



The Right Livelihood Award

for outstanding vision and work on behalf of our planet and its people

Mike Cooley (UK)

(1981)



Mike Cooley

...for designing and promoting the theory and practice of human-centred, socially useful production.

Mike Cooley worked for many years in the aerospace industry as a senior design engineer and was an active trade unionist. In the early 1970s he became one of the pioneers of the now-famous Lucas workers' Corporate Plan, whereby Lucas workers threatened with unemployment organised across factory and union boundaries to draw up their own plan for socially useful production, detailing 150 products which they and Lucas could make, including kidney dialysis machines, heat pumps, a road-rail bus and airships. The Plan was published in 1976 and, while it was rejected by Lucas management, it had a great impact in labour movement and other circles both in the UK and abroad. It led to the establishment of the Centre for Alternative Industrial and Technological Systems and similar units elsewhere in Britain. It has also resulted in other Worker Plans in other industries. Moreover, most of the technical ideas in the Plan have proved viable and have been produced, though often with less emphasis on their social usefulness than the Plan envisaged.

In 1980 Lucas sacked Cooley, alleging he spent too much time on union business or on concerns of society as a whole. He became Director of the Technology Division of the Greater London Enterprise Board (GLEB), which had been set up to combat unemployment in the capital and where he organised the London Technology networks. These networks linked community groups, universities and polytechnics in the development of ranges of ecologically desirable products and systems, which could then be used to establish new small businesses and cooperatives.

From his GLEB base, Cooley supported a number of independent but related projects. These included the London Innovation Trust, supporting the development of prototype products, particularly for the disabled and disadvantaged; Twin Trading, which promotes fair and mutually supportive trade between industrial and non-industrial countries; and ESPRIT Project 1217, which designed and produced a Human Centered Advanced Manufacturing System enhancing human skills rather than diminishing and subordinating them to machines. Through this, Cooley pioneered

the concept of Human Centered Systems and helped to set up the International Institute for Advanced Research into Human Centred Systems, of which he is now President. The Institute has facilitated a series of books and reports, which highlight the misuse of new technologies and propose constructive alternatives.

Cooley regards unemployment as one of the most serious issues confronting societies all over the world, and he is involved in a variety of job creation schemes. He set up the London Business Village, where some 1,500 new jobs have been created, and he helped to found a non-profit Product Bank (The Technology Exchange), which has 5,000 new products and services available for licensing. The Product Bank has become the biggest technology transfer organisation in the world, handling some 500 contracts each month in over 70 countries.

Cooley lectures worldwide and is visiting lecturer at universities in several countries. He has made several television and radio programmes and his writings have been translated into over 20 languages.

Quotation

"Science and technology is not given. It was made by people like us. If it's not doing for us what we want, we have a right and a responsibility to change it. We need a clear view of what we want for science and technology and the courage to stand up and do something about it."

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