

Publications Distribution Cooperative - what its demise means for us

Without a distribution system to get our publications round to bookshops, we should not have been in a position to publish them. Publications Distribution Cooperative (PDC) was set up not long before the health group took the decision to publish 'Whose priorities?' ourselves in October 1976. The purpose of PDC was to distribute books, pamphlets and magazines from radical groups, including both small ones like ourselves and larger ones such as the National Council for Civil Liberties and Interaction. Originally, publishers were supposed to contribute by helping with the work, but most, like ourselves, couldn't manage to and the work soon came to be done by paid workers.

In 1978, PDC, which was based in London, expanded and set up offices in Hebden Bridge and Edinburgh. As the work developed in Scotland and the North, it became different to that in London, and as a result, PDC decided to split into three separate cooperatives. Scottish and Northern Books distributes books in the Midlands, the North, Scotland and Ireland, while Southern Distribution distributed them in the south. Full Time Distribution, working from the same London premises as Southern, distributed magazines in both areas.

Scottish and Northern expanded into wholesaling books from larger radical publishers such as Pluto and the Women's Press who found it difficult to cover the more scattered areas in the North and Scotland. More recently, Scottish and Northern have extended into wholesaling radical and disarmament books from mass publishers like Penguin, Pan and Fontana. As a result they have managed to keep afloat for the benefit of small fry like ourselves.

South of Leamington Spa, things went less well. Southern Distribution did not expand in the same way, although it probably wouldn't have been able to take the same path as Scottish and Northern. In addition, it has been apparent that it has been less well organised, in terms of doing stock checks and paying up than Scottish and Northern - there were clearly internal problems as well as external ones. For some time, Southern and Full Time Distribution have been going further and further into debt. After applying unsuccessfully to the GLC for money to bail them out, they went into voluntary liquidation on January 3.

This leaves us, and many other groups, including BSSRS, without a means of distributing books and pamphlets in Southern England. BSSRS are also without a distributor for Science for People. They have got Central Books, which operates what seems to be the only alternative distribution system to take the current issue, and are suggesting a joint approach for BSSRS and Radical Statistics publications. A possible potential disadvantage of Central Books, however, is its link with the Communist Party. Meanwhile some of the larger groups who were with PDC are talking about setting up a new distribution network to replace it. It is not clear how far they have got, what their chances of success are, or whether they will want to include the smaller groups like ourselves. It is rumoured that they are approaching the GLC for funds. We shall have to discuss at the AGM, and possibly also before that, what we should do and who we should approach.

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