

A Silent Transformation

Audience Discussion

Co-operatives trace their origins to the British utopian socialists of the 19th Century. Based on solidarity and democracy, co-ops were a concrete act of refusal to accept the newly-emerging Capitalist social relations.

But history has shown that democratic microeconomic organization is not enough to break out of Capitalism. Reforming state institutions that regulate the economy is crucial. Dealing with this task requires a political consciousness, which the co-op sector currently lacks (although a concerted effort is being made to work together across sectors and to “federalize”).

At the same time, mass-based political movements lack the material bases from which to organize. As one co-op practitioner told us in an interview, movements such as Occupy Wall Street are important for mobilizing people for political action, while co-operatives can provide not only the resources but “a body of praxis” for the kind of economic relations that these movements call for.

So if there is any hope of clearing out the decaying corpse of Capitalism, what is needed today is a movement that would bring together political organizations with popular movements and link the two to democratic productive enterprises such as co-ops, credit unions, land trusts, and public (“anchor”) institutions (as well as faith-based organizations) into a broad-based coalition with the aim of taking political power.

What are some practical means by which this type of coalition-building can be advanced?

