

REVIEWS

by

JIM McCLOSKEY

A reviewer's life must be very hectic up to the Christmas rush but new publications slacken off for the first part of the new year. At least that is the way the system seems to work. At the time of writing there have only been a few publications on Co-operatives which have crossed my desk in '83 and most of them have been edited works released in late 1982 rather than new publications for 1983.

Following on the widespread interest in the Mondragon Co-operatives in Spain the Co-operatives Research Unit (CRU) of the Open University has just published Mondragon Co-operatives - Myth or Model (CRU, £2.). This is an edited version of a conference promoted by CRU in 1981 to gather views and to debate issues on the success and replicability of the Mondragon system. The second part of the title effectively describes the theme underlying much of the argument and discussion that is included in the proceedings - can UK Co-operatives use the Mondragon model or is Mondragon useful as a myth to spur Co-operators elsewhere on to greater achievements? Roger Spear of the CRU in his role as summariser pulls together the background to the Mondragon development in the first contribution 'The Mondragon Co-operative Experience' and highlights the main

perspectives and issues in his summary paper at the end. One could argue that these two papers alone would provide the necessary information but you would then miss the dialogue of the conference itself and the wealth of points that were raised in presentations on 'The Roots of Mondragon's Economy' by Keith Bradley, 'A Mondragon in Wales' by Denis Gragory and Chris Logan, 'Capital Stakes at Corby' by Robert Oakeshott, 'Co-ops. and the Labour Movement' by Alan Oberman and 'Mondragon and the Quality of Life' by Jack Eaton. As the organisers comment in the preface they have tried to bring together "the major protagonists on this topical issue". The book is organised in such a way that both the papers and relevant discussion are presented.

This book is not for the uninitiated but would be a useful addition to the bookshelf of anyone with an interest in Co-operative development who has some background knowledge of Mondragon. It presents a collection of views and chronicles an interesting debate on the issues. The final paper is 'must' reading to pull together the various threads of argument into an understanding of the various perspectives that can be taken in either dissecting the Mondragon success story or analysing conditions for Co-operative development. At £2 it won't hurt your budget too much either.

Another publication from CRU is the Co-operative Education Working Group's (CEWG) Towards Co-operation (CRU, £1). This long awaited catalogue of audio-visual resources on Co-operatives will be of interest to anyone involved in Co-operative education or in promoting Co-operatives.

In the past, many involved in Co-operative education have developed their own short-lists of useful audio-visual materials. This catalogue draws together many of these lists breaking them into three broad categories - 'What's Been Done', 'Principles and Philosophy of Co-operation' and 'Running the Business'. Within each of these there are further subdivisions for different Co-operative forms; i.e., housing, consumer, agriculture, credit union, community, workers Co-ops., etc.

Audio-visual resources are restricted to films, videos, slides and tapes but it is good to hear that there are plans to have a second catalogue which deals with kits, games and teaching aids.

The delay in publication of the catalogue can be excused by the fact that it has been selectively compiled. For an item to be included it has to be available in the UK, relevant to UK audiences, not out of date and of good technical quality. Most of the entries give details of distributor, running times and in addition a short review/recommendation of the item which can be helpful in selecting material.

A final compilation for this review is The Performance of Labour-Managed Firms edited by Frank Stephen (Macmillan, 1982, £20). This book, like the CRU one, is a set of papers from a conference. It draws together the contributions to a symposium on labour-managed firms held at the University of Strathclyde in 1979. This book (and presumably the symposium) tries to remedy the highly theoretical treatment normally given to this subject by

presenting a set of nine empirical country studies. The introductory chapter by Stephen gives a theoretical overview of the economics of labour-managed firms followed by the country studies including seven specifically on Co-operatives: two on USA (Derek Jones and Katrina Berman), Yugoslavia (Saul Estrin), Spain: Mondragon (Robert Oakeshott), France (Eric Batstone), Ireland (Connell Fanning), Chile (Juan Espinosa), Israel: the Kibbutz (Avner Ben-Ner and E. Neuberger) and West German Codetermination (Jan Svejnar). While these studies are not generally as difficult as the introduction some background in economics or a strong interest in the subject is needed if the reader is to persevere, despite Stephen's attempt to limit the technical nature of the presentation. The two summary presentations by Vanek and Horvat were of more general interest. This book is certainly more readable than the earlier volume 'Participatory and Self-Managed Firms' by Jones and Svejnar (reviewed in Bulletin 46) but is still a book to get from your library unless you have a spare £20.

Note of the Author: JIM McCLOSKEY is the Research and Information Officer at the Co-operative College and was previously the Research Fellow in the CLEAR Unit based at Stanford Hall.