The self-help movement had its origins in the 19th Century, when millions of ordinary people joined forces, without the assistance of the state, and formed voluntary associations to raise their living standards by saving, investing, buying and selling together. Many of its achievements survive to this day, even though in the 20th Century its philosophy has fallen out of fashion. Organisations of this kind could play a crucial role in a future libertarian world. The publications listed in this Study Guide are the best sources of information on what self-help achieved in the past and what it is still achieving today; a couple of works which look to the future are also included. Not all of the books mentioned have been written by libertarians; some of them contain socialist fallacies, of which the main ones are the labour theory of value and the belief that the Industrial Revolution caused poverty; but readers can easily make allowances for this.

Today, as the Labour Party prepares to rewrite Clause 4 of its constitution, the old-fashioned kind of state socialism is on its last legs. As libertarians we can only welcome this, but we should not forget that in the past many people became socialists out of a genuine (albeit misguided) spirit of idealism, because they wanted to build a better world. Now that their chosen ideology has failed, there is a danger that they may lapse into cynicism and assume that our present society, with all its glaring faults, is the best that can exist, and that our present problems are insoluble. Their idealism would not be wasted if they only realised that the way forward is through voluntary associations of free individuals, not state control. This Study Guide has been written with them especially in mind.
2. Self-Help Today

Richard BERTHOUD and Teresa HINTON
Credit Unions in the United Kingdom
Policy Studies Institute, London, 1989
A study of a new kind of co-operative bank which has only become common in Britain since the 1980s, although similar banks have flourished in some countries since the 19th Century.

Keith BRADLEY and Alan GELB
Co-operation at Work: The Mondragon Experience
Heinemann, London, 1983
Workers’ co-operatives have never equalled the success of consumers’ co-operatives; their growth has always been hindered by the difficulty of devising a constitution which overcomes the two main problems of shortages of capital and a reluctance to make long-term investments which will not pay off until after the retirement of the present generation of workers. Nevertheless, there have been some remarkable success stories, among them the group of co-operatives based around the Spanish town of Mondragon, which forms the subject of this book.

John EARLE
The Italian Co-operative Movement
Italy has the largest workers’ co-operative movement in Europe today, and it includes some thriving enterprises. This book gives a comprehensive description of the movement, with much historical information included.

David FAIRLAMB and Jenny IRELAND
Savings and Co-operative Banking
A country-by-country survey of the present situation worldwide, giving a brief history for each country.

Robert OAKESHOTT
The Case for Workers’ Co-ops
A very readable description of the workers’ co-operative movement in Europe at the time of publication, with chapters on France, Italy and the Mondragon group as well as Britain. The second edition has a new introduction which briefly describes some more recent developments.

Henk THOMAS and Chris LOGAN
Mondragon: An Economic Analysis
George Allen and Unwin, London, 1982
Rather longer than Bradley and Gelb (1983), and includes more historical information.

Peter THOMPSON
Sharing the Success
The story of the privatisation of the National Freight Consortium as told by the Chairman, who was the architect of the scheme under which the employees bought a major stake in the company.

3. Looking Ahead

David G. GREEN
Reinventing Civil Society
Institute of Economic Affairs, London, 1993
Describes the history of the friendly societies in Britain to 1948, with special emphasis on their role in character-building and upholding high moral standards. Suggests that this is the missing ingredient which Thatcherism lacks.

Stephen POLLARD, Terry LIDDLE and Bill THOMPSON
Towards a More Co-operative Society
A 24-page pamphlet by three Labour supporters which calls for a revival of the spirit of self-help and proposes that the trade unions should take on the same role in healthcare provision that the friendly societies once performed. If there were more people in the Labour party who thought along these lines, it could make a really constructive contribution to British politics.

See also:
Tim EVANS
Socialism Without The State: The Re-emergence of Collective Self-Help
Political Notes No. 99
Libertarian Alliance, London, 1995