

A tribute to Tim Pearce

*Mervyn Wilson, chief executive and principal of the Co-operative College, pays tribute to co-operator **Tim Pearce***

“A compulsive co-operator - he always looked for ways to help make the world a better place, through actions as well as words. Tim was really one of the good guys.”

That is how Peter Hunt, chief executive of Mutuo and former general secretary of the Co-operative Party, described Tim Pearce, a former Party official who passed away recently aged 73, after a long struggle against cancer.

Born in Wiltshire, he moved to north London in the 1960s, but it was following his move to the north east in the late 1960s that his passion for co-operation was ignited - and it remained with him for the rest of his life. While working as an arts administrator on Tyneside and helping establish Tyneside Free Press Workshop, Tim became involved in the Woodcraft Folk and the Co-operative Party. He stood unsuccessfully as a candidate in the council elections, with Nick Brown, later an MP and cabinet minister, as his election agent. Tim became assistant member relations officer in the north east in the late 1970s, working alongside Nigel Todd, now chair of the newly charitable incorporated organisation for the Co-operative College.

“Tim will always be remembered with great affection in the North East of England,” said Nigel. “He was very active in helping the Woodcraft Folk get off the ground in Newcastle in the late 1970s, and then came to work at the North Eastern Co-operative Society as assistant member relations officer.

“Using his background in community arts, he made quite an impact. He produced a wonderful comic that introduced the Co-op to young people and children, and he got the society to sponsor a heavy metal band formed by some teenagers in Wallsend. The manager of the Wallsend Co-op store wasn’t always happy at the sound of the rehearsals just above his shop, but the then-chair of the North Eastern Co-op’s board, Hedley Whitehead - who had a background in co-op youth work - was thrilled when the band members turned up to a society AGM and asked good questions about the balance sheet!”

It was Nigel who encouraged Tim to attend a weekend conference at the Co-operative College at Stanford Hall. There, he met Maggie Walker, who had been active in the London Co-operative Society’s Young Members Organisation in the 1960s. They married soon afterwards, maintaining links with others from the 1960s Young Members Organisation ever since.

After a spell running an arts centre in Warminster Tim joined the London Region CRS as a political organiser in 1984.

He was a great supporter of the new co-operative developments in London, building strong links and friendship with Hackney Co-operative Developments and others. Working with Andy Love, then CRS political secretary, they developed the London Region CRS Political Committee Newsletter - *Commonweal* - which Tim used as a vehicle to advocate co-operation and mutuality as an alternative to rampant Thatcherite privatisation.

In the mid-1990s, CRS realigned their political activities and Tim became a south west organiser for the Co-operative Party, moving to Bath. The South West Region covered territory from Peterborough to Penzance, bringing him into contact with Co-operative Party activists throughout.

“Tim and I worked together in the Co-operative Party for over a decade,” remembers Karen Wilkie, deputy general secretary of the Co-operative Party.

“He was a great colleague and an inspiration - cheerful, principled and responsible for many of our best policies. He was loved by the members and continued to guide the Party in the south west long after he retired. Tim will be missed by so many people and by so many parts of the movement - from the Woodcraft Folk to rail - where his influence, energy and ideas made such an impact.”

Tim Pearce was a strong advocate of mutualising the fragmented rail system, organising a conference on social enterprise and the railways that played an important role in the development of Go-op, of which he was a director and chair.

He was active in the Radstock Co-operative for a number of years, also serving as director and chair there for a time.

Although plagued by illness in recent years, Tim remained active throughout. His beaming smile was undiminished as he attended Co-operative Congress in 2014 and met friends in Cornwall in his last months. His warmth and humour remained to the end and he was an inspiration to the many friends and colleagues within the movement.

Tim is survived by his wife Maggie and daughter Eleanor. At Tim's request there was no funeral, but family and friends are planning an event to celebrate his life after the election.