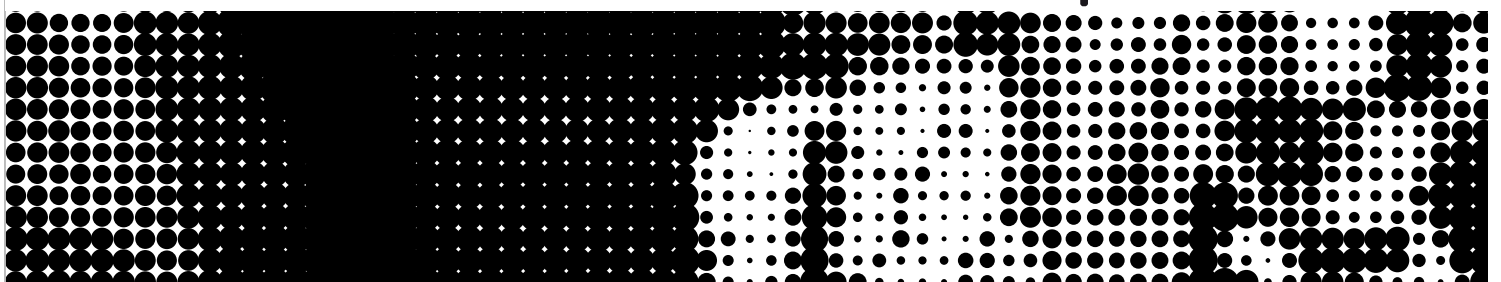


An introduction to

# RADICAL ROUTES



Network of radical co-operatives



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# What is Radical Routes?



Radical Routes is a network of independent co-operatives forming an independent secondary co-operative – a co-op of co-ops. Each co-op is owned and controlled by the members, who are responsible for its finances, activities and day-to-day running.

Radical Routes supports the idea of people controlling their housing and their work through co-operatives but specifically supports radical co-operatives - those opposed to capitalist systems of hierarchy, exploitation and money as power. We support co-operatives which are opposed to the destruction of the environment, committed to a positive ecological outlook and which support grass roots resistance to injustice. We are not a charity or a commercial organisation. Groups that join are expected to be active within Radical Routes; contributing time, effort and money in the form of service payments. The amount of work expected of member groups varies according to the size of the group - at present it is between two and four hours a week. By working for Radical Routes members help themselves and others, giving more people the same opportunities.

One advantage of this mutual aid system is that member co-ops can provide effective support to one-another. Many needs and problems are common to other groups and so are understood and can be effectively dealt with. Mutual aid and trust are fundamental to the Radical Routes outlook.

Radical Routes is funded by service payments from its member co-operatives and by donations. Loans are provided to members.. Each co-operative must participate in running Radical Routes, each must be involved in activities which are in line with the aims and principles of Radical Routes and each must be fully involved in decision making.

The specific means Radical Routes is pursuing are:

1. Setting up housing co-operatives to house people and projects with the above aims;
2. Setting up worker co-operatives with the above aims;
3. Promoting and organising participatory education through skills and knowledge sharing, through Taking Control events,

distributing informative material and through work shops;

4. Raising finance to allow control over resources [property, technology and land] through co-operation and the economic interlocking of the co-operatives;
5. Providing a mutual aid network;
6. Supporting like-minded projects.

We want to see a world based upon equality and co-operation, where people give according to their ability and receive according to their needs. Where work is fulfilling and useful and where creativity is encouraged, where decision making is open to everyone with no hierarchies and where the environment is valued and respected in its own right rather than exploited. We want to take control over all aspects of our lives. However, as we are not all in a position of

control we are forced to compromise to exist. Whilst we live under capitalism we will be forced to live out some of its contradictions.

However: as a co-operative, Radical Routes is working for self-control for its members. A running housing or land co-operative demonstrates that not all space has to be used for market speculation and money making, and a workers' co-op shows that profit and competition aren't the only reasons to work. A social centre like the Sumac is an example of a truly democratic public space.

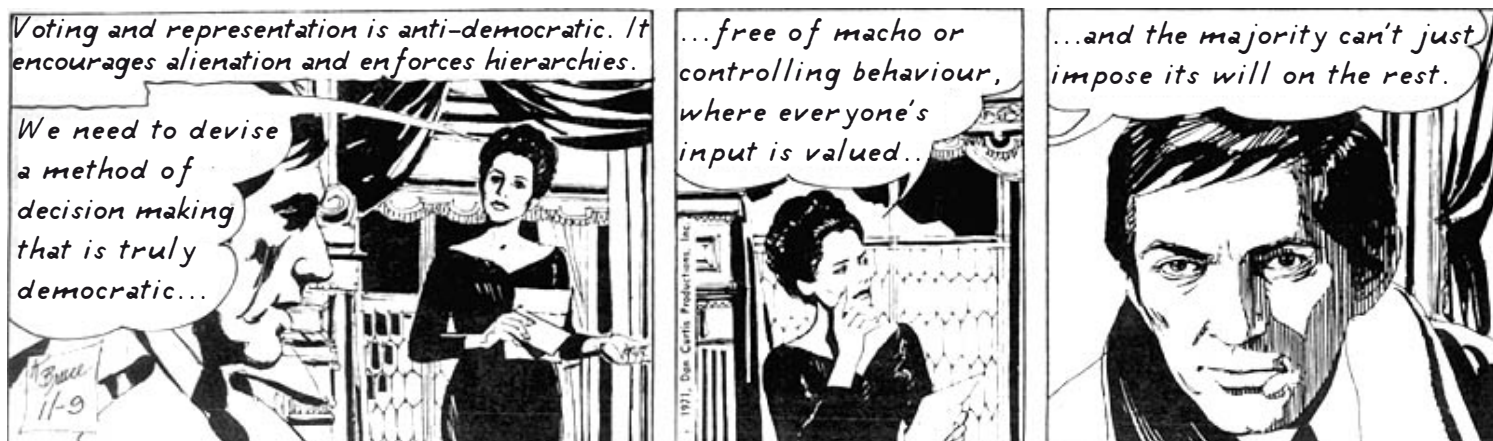
Radical Routes is part of a long history of the co-operative movement, which has had a big effect not only in this country, but internationally. As a member of Radical Routes you have a direct influence in shaping the future of the movement.

## How Radical Routes was formed

Radical Routes grew from a small group of independent co-operatives that developed in the 1980s. These housed people who were interested in buying properties from which they could start other projects but who were either unemployed or otherwise living on low incomes. Taking Control Events were organised whenever enthusiasm allowed. These were seminars on how to take control of housing and work by setting up co-operatives. In 1988 the network took the name Radical Routes and began holding quarterly gatherings. In 1991 we adopted the role of a secondary co-operative that made it possible to raise investment centrally through a national ethical investment

scheme. Previously each co-operative had raised money itself from friends, relatives and supporters and when necessary co-ops would lend money to each other. By promoting the activities of all member co-operatives we raised our public profile and at the same time we became more attractive to a wider range of investors through spreading invested money over a larger range of different ventures, thereby reducing the risk of investing money in a project that failed. In fact Radical Routes has never lost money through a failed project, a record which few if any other investment organisations can equal.

# Democratic decision making



The structure of Radical Routes enables every individual member of every co-operative to be involved in making major decisions. These include the admission of new members, the allocation of money from the loan fund, policy changes and the future direction of the organisation.

At gatherings a method called 'consensus decision making' is used to make sure that the views of individuals or minorities are not disregarded. The process involves using hand signals to make sure that it's not the people with the loudest voices who get heard the most. This tactic is used by anti-authoritarian groups across the world and Radical Routes' use of it symbolises its part in a global movement and its commitment to democratic decision making.

To change and develop policy co-operatives and/or working groups send proposals to the Secretarial Group to be included in the agenda for the following quarterly gathering. The agenda is sent out to all groups some weeks prior to the business meeting and give the co-operative's views. If no objections are

raised to a proposal the proposal is passed. Where there is no consensus a meeting is called at the gathering to discuss the issues raised and to seek a consensus. If a consensus is not reached at the gathering the proposal can be presented again at the next gathering. If objections to the proposal are not resolved by the time the proposal reaches its third gathering the proposal can be voted on.

In practice such a long drawn out process is rarely used, consensus is always sought and usually achieved; only three votes have been taken since Radical Routes was formed. Urgent issues can be raised as emergency proposals at gatherings. The decision reached at the gathering is then circulated to co-operatives with the minutes. Co-operatives then have eighteen days to object to a decision made on an emergency proposal.

# How Radical Routes is Organised

Most Radical Routes work is covered by its working groups, these are:

**Finance:** This group is concerned with accounting, making loans, and the administration of investment, members service payments and fund raising.

**Secretarial:** The Secretarial Group keeps and updates the record of members and the policy document. It compiles and sends out the paperwork for the quarterly gatherings of Radical Routes

**Co-op Support:** The Co-op Support Group visits interested co-operatives to talk about Radical Routes. It also visits existing members to review their involvement and/or listen to their concerns and ideas.

**Gatherings:** The Gatherings Group organises the business part of gatherings by making sure there are facilitators and minute takers

and by timetabling workshops.

**Publicity:** Responsibilities cover: the production of leaflets and booklets; exhibiting at relevant events; getting the Radical Routes information into appropriate media; and administering websites ([radicalroutes.org.uk](http://radicalroutes.org.uk) & [rootstock.org.uk](http://rootstock.org.uk)).

**Access:** This group ensures that Radical Routes gatherings and events are accessible to all and raises awareness of disability issues within the organisation.

All the working groups report to the membership on their activities, and where necessary recommend changes in our policy and procedures. All major decisions are however made by the membership as a whole.

## Radical Routes today

Here is a selection of the activities that co-operatives in the Radical Routes network are involved in:-

Sustainable land use - permaculture, land restoration, woodland creation, growing and distributing organic food, communal housing community resource centres  
Information - radical bookshops, magazine publication, how to set up co-ops, campaigning work  
- ecological campaigning, animal rights,

non-violent direct action, international peace work, home education, electrical, plumbing and small scale building work, support services - book-keeping and accountancy, computer services, training and consultancy, printing, mediation and group working...

We've asked four Radical Routes co-operatives to give an overview of what they do, to give some idea of how the models work in practice.

# Footprint, Leeds - a workers' co-op

Footprint was registered in 1996 by a group of eco-activists living in Cornerstone Housing Co-op (Leeds). We had been looking for an opportunity to set up a workers co-op so we could get off the dole and work part-time from home. We pooled our cash when the opportunity came up for a second-hand printing press being sold dirt cheap by a Green Party bloke in Aberystwyth.

After 3-4 years of faffing about, membership changes, 6 months in Africa and a printing course, Footprint finally started trading in July 2000. The two members at the time stayed on the dole for a couple of months until there was enough business to start paying wages. As of spring 2008 we are a four-person collective. We all work part-time because we think there are more important and interesting things to do than work for

money. Instead we put our time into our communities, political action, developing other projects, music and promoting co-operative living. Because we are based in Cornerstone Housing Co-op, we don't have to pay rent. This means we are not pressured to work to cover rent or much in the way of utility bills.

We haven't ever had a loan from Radical Routes, largely because we haven't borrowed any money from anyone since we joined RR. However, we have benefitted from the network's advice & experience.

We pay ourselves a decent hourly rate, but don't work many hours, which means we limit our income in line with the Radical Routes ethic of low consumption. However, it does give us leeway either to work more



Footprint workers' co-op.

hours if we need to or to offer work to others as the opportunities occur.

Our shift patterns are completely flexible and we cover each other as the need arises. This means we can take a week off at a moment's notice, but we don't get paid when we're sick.

We are keen to share skills and info as much as possible. We charge a lower hourly rate for time spent training people to use our equipment, so they can come in and print their own stuff, making it more affordable. We also put 50p/work hour into a fund for good stuff, so that if one of us wants to give cash or free printing to something we can do it with the minimum of bureaucracy.

## Walden Pond, Hastings - a housing co-op

We started as a group of three adults and one toddler renting houses in North London. With loads of support from Jigsaw - a housing co-op in Oxford now known as Dragonfly - we formed our own housing co-op (registered via Catalyst, a co-op that helps co-ops), and started going to Radical Routes gatherings. Having a co-op meant we could rent properties that would not rent to housing benefit claimants but that would rent out 'company lets'. We bundled all our members into a van to come to an RR Gathering in Bradford to do a 'presentation' of what we were about, and hoped to do. At the next Gathering we were accepted as members and we began thinking about actually buying a property. We became deeply involved in RR, in the Finance Group, the Internal

Footprint is a useful tool for activists in Leeds. We get vehicle insurance at a cheap commercial rate for a collectively-owned van and during the 2006 camp for climate action, Footprint was able to hire essential equipment & vehicles for the camp because we could provide trade references. Footprint helps keep the resource centre/office in Cornerstone ship-shape and staffed so that non-Cornerstone residents can drop in to use it during working hours.

And of course, having access to relatively cheap and quick printing is a must for political movements, and it's a double bonus to have confidence that the printers are wholeheartedly behind your efforts and will stay late and work weekends to get an urgent job done.

Communications Group, Training Group, Kids' Group and so on. It was exciting and very satisfying! Then, after several years of renting properties, we finally bought a property in Hastings (lowest prices in the South East). We had a mortgage from an ethical bank, money borrowed from friends and family (loanstock) and a crucial loan from Radical Routes to bridge the remaining gap with the purchase price. That meant an end, finally, to being moved on every year or so by landlords, and the chance to concentrate on our social change work and stable childrearing. At this point (2008), we own a house and a flat, and we rent three further flats in the same building, housing nine adults and one teenager in total - all thanks to Radical Routes.





A working weekend at the Peace House and [overleaf] some of the bikes from the recycling project.

## Coventry Peace House - a housing co-op

Coventry Peace House is a housing co-operative and a peace and environmental centre that grew out of the Peace Camp outside the Alvis tank factory in Coventry. We moved into the Peace House in January 1999, made up of what was six little empty terraced houses on the Stoney Stanton road, but now done up and painted bright yellow. The houses were very run down and even as they were being renovated we started our first project - with disenfranchised young people to teach them building skills and photography - and thanks to them and the many volunteers and friends who have helped us over the years we now have space for eight members, nice big communal rooms, an office for our peace education project: Worldwise, a bike workshop,

and a lovely exhibition/community space that is open for local community groups.

Since we moved in we have been active as a peace and environmental centre - by running free courses, offering hospitality to asylum seekers and campaigning. We have people living here, working here and lots of people passing through! It is a busy environment and not always peaceful in a tranquil kind of way, but it can be. We are lucky to have a large garden at the back which is great in the summer and a large kitchen with a wood burner which is toasty warm in the winter. Both of them are away from the traffic noise of Stoney Stanton Road and with a bit of imagination you can pretend you are in the countryside.



## Sumac Centre, Nottingham - a social centre

The Sumac Centre provides resources and a meeting place for local groups and individuals campaigning for human and animal rights, the environment, peace and co-operation world-wide. The values that we hold are all well and good but of little consequence unless they are acted on. Sumac Centre is all about putting it into practice and enabling others to do likewise.

The day-to-day activities of the centre are informed by our awareness of the issues and the world around us. As a co-operative, all volunteers have a say in how the Centre is run and the direction it follows.

The Centre itself provides a place where locals can meet other concerned

individuals in a friendly, relaxed environment. Whether people are popping in to make use of our vegan cafe and social club, or looking for information in the library, it all adds up to people participating and increasing their awareness of the issues.

Over the years Rainbow, and now the Sumac Centre, have built-up extensive campaigning resources (computer facilities, library, photocopier, etc). These are available for use by many local groups and individuals.

If you would like to get involved with any of the Centre's existing user groups, or even start your own, the facilities and know-how are all here. Sumac is all about co-operation and sharing our skills and knowledge.

# Why join?

## Social Support

By networking at meetings and gatherings and by visiting other groups in the network we can learn more about what co-operatives are doing. This makes us better able to help and support each other and enables us to gain, develop and spread useful knowledge. Special interest groups can be set up within the network. Established co-operatives are happy to pass information and experiences to each other and to new groups. Training is also available in all aspects of co-operative living.

## Registration & Legal Work

Co-operatives can be registered through Radical Routes quickly and at a lower

cost than through other agencies. Help is available with legal matters, an area in which Radical Routes has a considerable amount of knowledge and we publish booklets on how to set up housing and worker co-operatives.

## Advice

The Radical Routes network is a store of advice for people seeking viable social alternatives.

## Loans

To get a loan member co-operatives must produce evidence that they can repay the loan. A business plan is required detailing, amongst other things, how the repayments will be made. Applications



A business meeting at a RR summer gathering.

for loans are considered by the Finance Group who prepare a report for the following gathering, when member cooperatives will decide whether or not

to agree loans. These loans are often crucial in allowing a co-operative to buy a house, property or equipment that they need to set themselves up.

## Joining Radical Routes

To join Radical Routes a group must be registered cooperative. It must agree with the aims, principles and policies of Radical Routes and agree to do their share of work [usually by joining one of the working groups]. Member groups must also be involved in activities that are in line with the aims and principles of Radical Routes, with individual members working at least part-time on such ventures.

If you are interested in joining Radical

Routes, or would like to find out more information, you can check the website [www.radicalroutes.org.uk](http://www.radicalroutes.org.uk), email [info@radicalroutes.org.uk](mailto:info@radicalroutes.org.uk), or call 0845 330 4510.

Although you have to be a registered co-op to join Radical Routes, lots of people come to a gathering to find out how to register and meet people with similar aims. Get in touch to find out when and where the next gathering is taking place if you're thinking of coming along.



A prospective member co-op presents to the gathering.

# Associate Membership

Associate Members form a wider network of radical co-ops which support Radical Routes, but are either ineligible for membership, or unable to meet the commitments of full membership. Many Associate Members are actively involved in the work of Radical Routes. A number of RR Trading Co-ops Network (TCN) members are associate rather than full members of RR and play a significant role in making the TCN happen.

Associate members can take part in Radical Routes almost as fully as full members, while having no obligations, other than a quarterly service payment of at least £7.

However, associates may not block consensus in any decision-making, make any proposals or apply for a loan.

Associate Members are encouraged to:

- attend gatherings (or even host them)
- take part in any working groups
- join the Radical Routes email list
- get a login for the members' area of the website
- upload and update their own entry on the list of RR co-ops on the website
- get an entry in the printed version of the RR Directory of Members
- upload and update their own policies and/or secondary rules (and see those of other co-ops)



A facilitated political discussion at a gathering. Associate members are able to take part in such exercises.

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To become an Associate Member, co-ops must be in common ownership and

- state your support for and commitment to the Aims & Principles of Radical Routes
- present to a gathering and put info about yourselves in a gathering agenda
- send your rules, articles or constitution to the RR Secretary to prove you are a co-op in common ownership
- set up a quarterly service payment of at least £7
- send contact details to the RR Secretarial Group, Footprint Workers Co-op and the Finance worker

# The Radical Routes Trading Co-ops Network

Launched in August 2010, the Trading Co-ops Network is for network of radical co-ops which workers' co-ops, social centres, consumer co-ops and multi-stakeholder co-ops and people working in them or wanting to set them up. We want to promote working together co-operatively in our places of work, whether that's paid or voluntary. A big part of this is sharing experiences and skills with each other and people interested in setting up trading co-ops. We're all involved in working for radical social change.

- a mutual aid network, sharing ideas, skills and resources
- workshops and an open forum at every quarterly RR gathering
- A website with a directory of member groups
- joint marketing and promoting each other's businesses
- an email list for questions & lots of answers
- a voice for small, radical co-ops in the wider world



Training at the Peace House's Coventry Cycling Centre.



At every gathering, the Trading Co-ops Network will hold a forum, skill-share workshops and an organising group meeting.

Sometimes we will hold extra events on the Friday, with outside speakers. There are also regular workshops on Radical Routes, consensus decision-making, facilitation and how to set up trading co-ops. The TCN also creates opportunities for specific kinds of projects to communicate and co-operate. For example, there are potential networks already of radical bike projects and community food projects.

Full members of the Trading Co-ops Network will be listed on the website/directory and can take advantage of joint marketing opportunities. To become a full member of the Radical Routes Trading Co-ops Network, you must be a Full or Associate Member of Radical Routes.

For more info about the gatherings or the Trading Co-ops Network, contact Footprint Workers' Co-op on: [footprint@footprinters.co.uk](mailto:footprint@footprinters.co.uk) or 0113 262 4408



Above and above left: Birmingham Bike Foundry prepare the shop they have just rented for being open to the public.

# Other available resources

How to set up a Workers' Co-op. (156pp A5) £7

How to set up a Social Centre (92pp A5) £4.50

How to set up a Housing Co-op. (40 pages, A5) £3.50

Directory of Member Co-ops. £1.75

Rootstock - supporting co-operatives working for social change. Free

How to work out your Ecological Footprint. £1.50

To order any of the above publication, please send a cheque made payable to Radical Routes Ltd to:

Radical Routes  
Cornerstone Resource Centre  
16 Sholebroke Avenue  
Chapeltown  
LEEDS  
LS7 3HB



This booklet is also available in large print.  
Contact Footprint on 0113 262 4408.