

Editorial

In this issue we publish the first of a series of articles on the Japanese co-operative movement. The Japanese movement is the envy of the rest of the world because of its sheer size, its capacity for innovation and for marrying the two 'irreconcilables' of co-operative practice - successful business and an active membership - yet it is struggling to adapt both to an economic downturn and a rapidly changing social structure. Its basic building block of co-operative democracy - the 'han', or joint buying club - is being affected by deep changes in society such as the increasing numbers of women going into paid work. Yet the movement's response is interesting; it is finding ways of adapting the han to new needs and expectations, and is leading the search for new ways of meeting the needs of a fast-growing elderly population. We will be devoting most of the next issue of the journal to some more articles from Japan.

In the refereed section we publish an interesting and, perhaps, controversial interpretation of the work of Margaret Llewelyn Davies who was a major figure in the British Women's Co-operative Guild. This continues our theme of 'women and co-operatives' (soon we hope to publish two articles examining the role and experience of women in Japanese co-operatives). The article by David Brown and his colleagues in Southampton is a major departure from custom - they are not writing about co-operatives but about co-operative relationships between conventional firms. Why should we be interested in this topic? There is a view strongly held and vigorously preached by some co-operative leaders that, in order to survive, co-ops and mutuals have to compete aggressively in the market place, co-operating with each other only when this makes good economic sense. It is ironic that, while we are learning to do this, some conventional, investor-owned firms are learning to co-operate with each other in high trust relationships that have been labelled 'co-opetition'. The article is, we hope, the first in a series that examines a phenomenon that obviously has great ethical and practical implications for co-operatives and mutuals.

The article on the ethical policies of the UK Co-operative Bank is itself an example of co-operation, between Paul

Monaghan who gave a talk at the annual conference of the UK Society for Co-operative Studies and Sara MacKian who wrote it up as an article. In this case we do not have to learn from non-co-operative organisations how to live up to our own principles - the UK Co-operative Bank is leading the field in putting business ethics into practice. Finally, in this issue we begin a new section headed 'Responses to Published Articles'. We expect this to become a regular feature. The refereeing process encourages authors to respond to helpful criticism before getting into print; each of our refereed articles is subject to two reports from anonymous referees. However, sometimes authors have to agree to differ or to seek further evidence before making up their minds on a subject. This new section in the Journal will allow continuing discussion of important issues raised by our authors, among leading experts in the field.