

THE COOPERATIVES OF MONDRAGON

ONE REAL ALTERNATIVE TO THE UNEMPLOYMENT PROBLEM

The cooperatives of Mondragon are one of the most amazing phenomena of the second half of the twentieth century. So amazing, and yet: socialists, industrial unions, or governments of either persuasion never seriously discuss these cooperatives.

They are all strangely silent on the issue of the cooperatives of Mondragon. Why could that be? If you are truly concerned about employment then perhaps you could add some ideas about the Cooperatives of Mondragon to your thoughts.

This style of employment and ownership would not suit everybody, but that is not the point. Do at least have a look and think about it as a possible option and safety net that would suit many people.

These cooperatives were started in 1956 in the Basque Region of Northern Spain. Today they comprise about 120 companies, employing at present some 42 000 people. These companies compete on the international stage in the spirit of free enterprise. The employees own and control every aspect of everything they do: education, banking, housing, health, welfare and retirement. So why the silence? Strange isn't it?

Any person can join any one of these cooperatives so long as their skills meet the needs of the particular cooperative. There are three levels of wages depending on the amount of responsibility taken and amount of work a person wants to do. Each person receives bonuses, which can be taken or left in the business to earn interest. The workers from each cooperative select their own management from amongst themselves. Management can be changed as it suites them. All cooperative members can attend schools provided for further training and education. Any group can start a new cooperative with the blessing of the others.

There is one rule amongst them that seems to make things work. That is that there are no 'sleeping partners'. So if you leave a cooperative you must take all your money with you. You are of course, always welcome to return.

They have incentive and pride in their work and they never have industrial trouble. They have not found Utopia however, they are doing better than most workers anywhere in the world. This is free enterprise not capitalism. If you had not noticed, there is a difference.

These cooperatives seem to have some principals that make them work well. Their success should be embarrassing to those who talk about jobs but never mention the Cooperatives of Mondragon.

If you would like to learn a little more about these wondrous cooperatives go to www.snakeshow.net there you will find a more complete story about them; it is in PDF so it can easily be printed out.

There are links to sites about these cooperatives and there is a site by the cooperatives themselves. The main Mondragon site is in Basque, Spanish and English. Basque is the language of that region.

After learning a bit more about these cooperatives you could ask your favourite politician or union representative what they think. If they just duck and weave, then that is a kind of answer in itself.

You'll find more brain food at www.snakeshow.net