



Journal of Co-operative Studies

2023 Special issue: Robert Owen and Co-operation – Call for papers

Guest editors: Chris Williams, Professor of History, Head of the College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences, University College Cork, and **Nick Matthews**, chair of Co-operatives UK, a director of the Heart of England Co-operative Society, member of the Senate at the Co-operative Group, and UKSCS board member.

Following on from the 250th anniversary of Owen’s birth in 2021, this call for papers focusses on the intellectual, philosophical, and practical influences of Robert Owen on the co-operative movement, and the longevity and relevance of his ideas on contemporary co-operation, communitarianism, and management practice. The editors welcome submissions ranging from full academic articles/research papers (7,000 words), short articles (4,000 words), and short think pieces (approx. 1,000 words) — please see full call for papers and the *Journal's* guidelines for submission for information on Journal style and formatting.

Accepted papers will be published in a special issue of the *Journal* in 2023.

Key dates

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| 30 June 2022 | Deadline for extended abstracts (1,000-1,200 words) for academic articles and short papers; outline suggestions for think pieces (500-800 words, or in full). Email to: chris.williams@ucc.ie and nickmatthews@ukscs.coop with Submission for special issue in the subject line, and include detail in your email the type of submission being made (research article, short paper/practitioner paper, think piece). |
| 31 July 2022 | Initial decisions and invitations for submission of full papers |

Robert Owen and Co-operation — Call for papers

Robert Owen (1771-1858) has been commonly regarded as the ‘father’ of the co-operative movement in Britain and as the inspiration for co-operative ventures worldwide. British co-operators, George Jacob Holyoake prominent among them,

stewarded Owen's reputation in this regard during both the latter stages of Owen's long and eventful life and in the decades immediately following his death, including unveiling memorials to him in Newtown (his birthplace), London, and Manchester. This lead was taken up by other co-operators worldwide, and Owen's co-operative 'disciples' were keen to align their organisations and policies with the fecund body of thought and writing that Owen represented, and the considerable reputation that Owen enjoyed.

Co-operators were not alone in this regard for, as Friedrich Engels acknowledged in *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific* (1882, p. 50), 'every social movement, every real advance ... on behalf of the workers links itself on to the name of Robert Owen'. Yet the direction taken by the co-operative movement was not automatically aligned with Owen's own efforts or thoughts in this domain. The focus on consumer co-operation, from the Rochdale Pioneers onwards, represented something of a divergence from Owen's interests, which were predominantly located around producer co-operatives, labour exchanges, and co-operative communities ('villages of co-operation'). Writers in the liberal rather than the socialist tradition prioritised co-operation over the more explicitly socialist elements of Owen's legacy; to some extent the Fabians followed their lead.

Scholarship on Owen and co-operation has a long, distinguished history. Owen biographer George Jacob Holyoake set out his claims early in his *History of Co-operation in England* (from 1875). Beatrice Potter's *The Co-operative movement in Great Britain* and Benjamin Jones's *Co-operative production* both appeared in the early 1890s and paid tribute to Owen's importance. Sidney Pollard wrote on the transition in the movement 'from community building to shopkeeping' for *Essays in labour history: In memory of G. D. H. Cole* (1967, edited by Asa Briggs and John Saville). But after the early 1970s work on Owen shifted away from the focus on co-operation to embrace a plethora of topics on which Owen wrote and about which his various categories of followers enthused. As J. F. C. Harrison noted, 'each generation takes what it finds to be usable from its writings. Yesterday it was infant education, co-operative ownership, and profit-sharing; today it is feminism, community, and concern for environmental or "green" issues' (1992, p. 180).

Yet, for all the diversity of recent work on Owen, co-operation remains a constant thread. As Stephen Yeo (2010) commented, the continuities between the co-operative movement of Owen's day and that of our own are more prominent than the continuities within socialism: 'Members of co-operative and mutual enterprises with shared hopes and disagreements about their practice across the two periods, would recognize each other's discourse ... the power of the co-operative movement ... remains recognizable across time' (p. 240). It is in this context that it is timely to reflect on the state of recent global scholarship and current research on Robert Owen's ideas about, and his influence over, co-operation and the co-operative movement.

Potential topics for contributions to a special issue of the Journal of Co-operative Studies might include (but are not limited to):

- Owen's own writings and speeches that focused on co-operation, both as a theoretical development in political economy, and as a self-conscious and organized movement

- Owen's involvements in co-operative ventures, both in Britain and abroad
- Owenite influence upon co-operative and enlightened management practices and the influence of Owen's own experiences in New Lanark on his understanding of co-operation
- The built heritage of the co-operative movement and its debt to Owenite thought
- Complementary and conflicting strands in the contemporaneous co-operative movement, such as the Redemption Societies, the Christian Socialist movement, and the Rochdale Pioneers
- The influence of other contemporary thinkers (such as William Thompson and John Gray) on Owen (and vice versa) and the contribution they made to the development of early co-operative thought
- The Owenite movement and co-operation
- How co-operators interpreted, applied, and transformed Owen's ideas after his death
- The Labour movement's embrace of Owen's status as a pioneer of co-operation
- New scholarship focused on explicitly Owenite co-operative communities
- Owen's changing place in co-operative historiography, and the role of the co-operative movement in championing Owen's legacy in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries
- How other radical movements (in the United Kingdom and internationally) imported Owenite ideas or inspirations in respect of co-operative ideals: for instance, the influence of Owenism on the 'long' civil rights movement in the United States

References

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- Potter, B. (1891). *The Co-operative Movement in Great Britain*. Swan Sonnenschein.
- Yeo, S. (2010). Looking forward: Co-operative politics or can Owen still help? In N. Thompson & C. Williams (Eds.), *Robert Owen and his Legacy* (pp. 239-258). University of Wales Press.

[Submission guidelines for authors](#)