si è venuti a conoscenza di forme di incentivi non monetari, mentre esistono forme di retribuzione che potremmo definire "indiretta": contributi per attività sportive, ricreative, culturali, con costi sostenuti in parte o interamente dall'azienda.

Esiste un istituto, la Cassa Edili, gestita dal Sindacato e dalle imprese del settore, che amministra fondi dell'impresa stessa ed una parte delle retribuzioni dei lavoratori, che vengono poi restituiti sotto forma di mensilità aggiuntiva una volta all'anno ed in forma indiretta (contributi allo studio, case vacanze, cure termali, etc.).

Per la CMB il ricorso a forme di autosfruttamento appartiene alla storia degli anni '50 e '60. E' possibile comunque, qualora si verificassero particolari situazioni di crisi dell'impresa, che l'assemblea deliberi la riduzione del salario. Non si é invece mai fatto ricorso ad aumenti non pagati dell'orario di lavoro.

I lavoratori della CMB sono comunque abbastanza sicuri del loro posto di lavoro. Anche in momenti di particolare crisi, l'azienda ha deciso di non ricorrere ai licenziamenti, preferendo il blocco delle assunzioni e l'utilizzo della Cassa Integrazioni Guadagni a zero ore (C.I.G.), salvo, nel passato a Roma e Milano dove si é proceduto ad una riduzione del personale in accordo con il sindacato e collocando comunque i lavoratori presso altre imprese. L'orario di lavoro è quello contrattuale con utilizzo fisiologico dello straordinario (20-30 ore annue per lavoratore). Salvo il caso di Milano dove, date le caratteristiche strutturali, il ricorso allo straordinario é più consistente. Il ricorso allo straordinario é minimo anche perché in CMB questo viene pagato interamente nella busta paga e quindi é soggetto a tutte le imposizioni fiscali previste dalla legge, che rendono a volte controproducente per il lavoratore il superamento di un certo numero di ore di straordinario. Gli impiegati hanno un orario di lavoro flessibile per 30 minuti nel pomeriggio, mentre per gli operai le possibilità di disporre di un orario flessibile dipendono dalle caratteristiche dell'unità produttiva in cui sono impegnati (condizioni atmosferiche, tipo di lavoro e materiali

utilizzati per le lavorazioni, distanza del cantiere dalla Sede, etc.). La media degli infortuni sul lavoro è in linea con quella del settore, anche se è avviato un progetto sulla sicurezza che tende a diminuire ulteriormente gli indici. Anche di questo si parlerà in un momento successivo date le caratteristiche del progetto stesso.

Il ristorno

Il ristorno è un fatto episodico in CMB, ed è stato distribuito soltanto nel 1983 - in occasione del 75^o anniversario della Coop - Nella misura di 1.000.000 di lire versate a Capitale Sociale e nel 1984 nella misura di 250.000 lire. Piuttosto, si tende a retribuire la sottoscrizione delle quote sociali con un intervento che dal 1983, in applicazione della Legge cosiddetta "Visentini-bis", è passato dal 5% al 17% circa. Inoltre è in corso dal 1984 un piano triennale di sottoscrizione del capitale che viene effettuato attraverso ritenute mensili sulla busta paga.

Il grado di sindacalizzazione ed il sistema di relazioni industriali

In CMB il grado di sindacalizzazione è altissimo ed interessa la quasi totalità degli operai e circa il 90% dei Dirigenti e Quadri Intermedi impiegatizi. La CGIL, il sindacato di ispirazione

social-comunista, é praticamente l'unico presente in azienda (il 98% é iscritto a questo sindacato). Il sindacato é presente in modo organizzato in tutte le aree in cui opera la CMB. Negli ultimi anni la Coop ha seguito una politica di relazioni industriali che ha cercato di favorire l'estendersi ed il consolidarsi dei Consigli di Fabbrica (C.d.F.). Con ciò é mutato il ruolo del sindacato, nel senso che si tende a seguire le linee del confronto e del coinvolgimento su temi contrattuali e gestionali, come ad esempio sulla valutazione del personale ai fini dell'inquadramento, che é fatta da Comitati Paritetici tra impresa e sindacato, e non in base a "liste contrapposte". Fino al 1980 la conflittualità era sensibilmente alta, soprattutto a Roma dove furono attuati alcuni "scioperi selvaggi"; in seguito, la nuova linea sindacale sembra avere sostanzialmente ricomposto la conflittualità. In particolare la ricomposizione é stata notevolmente favorita dalla stipulazione dell'"Accordo Quadri" (1984), nella definizione del quale il sindacato ha giocato un ruolo fondamentale, e la comparsa dei comitati paritetici sembra aver sostituito la contrattazione di tipo tradizionale. Il confronto avviene anche su temi di carattere strategico, come la pianificazione e la riorganizzazione dell'impresa, la sicurezza, etc..

E' possibile quindi individuare i seguenti "attori" nel sistema di relazioni industriali interni alla CMB:

- 1) I Consigli di Fabbrica (uno per area) che sono consigli di delegati a base territoriale eletti ogni uno o due anni da tutti

i lavoratori di ogni area, operai ed impiegati.

2) Il Coordinamento Nazionale dei Consigli di Fabbrica, che é un organismo sovraterritoriale riconosciuto dall'impresa, che tratta i grandi temi di carattere strategico.

Il sindacato ha come interlocutore il Responsabile della funzione soci personale ed i responsabili del personale a livello di ogni area. A livello dell'impresa é costituita poi una Commissione Consigliare per le Relazioni Industriali che determina le politiche sindacali della Coop.

In definitiva si può dire che si é passati da un ruolo applicativo, di pura rivendicazione economica, ad un ruolo di coinvolgimento su temi di carattere gestionale e di politica generale. Uno degli effetti di questo processo é stato che il C.d.F., da espressione quasi esclusiva della base operaia e degli impiegati dei livelli più bassi, stà ottenendo un riconoscimento via via crescente anche da parte dei Quadri Intermedi e dei Tecnici, che iniziano ad essere rappresentati in questi organismi.

Paragrafo III

Il Problema della partecipazione

Come si é accennato in precedenza, la politica dell'autogestione é uno degli elementi che contraddistinguono l'attività della CMB in questi ultimi anni. Il problema della partecipazione è "esplosivo" in modo tale da richiedere nuove forme di gestione nel 1981-82. In quegli anni infatti si verificò un aumento dei bisogni partecipativi della base sociale, dovuto ad una serie di processi che hanno trasformato la CMB in modo sostanziale in alcune sue caratteristiche fondamentali.

E' possibile individuare tali processi nel modo seguente:

- a) - Il blocco delle assunzioni di operai attuato a partire dal 1981 e tutt'ora in corso, che non poteva lasciare indifferente una base sociale portatrice di una cultura come quella della CMB.
- b) - I mutamenti strutturali, in gran parte imposti dal mercato, che stanno trasformando la C.M.B. da cooperativa di muratori in impresa generale di costruzioni (General contractor). E' un problema di strategia dell'azienda, che comporta un diverso peso delle zone lontane dalla Sede, dei cosiddetti "grandi lavori" acquisiti altrove che incrementano notevolmente il monte lavori della Coop senza comportare aumento dell'occupazione, oppure favorendo soltanto l'acquisizione di manodopera in loco, perché la situazione economico-politica di quei mercati non consente

altrimenti.

c) - Il contemporaneo e conseguente aumento della complessità organizzativa e della struttura professionale della Coop, che si traduce nell'aumento del "peso" in termini numerici e professionali di Quadri, Tecnici ed Impiegati. E' facilmente intuibile quali fossero ed in buona parte quali sono ancora, le difficoltà e le diffidenze della base sociale nel comprendere un processo che vedeva da un lato il blocco totale delle assunzioni operaie e dall'altro un aumento apparentemente ingiustificato di figure non tradizionali all'interno della Coop. E' un problema pressante a livello dell'intero Movimento Cooperativo, dal quale la CMB non é certo stata esentata. E' un problema di carattere politico oltre che organizzativo, quello del "rapporto tra struttura e tecnostruttura", tra la base sociale dove i valori tradizionali della cooperazione sono profondamente radicati ed una serie di nuove figure professionali portatrici delle competenze specialistiche indispensabili al modo nuovo in cui la Coop é presente nel mercato.

La portata del fenomeno é comprensibile se si pensa che soltanto sino al 1978 le uniche figure "istituzionali" riconosciute erano il Direttore Tecnico ed il Segretario (con funzioni contabili ed amministrative) e che gli impiegati venivano considerati niente più di "appendici strumentali" della Coop (nella Coop Muratori, soltanto dal 1975 gli impiegati potevano diventare Soci). Il processo in corso era quindi "subito" con diffidenza e la fiducia sulla fedeltà politica e le capacità sociali di queste nuove

figure era molto scarsa. Il rischio era quello di assistere ad una spaccatura insanabile tra la dimensione sociale e quella operativa dovuta alla funzione di "filtro" attuata dalla nuova fascia intermedia senza tuttavia possedere la necessaria cultura per farlo, con conseguenze che sarebbero state mortali per i contenuti sociali e politici dell'impresa cooperativa.

d) - il ricorso alla Cassa Integrazione Guadagni (C.I.G.) a "zero ore" a partire dall'inverno del 1982, ha diffuso una sorta di "stato di allarme" tra la base sociale. Il ricorso C.I.G. é visto ancora con diffidenza da molte coops le quali, pur di non utilizzarla, o di utilizzarla in misura limitata assumono addirittura lavori in perdita. La CMB ha fatto ricorso in modo crescente a questo strumento (11,98 ore in medià per ogni lavoratore nel 1982, 53,17 ore nel 1983, 93,84 ore nel 1984). In ogni caso, il ricorso alla C.I.G. ha riproposto ai Soci il problema della stabilità della propria condizione lavorativa.

e) - Anche la percezione della crisi generalizzata del settore delle costruzioni ha contribuito ad ingenerare quello "stato di allarme" in seno alla base sociale. Infatti, molte Coops di costruzioni come la CMB sono entrate in grave crisi all'inizio degli anni '80 ed alcune, dopo qualche anno di difficoltà, pur ricorrendo ai licenziamenti, alla C.I.G., a varie forme di "autosfruttamento", all'istituzione di Consorzi per facilitare l'acquisizione di nuove commesse, hanno dovuto cessare l'attività senza che fosse sempre possibile il tradizionale "riciclaggio" del personale all'interno del Movimento.

In definitiva, le condizioni sopraindicate hanno fatto avvertire ai Soci una sorta di minaccia alla propria situazione lavorativa, ed hanno messo in moto dei processi di cambiamento che, senza un'assistenza adeguata di carattere organizzativo, non potevano essere facilmente comprensibili. Da questa sensazione di pericolo è sorta una maggior spinta partecipativa dei Soci, peraltro senza che a tal fine venissero innescati dei particolari meccanismi (si è a conoscenza, ad esempio, anche di un episodio di "autoconvocazione" di circa 40 Soci). Naturalmente, l'incremento meramente quantitativo dei livelli di partecipazione non risolve i problemi dell'autogestione, ed anzi rischia di innalzare il grado di conflitto sociale senza disporre dei mezzi per gestirlo. Da qui, allora, l'esigenza di un progetto sull'autogestione che, partendo dalla realtà della CMB, permettesse di riqualificare la partecipazione. Il progetto parte quindi dall'idea che l'autogestione non è più un fatto spontaneo, ma un patrimonio divenuto un problema organizzativo che, come tale, deve essere gestito.

Nella seconda metà del 1983, il C.d.A. incaricò dunque un gruppo di lavoro di elaborare il progetto. Tale gruppo, composto dal responsabile della Funzione sociale, da alcuni capicommissa delle zone in cui opera la Coop, dai responsabili del personale delle stesse zone e da due consulenti esterni, si formò nei primi mesi del 1984 e si riunì più volte prima di arrivare alla prima definizione del progetto, nel Giugno del 1984, operando sempre a stretto contatto con il C.d.A. tramite la Commissione Sociale

(con funzioni di controllo, verifica e confronto).

Il progetto individua cinque processi organizzativi sui quali l'intervento é ritenuto prioritario:

- 1) Informazione;
- 2) Microdemocrazia industriale (M.D.I.);
- 3) Sicurezza;
- 4) Quadri sociali;
- 5) Politica dei Quadri.

Per quanto riguarda l'informazione, il problema deriva dal fatto che quella tradizionale in uso in CMB, è troppo spesso indifferenziata, aspecifica, ridondante e non risponde adeguatamente alle domande di fondo che si pongono i Soci, che sono: a) dove sta andando la Coop? b) come st. andando? c) quale é l'identità della Coop e dei suoi Soci? Per tentare di dare una risposta a queste domande, la CMB è intervenuta rivalutando il ruolo del Giornale aziendale, e soprattutto modificando le modalità di svolgimento ed i contenuti delle assemblee, nonché il tipo di informazioni che vengono date, rendendone più accessibili la fruizione e la lettura. Il giornale aziendale nato molti anni fa come organo ufficiale della Coop, dal 1979 é gestito da una redazione autonoma, più svincolata dal potere politico della Coop.

Lo scopo é quello di trasformare il giornale da strumento di prevalente propaganda ideologica a mezzo per aumentare l'informazione dei Soci sull'andamento dell'impresa e quindi,

indirettamente, la partecipazione.

Per M.D.I. si intende invece il coinvolgimento dei lavoratori nei processi decisionali che li riguardano direttamente e per i quali dispongono di specifiche competenze. La sperimentazione in atto, alla quale si é più volte accennato, coinvolge quattro unità produttive situate nelle aree d'intervento della CMB e differenti figure professionali. Le unità prese in considerazione sono un gruppo di Quadri Intermedi a Milano, due cantieri (uno a Roma e uno a Carpi), ed un ufficio di segreteria a Carpi.

I temi trattati a livello di singola unità sono:

- a) organizzazione del lavoro;
- b) sicurezza;
- c) programmazione dei lavori e verifiche periodiche.

Per i Quadri Intermedi, il maggior coinvolgimento si realizza sui seguenti temi:

- a) fissazione degli obiettivi individuali e relativa valutazione;
- b) politica della sicurezza;
- c) ruolo dei Quadri Intermedi nella costruzione e gestione del budget.

In ogni unità si tengono riunioni periodiche (settimanali, in genere), della durata di mezz'ora/un'ora, "a cavallo" dell'orario di fine lavoro. Ogni unità di sperimentazione ha come riferimento un gruppo di controllo con caratteristiche simili ed il confronto avviene su una serie di indicatori che sono: infortuni,

assenteismo, proposte di modifica dell'organizzazione dei lavori, richieste di informazioni, conflittualità, produttività, richieste di formazione, modalità e flessibilità dell'orario di lavoro, presenza sociale. La presenza di questi "gruppi di controllo" ha la funzione sia di verificare i cambiamenti che intervengono nelle unità di sperimentazione, sia di fornire un'immagine "attuale" della realtà, quasi una fotografia della situazione, prima di avviare qualsiasi processo di M.D.I..

I Quadri Sociali sono tutti quei Soci che ricoprono cariche specifiche all'interno della Coop, come i Consiglieri di Amministrazione, componenti di comitati, commissioni, etc., cioè quelle figure che nella Coop riversano un preciso impegno politico. I meccanismi di selezione di questi soci sono importantissimi, perché riflettono le modalità tramite le quali la Coop si riproduce nel tempo, mantiene o modifica i propri caratteri originali. Così come sono importanti i meccanismi elettorali, le modalità di costituzione e funzionamento del C.d.A. ed il ruolo, poteri e compiti delle Sezioni Soci. Si ritiene quindi fondamentale che tutti i Soci comprendano quali sono questi processi di coinvolgimento che assicurano la continuità della Coop.

Per quanto riguarda la "politica dei Quadri" - cioè il modo in cui la Coop intende gestire il rapporto con il Middle Management - la Coop ha avviato un programma specifico che ha ridefinito la loro figura, stipulando un contratto altamente innovativo a livello dell'intero Movimento Cooperativo, nel quale si

ridefiniscono i criteri di valutazione in una logica di maggiore congruenza con il sistema dei compiti.

La politica dei Quadri della CMB punta, in definitiva, al coinvolgimento di queste figure professionali non solo nelle attività direttamente produttive, ma anche nei momenti sociali ad esse connessi.

Sul problema della sicurezza la CMB ha avviato un progetto che si inserisce pienamente nel progetto complessivo sull'autogestione.

A seguito di tre incidenti mortali avvenuti tra il 1977 ed il 1982, del sempre maggior controllo esercitato dalla Magistratura sulle condizioni di lavoro e le misure di sicurezza approntate, dall'intervento delle Unità Sanitarie Locali con compiti ispettivi, nacque l'esigenza di una attenta ed articolata rilevazione dei dati sugli infortuni prima, e di progetto globale sulla sicurezza poi. Un gruppo di lavoro interfunzionale (formato dal responsabile del Personale, dal Vicepresidente della Coop, dai Responsabili di area, da quello dei servizi tecnici, dal responsabile dell'Ufficio Progetti, dal responsabile dell'Ufficio Acquisti e da quattro membri del C.d.A.), lo ha elaborato e lo ha avviato nel Giugno del 1984, con una durata che va fino al termine del 1985. Il progetto prevede un coinvolgimento "a cascata" di tutti i Soci a tutti i livelli della Coop, attivando dei gruppi di lavoro per area che agiscono sui Capi a livello delle unità produttive, responsabili a loro volta di specifiche riunioni di cantiere. Il presupposto è il superamento della visione "fatalistica" del problema della sicurezza, per

considerarlo invece come una "disfunzione organizzativa" che, come tale, va affrontata. Il progetto, commissionato ed acquisito da una società di consulenza specializzata, si basa sul concetto di prevenzione e prevede cinque moduli relativi ai temi principali: a) il fenomeno infortunistico; b) i mezzi personali di protezione; c) le macchine e i mezzi di sollevamento; d) gli impianti elettrici; e) le opere provvisoriale.

Quindi l'intervento, nel suo complesso, é di carattere organizzativo, informativo, formativo, e di addestramento. Le prime verifiche dimostrano, ad un anno dall'inizio della fase operativa, che tutti gli indici sugli infortuni sono in diminuzione, ponendo la CMB al di sotto della media (su tali indici) delle altre imprese del settore.

Da quanto detto sinora si intuisce che i processi attivati sulla politica dei Quadri e sulla sicurezza si inseriscono in senso longitudinale in quello sul coinvolgimento attivo, e quindi nel progetto di M.D.I.. Il concetto di coinvolgimento attivo racchiude quindi tutti i processi avviati sino ad ora (Quadri Intermedi, Sicurezza, M.D.I.).

Per questo si può dire che, in definitiva, i tre grandi processi sui quali si interviene sono:

- a) Informazione;
- b) Quadri Sociali;
- c) Coinvolgimento attivo.

Il progetto accompagna il cambiamento organizzativo in atto e, nel momento in cui si scrive, si muove con una logica di

gradualità e di sperimentazione che coinvolge in modo diverso ma sinergico le figure ritenute "critiche" in tale processo. C'è da dire, comunque, che il progetto è seguito con un certo interesse in tutta la Coop, e sembra stia agendo in maniera molto profonda soprattutto sull'atteggiamento "culturale" di quei Soci che vi sono più direttamente coinvolti (Capi Area, Capi Cantiere, Responsabile di Commessa, Assistenti Tecnici) che hanno già vissuto dei momenti di formazione finalizzata alla gestione del progetto. Ci si riferisce in particolar modo ad un modulo di tre giorni realizzato in tre edizioni riservato appunto a coloro che, operativamente, devono gestire il progetto ai vari livelli.

Le maggiori difficoltà si registrano nell'unità di Milano, che da sempre è una realtà particolare per la sua configurazione organizzativa e sociale e perché il coinvolgimento attivo dei Quadri è certamente il più complesso da impostare a gestire anche da un punto di vista puramente tecnico.

Nel periodo in cui si scrive, si sta inoltre provvedendo all'avvio delle riunioni di produzione in tutti i cantieri della CMB, con frequenza mensile e sui temi precedentemente indicati (rese ed avanzamento lavori, organizzazione del lavoro, sicurezza).

Dalle "schede di rilevazione" delle riunioni di produzione che sino ad ora hanno avuto luogo si rileva un elevato grado di partecipazione ed interesse per i temi proposti.

Paragrafo IVRetribuzioni e contratti

La politica retributiva della CMB é stata per lunghi anni quella risultante dalla contrattazione collettiva nazionale, definita tra le Confederazione Sindacali e gli organi del Movimento Cooperativo.

Soltanto a partire dal 1984 si può parlare di una specificità della politica retributiva della C.M.B., con la stipulazione di un accordo contrattuale riservato ai Quadri Intermedi ed ai tecnici che viene ormai considerato esempio da seguire, perlomeno a livello del Movimento Cooperativo regionale.

Fino al 1980 quindi, la politica retributiva della Coop era quella di applicare i minimi retributivi indicati dal CCNL. Erano gli anni in cui il sindacato si batteva strenuamente per la "politica dell'egualitarismo" che, nel lungo periodo, determinò un appiattimento delle retribuzioni che, perlomeno ai livelli più alti, non poteva non essere fonte di tensioni. In CMB, se si considera il periodo 1972-1982 e si esaminano i valori tabellari dei parametri reali (paga base + contingenza + premio di produzione) ponendo come base 100 il parametro dei "manovali", si vede che gli operai qualificati sono passati da 112 a 106, gli operai specializzati da 103 a 112, la II categoria operai da 147 a 122, la II categoria impiegati da 171 a 120 e la I categoria impiegati da 230 a 134. Come si nota, la politica

dell'egualitarismo ha colpito maggiormente le categorie impiegatizie, ed i fenomeni di maggior appiattimento si verificano nelle fasce medio-alte. D'altro canto, il nuovo CCNL non sembrava poter mutar sostanzialmente la situazione. Inoltre, come si é considerato in precedenza, le dinamiche che investivano la CMB erano tali da coinvolgere anche tutto il sistema retributivo. Con ciò si vuole dire che il fenomeno di "affollamento" di figure professionali e di prestazioni molto diverse tra di loro sugli stessi livelli retributivi, era drammatizzato in CMB dai mutamenti strutturali in senso orizzontale e verticale che si sono evidenziati nel III paragrafo.

Le Figure professionali più colpite erano quelle della fascia medio-alta in rapida crescita e richiedenti delle risposte sul piano retributivo ed i Quadri operai medio-alti che erano appiattiti in modo pressoché totale sui livelli inferiori. In pratica, Dirigenti e Quadri Intermedi. Era quindi indispensabile individuare delle soluzioni a questo problema.

Per quanto riguarda i Dirigenti la CMB applica dal 1982 il contratto sperimentale per Dirigenti cooperativi stipulato a livello regionale tra la Lega Cooperative ed il Sindacato, con l'obiettivo di creare condizioni normative e retributive adeguate, senza peraltro dovere e volere applicare il Contratto per Dirigenti delle imprese private.

Ma se il contratto per Dirigenti cooperativi rappresenta sicuramente un passo in avanti, non era certamente sufficiente per risolvere "in toto" la questione retributiva in CMB. Inoltre

il problema era (ed è ancora in molti casi) che l'appiattimento retributivo si traduceva inesorabilmente in una scarsità della disponibilità di queste figure professionali, soprattutto impiegatizie, che spesso possono trovare migliori condizioni presso le imprese private. Parimenti, quando si ricercavano risorse di quel tipo sul mercato esterno, le richieste retributive erano troppo elevate per poter essere soddisfatte in CMB senza far sorgere delle tensioni sociali molto forti.

In molto casi, la tradizionale sicurezza del posto di lavoro in Coop, non è più sufficiente a compensare le differenze sul piano retributivo tra Coop e imprese private.

Questa situazione ha posto la CMB in condizioni tali da rivedere in modo autonomo, per quanto possibile, il sistema di determinazione delle retribuzioni soprattutto per le fasce sopracitate, nella consapevolezza che la questione retributiva sul piano delle relazioni industriali esterne non si sarebbe risolta a breve termine. Peraltro, i C.d.F. delle varie zone sembravano sensibili e pronti a confrontarsi su questi temi. Si iniziò così a studiare la definizione di un nuovo sistema premiante basato, come si sostiene in CMB, "sulla individuazione congiunta e concordata delle specificità dei compiti e delle responsabilità di ciascuno". Questo processo del resto trovava terreno favorevole grazie all'introduzione in CMB, a partire dal 1980, del controllo di gestione direzionale ed operativo che permette di definire un sistema premiante orientato ai risultati, favorendo al contempo stili di direzione orientati al coinvolgimento, definendo programmi ed obiettivi personali.

Questo discorso presenta degli evidenti punti di contatto con il progetto sul coinvolgimento attivo (Paragrafo III) dei Quadri, che si realizza sui temi: a) valutazione delle prestazioni e definizioni dei compiti; b) sicurezza, intesa anche come obiettivo del singolo e quindi facente parte del sistema di valutazione individuale; c) costruzione del budget e piano strategico. Il processo di coinvolgimento e di integrazione di Quadri e Tecnici in CMB, basato sull'identificazione e il riconoscimento sociale di queste fasce professionali, toccando tutti i punti che si sono visti é guardato con grande interesse dagli organismi centrali e locali della Lega, tanto da essere definito una "soft revolution" nel mondo cooperativo.

Quindi, l'esigenza di definire un accordo specifico per Quadri e Tecnici é diventato uno degli elementi di maggior spicco della politica aziendale della CMB in questi ultimi anni.

La discussione sull'accordo per Quadri e Tecnici é stato probabilmente uno dei momenti di maggior coinvolgimento attorno ad un tema specifico, a tutti i livelli della CMB.

L'incarico per l'elaborazione di un progetto sulla realizzazione di un sistema integrato e formalizzato per la gestione dei Quadri e dei Tecnici fù affidato nel Giugno del 1983 ad una società di consulenza di Milano. Dopo 18 mesi, cioè nell'autunno del 1984, l'accordo aziendale per Quadri e Tecnici é stato stipulato tra la CMB ed i Consigli di fabbrica ed é stato firmato anche dai Sindacati Provinciali di Roma e Milano. L'accordo si articola sostanzialmente in tre punti:

- 1) la definizione del "job grading", cioè la valutazione del peso

relativo di ciascuna posizione nell'area Quadri e Tecnici. L'accordo prevede la definizione di un livellogramma con le relative "classi di responsabilità".

2) La costruzione di una curva retributiva in base alle suddette classi di responsabilità, rispondente a criteri di equità interna e competitività sul mercato.

3) La valutazione delle prestazioni in base alle responsabilità ritenute caratteristiche di ogni posizione. I Quadri vengono quindi valutati dai Capi all'interno di un Comitato Paritetico attraverso un processo di valutazione formalizzata, cioè apportando delle schede di valutazione per competenze ed obiettivi individuali.

Per esempio, un Responsabile di commessa è valutato per il 20% in base a competenze specialistiche, per il 20% in base a competenze procedurali, per il 30% in base alle capacità di gestione delle attività, per il 35% in base all'autonomia gestionale.

E' importante ricordare che definizione della curva retributiva e criteri di valutazione sono unici per Quadri, Tecnici e Dirigenti.

La retribuzione lorda che è stata ottenuta è stata poi trasformata negli elementi che determinano la retribuzione in base al contratto dei Dirigenti. I Dirigenti vengono valutati con la stessa metodologia formalizzata, ma dal C.d.A. su proposta del Presidente; il sindacato è invitato, ma non ha potere di voto.

In definitiva, si può dire che le retribuzioni sono delineate nel modo seguente:

a) per i lavoratori operai ed impiegati non Quadri si utilizzano

i profili professionali previsti dal CCNL, arricchiti in base a parametri caratteristici dell'azienda, formulati tenendo conto della particolare organizzazione del lavoro. Sono comunque profili contrattati con i C.d.F. interni. La valutazione delle prestazioni annuali ai fini dell'inquadramento retributivo è affidata a Comitati Paritetici (composti in pari misura da rappresentanti della Coop e rappresentanti del sindacato), che convocano i Capi per valutare i livelli inferiori con un procedimento "a cascata".

b) Per gli altri livelli c'è un contratto aziendale che definisce le posizioni retributive delle varie posizioni organizzative per Quadri e Dirigenti (Accordo Quadri e Tecnici ed Accordo Dirigenti).

Quindi, in CMB è in atto un forte processo di differenziazione delle retribuzioni in base alle prestazioni.

Il rapporto tra retribuzione minima e retribuzione massima in CMB, che sino al 1983 era di 1 a 1,5, è oggi di 1 a 3.

Nonostante il forte processo di differenziazione interna in atto, le retribuzioni di Quadri Intermedi e Dirigenti conservano la caratteristica pregnante di non competitività rispetto ai livelli di mercato. Un'indagine compiuta nel 1984 sui valori medi delle retribuzioni dei livelli medio-alti delle imprese private del settore dimostra che un dirigente CMB (Amministratore delegato, Direttore Generale, Presidente), guadagnando 43 milioni annui, percepisce il 58% in meno di un pari livello di una impresa privata. Il fenomeno è generalizzato per tutte le figure individuate, per le quali le differenze oscillano dal 40% al 20% in termini negativi.

IL CRESM

Quello che si vuole qui presentare non è il "caso" di una impresa cooperativa bensì la realtà espressa da un insieme di imprese cooperative situate nella zona più duramente colpita dal disastroso terremoto avvenuto in Italia il 23.11.1980 e che ha coinvolto quasi interamente le due regioni meridionali Campania e Basilicata.

L'area che interessa nel nostro discorso rappresenta praticamente il cuore geografico di quello che la legge di intervento per il terremoto 219 del 1981 definisce "cratere", cioè i comuni che hanno subito le distruzioni più gravi. Per grandi linee possiamo identificarla nella Comunità Montana dell'"Alta Irpinia" (provincia di Avellino) più alcuni comuni limitrofi, si estende per oltre 70.000 ettari, gran parte dei quali collocati su superfici montane con una popolazione di circa 50.000 persone. Si tratta di un'area interna fra le più colpite dai fenomeni di crisi tipici del Mezzogiorno Italiano ed è caratterizzata da forti squilibri territoriali, sia al suo interno, che rispetto alle aree ricche della pianura circostante. Il terremoto ha naturalmente aggravato tali squilibri, accentuando una realtà economica assistita e dipendente, le cui risorse principali sono costituite infatti dai trasferimenti di reddito alle persone (sussidi, pensioni, ecc.), le rimesse degli emigranti, gli investimenti dello Stato per lavori pubblici. Parziali situazioni di sviluppo (artigianato e terziario) determinatisi nel corso degli anni '70 in alcuni comuni di quest'area non sembrano aver mutato il quadro generale, ne hanno anzi accentuato contraddizioni e difficoltà di intervento.

Il terremoto del 23.11.1980 ha provocato in tutta Italia un vasto movimento di solidarietà che si è concretizzato, nelle sue parti più significative ed interessanti, in un diffuso intervento non solo per l'emergenza ma anche per la

ricostruzione, ricostruzione intesa soprattutto come creazione e sviluppo degli elementi costitutivi della vita economica. In questo quadro grande rilevanza ha avuto il movimento dei lavoratori, nelle sue forme organizzate (Sindacati e partiti) o nelle strutture, gruppi, associazioni che, in diversa misura, ad esso si richiamano nella loro prassi sociale e politica.

L'impresa cooperativa è stata individuata come uno dei soggetti più idonei per assicurare non solo un corretto e utile impiego dei fondi raccolti ma anche una crescita reale ed appropriata dell'economia e al tempo stesso della cultura in quelle realtà meridionali.

Una delle associazioni che più coerentemente e stabilmente ha operato in tal senso è stato il CRESM (Centro Ricerche Economiche e Sociali per il Mezzogiorno). Al di là delle valutazioni sul suo operato, il CRESM, infatti, dopo aver contribuito agli interventi di soccorso, ha scelto di operare con continuità nel cratere e a tutt'oggi, con una sede a Lioni, e alcuni collaboratori è senza dubbio un punto di riferimento per le strutture cooperative delle zone terremotate. Nel corso del 1981 circa 25 cooperative avevano ottenuto aiuti tramite il CRESM per quasi mezzo miliardo di lire.

Il CRESM ha svolto un ruolo di supporto tecnico-culturale per "promuovere, stimolare, aiutare la nascita e lo sviluppo delle cooperative affinché la spesa pubblica passi il più possibile attraverso le aziende cooperative (.....) e si valorizzino le enormi risorse umane e materiali presenti in tutta la zona terremotata" (Notiziario CRESM, giugno 1981). Tale azione si è d'altro canto accompagnata ad un più generale lavoro sociale per la crescita della "partecipazione e del controllo popolare al processo di ricostruzione (.....) e di una programmazione regionale che veda le zone terremotate protagoniste della liberazione del Sud dalla attuale dipendenza economica, culturale e politica" (documento CRESM, dicembre 1981).

La presente relazione, pertanto sebbene conterrà talvolta espliciti richiami all'azione del CRESM si riferisce esclusivamente a cooperative presenti nelle zone dell'Alta Irpinia e più precisamente a quelle costituite dopo il terremoto senza l'aiuto di forme massicce di sostegno (formativo, finanziario, ecc.) da parte di grandi strutture nazionali.

Indubbiamente, la realtà cooperativa delle zone terremotate non è meccanicamente assimilabile all'intervento del CRESM; molte imprese esistevano prima del terremoto, molte altre sono state promosse ed aiutate da altri organismi e d'altro canto non esistono cooperative "del CRESM". D'altro canto in questa sede non interessa quantificare l'incidenza dell'azione CRESM quanto piuttosto analizzare un certo tipo di impresa cooperativa nella sua dinamica organizzativa, una dinamica però apprezzabile soltanto se letta attraverso i momenti di integrazione, confronto, scambio espressi dalle aziende cooperative presenti in quelle zone e ai quali il CRESM ha portato e porta il suo contributo.

Alla fine del 1983 nel cuore delle zone terremotate operavano circa 180 cooperative (escluse quelle di abitazione); escludendone una ventina di cui non si hanno dati attendibili si ha la seguente situazione:

Tipo coop.	Cooperative			%	Soci	
	Prima del terremoto	dopo il terremoto	totale		N°	%
Agricole	38	22	60	38	3.108	64
Edili e collegate	22	35	57	36	1.029	22
Manifatturiere	9	11	20	13	253	5
Culturali di servizi	6	15	21	13	429	9
TOTALE	75	83	158	100	4.819	

Molte delle cooperative agricole costituite prima del terremoto erano inattive, generalmente inoltre hanno un numero di soci superiore a quelle sorte dopo il novembre 1980. L'evento sismico dunque ha attivato un forte impulso alla nascita di aziende cooperative; non si è trattato semplicemente di una nuova forma di canalizzazione di denaro pubblico; in proposito in questa sede ci sembra sufficiente notare come le cooperative costituite dopo il terremoto a 4/5 anni della loro fondazione sono generalmente più attive di quelle costituite prima del 1980, il numero dei soci si avvicina molto a quello dei dipendenti effettivamente impiegati, hanno spesso commesse o mercati non rigidamente confinati nell'ambito locale, hanno relazioni con altre imprese od organismi più intensi.

Sin dall'inizio del 1981 dunque cominciano a nascere nuove cooperative. L'azione del CRESM si svolge oltre che sul versante della promozione-creazione della singola impresa anche e forse soprattutto su quello della connessione e integrazione fra le imprese. Viene così costituito il COMER, una sorta di consorzio intersettoriale fra cooperative con lo scopo di fornire consulenza amministrativa, curare la formazione dei soci, procacciare commesse e mezzi finanziari, elaborare piani e progetti nelle zone terremotate, gestire un fondo di rotazione per finanziare le attività delle cooperative aderenti e più in generale sviluppare scambi fra le aziende del consorzio stesso.

Il COMER nel corso del 1983 associa circa 70 imprese e si struttura in sub-strutture settoriali.

Il CRESM sebbene non direttamente interessato alle attività del COMER esercita di fatto su di esso una forte influenza. Nel corso del 1984 il COMER ha attraversato una difficile fase, è attualmente in ristrutturazione, tendente a concedere autonomia anche formale alle strutture settoriali (consorzi di settore).

Abbiamo brevemente descritto questa iniziativa non solo perchè indicativa anche dal punto di vista quantitativo (per numero di associati e fatturato con seguito) ma soprattutto in quanto evidenzia un motivo che ricorre spesso nella prassi del CRESM e in quello di molte cooperative esistenti nelle zone del terremoto: e cioè l'integrazione, il collegamento funzionale con altre imprese non solo come strumento per una maggior forza di mercato (sia di acquisto che di ven dita) ma anche come momento di creazione di una compiuta realtà organizzativa aziendale che altrimenti si annullerebbe nei rapporti interpersonali tra i soci.

Fra l'universo delle cooperative presenti nell'area dell'Alta Irpinia quel le più interessanti dal nostro punto di vista sono probabilmente le manifatturiere. Infatti sebbene siano solo il 13% delle cooperative e il 5% dei soci, rap presentano un fenomeno nuovo nel panorama produttivo della zona per modalità di aggregazione fra i soci, per la loro giovinezza (la più antica è stata costitui ta nel 1979), per la capacità di sfruttare capacità professionali e abilità so ciali già presenti (ceramica e tessile, abbigliamento), per la composizione dei soci e dei dipendenti (quasi esclusivamente donne) e per la rilevanza sociale e culturale che quest'ultimo comporta.

Praticamente tutte hanno contatti con il CRESM, tuttavia relazioni più sta bili esistono soprattutto con quelle costituite dopo il terremoto e dove l'inter vento con il CRESM si è espresso in forma più diretta. Ci riferiamo quindi in particolar modo a: IL LUCIGNOLO (Sant'Angelo dei Lombardi, 11 soci, lavorazione

ceramica), SAN CRISPINO (Salza Irpina, 12 soci, calzature), LA META' DEL CIELO (Teora, 11 soci, dipinto su tessuto), LA GINESTRA (Rapone, 14 soci, ricamo), LA SPIGA D'ORO (Santomenna, 22 soci, confezioni pantaloni), LA VERDE VALLE (Consa della Campania, 18 soci, confezioni in pelle), L'OFANTINA (Lioni, 12 soci, maglieria), IL CIGNO (Lacedonia, 12 soci, ceramica), LA MONGOLFIERA (Torello dei Lombardi, 22 soci, confezioni camicie).

Nascono tutte intorno al 1981/82; il 1983 segna l'inizio dell'attività produttiva vera e propria; quasi tutte aderiscono al COMER. Prese nel loro insieme presentano aspetti assai diversi.

Per quanto riguarda la composizione dei soci abbiamo aziende formate esclusivamente da giovani (IL CIGNO e LA META' DEL CIELO) ed aziende con una forte presenza di donne già sposate con figli; ciò non discrimina circa la professionalità della manodopera: alcune cooperative dove le dipendenti hanno un'età media più alta (35 anni) non necessariamente presentano attività lavorativa nel settore altrettanto elevato; le giovani generalmente invece avevano già fatto qualche piccola esperienza. Mediamente comunque il back-ground professionale è molto basso. Tecnicamente abbiamo imprese sufficientemente dotate (IL LUCIGNOLO con 400 mq di capannone, LA VERDE VALLE macchine nuove automatiche) ed altre che lavorano in impianti disagiati e con attrezzatura assolutamente artigianali (LA GINESTRA, L'OFANTINA).

Molte lavorano su commessa (di aziende del centro Nord). Quasi tutte hanno approntato campionari propri (specie la SAN CRISPINO, IL LUCIGNOLO). Quasi tutte le imprese inoltre hanno allargato il mercato dei committenti eventualmente già posseduto dalle singole socie-dipendenti. Ogni dipendente è socio. I soci non di

pendenti sono un ristretto numero. Le dimensioni del fatturato vanno dalle poche decine di milioni ad oltre trecento milioni di lire.

Il costo del lavoro rappresenta mediamente il 60/70% del fatturato.

Alcune sono associate alla Lega Nazionale delle Cooperative e Mutue. Quasi tutte, specie quelle dotate di impianti migliori, hanno ricevuto aiuti (prevalentemente in macchine) da organismi nazionali o internazionali di solidarietà e/o da strutture sindacali di base, più raramente e in misura minore dalle istituzioni.

Qualcuna tramite questi canali ha ricevuto commesse di lavoro.

In tutte le cooperative il consiglio di amministrazione è formato non dalle lavoratrici più esperte o comunque non è questo l'elemento discriminante; si tratta invece di quelle socie più capaci nell'intrattenere rapporti con l'ambiente esterno o nel gestire le questioni amministrative.

Posta questa premessa va detto che il livello medio di partecipazione (fra le aziende, per socio di ciascuna impresa, per argomento) è decisamente elevato e si esprime in forma assembleare. Se le decisioni risultano ovviamente vincolanti, non di meno anche i semplici pareri o atteggiamenti influenzano significativamente il ristretto campo discrezionale dei membri del consiglio di amministrazione il quale di conseguenza risulta spesso molto poco convocato. Le assemblee vengono svolte durante l'orario lavorativo, prevedono dunque l'interruzione della produzione e sono precedute da intensi dibattiti informali svolti al di fuori o nel mentre si esplica l'attività lavorativa. Specie nelle imprese di confezione per conto terzi dove l'andamento della produzione è più rigidamente scadenzato,

la durata dell'assemblea è prefissata, i mancati prodotti calcolati e il tempo viene spesso recuperato. Complessivamente sembra che le cooperative manifatturiere abbiano un livello di partecipazione più alto rispetto a quello delle cooperative di altri settori presenti nelle zone terremotate.

Tale bisogno di influire sulle decisioni finali presenta caratteristiche complesse e spesso contraddittorie. Certamente una presenza più intensa alla conduzione dell'azienda nei suoi molteplici aspetti è maggiormente presente nelle cooperative con minor numero di soci, età media più bassa, livello di scolarizzazione più alto. Tuttavia ciò non sembra poter esaurire l'analisi delle cooperative in esame; infatti se fattori ideologici sono ben presenti nelle cooperative prima indicate non emergono quelle situazioni di impresa-comunità tipica di certa cooperazione giovanile moderna.

L'elemento comunità entra invece in gioco nelle cooperative con una presenza di lavoratrici più "anziani", dove la comunità non è quella di nuova acquisizione costituita dall'insieme delle socie e compagne di lavoro bensì quella del paese. Sul lavoro cioè si riproducono e si amplificano alcuni rapporti sociali pre-esistenti. Talvolta, specie nel caso di lavoro monotono e ripetitivo, la disposizione dei posti di lavoro segue la logica non delle "amicizie" ma del "vicinato" e il lay-out dei macchinari si vorrebbe tale da poter permettere la conversazione.

In questo quadro certo individualismo delle popolazioni meridionali si sposa con la volontà di successo e compattezza della propria azienda verso "l'esterno" nel determinare una forte spinta partecipativa alle decisioni ritenute cruciali per l'impresa.

Ne consegue che in quest'ultimo caso che si ha un interesse maggiore verso gli argomenti più vicini e minore verso quelli che sembrano più lontani. Il lavoro è spesso uguale per tutti quindi la sua divisione non rappresenta terreno di frequenti discussioni.

Più forte è invece l'interesse per le questioni a livello d'impresa, molto meno a livello di settore (avvertito tuttavia sempre più al crescere della professionalizzazione), moderato per il consorzio, mentre torna ad essere elevato per le questioni che vedono coinvolto il CRESM, e torna a scemare sui fatti più generali che vedono coinvolto il livello di centrale cooperativa o di istituzione (programmazione economica). Coerentemente, argomenti privilegiati sono il livello e il sistema di retribuzione, gli investimenti da compiere, gli assetti interni,

Queste modalità di partecipazione sono così radicate, vista anche l'impegnativa scelta fatta da queste donne di costituirsi in cooperative, da essere considerate quasi naturali e inimmaginabile è quindi una organizzazione che non le prevedesse,

Data la giovinezza di queste imprese è difficile valutare il rapporto tra grado di partecipazione e risultati economici. Quel che sembra certo è una relazione positiva tra il livello di partecipazione e l'affidabilità nei tempi e nella qualità della produzione, da un lato e sviluppo professionale, dall'altro. Tali due elementi se certamente non esauriscono i bisogni per riscontri economici positivi senza dubbio però costituiscono la base per uno sviluppo aziendale efficace e duraturo; "rischio imprenditoriale" e propensione all'innovazione sembrano invece dipendere da altri fattori riconducibili essenzialmente a livello d'istruzione, all'età e al tipo di produzione (più scarsa nel campo delle confezioni).

E' interessante inoltre notare che le dimensioni del fatturato non influenzano nel nostro gruppo di cooperative il tipo di organizzazione e il livello di partecipazione.

Come si è già accennato, scarso è il background professionale dei soci delle nostre cooperative. Una certa diffusione del lavoro a domicilio per quanto riguarda la maglieria o delle tradizionali lavorazioni di ricamo e cucito non hanno

costituito un patrimonio meccanicamente trasferibile nelle nuove situazioni aziendali. D'altro canto nel campo delle confezioni i problemi cruciali vanno ricercati nel nostro caso prevalentemente nell'ideazione del prodotto, nella programmazione della produzione e nelle modalità di erogazione del lavoro. Ceramica, pittura tessuti, articoli in pelle sono i comparti dove in qualche misura si è attinto da precedenti esperienze o piuttosto da esperienze personali dalle singole lavoratrici.

Indubbiamente nel territorio esistevano ed esistono capacità e abilità orientate verso questi settori. Tuttavia ciò costituisce una sorta di spunto d'avvio e niente più; l'aspetto interessante delle nostre cooperative è infatti costituito dall'aver orientato tali risorse all'idea di imprese per la quale hanno dovuto affrontare problemi non solo e non tanto tecnico-professionali quanto più generalmente culturali rispetto alle proprie esperienze e modi di pensare. In questo senso praticamente tutti i soci delle cooperative stanno attraversando periodi di formazione dove i contenuti professionali più "richiesti" sono quelli propri della direzione d'azienda, della organizzazione e programmazione della produzione, della commercializzazione e del marketing. Corsi per operatori al taglio, alla maglieria, ai prodotti di pelle vengono destinati ai nuovi assunti o prevedono progressivi livelli di specializzazione. Tali corsi sono prevalentemente gestiti dal CRESM e sono destinati ai soli soci delle cooperative che al termine delle attività formative verranno effettivamente integrati in azienda.

Tutte le lavoratrici delle cooperative hanno un regolare rapporto di lavoro. Fra le cooperative vigono diverse forme di retribuzione: dal salario uguale per tutti di alcune (specie quelle che lavorano per il mercato) al salario in relazione alla quantità prodotta per singolo dipendente (per quelle che lavorano per commesse).

In ogni caso l'ammontare complessivo o dei tetti raggiungibili sono determinati dall'assemblea sulla base dei piani di attività elaborati per grandi linee dai Consigli di Amministrazione. Fino ad oggi sebbene l'obiettivo sia la paga "sindacale" nessuna cooperativa è riuscita a raggiungere quel limite, con scarti talvolta anche molto forti. La maggior parte delle imprese infatti preferisce diluire nel tempo la produzione e/o ripartire fra tutti i soci il lavoro piuttosto che saturare il tempo-paga di un numero minore di occupati.

Con la crescita del volume d'affari però si stanno cominciando a porre problemi di programmazione del lavoro sia per la maggiore quantità di produzione e sia per la conservazione del margine di ricavo che oggi è prevalentemente garantito dal più basso livello del costo del lavoro esistente in questa zona.

Non esistono incentivi non monetari, come non esistono forme di auto-sfruttamento per le cooperative meno solide. I soci con incarichi di responsabilità (che tuttavia non danno diritto a salari più alti) e più generalmente le imprese con un andamento della produzione meno prevedibile risentono del clima di elevata partecipazione esistente. In questi casi pertanto viene svolto una gran mole di lavoro al di fuori del previsto, gran parte del quale destinati a migliorare la qualità e le condizioni dell'impresa.

Ogni mese in quasi tutte le cooperative viene fatto un bilancio consuntivo e preventivo, sulla base del quale si rimodella la struttura salariale.

Date le caratteristiche di queste imprese non si pone la questione circa il ruolo e atteggiamento del sindacato. Tuttavia va segnalata una forte spinta da parte del CRESM e delle lavoratrici più politicizzate a sviluppare la cultura politica e sindacale delle socie, da un lato, e ad instaurare diversi rapporti con le strutture sindacali, dei partiti politici, delle centrali cooperative.

Vi è tuttavia tra i due momenti una sorta di scissione. Infatti mentre nel la gestione dei conflitti interni si persegue costantemente la strada della mediazione (con qualche rilevante ritardo nella velocità dei processi decisionali) nel caso di conflitti su questioni generali, esterne, politiche (sebbene assai scarsi) più difficilmente si giunge ad una loro composizione.

Le cooperative che abbiamo analizzato nascono in una zona per la quale più di altre si atpeggia la definizione di area interna. "L'orizzonte chiuso" che spesso circonda le comunità meridionali sembra in questo caso anche più ristretto e privo di prospettive. Disoccupazione o emigrazione sembravano le uniche alternative possibili per i giovani maschi. Per le donne v'era solo la casa e qualche magro lavoro nei campi.

Indubbiamente sul finire degli anni '70 si intravedevano alcuni segni di cambiamento di tendenza, se non altro dovuti all'esaurirsi della emigrazione come valvola di sfogo, all'andamento del livello di istruzione, ecc. Tuttavia, il terremoto del 23.11.'80 rappresenta per quelle popolazioni un vero trauma, violento e inaspettato.

E' su questa base che nasce e si sviluppa il fenomeno cooperativo, specie quello giovanile e femminile. Nei paesi più grandi e vivi è stata la determinazione di alcune donne a decidere la formazione delle cooperative; in altri è stato il lavoro paziente di decine di riunioni casa per casa fra nonne, madri e figlie che ha portato la nascita di questa impresa. In ogni caso, però, è stata sempre la realtà del paese che ha espresso dei soggetti portatori di idee produttive. Si tratta dunque di soggetti che provengono da un tessuto sociale povero di cultura "imprenditoriale" come di "commercio", di "traffici", di scambi reali con l'esterno. Le donne che hanno fondato le cooperative non perseguono "alternative"; i loro modelli organizzativi per quanto influenzati da soggetti esterni risultano in gran parte modellati su esperienze culturali sostanzialmente tradizionali.

"Alternativo" è il fatto stesso che siano nate. Le socie-lavoratrici non possono e forse non vogliono rischiare capitali; vogliono invece rischiare il proprio la voro. Non hanno e non vogliono avere debiti; hanno usufruito delle risorse provenienti dalla solidarietà per il terremoto e probabilmente almeno dall'indotto dei danari statali per l'assistenza ma non vogliono i soldi dello Stato; per lo ro l'assistenza non sostituisce il lavoro. Rispetto a tali aree, le cui terre sono state abbandonate in alcuni punti nell'arco di 15/20 anni dal 40/50% della popolazione, per chi è rimasto, in fondo, anche lo Stato più generoso non è affidabile. E i giovani e gli emigrati di ritorno certamente più istruiti ed accultu rati hanno ancor più forti questi sentimenti, proprio perchè ancor più frustrati da altre esperienze fallimentari.

Non si tratta dunque certamente per queste donne di una sistemazione in attesa di trovare un'altra collocazione professionale. Pur avendo secondo moder ni parametri un basso grado di imprenditorialità, tale interpretazione risulta totalmente inapplicabile essendo in tale contesto la creazione di occupazione un arduo obiettivo che qualora venga raggiunto costituisce l'effettiva "realizzazione di impresa".

NUOVA PROFESSIONALITA'

a) Le aree interne del Mezzogiorno italiano vengono rappresentate nel dibattito sociologico e nelle analisi come il Sud del Sud intendendo con questo sottolineare la presenza di un ulteriore disequilibrio nello sviluppo che si è creato negli ultimi anni e che si aggiunge al tradizionale divario che segna il meccanismo di crescita economica che storicamente ha caratterizzato l'Italia. Si tratta del diverso ritmo di sviluppo tra le aree "forti" metropolitane come Napoli e Bari che fungono da poli di attrazione delle diverse attività assorbendo ulteriormente risorse non solo dai rispettivi hinterland ma anche dalle aree più interne collinari e/o montane, aggravando per questa via la situazione di disgregazione socio-economica già molto forte per i noti processi emigratori.

In tale contesto che registra quindi tassi di disoccupazione giovanile tra i più alti d'Italia ed in particolare tra la forza-lavoro altamente scolarizzata sorge la coop. Nuova Professionalità, a Tolve in provincia di Potenza (Basilicata). La nascita e quindi poi la vita di tale impresa deve essere inquadrata per capire le motivazioni di fondo nel rapporto che esiste tra stato e quindi ente locale e "paese" da una parte e le avanguardia sociali e politiche che si sono formate nel corso degli anni '70. La spinta iniziale alla formazione della coop. che avviene formalmente nel 1981 è da inquadrare in quel movimento verso la cooperazione che è esploso nel 1980 in occasione del terremoto nella vicina Irpinia. Quel momento ha visto la mobilitazione per la solidarietà di molte organizzazioni sociali ed economiche sia a livello nazionale che locale; ha rappresentato anche per molti giovani del Sud un momento di socializzazione e di dinamizzazione politica, è stata l'occasione per mettere in discussione gli assetti sociali consolidati in quell'area come in altre.

La coop. quindi usando solo il referente legislativo come puro appoggio formale nasce coagulando intorno a sé giovani che sia socialmente che politicamente sono l'espressione culturalmente più avanzata o almeno vengono riconosciuti come tale dalla piccola comunità/paese.

Ad essa infatti aderiscono giovani diplomati e laureati con precedente esperienze di impegno politico-sindacale sia a livello di movimenti di base che nelle organizzazioni, esperienze però tutte compiute al di fuori della comunità. La scelta quindi di localizzare la coop. nel proprio paese di appartenenza che prima non era stato colpito dal terremoto, viene caricato di molti significati; è da ricordare che molti dei giovani partecipanti al nucleo originario della coop avevano compiuto gli studi in area metropolitane centro-settentrionali e che ognuno di loro ha vissuto sia pure indirettamente il problema dell'emigrazione, portandone le conseguenze anche nei modi della socializzazione e acculturazione sia a livello individuale che di gruppo. E' quindi questo rifiuto della cultura dell'emigrazione unito alla coscienza che "si può fare qualcosa" nel "paese" e per il "paese" il background di fondo, che riesce ad unire gli individui per una stessa finalità anche se le basi di partenza e le motivazioni dei singoli possono variare.

- b) In un primo momento Nuova Professionalità sceglie come proprio settore di attività quello dei servizi sociali rivolgendo la propria offerta all'Ente Locale, il Comune. Tale scelta, sia pure inquadrabile in una logica di assentenzialismo, era compiuta in base alla constatazione che la comunità avendo sofferto l'emigrazione si trovava ad avere da una parte un altissimo livello di senilizzazione dell'intero corpo sociale e dall'altra uno scalfimento o una completa assenza dei servizi scolastici e para-scolastici, di assistenza dei minori e degli handicappati ecc.

La risposta dell'Ente Locale, fortemente tipica di situazioni simili è stata

anche in questo caso improntata alla diffidenza e comunque non portava ai risultati sperati dai partecipanti alla coop.. Altre difficoltà dovute al reperimento di locali adatti, (in primo tempo la coop. disponeva di un monolocale in una casa fatiscente avendo solo in seguito ricevuto dalla parrocchia l'agibilità di alcune sale per riunioni), le temporanee assenze per piccoli lavori per la sopravvivenza di alcune figure leader del gruppo, la presenza di alcuni avversari politici identificabili con i "benpensanti" del paese, ecc., portavano ad un momento di dibattito teso e di crisi che però può essere definito come il momento positivo in cui si attuava il passaggio del gruppo promotore insieme a nuovi soci dal "collettivo" (gruppo informale) alla "impresa".

- c) Tale passaggio avviene tra il 1980 e '81 in occasione dell'assegnazione alla coop. di un corso di formazione per operatori sociali da parte della Regione che da parte di quest'ultima ha il chiaro scopo di essere uno strumento di garanzia di un reddito minimo per i soci. Viceversa tale possibilità, con decisione unanime ed entusiasta dell'assemblea, viene colta sia come momento di auto-formazione che per assicurarsi un piccolo fondo per ulteriori investimenti. La parte quindi destinata come borsa di studio ai soci-allievi viene da tutti "girata" alla cooperativa che la destina all'acquisto di una serie di attrezzature: personal computer, macchina da scrivere, ecc. Tale forma spuria di "auto finanziamento" dovuta certamente al fortissimo grado di motivazione dei soci, porta poi la coop. tutta lungo un processo di definizione dei propri compiti, di una più chiara definizione organizzativa e di un più preciso rapporto con il territorio. Proprio quest'ultimo elemento diventa il filo conduttore del processo di auto-formazione che si innesca. Emerge che essere impresa di servizio in quella determinata comunità e soprattutto voler fornire determinati servizi all'uomo, comporta una cono

scienza/coscienza del proprio ambiente, una metodologia di azione nel territorio e verso le sue componenti, assai particolare, allo stesso tempo di partecipazione e critica. Viene anzi individuato questo come il tratto professionale distintivo dell'operatore cooperativo rispetto ad altri agenti socio-economici. A tale processo di formazione danno il loro contributo di docenti ma anche di sostenitori esponenti a livello nazionale dei movimenti ecologisti, e alcuni responsabili regionali della Lega. Tutti i settori economico-produttivi sui quali si articola la vita del paese, vengono così investiti da un lavoro di ricerca ed allo stesso di confronto tra i soci ed altri lavoratori; emergono così come dato di conoscenza ed allo stesso modo campo di azione alcuni nodi dell'organizzazione sociale complessiva sui quali la coop. decide di intervenire. Si potrebbe dire che si tenta di rendere produttiva la contraddizione.

- d) Le attività che vengono individuate da Nuova Professionalità come settori intorno ai quali strutturare le proprie offerte di lavoro sono:
- 1) organizzazione e gestione di una edicola (nel paese era assente qualsiasi tipo di vendita dei quotidiani, riviste, ecc.)
 - 2) servizi di contabilità e amministrazione per le piccole imprese locali (con l'uso del personal computer)
 - 3) attività di ricerca ed intervento sui problemi della fruizione culturale dei giovani del paese, sulla condizione degli anziani.

Le attività che nel corso degli ultimi anni riescono a realizzarsi occupando 2 soci a tempo pieno e altri 7 a tempo parziale sono essenzialmente le prime due. Nel caso della realizzazione la prima si trova ad affrontare ostacoli essenzialmente di tipo organizzativo-burocratico dovendo fare i conti con l'estrema arretratezza dell'organizzazione distributiva locale, con le difficoltà dei trasporti, ecc., ma il raggiungimento del risultato sia per quanto riguarda la creazione di lavoro e per la

coop. e sia soprattutto per aver portato nel paese la possibilità di fruire dei mezzi di stampa in tempi possibili, che viene giudicato un momento di crescita della qualità della vita, consolidano la scelta effettuata. L'attività di servizio (contabilità ecc.) invece trova solo ostacoli

di tipo marginale, superati con relativa facilità, nell'acquisizione e uso del software adatto; non si trovano pur nelle ridotte dimensioni del relativo mercato, difficoltà di penetrazione se non verso quelle strutture economiche piccole o piccolissime che non amano rendere pienamente palesi i propri conti economici.

Diversamente si pone il problema delle attività di ricerca che ancora non trovano la disponibilità piena da parte degli organismi pubblici ai quali viene rivolta l'offerta. A questo contribuisce sia il timore dell'Ente Locale che non si riesca a dare seguito pratico e di intervento ai risultati delle indagini, sia la situazione di concorrenza e/o di sovrapposizione con altri organismi sia statali che privati operanti nella Regione che si potrebbe venire a creare, pur operando tali strutture a livello territoriale più vasto. Tutti i soci esprimono comunque la volontà di proseguire su tale strada, avendo individuato questo settore come l'asse strategico per lo sviluppo della coop. stessa e della sua validità in termini di occupazione e di rilevanza sociale.

- e) L'organizzazione di Nuova Professionalità dal punto di vista interno/formale si pone in maniera assai semplice avendo come corrispettivo la complessità del suo rapporto con il sociale. La "situazione" organizzativa è poi comprensibile solo comprendendo il ruolo di Leadership del gruppo assunto dal nucleo promotore composto da 3 persone tra i quali una donna in particolare rappresenta la continuità nel tempo e il cui intervento risulta spesso necessario per la risoluzione dei problemi inerenti i rapporti esterni, con la Lega, con gli organismi economici ecc.

Data l'esinguità numerica e l'estensione territoriale ridotta del paese spesso l'assemblea dei soci si svolge senza convocazione formale preventiva ed è comunque legata spontaneamente all'insorgere dei problemi. Non si registrano finora tensioni e conflitti nell'assegnazione dei compiti che vengono definiti in assemblea in base alla disponibilità dei singoli e alla competenza, così come spesso particolari lavori vengono assegnati in base alle necessità economiche del socio. L'assemblea funziona poi anche come momento di controllo sul lavoro in corso e decide ovviamente sulle retribuzioni. Momenti di tensione sia organizzativo che nei rapporti interpersonali si registrano invece a causa delle assenze dal paese della figura leader dovute a motivi di studio o per il contemporaneo impegno in strutture politico-sindacali o nella Lega. Negli ultimi tempi si è andata incrementando l'azione di alcuni membri verso la promozione nella formazione di imprese cooperative in altri settori di attività economica nelle aree limitrofe nel tentativo di diffondere ad altre aree anche il proprio metodo di intervento. Molti soci tuttora esprimono palesamente che il loro interesse alla coop. permane certamente dal punto di vista occupazionale e di crescita professionale, ma è subordinato all'interesse politico e di impegno per il cambiamento sociale, questa è la condizione individuabile per il loro operare dentro tale forma d'impresa. Risulta del tutto assente un qualsiasi rapporto con il sindacato la cui presenza è del resto debole in altre realtà produttive della zona; esso comunque non pare abbia elaborato ancora a sufficienza a livello locale una linea di condotta nei confronti di questo tipo di imprese cooperative.

MEZZOGIORNO E NUOVA COOPERAZIONE

E' necessario richiamare molte problematiche e filoni interpretativi al centro di discussioni sociologico-politiche per poter sostanziare l'ipotesi che la crescita della domanda di cooperazione, non sempre tradotta nella realizzazione d'impresa, che si registra al Sud, mette in movimento parametri organizzativo/culturali e di rapporto con le istituzioni diverse e più complesse rispetto al quadro della cooperazione come storicamente si è realizzata in altre aree del paese. Né è sufficiente il quadro legislativo-istituzionale di sostegno e promozione delle imprese cooperative che pure si è delineato. Sebbene molte condizioni strutturali del Sud depongano a favore di una interpretazione di tale domanda in termini di "supplenza" al vuoto d'impresa grande o medio-piccola, (il tasso di disoccupazione, la crisi del modello di gruppo per poli, ecc.) e alla ricerca del rapporto con lo Stato di dipendenza/assistenza sia pure sotto altre forme, ad una analisi più ravvicinata appare invece come questa trovi straordinari punti di aggancio con quel movimento di idee, di cultura, ecc. che ha mandato in crisi le categorie di analisi di cui si discuteva a proposito della "questione meridionale".

Si può dire che, divenendo più rapidi che altrove i processi di mutamento sociale, essi hanno liberato alcune forze, particolarmente ma non esclusivamente nelle aree di alta scolarizzazione, che trovano nella diversa forma di impresa e nelle nuove modalità di lavoro che possono essere offerte o si inquadrano nel movimento cooperativo, una possibilità di perseguire finalità sia individuali che collettive legate alle comunità che storicamente si sono trovate etero-dirette, "invase" da interventi esterni, o comunque pilotate nelle scelte. La cooperazione appare quindi uno dei modi attraverso il quale rifiutare comportamenti e atte

se tipici della "periferia" e allo stesso tempo recuperare valori che contrastino i processi di disgregazione sociale fortissimi ancora in atto.

Emerge, nei fatti sociali, la negazione del "familismo amorale" di Banfield.

La cooperazione che nelle aree tradizionali ha le radici in un quadro di riferimento ideologico-politico ben delineato e strutturato, al Sud a fronte di un consenso sociale sempre più vasto anche se dai contorni sempre meno definibili, vi corrisponde invece talvolta una azione di freno per inadeguatezza, crediamo, degli strumenti di comprensione dei mutamenti in atto. Tra questi ultimi la crisi dell'industrialismo sia pure vissuto da lontano, almeno nelle aree più deboli del mezzogiorno o comunque non-metropolitane, porta i gruppi sociali più dinamici alla ricerca della valorizzazione delle risorse endogene, sia storico-culturali che economico-finanziarie non solo e non tanto in termini di difesa quanto di proposte e di iniziativa. Si delinea così sotto la forma della razionalizzazione di impresa delle espressioni economiche cosiddette "informali", del vicolo, ecc. all'organizzazione cooperativa parallelamente ad una presa di coscienza che più che sociale ha i caratteri di una nuova cultura economica tout court.

Non dissimile è il processo per il lavoro a più alto contenuto di informazioni e professionalità che passa dal rapporto individualistico-particolaristico alla socializzazione nell'impresa lavorativa come punto di forza anche

con le istituzioni sia private che pubbliche.

Per approfondire ulteriormente tale quadro di "emergenze" relativo alla cooperazione nel mezzogiorno d'Italia occorre dire che non è ad essa estranea in molte aree di intervento quel movimento di idee che più che "ecologico-ambientalista" si può definire di salvaguardia e utilizzo produttivo di risorse ambientali di cui il Sud sta scoprendo di essere ricco. Il localismo che altrove assume talvolta caratteri di pura conservazione dell'esistente, si delinea viceversa in alcune

esperienze che si stanno portando avanti come parametro economico e possibilità di nuova imprenditorialità. Tale ricchezza di dibattito e crescita socio-politica che attraverso la cooperazione si sta attuando esclude quindi l'ipotesi che la si possa considerare come fenomeno dell'"onda lunga" di quell'avvenimento, per molti versi assai importante, che è stato l'intervento del movimento cooperativo durante e dopo il terremoto dell'80 in Irpinia. Se la catastrofe è socialmente ed ideologicamente un terreno sul quale la cooperazione può innestarsi e crescere, la sua sopravvivenza ed anzi accelerata diffusione trovano evidentemente motivazioni tutte ancora da indagare in un assai diverso trauma quale è la storia del Mezzogiorno.

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