

**‘Better, Farming, Better Business, Better Living’: The Irish Co-operative
Movement and the Construction of the Irish Nation-State, 1894-1932**

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List of Abbreviations

| | |
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| Agricultural Credit Corporation | ACC |
| Co-operative Wholesale Society | CWS |
| Dairy Disposal Company | DDC |
| Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction | DATI |
| House of Commons Parliamentary Papers | HCPP |
| Irish Agricultural Organisation Society | IAOS |
| Irish Associated Creameries | IAC |
| Irish Creamery Managers' Association | ICMA |
| Irish Parliamentary Party | IPP |
| Irish Republican Army | IRA |
| Irish Transport and General Workers' Union | ITGWU |
| Kerry Local History Archives | KLHA |
| National Archives of Ireland | NAI |
| National Library of Ireland | NLI |

Abstract

This thesis argues that agricultural co-operative societies under the leadership of the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society played a crucial role in building the Irish state and defining a national identity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By questioning widely held assumptions about a formative period in Ireland's political and economic development, it is argued that critical ideas about the Irish nation emanated from the sphere of economics. In particular, the efforts of co-operative activists are understood as important actors in the process of building the Irish nation-state through their interventions to reorganise rural society.

The co-operative movement's attempts to organise the resources and population of the Irish countryside represented a serious modernising effort that shaped the character of the politically autonomous nation-state that emerged in the 1920s. The establishment of co-operative societies introduced new agricultural technologies to rural districts and placed local farmers in control of agricultural business. Although co-operators met with frequent frustration in their objective to restructure Irish society along co-operative lines, the study of the movement remains central to a thorough understanding of social and political conditions in the period under review. Co-operative ideas became incredibly influential amongst Irish nationalists associated with Sinn Féin. It is argued that the co-operative movement's modernising project became embedded in the Irish countryside and enmeshed in a political economy of revolutionary nationalism. As a consequence, the co-operative movement exerted a significant influence upon those who seized governmental power after the Irish revolution, which extended beyond independence.

The thesis utilises a range of local and national sources which include records for individual co-operative societies, reports and publications associated with the national movement, as well as a wide variety of contemporary literature and journalism. By applying a local approach that feeds into an analysis of the co-operative movement on a national level, the thesis presents a detailed analysis of how co-operative activists and ideas influenced the creation of Ireland's political culture. Crucially, the work of interstitial actors is reinserted into the process of the Irish state's development. The building of state institutions is viewed through the work of a network of co-operative experts and therefore as something that occurred outside the deliberations of official circuits of power. The thesis breaks new ground in the historiography of the development of the Irish state by analysing the important work of those involved in shaping rural social relations and institutions such as co-operative organisers, engineers, propagandists, managers and secretaries.

Declaration

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Introduction: The Co-operative Movement and the ‘Irish Question’

In the early twentieth century, the Irish co-operative movement played an active role in re-shaping Irish society. Led by the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society (IAOS), this movement sought to transform the character of the Irish citizenry by establishing a countrywide network of agricultural business societies that targeted the farmer as the subject of national improvement. At its 1915 annual conference the IAOS issued a statement to members and the wider public:

Wherever the problem of rural life, as it is now commonly called, is under discussion, the Irish three-fold scheme – better farming, better business, better living – is regarded as the final solution, and the Society is hailed as the parent of a new agency of social service which was needed before any conceivable governmental action could avail to right what was wrong with the rural economy of nations absorbed in the interests of city life.¹

Delivered a year into the First World War, this declaration articulated the co-operative movement’s own sense of importance to the way Irish society functioned. Rather than view the rural sphere as independent of the activity of urban centres, Irish co-operators viewed their attempts to improve the countryside as something aimed at the benefit of modern civilization. Furthermore, they viewed attempts to embed rural society with a co-operative ethos as fundamental to the realisation of successful government in Ireland.

The Irish co-operative movement emerged at the end of the nineteenth century and by 1920 had established over 1,000 societies throughout the country with over 150,000 members – a significant figure for a country with a population

¹ Irish Agricultural Organisation Society, *Report of the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society for the period from 1st July 1914 to the 31st March 1915* (Dublin: Sackville Press, 1915), p. 24. [Hereafter, all reports are referred to in footnotes as IAOS, *Annual Report*, 19XX]

under 4,400,000.² Horace Plunkett, the social reformer who pioneered the movement coined the movement's slogan 'better farming, better business, better living'. The three 'Bettors' encapsulated the aims of a movement that encouraged farmers to reorganise the agrarian economy along mutualist lines, whilst instilling characteristics of dignity and self-reliance to the rural population.³ Co-operative activists believed the local co-operative society contained the potential to overhaul farming methods, improve the economic performance of farmers and, most importantly, make agriculture a viable, even desirable, lifestyle. This thesis considers why the Irish state developed the way it did, arguing that the co-operative movement played a crucial role in the process.

Today, the Irish and Northern Irish states are commemorating events that led to their creation. Commemorations are expected to focus upon moments of political upheaval, such as the outbreak of the nationalist Easter Rising in 1916. Official commemorations precipitate moments of existentialist angst on a national scale, as contemporary problems lead to a questioning of precepts that underpin the nation-state.⁴ Past commemorations have shown this to be the case. In 1966, the official commemoration of the Easter Rising's fiftieth anniversary combined a celebration of a revolutionary past with an emphasis upon a need to continue processes of modernisation through technological and economic advancement. 'Practical patriotism' characterised the rhetoric of government, as opposed to a tone of 'zealous

² House of Commons Parliamentary Papers (HCPP) [Cd. 6663], *Census of Ireland, 1911: General Report with Tables and Appendix* (1913) p. 1; IAOS, *Annual Report, 1921*, p. 7.

³ Trevor West, *Horace Plunkett, Co-operation and Politics* (Gerrards Cross, Bucks.: Colin Smythe, 1986), p. 3.

⁴ See Mary E. Daly and Margaret O'Callaghan, eds, *1916 in 1966: Commemorating the Easter Rising* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2007); John R. Gillis ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Lyn Spillman, *Nation and Commemoration: Creating National Identities in the United States and Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

nationalism.’⁵ Whilst commemoration in 1966 emphasised a narrative of Irish modernisation in order to address contemporary economic and political issues, an exploration of how those who built the Irish state conceived of modern Ireland remained absent. Similarly, the centenary commemoration in 2016 will be conditioned by the socio-economic context. Public anxieties around Irish national identity and assessments of political independence are likely to emerge. However, the focus upon contentious moments of political conflict loses sight of changes and continuities that held long-term implications for the nature of socio-political order in Ireland. By examining one particular vision of Irish modernisation, this thesis views the state’s emergence as the result of complex interaction between actors that occurred as prominently in the field of practical economics as it did amongst political groups and militarists and over a considerable period of time.

IAOS activists believed that the application of co-operative principles offered a solution to problems of rural life and addressed social anxieties prevalent in the Irish countryside. The co-operative project placed the farmer at the centre of a radical societal blueprint that advocated their control of agricultural business, whilst promoting a model of an idealised community based upon reciprocity and mutual concern. The concentration upon social and economic aspects of rural life did not isolate co-operators from the contemporary debate about Ireland’s political future. Rather, such a position formed an important counterpoint. Most historical treatments of the co-operative movement take the outbreak of the First World War as a point at which to conclude their assessments.⁶ The periodisation of this thesis has been

⁵ Roisín Higgins, *Transforming 1916: Meaning, Memory and the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Easter Rising* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2012), p. 3.

⁶ For example, Liam Kennedy, ‘Farmers, Traders and Agricultural Politics in Pre-Independence Ireland’, in *Irish Peasants: Violence and Political Unrest, 1780-1914*, ed. by James S. Donnelly Jr

deliberately chosen to take an analysis of the co-operative movement from its emergence in the 1890s through to the end of the first decade of political independence in 1932. This emphasises the importance of co-operative societies throughout a prolonged period of wide-ranging social and political change, encompassing war and nationalist revolution.

This thesis reassesses the position of the co-operative movement and argues that it moulded notions of Irish nationhood and identity, thereby representing an ideological through-line across the pre- and post-independence polities. The co-operative movement stood out against the political ferment that characterised Ireland's tentative steps towards independence. Before 1914, the much debated 'Irish Question' revolved around the contested implementation of Home Rule legislation that would provide an autonomous Irish parliament.⁷ The co-operative movement offered a unique analysis of the 'Irish Question' in stark contrast to this political debate. It re-framed the 'Irish Question' as social and economic in nature and identified the condition of rural life as the integral component. Its emphasis on rural reform as the most urgent priority contrasted with the logics of British government, which throughout the nineteenth century diverted attention to the logistics and organisation of urban society. The city formed the object of reform and intervention.⁸ Co-operators concluded that concern for rural society remained a low priority of government in Ireland. As a consequence a discourse that revolved around the revitalisation of rural society gradually became linked to rising disaffection towards

and Samuel Clark (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), pp. 339-373; Kennedy, 'Traders in the Rural Irish Economy, 1880-1914', *Economic History Review*, 32.2 (1979), 201-210.

⁷ For a historiographical overview of the 'Irish Question', see Percy Allum, 'The Irish Question', *Crane Bag*, 4.2 (1981), 6-14.

⁸ Literature on nineteenth century British governmentality focuses on the city as the unit of analysis. See Patrick Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* (London: Verso, 2003); Chris Otter, *The Victorian Eye: A Political History of Light and Vision in Britain, 1800-1910* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

British rule. Rural reformers remained alive to processes of rural depopulation and ‘backward’ agricultural practices.

A more detailed understanding is required of the role played by intermediary institutions in shaping Irish political culture. In particular, a historical understanding of the co-operative movement’s influence in the process of Irish modernisation and the concurrent development of the nation-state remains limited. Over the course of the period under review, the IAOS encouraged the diffusion of an ideology of co-operation that emerged interstitially and was ‘elaborated along networks distinct from but nevertheless dependent upon the official circuits of power.’⁹ This study redresses this gap in the historiography of the Irish state, arguing that Irish co-operators co-ordinated a serious developmental effort during the early twentieth century outside these official circuits of power. As this thesis will show, the co-operative movement occupied a curious position within governmental structures in Ireland. It emerged from the voluntary effort of a group of activists, and therefore sat outside the official state apparatus. For instance, the movement’s relationship with the Department of Agriculture oscillated between acting as a vital instrument for rural development to an unwanted and alternative source of expertise. The complex and incongruous relationship between a voluntary co-operative movement and the state became a site of political conflict, which left an indelible mark upon Irish institutions. The movement remained legitimate for many farmers and built up an active network of societies that repeatedly intervened in the practice of rural life. Therefore, the co-operative movement acted as an unofficial instrument of

⁹ William H Sewell Jr, *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 119. For an analysis of the emergence of interstitial ideologies as a source of social power, see Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power, Volume I: A History of Power from the Beginning to A.D. 1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 15-19.

government in Ireland. By following the thread of co-operative modernisation it is argued that the movement contributed to an Irish form of rule.

This thesis is interested in the political economy that emerged out of an important economic organisation and traces its intellectual evolution during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As such it is not an exhaustive economic history of the movement. The remainder of this introduction outlines this study's broad themes and establishes where it fits into the existent historical literature. First, I introduce methodological approaches utilised and note the complexity of their application to Irish historiography, before attention turns towards the historical literature that deals with co-operation. Next, the link between ideas of the nation and the state is surveyed. It will be argued that the co-operative movement brought these concepts of the nation and state to life, whilst encouraging Irish political culture to revolve around producers. Thirdly, the co-operative movement is situated within a broader process of modernisation in Ireland. The co-operative movement's modernisation project suited the purposes of revolutionary nationalists and formed an integral part of the debate about an Irish future in the early twentieth century. Finally, a note is made to indicate the overall thesis structure.

Methodology and Historiography

In the decades since political independence, the writing of history has provided a contested site where complex debates about Irish national identity played out. Much of this work has tended towards the production of competing partisan narratives, dominated by nationalist historians and revisionists.¹⁰ A tension immanent to the

¹⁰ For an account of the revisionist debate, see D. George Boyce and Alan O'Day, eds, *The Making of Modern Irish History: Revisionism and the Revisionist Controversy* (London: Routledge, 1996). For a recent assessment of the state of Irish history that surveys labour, social and feminist approaches, see Mary McAuliffe, Katherine O'Donnell and Leeann Lane, eds, *Palgrave Advances in Irish History* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

writing of Irish history remains the complex relationship with its neighbour, Great Britain. The Irish state is an anomalous one.¹¹ For example, Patrick Joyce sees Ireland as a conundrum that at once appears integral to the creation of the liberal governmentality that defined the British state, but also apart from it.¹² As a result, Ireland is viewed as an exceptional historical case-study and forms an incongruent adjunct to other histories concerned with Britain, Europe and empire.¹³ Yet Ireland can relate to all these histories. The Irish co-operative movement provides a case in point. The attempt to co-operatively organise the countryside represented the manifestation of an economic principle promoted on an international basis, but tailored to fit an Irish context. The co-operative movement drew upon international precedents, but co-operation became ‘Irish’ in the sense that it was mediated and transformed by national and local contexts. In turn, international experts who desired to inculcate a version of rural improvement in other countries looked to the example of the Irish co-operative movement for a lead. Therefore, a study of the co-operative movement places Ireland into a wider picture of global development.

Technologies of governance peripheral to the state in Ireland have been overlooked. By tracing the development of the co-operative movement, it will be argued that an analysis of these technologies provides a crucial corrective to a historical understanding of how the Irish state functioned. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw a great deal of social and technical experimentation take place in Ireland. Yet the dominant historical narrative suggests that the valorisation of technical and economic expertise became wedded to national identity

¹¹ David Lloyd, *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1993).

¹² Joyce, *Rule of Freedom*, p. 258.

¹³ Liam Kennedy, ‘Modern Ireland: Post-Colonial Society or Post-Colonial Pretensions’, *Irish Review*, 13 (1992), 107-121; Terrence MacDonough, ed., *Was Ireland A Colony?: Economics, Politics and Culture in Nineteenth Century Ireland* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2005).

in the mid to late twentieth century.¹⁴ Ever since independence from the United Kingdom, the Irish state remained sensitive to accusations of backwardness. Whilst a perceptible change in Irish economic policy occurred in the 1950s, to view this as a departure overlooks the immense amount of theoretical and practical experimentation that occurred since the nineteenth century. The co-operative movement represented one such project that promoted a technical programme of modernisation. This thesis addresses how this project shaped the Irish population, and, in turn, the state – albeit not always as intended by co-operative experts.

This thesis draws inspiration from a local turn in Irish historiography and links the development of the co-operative movement at a grass-roots level to the larger narrative of Irish state-building. The turn towards local history showcased the importance of provincial experience to Irish political development and raised important questions for future inquiry. David Fitzpatrick's study of the Irish revolution at a local level emphasised how everyday experience and local interests often superseded national matters in their importance to 'ordinary people'.¹⁵ More recent work utilises overlooked local sources to challenge historical orthodoxies. In particular, the work of Fergus Campbell and Michael Wheatley has shown that the rural population's concern with land issues and a concurrent disengagement with constitutional nationalist politics in the early twentieth century meant that space existed for other movements and actors to shape the rural population.¹⁶ This created an opportunity for co-operative societies to contribute richly to the experience of

¹⁴ Tom Garvin, *News from a New Republic: Ireland in the 1950s* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2011), p.13. Also, RF Foster, *Luck and the Irish: A Brief History of Change, 1970-2000* (London: Penguin, 2008); Garvin, *Judging Lemass: The Measure of the Man* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2009).

¹⁵ David Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life, 1913-1921: Provincial Experience of War and Revolution* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1977).

¹⁶ Fergus Campbell, *Land and Revolution: Nationalist Politics in the West of Ireland, 1891-1921* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Michael Wheatley, *Nationalism and the Irish Party: Provincial Ireland, 1910-1916* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

everyday life in the countryside and to affect a degree of socio-economic transformation.

Close examination is given to the work of the co-operative movement in County Kerry. Located in the south-west of Ireland, Kerry represented a target county for the IAOS as it possessed a ninety per-cent rural population and formed an integral part of the dairying heartlands that made up a region that produced key Irish exports.¹⁷ Many of the profound changes that affected rural areas, such as reform of land ownership, emigration, and violence, occurred there.¹⁸ Local analysis reveals resistance to co-operative expansion, which acted as a major frustration to the IAOS's attempts to organise the county's farmers. This work utilises a range of sources, including local newspapers, papers of a solicitor who represented several societies and, most importantly, the correspondence files for individual co-operative societies.¹⁹ One limitation to correspondence files is that they represent an incomplete portrayal of individual societies. For example, empirical data for each society only appears when mentioned within dispatches or reports written by visiting IAOS organisers. However, such sources are useful in that they offer access to the experiences of local societies and the roaming co-operative experts. Interaction between local societies and the national leadership in Dublin occurred on a frequent basis. The correspondence files provide a wealth of material concerning how local co-operators viewed their position within the overall national movement, whilst

¹⁷ Desmond A Gillmor, 'Agriculture', *Irish Resources and Land Use*, ed. by DA Gillmor (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1979), pp. 109-137 (p. 119-122); Gillmor, 'Land and People, c. 1926,' in *A New History of Ireland, Volume VII: Ireland, 1921-84*, ed. by JR Hill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 62-85 (pp. 84).

¹⁸ Donnacha Seán Lucey, *Land, Popular Politics and Agrarian Violence in Ireland: The Case of County Kerry, 1872-1886* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2011); Margaret O'Callaghan, *British High Politics and a Nationalist Ireland: Criminality, Land and the Law under Forester and Balfour* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1994).

¹⁹ Tralee, Kerry Local History Archive (KLHA), Papers of Dr O'Connell; Dublin, National Archives of Ireland (NAI), 1088 series, Co-operative Movement General Correspondence.

revealing the tensions and conflicts that operated on an everyday basis. This study uses sources that move constantly between local and national concerns in order to demonstrate how the process of state-building occurred at both levels.

Outside Ireland, historical scholarship has made dynamic use of co-operative movements to assess the social, economic and cultural characteristics of other nations. However, the movement has been afforded a minor place within Irish historiography. A recent upsurge in interest in co-operation as a social phenomenon is apparent across academic disciplines. In sociology, Richard Sennett's examination of co-operative ideas and behaviour emphasises key characteristics required for their successful conversion into practice. The basic features of successful co-operative behaviour include popular support from a broad cross-section of society and an acceptance that co-operation is a messy, uneven and complicated practice. At its simplest, co-operation involves people working with one another and combining resources to achieve something they cannot do alone.²⁰ Historical case-studies provide evidence about how co-operation becomes embedded amongst populations and instigates changes throughout society. This study addresses a notable absence in the Irish historiography by providing a treatment of the movement's role in instigating societal change. Specifically, this work explores how the movement exerted its influence at the interface of rural development during a period of profound social and political flux. This led to the co-operative movement exerting a profound influence on the creation of the Irish nation-state.

The first wave of historical interest in Irish co-operative organisation occurred alongside the movement's early expansion across Ireland and reflected the

²⁰ Richard Sennett, *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Co-operation* (London: Allen Lane, 2012).

IAOS's desire to record its own achievements. This process was intensified by the establishment of Dublin's Co-operative Reference Library in 1914.²¹ Such work emphasised the co-operative movement's role as an agent of improvement, citing its 'practical attempt to deal with some of the more fundamental Irish problems.'²² The implication that Irish co-operation drove agricultural modernisation was clear. However, much of the relevant historical literature concentrates upon the movement's founder and leader, Horace Plunkett.²³ Plunkett made a significant contribution to the political and intellectual culture of Ireland. He argued that the 'Irish Question' centred on social and economic problems as much as constitutional ones and that co-operative organisation of the economy offered a means to improve farming and smooth over political tensions.²⁴ Plunkett made important political and economic interventions during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and any historical analysis of the co-operative movement must deal with this figure. However, the main impetus behind this study is to move the analysis beyond Plunkett and look at the wider impact of the co-operative intervention in Ireland.

This thesis analyses agricultural development with the ideology of co-operation at the forefront in order to assess its contribution to Irish political culture.

²¹ Prominent examples of this work involved IAOS activist and Secretary of the Co-operative Reference Library, Lionel Smith-Gordon. Smith-Gordon produced copious volumes on the history and development of the Irish co-operative movement. See Smith-Gordon, *Co-operation for Farmers* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1918); Smith-Gordon and Cruise O'Brien, *Co-operation in Ireland* (Manchester: The Co-operative Union Limited, 1921); Smith-Gordon and Laurence S. Staples, *Rural Reconstruction in Ireland: A Record of Co-operative Organization* (London: PS King and Son, 1917).

²² Smith-Gordon and Staples, *Rural Reconstruction*, p.1.

²³ RA Anderson, *With Horace Plunkett in Ireland* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1935); Margaret Digby, *Horace Plunkett: An Anglo-American Irishman* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1949); Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (London: Verso, 1995), p.100; James J. Kennelly, 'The "Dawn of the Practical": Horace Plunkett and the Co-operative Movement', *New Hibernia Review*, 12.1 (2008), 62-81; Carla King, 'Co-operation and Rural Development: Plunkett's Approach', *Rural Change in Ireland*, ed. by John Davis (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, The Queen's University of Belfast, 1999), pp. 45-57; West, *Horace Plunkett*.

²⁴ Horace Plunkett, *Ireland in the New Century: with an Epilogue in Answer to Some Critics* (London: J Murray, 1905).

Economic historians have focused on the diffusion of creameries and technology without sustained reference to the importance of the co-operative ideology that underpinned the drives to organise the countryside. Existing economic history scholarship on the movement assesses how successful the co-operative movement was in delivering upon its economic promises and the prevailing judgment is largely a negative one. Lám Kennedy has noted that the controversial and contested nature of the co-operative movement's intervention into the rural economy meant that often its work was frustrated. Kennedy argued that such conflict limited the effectiveness of co-operators in the rural field, but the imposition of any new network invariably precipitates social conflict.²⁵ Cormac Ó Gráda examined the co-operative movement's role in the proliferation of creameries, and placed this process alongside fierce competition from a robust private creamery sector. This work highlighted the role of co-operative and private creameries in diffusing new dairying technology to Irish farmers.²⁶ Other economic historians utilise a comparative approach to contrast the Irish co-operative movement with continental co-operative movements. These all argue that Irish co-operators failed to engender a significant level of societal 'improvement' in keeping with its stated objectives.²⁷ However, as the impact of the

²⁵ See Lám Kennedy, 'The Early Response of the Irish Catholic Clergy to the Co-operative Movement', *Irish Historical Studies*, 21.81 (1978), 55-74; Kennedy, 'The Roman Catholic Church and Economic Growth in Nineteenth-Century Ireland', *Economic and Social Review*, 10.1 (1978), 45-60; Kennedy, 'Farmers, Traders and Agricultural Politics'.

²⁶ Cormac Ó Gráda, 'The Beginnings of the Irish Creamery System, 1880-1914', *Economic Review of History*, 30.2 (1977), 284-305. Also, Ó Gráda, 'Irish agriculture after the Land War, in *Land Rights, Ethno-Nationality and Sovereignty in History*, ed. by Stanley Engerman and Jacob Metzger (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 131-52. William Jenkins emphasises the role of private creameries as antagonists to the co-operative movement. Jenkins, 'Capitalists and Co-operators: Agricultural Transformation, Contested Space, and Identity Politics in South Tipperary, Ireland, 1890-1914', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 30 (2004), 87-111. Ó Gráda's article remains an influential intervention. A recent historical survey of global agriculture cited it to argue that 'the co-operative movement developed sluggishly and belatedly in Ireland'. Giovanni Federico, *Feeding the World: An Economic History of Agriculture, 1800-2000* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 136.

²⁷ Timothy W Guinnane, 'A Failed Institutional Transplant: Raiffeisen's Credit Cooperatives in Ireland, 1894-1914', *Explorations in Economic History*, 31 (1994), 38-61; Ingrid Henriksen, 'Avoiding Lock-In: Cooperative Creameries in Denmark, 1882-1903', *European Review of Economic*

movement on the development of a national political culture is the major concern of this study, a comparative analysis is eschewed as it distracts from an understanding of the real structural changes encouraged by the emergence of co-operative organisation. Co-operative societies placed new dairying technologies within reach of farmers, but combined it with an organisational imperative. As such, this work seeks to place the impact of one economic organisation within its wider political culture.

This thesis argues that the co-operative movement played an important role in conceptualising the Irish nation-state by imagining it through its project of agricultural development. Much of the work upon Irish co-operation has been economic in nature, but recent scholarship emphasises the movement's cultural roots.²⁸ The co-operative movement emerged during the Irish Revival of the late nineteenth century and was enmeshed in an explosion of cultural nationalism. This cultural revival instigated new ways of conceptualising the Irish nation-state. The co-operative movement contributed to such efforts by its attempts revitalise rural life through the promotion of a reorganised agriculture that emphasised the importance of self-help. Connections between various cultural nationalist groups developed over

History, 3 (1999), 57-78; Henriksen, Markus Lampe, and Paul R Sharp. 'The Role of Technology and Institutions for Growth: Danish Creameries in the Late Nineteenth Century', *European Review of Economic History*, 15.3 (2011), 475-93; Henriksen, Lampe, and Sharp, 'The Strange Birth of Liberal Denmark: Danish Trade Protection and the Growth of the Dairy Industry from the Mid-Nineteenth Century', *Economic History Review*. 65.2, (2012), 770-88; Henriksen and Kevin H O'Rourke, 'Incentives, Technology and the Shift to Year-Round Dairying in Late Nineteenth-Century Denmark', *Economic History Review*, 58.3 (2005), 520-554; Carla King, 'The Early Development of Agricultural Cooperation: Some French and Irish Comparisons', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 96C.3 (1996), 67-86; Kevin O'Rourke, 'Culture, Conflict and Co-operation: Irish Dairying Before the Great War', *Economic Journal*, 117.10 (2007), 1357-1379.

²⁸ It is worth noting that institutional histories have been produced on individual societies. Many of these are largely celebratory. Teddy Fennelly, *A Triumph Over Adversity: The History of Donaghmore Co-operative Creamery Ltd, Founded in 1927* (Portlaoise: Arderin Publishing Company, 2003); Denis Foley, *Mullinahone Coop: the First One Hundred Years* (Tipperary: Mullinahone Cooperative Dairy Society, 1993); Noreen McDonnell, *Callan Co-operative Agricultural and Dairy Society Ltd, 1899-1999* (Callan: Callan Co-operative Agricultural and Dairy Society Ltd, 1999); Raymond Smith, *A Century of Co-operative Endeavour: Centenary Co-operative Creamery Society Ltd* (Dublin: Mount Cross, 1998).

time which led to funding and publicising each other's work.²⁹ However, the co-operative movement receives less historical attention than the Gaelic aspects of this revival, such as the language revival. Having emerged during the Irish cultural renaissance, co-operators proved adept at embedding their ideas amongst a new generation of political nationalists. The desire of co-operative activists to re-make the Irish countryside and modernise Irish farming held important implications for Irish political and economic development. The IAOS produced a reservoir of knowledge about the Irish countryside and left its imprint on social practices and upon the country's dairying industry. It is an analysis of this project and its legacy upon the Irish state that this thesis addresses.

The Production of Ireland

The co-operative movement shaped a popular understanding of what constituted the Irish nation and simultaneously contributed to the complex state-building process that occurred in the early twentieth century. Horace Plunkett argued that '[t]he Irish Question is... the problem of a national existence, chiefly an agricultural existence, in Ireland.' Co-operative organisation offered a solution to this problem.³⁰ The study of co-operatives provides a framework that takes account of the social and economic changes that occurred within a contested political environment.³¹ Viewing the state-building project through the lens of the co-operative movement offers a fresh perspective that locates this process as something that emerged out of an economic

²⁹ John Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987); PJ Mathews, *Revival: The Abbey Theatre, Sinn Féin, the Gaelic League and the Co-operative Movement* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2003); Brian Maye, *Arthur Griffith* (Dublin: Griffith College Publications, 1997), pp. 158-159.

³⁰ Plunkett, *Ireland in the New Century*, p. 39.

³¹ Yannis Kotsonis' study of agricultural co-operatives in imperial Russia emphasises their socio-political utility. The democratic structure of co-operatives offered 'one of the few forums where otherwise estranged groups... could submerge their distinct political and social agendas and pursue common goals.' Kotsonis, *Making Peasants Backward: Agricultural Cooperatives and the Agrarian Question in Russia, 1861-1914* (Houndmills: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1999), pp. 1-2.

discourse on Ireland. As such, a definition of an Irish national identity can be discerned within contemporary socio-economic debates that occurred alongside the work of state-building.

This study understands the Irish nation as a rural construction, something the co-operative movement propagated. In Ireland, separating the nation from the state requires a serious effort of disassembly. For Foucault, the state is a complex system, ‘which exists, but which does not yet exist enough. Raison d’état is precisely a practice, or rather the rationalization of a practice, which places itself between a state presented as given and a state presented as having to be constructed and built.’³² The state embraces the means of government, which is the embodiment of ideas and practices concerned with the rule of a population and the major associated institutions. An historical approach contributes to a detailed understanding about how state institutions took their prevailing form. They emerge from the ideas and interactions between various interest groups, which take the form of political contestation, which grant resultant institutions ‘a content and legitimacy they would (and could) not have had if they had been singularly “imported” from elsewhere.’³³ Ireland provides a case-study of such political contestation. In Ireland, the creation of the state drew on many influences, including Catholicism, British rule and localism.³⁴ This study contributes to an understanding of the state-building process by tracing the development of the ideological and practical contribution of the co-

³² Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 4.

³³ Michael Woolcock, Simon Szreter and Vijayendra Rao, ‘How and Why History Matters for Development Policy’, *History, Historians and Development Policy: A Necessary Dialogue*, ed. CA Bayly, Vijayendra Rao, Simon Szreter and Michael Woolcock (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 3-38 (p. 16).

³⁴ Tom Garvin, *1922: The Birth of Irish Democracy* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2005).

operative movement to the organisation of Irish government and its social and economic apparatus.

Ideologies act as vehicles ‘for belief and political action.’³⁵ The study of co-operative societies provides unique access to contemporary discourses that underpinned the drive towards Irish independence. Political tensions characterised Anglo-Irish relations in this period. The chronology of the constitutional crisis in Ireland – a tacit acceptance of some form of Home Rule, the outbreak of the First World War, and the 1916 Easter Rising, which set the country on the path to violent conflict – forms the dominant historical narrative of this period.³⁶ Constitutional debates threatened to drown out alternative discourses, which argued that political energies needed to concentrate upon social and economic problems. However, competing political ideologies of nationalism and unionism did not monopolise the terms of contemporary debate. The advocacy of an ideology of co-operation by the IAOS and its efforts to reorganise rural society mattered and co-operative activists played a part in re-framing the ‘Irish Question’.

A theorisation of the Irish nation based around the rural, co-operative community gathered momentum in the late nineteenth century, and provided a basis for nationalist critique of the British state in Ireland. The language of ‘nation’ represents a crucial part of state-building in places where demand for political independence gathers momentum. Benedict Anderson’s definition of what constitutes a nation remains an influential departure point in order to study the composition of the nation-state. Anderson argued that the nation represents ‘an

³⁵ Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe’s Twentieth Century* (London: Penguin, 1999), p. xii.

³⁶ Paul Bew outlines the development of Irish nationalism and Ulster unionism. See Bew, *Ideology and the Irish Question: Ulster Unionism and Irish Nationalism, 1912-1916* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

imagined political community... both inherently limited and sovereign.³⁷ Manu Goswami argues that in colonial India, a discursive construction of national identity articulated the position of a community unevenly incorporated into an imperial economy. Associated ideas formed the basis of a critique of prevailing socio-political conditions and advocated their replacement with something considered 'authentic'. Goswami identifies anti-colonial activists as the 'authors of the political economy of nationhood'.³⁸ Some of the most effective authors of a national political economy in Ireland emerged from the co-operative movement.

The co-operative movement utilised a discourse of 'nation' to promote its organisation and in the process called the state into existence. As such, throughout this thesis, the concept of 'nation-state' is deployed. This recognises that the work of state-building, associated with the institutions and practices that governed the population, occurred concurrently to a definition of the nation. The establishment of the independent Irish Free State in 1922 amounted to a culmination of such efforts, albeit one that proved unsatisfactory for a significant number of nationalists. This thesis encompasses a period when the form of the nation-state was contested. Nevertheless, by the 1920s, a partitioned, agricultural nation-state is precisely what emerged. The importance of the co-operative movement then, resided in its ability to conjure up notions of what constituted the 'nation', whilst simultaneously organising the resources and ideas that helped assemble the state in Ireland throughout the period under review.

³⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition (London: Verso, 1991), p. 6.

³⁸ Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 279.

Re-framing the ‘Irish Question’: A Political Culture of Producers

The IAOS created an archetype of the ideal economic subject and therefore played a critical role in defining the economic character of Irish national identity. Competition to dominate co-operative organisation in Ireland in the period under investigation formed an economic source of Anglo-Irish tension, with implications for the emerging definition of the Irish nation. The IAOS served the interests of agrarian producers and found its most successful expression in the institution of the co-operative creamery. This lent it a prominent presence in dairying regions located in the south-west and north-east of Ireland. At the start of the twentieth century, Irish and British co-operative movements competed to organise Irish dairying and therefore control butter production. As such, the IAOS constantly lobbied its resources in support of the Irish agrarian producer, whilst the British Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS) promoted those of its consumer members based in industrial cities. This culminated in economic conflict, which delineated an Irish national interest from a wider British one.

Historians of British co-operation have argued that the Manchester-based CWS made important interventions in British political culture. Peter Gurney’s seminal study of British co-operation highlighted the importance of the CWS to the development of modern British political culture. In Britain, co-operation constituted ‘a particular mode of consumption [that] generated fierce and protracted social conflicts’. Co-operation represented an alternative paradigm for consumption to that offered by capitalist entrepreneurs. By generating debate and conflict around the sphere of consumption, the co-operative movement shaped modern British society. The British co-operative movement helped locate twentieth-century political culture

around practices of consumption, which in turn shaped communities.³⁹ Subsequent histories have further emphasised the link between economic and political cultures. Frank Trentmann highlights the connection between the economic idea of free trade and the way in which its intellectual applications influenced civil society. Free trade ‘derived its power from popular enthusiasm, from passion and morals, and from its connection with national identity and social emancipation’.⁴⁰

The organisation of Irish producers along co-operative lines granted them a platform to influence the development of an emergent nation-state. Throughout this study, it is argued that the co-operative movement authored a specific type of ‘imagined community’ in the Irish countryside and gave it form through its network of societies. Co-operative organisation played a fundamental role in shaping Ireland’s political culture. The Irish reconfigured co-operation to favour the interests of rural producers and in the process differentiated their version from a British conception of co-operative organisation. Taking a lead from Gurney, this study argues that the IAOS’s reorganisation of rural society helped link Irish political culture to the interests of producers. Furthermore, the principle of co-operation drew an impassioned response from many sections of society in Ireland similar to how Trentmann conceives of the role played by free trade in late Victorian Britain.

³⁹ Peter Gurney, *Co-operative Culture and the Politics of Consumption in England, 1870-1930* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 22. Notable work that highlights the role of co-operation in similarly organising the political culture of the twentieth century can be found in Lawrence Black and Nicole Robertson, eds, *Consumerism and the Co-operative Movement in Modern British History: Taking Stock* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); Mary Hilson, Pirjo Markkola, and Ann-Catrin Ostman, eds, *Co-operatives and the Social Question: The Co-operative Movement in Northern and Eastern Europe (1880-1950)* (Cardiff: Welsh Academic Press, 2012); Nicole Robertson, *The Co-operative Movement and Communities in Britain, 1914-1960: Minding their Own Business* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); Anthony Webster, Alyson Brown, David Stewart, John K Walton and Linda Shaw, eds, *The Hidden Alternative: Co-operative Values, Past, Present and Future* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011).

⁴⁰ Frank Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption and Civil Society in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 354.

Understanding why Ireland developed the way it did needs to take account of the lobby of rural producers.⁴¹

As early as the 1930s, analyses of Irish independence emphasised agriculture's importance to Irish national identity. Leo Kohn portrayed agriculture as 'the principal industry of the country, and it has behind it a tradition of administration which is at once more comprehensive *and more Irish* [emphasis added] than that of any other government service.'⁴² This thesis explores how the co-operative movement framed agriculture and makes prominent use of the Department of Agriculture's records. The establishment of an Agricultural Commission in 1922 confirmed the government's intention to rely upon co-operatives as a vehicle for economic growth. Chapter four argues that the Agricultural Commission's Report established a post-independence governmental template. The involvement of the IAOS in the Commission represented an effort to harmonise the state and co-operative sector. Co-operatives were uniquely positioned as a buffer between farmers and policymakers to provide a valuable and unique insight into the governance of the rural sphere. The Irish Free State represented a polity defined by its rural character, which lent the new state an institutional bias towards farmers as the largest producing class. The co-operative movement supported this arrangement.

The Co-operative Movement and Independence

In his 1967 documentary about Ireland, Peter Lennon posed the question, 'What do you do with your revolution once you've got it?'⁴³ This thesis attempts to answer that question. Political independence from Britain came with the expectation that

⁴¹ For more on this topic of understanding Irish development see Tom Garvin, *Preventing the Future: Why Was Ireland So Poor For So Long?* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2004).

⁴² Leo Kohn, *The Constitution of the Irish Free State* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1932), p. 312.

⁴³ *The Rocky Road to Dublin*, dir. by Peter Lennon (First Run/Icarus Films, 1967).

Irish rule would automatically benefit the people. However, as Clifford Geertz argues in 'After the Revolution', promises made by revolutionary nationalists before independence – 'popular rule, greater social equality, rapid economic growth, cultural regeneration and national greatness' – swiftly melt away. Instead, realisation takes hold 'that social, economic, and political problems, once thought to be mere reflexes of colonial rule, to disappear when it disappeared, have less superficial roots.'⁴⁴ The Irish Free State faced up to such a situation, characterised by civil war, partition and economic depression. Economic growth and national greatness seemed as distant as ever. The vibrant intellectual and political activity that characterised the movement towards independence soon settled into the routine and mundane.

The first independent Irish administration approached the work of government with a pragmatic attitude. The Minister of Finance, Ernest Blythe, recounted that the government's major achievement related to getting 'things going'.⁴⁵ However, the real achievement resided in encouraging other institutions to get 'things going', where their expertise might prove more effective than government intervention. This study contributes to a deeper understanding about how this work was achieved, arguing that the IAOS found itself in an influential position after 1922.

The reason for the co-operative movement's influence upon Irish nationalism stemmed from its embedded foundations within the rural sphere. Samuel Huntington argues that in economically underdeveloped, democratic countries, political elites court organised rural opinion and that nationalist regimes draw popular support from

⁴⁴ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 234-235.

⁴⁵ Ciara Meehan, *The Cosgrave Party A History of Cumann na nGaedheal, 1923-33* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2010), p. 29.

the countryside's inhabitants. A well-organised population remains crucial to the attainment of political power, 'but it is also the foundation of political stability'.⁴⁶ This study analyses the gradual sublimation of co-operative thought into a larger nationalist ideology, and its role in shaping the political culture of the Irish nation-state. The decision to take a study of the co-operative movement past the establishment of the Irish Free State is deliberate. By taking the analysis to 1932 this thesis argues that co-operative societies represented an important source of continuity across rural Ireland. The changing *dramatis personae* of Irish political administrations mattered less than the organisation of local resources to people who utilised co-operative societies on a frequent basis. As a result, co-operative organisation provided one means of ensuring that the Irish Free State experienced a degree of political and economic stability in the aftermath of revolution.

The Co-operative Movement and Modernisation

This thesis relocates the co-operative movement as a pre-eminent force in a modernisation process that emerged in Ireland during the nineteenth century. The IAOS aggressively promoted and installed co-operative societies across the countryside in order to transform the Irish farmer into a co-operative subject. However, work examining the creation of modern Ireland makes only brief references to the role played by co-operators.⁴⁷ Senia Paseta dealt shortly with the co-operative movement in her survey of nationalism and social change in Ireland,

⁴⁶ Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), pp. 433-461.

⁴⁷ Thomas Bartlett views the co-operative movement as unimportant, dismissing Horace Plunkett as 'that Protestant do-gooder'. Bartlett, *Ireland: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 361. Also, Paul Bew, *Ireland: The Politics of Enmity, 1789-2006* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland, 1900-2000* (London: Profile Books, 2005); Alvin Jackson, *Ireland, 1798-1998: Politics and War* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1999). The major work on the co-operative movement remains Patrick Bolger, *The Irish Co-operative Movement: Its History and Development* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1977).

stating that ‘Plunkett established a co-operative society [IAOS] in 1894, but this did little to address issues beyond agricultural concerns.’⁴⁸ However, agricultural concerns proved to be of great importance to the way Ireland was governed throughout the twentieth century. As such, this work contributes to an understanding of modernisation in Ireland, but also views the process as a rural phenomenon as much as it is an urban one.

This study recognises modernisation as a homogenising process whereby target subjects are defined as economically and socially sophisticated. Modernisers utilise a binary discourse of ‘backwardness’ and ‘progress’, positing a movement from a ‘traditional’ arrangement to an ‘improved’ one. An underlying assumption to this view is that the move from a traditional arrangement to a modern one is fundamentally positive. Improvement is measured through changes to economic outputs, technology and demonstrable expertise.⁴⁹ The work of Marshall Berman and David Harvey has redefined modernisation as a dialectical process that produces an unsettling effect. Modernity is understood as a complex and disturbing condition that may encourage uneven economic transformations and new forms of political violence.⁵⁰

The historical understanding of modernisation as applied to Ireland is a complicated one. RF Foster argues that ‘a good deal of what characterized the country in the mid-twentieth century was obdurately pre-modern’, and not until 1972, with Ireland’s entry into the European Economic Community, were ‘old

⁴⁸ Senia Pasetta, *Before the Revolution: Nationalism, Social Change and Ireland’s Catholic Élite, 1879-1922* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1999), p. 126.

⁴⁹ Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), pp. 5-7.

⁵⁰ Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso Editions, 1983); David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

moulds... broken with apparent decisiveness.’⁵¹ In contrast, Joseph Lee views modernisation as an economic process that emerged out of nineteenth century peasant-based society as a result of slow improvements to farming, combined with concurrent processes of depopulation and infrastructural reform. For Lee, the modernity of the Irish state throughout the twentieth century was measured in terms of the economic performance of the Free State, and later the Republic.⁵² Other authors cite internationalism as a signifier of modernity. The work of Till Geiger, Michael Kennedy and Bernadette Whelan has highlighted a deeper involvement in international politics and economy after the Second World War as evidence of a modern bureaucratic and diplomatic state.⁵³ Nevertheless, a satisfactory definition of what precisely constitutes the condition of Irish modernity is lacking from this debate and scope remains for further investigation.

This thesis takes a lead from James Scott who argues that the condition of modernity is the organisation of knowledge and resources in order to overcome problems related to economy and society, such as the production of food. Scott argues that modernising tendencies equally apply to developmental strategies in the rural sphere and agriculture, rather than something that reflects urban life.⁵⁴ The IAOS’s attempts to modernise Ireland in the early twentieth century resided in

⁵¹ RF Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* (London: Penguin, 1989), p. 569.

⁵² Joseph Lee, *The Modernisation of Irish Society, 1848-1918*, 3rd edn (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2008); JJ Lee, *Ireland, 1912-1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁵³ Till Geiger and Michael Kennedy, eds, *Ireland, Europe and the Marshall Plan* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004); Michael Kennedy and Deirdre McMahon, eds, *Obligations and Responsibilities: Ireland and the United Nations: Essays Marking Fifty Years of Ireland’s United Nations Membership* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 2005); Bernadette Whelan, *Ireland and the Marshall Plan, 1947-57* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000).

⁵⁴ James C Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (London: Yale University Press, 1998).

efforts to ‘organise’ the constituents of rural society and economy.⁵⁵ By tracing the co-operative movement’s organisational efforts in the Irish countryside, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are presented as a period when a great deal of social and economic experimentation occurred. The co-operative movement’s work is indicative of a complicated modernising process in Ireland and its attempts to organise rural resources and people meant it became entangled with an emergent nationalist project that eventually seized governmental power.

Viewing a process of modernisation through an agent such as the co-operative movement shows that an impetus for ‘improvement’ occurred outside the deliberations of political elites. The co-operative movement’s attempts to produce a citizen suited to the Irish political and economic environment occurred alongside, and tempered, official government policies. The shift from subsistence to commercial farming in the second half of the nineteenth century introduced high levels of structural emigration from Ireland and encouraged the consolidation of farmland.⁵⁶ Co-operators wanted farmers to resist socio-economic atomisation that accelerated in the wake of the Great Famine. Therefore, the IAOS used co-operative societies to foster a citizen that functioned effectively within an Irish polity. The envisaged co-operative subject would act in a self-regulating manner that contributed to the realisation of a vibrant and interactive community life taking place around co-

⁵⁵ This Irish form of ‘organisation’ inspired similar efforts in rural America. Daniel T Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (London: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 334.

⁵⁶ An extensive historical literature exists on the Great Famine (1845-1852) and its social, economic and cultural legacies. See Enda Delaney, *The Curse of Reason: The Great Irish Famine, 1845-52* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2012); James S Donnelly Jr., *The Great Irish Potato Famine* (Stroud: Sutton, 2001); Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity: The Irish Famine, 1845-52* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1994); Cormac Ó Gráda, *Black '47 and Beyond: The Great Irish Famine in History, Economy and Memory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Ó Gráda, *Ireland Before and After the Famine: Explorations in Economic History, 1800-1925* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).

operative institutions. Sometimes this conception of organisation excluded smaller farmers and agricultural labourers from participation in the new co-operative community and a practical focus upon medium to large landholders provided an easier constituency with which to encourage desirable results. The co-operative movement established a far-reaching network of socio-economic institutions that were both resisted and embraced, but which achieved legitimacy in the eyes of Irish political administrations.

The Co-operative Movement, Rural Ireland and Nationalism

This study views Irish modernisation as a process located in the rural sphere and agricultural industries, whilst also connected to an emerging nationalist project. In 1940, the writer Sean O’Faolain took a journey through Ireland during which he meditated upon what constituted the Irish character and described Ireland as ‘a land of fields, and farmers, and small towns, and it is these that have made it what it is.’⁵⁷ O’Faolain articulated, and reinforced, a predominant conception of Ireland as an agricultural country that relied upon the industry of farmers. In Ireland, conceptions of modernity and rurality have long intertwined. In later work, O’Faolain cited a tension at the heart of Irish modernisation which he identified as ‘striving hard to catch “up” with the rest of the world in industry and business’, but that also attempted ‘to build an attractive country life... to keep her young people in the fields.’⁵⁸ Co-operators would have recognised this conundrum.

Views like O’Faolain’s echo the wealth of literature that emerged during the late nineteenth century cultural revival. The interest taken in rural life as a site of national identity came from an urban, bourgeois coterie of intellectuals and writers.

⁵⁷ Sean O’Faolain, *An Irish Journey* (London: Readers Union Limited, 1941), p. 13.

⁵⁸ Sean O’Faolain, *The Irish*, revised edition (London: Penguin, 1969), p. 82.

The motif of a stable, unchanging peasant culture formed a foundation to the work of celebrated writers including WB Yeats, Lady Gregory, AE, and John Millington Synge.⁵⁹ The literary revival's infatuation with the peasant and rural society remained relevant in a range of disciplines throughout the twentieth century, including anthropology, literature and filmmaking.⁶⁰ For example, the anthropologist Conrad Arensberg argued that agrarianism formed the dominant mode of national life and contended that 'to look at the work of the countryman of rural Ireland demands dipping into the economics of the whole Free State.'⁶¹ Similarly, a preoccupation with the Irish peasant can also be found in films such as Robert Flaherty's *The Man of Aran*.⁶² The co-operative movement acted as an analogue to the literary revival by perpetuating this interest in the condition of the rural peasant in its economic discourse and must be understood as a contributor to a resultant sustained interest.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the problem of rural life preoccupied many experts. Yannis Kotsonis's work on late-imperial Russia argues that co-operative movements provide an entry into complex agrarian situations whereby 'many questions of economy, politics, society, and culture were debated'. Co-operatives provide an insight into the implications of these debates for rural society at a local level, whilst also demonstrating how they instigated 'monumental

⁵⁹ George Cusack, *The Politics of Identity in Irish Drama: WB Yeats, Augusta Gregory and J.M. Synge* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 149.

⁶⁰ Michael D Higgins, 'Liam O'Flaherty and Peadar O'Donnell: Images of a Rural Community', *Crane Bag*, 9.1 (1985), 41-48.

⁶¹ Conrad M Arensberg, *The Irish Countryman*, 2nd edn (Garden City, New York: The Natural History Press, 1968), p. 48. Also, Arensberg and Solon T Kimball, *Family and Community in Ireland*, 2nd edn (Gloucester, Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1961). Later studies on rural Ireland emphasise this depiction of a modern, yet traditional, society. See Hugh Brody, *Inishkillane: Change and Decline in the West of Ireland* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Pelican, 1974); Nancy Scheper-Hughes, *Saints, Scholars and Schizophrenics: Mental Illness in Rural Ireland*, 2nd edn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

⁶² *The Man of Aran*, dir. by Robert Flaherty (Gaumont British Distributors, 1934).

change' on a national level.⁶³ In Ireland, the IAOS offers an observational field through which to view these same issues. Since the eighteenth century, agricultural experts viewed farming practices as backward and agriculture has remained central to Irish schemes for improvement.⁶⁴ Co-operative experts repeatedly intervened in the lives of farmers before and after the attainment of independence in order to improve their condition. Quite often, their diagnoses of rural problems proved inextricable from broader political questions.

The co-operative movement allied its organisational blueprint to new technologies that overhauled international dairying. The introduction of mechanical separators housed in creameries converted the production of butter from a home industry to one located in the public sphere. When the IAOS established a new creamery in a local district, they placed this new technology within the reach of Irish farmers for the first time and encouraged a transformation in their industry. Furthermore, the co-operative structure of creamery societies meant farmer-members collectively owned and maintained new technology.⁶⁵ Also butter-making, which previously occurred in the homestead, moved into the public sphere. Joanna Bourke has highlighted that the co-operative movement's interventions changed the position of women in the rural economy. Prior to the intervention of creameries, women produced butter within the home. The popular embrace of the creamery placed butter

⁶³ Kotsonis, *Making Peasants Backward*, pp. 4-8.

⁶⁴ Jonathan Bell and Mervyn Watson, *A History of Irish Farming, 1750-1950* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009); Mary E Daly, *The First Department: A History of the Department of Agriculture*, (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 2002).

⁶⁵ Kevin H O'Rourke, 'Culture, Conflict and Cooperation: Irish Dairying Before the Great War', *Economic Journal*, 117 (2007), 1357-1379; Kevin H O'Rourke, *Culture, Politics and Innovation: Evidence from the Creameries* (Dublin: Department of Economics and IIS, Trinity College, 2001), pp. 7-8.

production into the public sphere and this work became a masculine affair.⁶⁶ Furthermore, the establishment of co-operative societies allowed new elites to extend influence throughout communities. The co-operative movement empowered members at the expense of other figures that included shopkeepers, traders, and landless rural labourers whose presence in the countryside declined.⁶⁷ Therefore, as it reorganised rural business the IAOS left a significant mark upon Irish society.

A historical understanding of modernisation in Ireland also needs to account for the place of nationalism, which is itself an element of modernity.⁶⁸ One effect of the revisionism debate within Irish historiography has been to propagate an assessment of nationalism in Ireland that obscures the fact that nationalist discourses contain certain features that are liberatory and progressive.⁶⁹ In the early twentieth century, the contribution made by co-operative societies towards processes of rural development drew attention from a coterie of nationalists who sought to usurp British power in Ireland. On account of this, economic principles of co-operative organisation became subsumed into a wider political economy of radical Irish nationalism.

An analysis of the co-operative movement also needs to be contextualised amidst the significant structural changes that occurred in the countryside throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Questions around the issue of land ownership and recurrent outbreaks of rural agitation remained a relevant social issue throughout

⁶⁶ For more on how the role of women changed see, Joanna Bourke, 'Dairywomen and Affectionate Wives: Women in the Irish Dairy Industry, 1890-1914', *Agricultural History Review*, 38.2 (1990), 149-160; Patricia O'Hara, *Partners in Production?: Women, Farm and Family in Ireland* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1998).

⁶⁷ Dan Bradley, *Farm Labourers: Irish Struggle, 1900-1976* (Belfast: Athol Books, 1988).

⁶⁸ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983).

⁶⁹ Conor McCarthy, *Modernisation, Crisis and Culture in Ireland, 1969-1992* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000).

the period covered in this thesis. A rich historical literature on this topic exists, which helps understand the social changes and shifts in power that occurred in Ireland. Irish nationalists drew doubly upon the land question as a source of popular appeal and as a manifestation of Irish grievances with Britain.⁷⁰ As the ‘Irish question’ moved towards resolution, interconnections between rural culture, violence, and nationalism underpinned the various dynamics driving socio-political change. Co-operative societies intersected with all these.

The British government’s Irish policy consisted of ‘an integrated doctrine of strong government and social amelioration’. This remained the orthodoxy until the outbreak of the First World War.⁷¹ Momentous reforms enacted between 1870 and 1909 shifted ownership of farmland from the Anglo-Irish landlord class to the tenant-occupiers.⁷² The implementation of these reforms occurred as a response to rural violence, which reached an apogee during the Land War of 1879-82. This violence occurred prominently in the western counties of Ireland, drawing upon longstanding traditions of agrarian unrest that predated the Great Famine.⁷³ This seeming settlement of the land question at the end of the nineteenth century ushered in a temporary cessation of rural violence that allowed the co-operative movement to

⁷⁰ Philip Bull, *Land, Politics and Nationalism: A Study of the Irish Land Question* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1996); Maura Cronin, *Agrarian Protest in Ireland, 1750-1960* (Dundalk: The Economic and Social History Society of Ireland, 2012); James S Donnelly, Jr., *The Land and the People of Nineteenth-Century Cork* (London: Routledge and Paul, 1975); PJ Drudy, ed., *Ireland: Land, Politics and People*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Fintan Lane, ‘Rural Labourers, Social Change and Politics in Late Nineteenth-Century Ireland’, *Politics and the Irish Working Class, 1830-1945*, ed. by Fintan Lane and Donal Ó Drisceoil (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 113-139; WE Vaughan, *Landlords and Tenants, 1848-1904* (Dublin: The Economic and Social History Society of Ireland, 1984).

⁷¹ Andrew Gailey, *Ireland and the Death of Kindness: The Experience of Constructive Unionism 1890-1905*, (Cork: Cork University Press, 1987), p. 3. Ciara Breathnach explores one state-backed initiative, which sought to alleviate poverty in the west of Ireland. Breathnach, *The Congested Districts Board of Ireland, 1891-1923: Poverty and Development in the West of Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005).

⁷² Lee, *Modernisation of Irish Society*, pp.105-107.

⁷³ Paul Bew’s study of the nineteenth-century land question shows how it framed national politics. Bew, *Land and the National Question in Ireland, 1858-1882* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978).

flourish. However, practices of land redistribution continued long into the twentieth century and remained an emotive political issue beyond independence.⁷⁴ The spectre of rural unrest remained ever present.

Although Irish farmers owned the land for the first time, they remained economically vulnerable. The establishment of a co-operative society represented one way in which farmers mediated this circumstance. Indebtedness formed a constant companion to the experience of rural life and farmers relied upon local sources of credit. Farmers relied upon local shopkeepers who supplied necessary consumables on credit. Within IAOS rhetoric, providers of local credit, including shopkeepers, publicans, and traders, were labelled ‘gombeen-men’— a pejorative term derived from Gaelic that possessed usurious overtones.⁷⁵ The co-operative movement aimed to reorganise the countryside by encouraging farmers to act in concert to protect one another from the threat of ‘gombeenism’. Co-operative credit societies in Ireland tended to emerge during moments of heightened economic anxiety such as during a period of economic deflation in the 1920s as explored in chapter four. Wherever a co-operative society of any type materialised, a new set of social relations surfaced that was resisted by the trading community. Co-operative credit societies, and creameries, reduced farmers’ reliance upon the ‘gombeen-man’ and granted farmers autonomy over their economic affairs.

Nationalists exploited rural unrest to gather support, but so far the link between nationalism and co-operation remains understudied. Co-operators were

⁷⁴ Terence Dooley, ‘Land and Politics in Independent Ireland, 1923-1948: The Case for Reappraisal’, *Irish Historical Studies*, 34.134 (2004), 175-197; Dooley, *The Land for the People’: The Land Question in Independent Ireland* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2004). For an account of this issue of land annuities, see Peadar O’Donnell, *There Will Be Another Day* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1963).

⁷⁵ Peter Gibbon and MD Higgins, ‘Patronage, Tradition and Modernisation: The Case of the Irish “Gombeenman”’, *Economic and Social Review*, 6.1 (1974), 27-44.

prominent rural actors and divided opinion in local communities. A stance of co-operative organisation proved indicative of a particular socio-economic outlook, but also suggested a particular political view. Tom Garvin's work on revolutionary nationalism argues that the vision of an Irish future articulated by the Sinn Féin party was rooted in an idealised version of an Irish-Gaelic past, where 'the modern and traditional have been forced to live in uneasy juxtaposition'.⁷⁶ As an organisation that saw modern Irish communities embedded within a rural setting, the rhetoric of the IAOS appealed to separatist nationalists on these grounds. Farmers derived a form of economic autonomy through the co-operative society that complemented the separatists' demand for political autonomy. This thesis explores the relationship between co-operators and nationalists, arguing that a co-operative vision of modernisation was appropriated by the revolutionaries that eventually claimed power. The ways political elites encountered the co-operative movement mattered for the type of Irish state that emerged by the 1920s. Through its desire to inculcate 'improvement', the co-operative movement could not avoid involvement with those who advocated the establishment of an independent Irish nation-state.

The extent to which co-operators succeeded in conveying their insight and opinion to policymakers fluctuated over time and depended upon who occupied the seat of official power. The IAOS provided the movement with a platform to influence national policy at the Department of Agriculture, whilst individual societies directly engaged with the farming population. Therefore each chapter break accords with a reorientation in official attitudes to the co-operative movement. This study utilises sources including IAOS Annual Reports in order to establish the

⁷⁶ Tom Garvin, *Nationalist Revolutionaries in Ireland, 1858 – 1928* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 4.

relevance of Irish co-operatives to broader political issues and show how co-operators responded to new ideas. Much use is made of Parliamentary Inquiries, especially in chapter two, to provide an insight into late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century rural conditions as well as to explore the political economy promoted by official governmental institutions and the position of co-operators within this debate.

Co-operative modernisation aimed at the production of a rural citizen that best served the needs of Irish economy and society and therefore requires replacement within the narrative of Irish development. Through the medium of the co-operative society, farmers combined resources in order to promote their mutual interest. Co-operative societies were important institutions that directed resources, measured the economic activity of their members and provided farmers with access to markets. Although a product of voluntary association, both British and Irish state administrations grasped that an active network of co-operative societies possessed the potential to serve a useful governmental function. Co-operative societies intervened in the industry of farmers, who in turn owned and operated new agricultural technologies, whilst receiving a practical education from IAOS employees. The success of co-operative-inspired improvement rested upon the collaborative efforts of co-operative organisers, engineers and managers. In scrutinising the modernising tendency peculiar to co-operative organisation, these technocratic experts are revealed as important actors that engineered the Irish state and society.

Thesis Structure

This thesis will establish the important role played by the co-operative movement in the Irish state-building process. The following structure is utilised in order to achieve

this. The study is arranged into four chapters. Chapters one and two focus on how the co-operative movement became embedded within Irish society up to the end of the First World War. Chapters three and four focus upon the revolutionary period and its aftermath paying close attention to the relationship between co-operation and Irish nationalism. This relationship held important implications for long-term economic and political development. The chapters provide a long-term perspective on the co-operative movement and the way it shaped the Irish nation-state. Chapter one locates the co-operative movement in its national context, which forms the main focus of this thesis. It is argued that the specific way co-operative organisation developed, reflected, and concurrently impacted upon, the Irish political context. The co-operative movement's values and aims are teased out in the context of a polarised political climate. The Irish movement's clash with its British co-operative counterpart is analysed to demonstrate this point. Through an examination of the writings and speeches of key actors, an attempt is made to understand the ideological underpinnings of the co-operative movement and its attempts to build a Co-operative Commonwealth in Ireland.

Chapter two examines the co-operative movement's relationship with the state alongside continued attempts to cultivate a co-operative population. This takes the focus beyond 1914, where most historical treatments of the movement stop. The years 1907-18 highlight the complex and confusing relationship between the state and co-operative movement. The outbreak of the First World War provided an important watershed for the movement, which led to its emphatic politicisation and heralded a loss of confidence in the British state. During the war, the supply of food formed a central concern of the Westminster government. Subsequent demands placed upon Irish farmers by the national food policy are examined through the

prism of co-operative societies. During the war the co-operative movement adjusted to a new economic environment. This ability to adapt to social change highlighted its importance to the rural population. Farmers became prosperous on account of the war, but pressures associated with wartime controls emboldened the co-operative movement. As the war came to a conclusion, one co-operator described the movement's position as one in which 'the groundwork may be considered complete, and that the time is ripe for new experiments'.⁷⁷ The movement emerged from the war somewhat chastened by the experience, but also asserted its blueprint for social organisation with recovered urgency.

Chapter three and four examine how the movement interacted with the forces that advocated political independence for Ireland. In particular, they examine how a new, radical nationalism emerged from the war and utilised co-operative ideas to develop a distinct political economy. This development gave the co-operative movement a prominent influence in the creation of the state apparatus after 1922. The third chapter examines the co-operative movement during the revolutionary period before independence when violence threatened to destabilise the co-operative experiment. During 1920-21 attacks carried out by Crown forces in reprisal to local rebellious activity affected many co-operative societies. The chapter utilises the correspondences of local societies and contemporary news reportage to reveal the impact of violence upon the movement. State violence undermined co-operative behaviour in certain districts, and potential avenues for the movement's development experienced permanent setback.

⁷⁷ Smith-Gordon and Staples, *Rural Reconstruction*, p. 254.

Chapter four looks at the co-operative movement after independence. The movement was embedded within rural society by this point and post-independence governments utilised the co-operative society network to promote agricultural development. This chapter evaluates the changes implemented by the movement and takes stock of its relationship with the state. In particular, the findings of the Agricultural Commission of 1922-24 are analysed. The IAOS used the opportunity afforded by post-independence reconstruction to ensure co-operative principles received a hearing from the new political elite. The Agricultural Commission's report established a coherent governmental template for rural Ireland, one which betrayed the influence of co-operative ideology. The thesis argues that, having established itself as a permanent fixture in the rural sphere, the IAOS and its attendant co-operative infrastructure provided partial evidence of a 'Co-operative Commonwealth' within the new polity. For co-operating farmers, the answer to the question 'what do you do with your revolution?' appeared clear. It was business as usual.

Chapter 1: Building the Co-operative Commonwealth in Ireland, 1894-1910

On 10 December 1909, co-operative activist and writer George Russell, popularly known by his pen-name, AE, delivered a critical speech to the Annual General Meeting of delegates from Ireland's co-operative movement. He accused the movement of lacking 'the vital heat' displayed by nationalist and unionist organisations working in Ireland. These organisations debated the merits and faults of a potential Home Rule parliament for Ireland. Such a parliament would mean the transferral of certain political powers from the British government at Westminster to an Irish parliament in Dublin. In an extraordinary address that rejected the concentration upon a political binary of support or opposition to Home Rule, AE sought to re-establish the sense of purpose that had animated the co-operative movement in its early years. He opened provocatively:

We want to find our ideal – the synthesis of all these co-operative efforts. Butter especially when it is good, is a pleasant thing to think about; but you cannot inspire a national movement by calling out, 'Really choicest butter.' Eggs, when they are fresh are a delightful food; but they will not help much to form national ideals, though they may occasionally help to mar them – at election times. So we are driven from the actual character of our rural industries to consider the men who carry them on. It is in our men and in the object of their great endeavours we must find ideals.¹

In the context of a fracturing political culture, the speech carried a radical message. AE asked the delegates to concentrate upon the social impact of the co-operative movement in order to uncover their national ideals. AE voiced the dilemma that faced the movement by 1909. It needed to remain a relevant social force or risk becoming a marginalised one. Whilst the production of items such as butter and eggs

¹ AE's address, 'The Building up of a Rural Civilisation', given at the IAOS Annual Conference. Regarded as an important intervention, the IAOS published a transcript in pamphlet form. IAOS, *Annual Report, 1909*, p. 38.

remained the immediate purpose of co-operative societies across Ireland, the true reason for the creation of a co-operative infrastructure resided in the inculcation of a meaningful Irish subject. In particular, the character of the rural subject represented a more worthwhile battleground than the political fault-lines that had emerged on the issue of Home Rule. It was this issue that represented the more worthwhile cause for co-operative activists to fight over. By posing a question about fundamental ideals at the heart of the national co-operative project, AE urged delegates to contribute to the building up of a new rural civilization.

The timing of AE's speech added to its sense of urgency. The question of Ireland's constitutional status within the Union re-emerged repeatedly throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By December 1909, the implementation of some form of Home Rule appeared possible with a general election due in January 1910 viewed as an opportunity for nationalists to press the case. Political opinion in Ireland polarised between those who supported nationalist claims for political autonomy, and those who argued for the retention of the north-eastern province of Ulster within the United Kingdom.² For AE, those who attended the nationwide meetings, which discussed Home Rule, managed 'to lose themselves in their varying ideals of Ireland and Empire.'³ The associated political debates appeared to drown out arguments that emphasised Ireland's need to concentrate upon social changes, rather than political ones. Ambitiously, AE wanted to reframe the 'Irish Question' and transcend the dominant political debates. Instead, the co-operative movement

² Paul Bew, *Ideology and the Irish Question: Ulster Unionism and Irish Nationalism, 1912-1916* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Ronan Fanning, 'The Irish Policy of Asquith's Government and the Cabinet Crisis of 1910', in *Studies in Irish History: Presented to R. Dudley Edwards*, ed. by Art Cosgrove and McCartney (Dublin: University College Dublin, 1979), pp. 279-303; Nicholas Mansergh, *The Unresolved Question: The Anglo-Irish Settlement and its Undoing, 1912-72* (London: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 34-40.

³ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1909*, p. 38.

should offer a plan for a positive conception of social relations within Ireland. In this way, AE challenged his audience to assess their reasons for promoting co-operation. The movement stood for more than an improvement to Irish farming. This economic function remained important, but the original impetus behind the establishment of co-operative organisations derived from a desire to re-mould and improve Irish society. Having raised this problem, AE proceeded to establish a renewal of the IAOS's sense of purpose in challenging circumstances. Ultimately, the speech demanded that everyone involved with the co-operative movement needed to contribute to the building up of a new type of rural civilisation in Ireland – the creation of a Co-operative Commonwealth.

Born George William Russell, in Lurgan, 1867, AE embodied a multitude of identities. Various guises included mystic, economist, painter, poet, nationalist and journalist and he was one of the most recognisable individuals in Irish cultural and political life during the early twentieth century.⁴ His most important role proved to be his long career in the Irish co-operative movement. AE joined the IAOS as an organiser of co-operative credit societies in 1897. In 1905, he became the editor and chief contributor to the movement's influential journal, *The Irish Homestead*. This occupation allowed AE to develop his credentials as a prominent social theorist and he wrote obsessively about contemporary politics and economics. He produced a voluminous number of articles and books in a period that marked the transition of Ireland from a subject territory within the United Kingdom towards an autonomous nation-state. This chapter draws upon AE's writings in order to establish coherent

⁴ Nicholas Allen, *George Russell (AE) and the New Ireland, 1905-1930* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003); Henry Summerfield, *That Myriad-Minded Man: A Biography of George William Russell 'AE' 1867-1935* (Gerrards Cross, Bucks.: Colin Smythe, 1975).

ideas about what constituted an ideal version of the Irish nation from a co-operative perspective.

Attempts by co-operative activists to re-make Irish society have occupied a less important position within the historiography of the early twentieth century when placed in the context of dramatic political developments. However, the co-operative movement was far from irrelevant, and it represented an influential and resilient socio-economic actor, despite the officially indifferent, often hostile, attitude of Irish politicians at this juncture. This chapter aims to recover this 'lost' ideological thread of Irish co-operation, which suffused political, social and economic discourse within Ireland during this period. It positions the co-operative movement amidst Ireland's on-going political development in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and argues for its contemporary importance in mediating social and economic change. Firstly, the chapter offers an overview of the work of the co-operative movement from 1894 until AE's speech, placing it in the context of changing rural conditions. A small but industrious group of IAOS employees contributed to these changes in rural society, through their policing of local societies and their membership. In addition, tensions between Irish and British co-operative movements helped define the Irish co-operative project in the early 1900s. The challenge of a consumer-oriented movement forced the IAOS to emphasise its own producer-oriented credentials. This possessed long-term implications for the movement's evolution, but also contributed to Ireland's identity as a nation of producers.

The Irish Co-operative Movement and its National Context

The emergence of the Irish co-operative movement at the end of the nineteenth century proved timely. The movement's efforts to revitalise the condition of rural life occurred at the end of a century that saw a devastating famine take place in the

1840s, emigration and restructuring of farming.⁵ Throughout the nineteenth century, ‘famine and disease remained constant spectres.’⁶ By the end of the century Irish agriculture struggled to compete with international competition. From the 1870s, the government instigated a programme of subsidised land purchase for tenant farmers in order to resolve the issue of land ownership. By the 1880s, an agricultural depression placed further economic pressure on Irish farmers. The value of agricultural output for 1886 stood at 64 per cent of its 1876 value.⁷ Horace Plunkett used this juncture to promote the co-operative organisation of rural society. This served the purpose of making Irish agriculture competitive in an international marketplace. Most importantly, Plunkett sought to instigate a revolution of character that would produce an improved rural citizenry. He directed a governmental programme that would inculcate a new co-operative Irish subject that also diffused a co-operative ethos and new technologies in order to modernise the Irish countryside.

The Irish co-operative movement’s rise occurred within a broader international uptake of the co-operative model. The modern co-operative principles that became rooted in Ireland during the early twentieth century possessed complex, international origins. In many ways the adoption of co-operative organisation as a way to meet Irish farmers’ social and economic challenges reflected the cosmopolitanism of the movement’s founder, Horace Plunkett. He drew upon an array of influences, which encompassed his young adult life spent on the plains of

⁵ Mary E Daly, *The Famine in Ireland* (Dundalk: Dundalgen Press, 1986), pp. 65-6; Cormac Ó Gráda, *Black '47 and Beyond: The Great Irish Famine in History, Economy, and Memory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 104-114.

⁶ Virginia Crossman, *Politics, Pauperism and Power in Late Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p.106.

⁷ Barbara Lewis Solow, *The Land Question and the Irish Economy* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 171-173.

Wyoming, to his interactions with co-operators in England.⁸ Father Thomas Finlay, the Vice-President of the IAOS and close friend of Plunkett, emphasised that Plunkett's attendance at the 1889 Co-operative Congress in England proved a key influence. There he met with leaders of the British co-operative movement, which allowed him to make 'a new and deeper study of the principles of co-operation, and [he] came back resolved to apply them on a large scale at home.'⁹ Connections with other co-operative organisations were important, but the Irish movement soon established an exceptional pedigree of its own. For example, American agrarian experts studied the IAOS in order to apply lessons to the rural United States.¹⁰

Plunkett believed that 'the spread of agricultural co-operation through voluntary associations' was required to overcome practical problems that affected Irish farming's international reputation and a way to exploit national resources. He argued that co-operative societies represented an 'agency of social and economic progress' without which:

Small landholders will be but a body of isolated units, having all the drawbacks of individualism and none of its virtues, unorganised and singularly ill-equipped for that great international struggle of our time, which we know as agricultural competition.'

This concern for the small farmer remained a feature of co-operative rhetoric during the early twentieth century. Ireland's recent transition from 'landlordism to a peasant proprietary' deprived them of a semblance of social cohesion. Co-operative organisations offered a means through which an element of social cohesion might be

⁸ Lawrence M Woods, *Horace Plunkett in America: An Irish Aristocrat on the Wyoming Range* (Norman, Oklahoma: Arthur H. Clarke Co., 2010).

⁹ TA Finlay, 'Agricultural Co-operation in Ireland', *Economic Journal*, 6.22 (1896), 204-211 (p. 205).

¹⁰ Daniel T Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (London: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 318-343.

restored and ensure that small farmers managed to contribute to national development.¹¹

Plunkett borrowed from co-operative movements in Britain and Europe. Various forms of co-operative organisation emerged across Europe during the second half of the nineteenth century. In Britain, co-operative organisation arose in the areas of consumption and retail and was promoted by the Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS). In Germany, co-operative credit societies and agricultural mass-purchase societies became popular. In France, a variety of consumer and producer societies emerged.¹² In particular, Denmark provided important lessons for those interested in the state of Irish agriculture. The economic impact of co-operation there affected Irish economic fortunes in the late nineteenth century. Due to the introduction of co-operative creameries, Danish dairy produce improved in quality and quantity. Built around the unit of the parish, co-operative dairy societies empowered local farmers. Economic and social independence was the objective of the movement, but political and cultural demands crept into their programme. As a result Danish dairy farmers displaced their Irish counterparts to take the preeminent position in the British market place.¹³ The Danish success in dairying encouraged the IAOS to focus on the creamery as its principal society. Writing in 1890, Plunkett cited Denmark as an important influence: 'To the organisation of Co-operative Creameries [in Ireland] is largely due the success of the Danish butter, the most

¹¹ Horace Plunkett, *Ireland in the New Century: with an Epilogue in Answer to Some Critics* (London: J Murray, 1905), p. 44.

¹² Johnston Birchall, *The International Co-operative Movement* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), pp. 17-20, 78-81.

¹³ Ingrid Henriksen, 'Avoiding Lock-In: Co-operative Creameries in Denmark, 1882-1903', *European Review of Economic History*, 3.1. (1999), 57-78; Peter Manniche and an International Group of Writers, *Rural Development and the Changing Countries of the World* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1969), pp. 60-64; Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland: A New Economic History, 1780-1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 259-262; F Skrubbeltrang, *Agricultural Development and Rural Reform in Denmark* (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1953), pp. 183-234.

formidable rival of our own product in the English markets.’¹⁴ The success of Danish co-operative creameries highlighted the improvements these institutions could deliver to the dairying industry. They produced butter of a uniformly high quality and established a higher benchmark in efficiency and hygiene.¹⁵

The application of a social principle of organisation with an international pedigree proved adaptable to national conditions. Besides the economic benefits, Plunkett saw co-operation as principle with which to mould the character of the Irish population. The political context of the late nineteenth century allowed new governmental projects to emerge. During the 1890s, Irish nationalism continued to reverberate from the death of its influential leader, Charles Stewart Parnell, and the attendant split in the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) that followed.¹⁶ The failure of the second Home Rule Bill in 1893 temporarily side-lined the debate over Ireland’s constitutional status.¹⁷ Lady Augusta Gregory, writer and co-founder of the Irish Literary Theatre, noted the political vacuum created by the death of Parnell. In a seminal article entitled, ‘Ireland, Real and Ideal’, Gregory argued that Irish national life became more vibrant as a result of political inaction: ‘Since the hewing down of that great overshadowing tree [Parnell] other growths have had a chance at stretching towards the sunlight, and new forces are coming into play.’ Gregory then focused in upon the work of two of these ‘new forces’ – the Gaelic League and the IAOS.

¹⁴ Horace Curzon Plunkett, *Co-operative Dairying: an Address to the Farmers of the Dairy Districts of Ireland* (Manchester: Co-operative Union Limited, 1890) pp. 6-7.

¹⁵ Kevin H. O’Rourke, ‘Culture, Conflict and Cooperation: Irish Dairying Before the Great War’, *Economic Journal*, 117 (2007), 1357-1379 (pp. 1360-1368); O’Rourke, *Culture, Politics and Innovation: Evidence from the Creameries* (Dublin: Department of Economics and IHS, Trinity College, 2001), <http://www.tcd.ie/Economics/TEP/2001_papers/TEPNo20KO21.pdf> [accessed 28 August 2012] (p. 19), p.1.

¹⁶ Paul Bew, *Enigma: A New Life of Charles Stewart Parnell* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2012), chapters 6 and 7.

¹⁷ Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule: An Irish History, 1800-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 80-85.

Gregory argued that both of these organisations reinvigorated national life in a way constitutional politics had never achieved.¹⁸

The Irish Revival of the late nineteenth century provoked the emergence of ‘a new “self-help” consensus’. As Senia Pasetta argues, this cultural revival’s ‘amorphousness’ allowed it to be ‘a rallying point for various political and social causes, and facilitated the fraternisation of individuals as diverse as Douglas Hyde, Eoin MacNeill, Horace Plunkett and George Russell.’¹⁹ According to contemporary commentators, such as Lady Gregory, this revival heralded the irrelevance of parliamentary politics. Instead, the promotion of co-operative organisation in agriculture and industry, the teaching of the Gaelic language and a host of other programmes replaced the dominance of political debate. Gregory highlighted the radical change championed by new national movements for a contemporary audience. Along with writers such as WB Yeats and Edward Martyn, Gregory established the Irish Literary Theatre, which showcased a roster of Irish plays that promoted an Irish conception of literary and dramatic norms. A cross-pollination of personnel from these various movements occurred, as demonstrated by Gregory and Plunkett’s successful attempt to establish a co-operative society in her village.²⁰ However, whilst the rise of organisations such as the IAOS and the Gaelic League are typified as promoting a distinct cultural form of nationalism, their actions possessed political ramifications.²¹ As such, the IAOS aimed to make ‘Ireland a place of innovation’.²² This innovation, coupled with the political intervention

¹⁸ Augusta Gregory, ‘Ireland, Real and Ideal’, *Nineteenth Century*, 44.261 (1898), 769-782 (p. 770).

¹⁹ Senia Pasetta, *Before the Revolution: Nationalism, Social Change and Ireland’s Catholic Élite, 1879-1922* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1999), p. 153.

²⁰ Gregory, ‘Ireland, Real and Ideal’, pp. 771-773; PJ Mathews, *Revival: The Abbey Theatre, Sinn Féin, the Gaelic League and the Co-operative Movement* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2003), p. 5.

²¹ Mathews, *Revival*, pp. 6-7.

²² Mathews, *Revival*, p. 32.

represented by the promotion of co-operation, requires analysis in order to understand the development of the Irish nation-state more comprehensively.

During the 1920s, the former nationalist MP Stephen Gwynn looked back on the wave of social and intellectual activity that occurred in the late nineteenth century as a decisive factor in the creation of Ireland's 'strong culture'. Gwynn believed that 'many forces have contributed to it', amongst which he counted the Gaelic League, the literary movement and Sinn Féin 'in its earlier more purely intellectual phase'. However, for Gwynn the most important social force that contributed to a modern Irish culture remained the co-operative movement:

All these separate activities were in touch with one another, by attraction or repulsion: but Sir Horace Plunkett perhaps more than anyone else helped to create out of these a central culture. His wide sympathies drew about him a group of young men and women concerned generally for the welfare of Ireland... As a result, Irish thought began to be taken seriously wherever there was interest in ideas, and gained dignity in the process.²³

Gwynn saw the co-operative movement as the network around which cultural and social expressions of Irishness cohered in the early twentieth century. Under Plunkett's leadership, the movement galvanised enough support to drive the expansion of this project until it weaved various social, economic and political threads together to create a distinct Irish culture.

The centrality of co-operative societies to rural communities proved obvious to visiting foreign writers. Louis Paul-Dubois's 1908 travelogue cited the co-operative movement as a major source for potential national regeneration. He viewed it as one of the major agents of education for Irish farmers and believed it exerted a moral effect upon the population, inculcating values such as discipline, and the

²³ Stephen Gwynn, *Ireland* (London: Ernest Benn, 1924), pp. 118-119.

powerful notion of ‘self-help by mutual help’.²⁴ Although virtually given a guided tour, Paul-Dubois presented a view that emphasised the co-operative movement’s role in striving for social improvement. This accorded with the view of the American labour activist, Henry Demarest Lloyd who expected scenes that fitted Ireland’s reputation as ‘the most distressing country in Europe... with its sad faces by the roadside’. He instead encountered a country undergoing profound social change. He credited this transformation to ‘the light of co-operation... one now finds Ireland – the land of famines and evictions... further advanced in the organization of agricultural co-operation than England.’ Impressed by the economic statesmanship of Horace Plunkett and the early impact of the IAOS, Lloyd viewed Irish co-operation as pre-eminent in the field of agriculture, far in advance of its English counterpart.²⁵

The co-operative movement contributed to the political stratification of Irish society during the first decade of the twentieth century. Two major institutional factors influenced the direction of the IAOS development from 1900 onwards. Firstly, the creation of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (DATI) in 1899 represented a landmark in Irish political development and a testament to Horace Plunkett’s tenaciousness. Plunkett used his combined influence as IAOS President and Member of Parliament to fashion a coalition of political interests to establish the DATI. Plunkett chaired a Recess Committee in 1895-6, which issued a report that advocated an autonomous Irish department for agriculture.

²⁴ L Paul-Dubois, *Contemporary Ireland* (Dublin: Maunsel and Company, 1908), p. 451.

²⁵ Henry Demarest Lloyd, *Labor Copartnership: Notes of a Visit to Co-operative Workshops, Factories and Farms in Great Britain and Ireland, in which Employer, Employé, and Consumer Share in Ownership, Management, and Results* (London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1898), p. 52.

An Act of Parliament passed in 1899 created the DATI.²⁶ The Recess Committee supported Plunkett's claim that co-operative organisation proved the most effective agent of improvement in agriculture. Their consideration of this particular form of organisation throughout the continent led the committee to view co-operation as 'the chief lever of progress.'²⁷ The DATI represented the first autonomous Irish government department, a significant departure in the political relationship of the two islands. The Irish political class now controlled agricultural development for the first time. TP Gill, long-time Secretary of the DATI, reflected years later upon its foundation and emphasised that 'the whole project and the whole idea was an Irish one, the work entirely of Irish men representing all parties and all sections of the country.'²⁸ Importantly the DATI represented a political institution under the control of Irish politicians which made it a unique within the Irish state system. Plunkett's prominent role in its establishment, led to his appointment as the Vice-President of the DATI. The Vice-Presidency was the leadership role in the Department, as the Presidency was a ceremonial role reserved for the Westminster government's representative, the Chief Secretary of Ireland. During 1900-1907, the DATI and IAOS developed a symbiotic relationship that furthered the spread of co-operative organisation, but proved a short-term arrangement.

The second institutional factor concerned the IAOS's fractious relationship with the Manchester-based CWS. The Irish co-operative leadership conceived of the co-operative society as a politically neutral and non-sectarian space. IAOS rulebooks stated that '[n]o political or sectarian discussion shall be raised, or resolution

²⁶ Michael Clune, 'The Work and the Report of the Recess Committee, 1895-6', *Studies*, 71.281 (1982), 72-84; Carla King, 'The Recess Committee, 1895-6', *Studia Hibernica*, 30 (1998/1999), 21-46.

²⁷ Horace Plunkett, 'The Recess Committee and Remedial Legislation for Ireland', *Economic Journal*, 7.25 (1897), 131-136 (p. 134).

²⁸ National Archives Ireland (NAI)/AGF/2005/68/80, Evidence of TP Gill, 16,17 & 18 January 1923.

proposed'.²⁹ This reflected the leadership's determination to ensure that the movement emphasised social and economic aspects of the 'Irish question'. Nevertheless, adherence to this objective amongst IAOS staff oscillated wildly in the south-west of Ireland where organisers deployed nationalist rhetoric to compete with the CWS. The CWS established creameries in Ireland that privileged the interests of its consumer-members in industrial cities over those of farmer-producers. Percy Redfern, the CWS's official historian, wrote in 1913 in summation of this situation that 'the CWS sought to provide the English co-operative consumer with a British-made alternative equal in quality to Danish butter'. By establishing creameries in Ireland, the CWS hoped to become less reliant on purchasing high priced butter from Denmark by organising and controlling the means of production in Ireland. However, the IAOS recognised that the interests of their members were not best served by such a policy. Redfern continued that:

The Society was charged with desiring to make of the Irish "a stick to beat the Danes." Irishmen have not the character of being averse to sticks and beatings, but in this case they wanted for themselves as producers the full rewards of victory.³⁰

As the respective co-operative organisations strove for dominance of the Irish creamery sector, the IAOS's increasing identification with the producer class led to a differentiation in Irish and English identities that occurred in the sphere of economics.

Throughout the early twentieth century, the co-operative movement played a leading role in conceiving of, and defining, the Irish nation. A crucial figure in this creative process was AE, who more than any other individual contributed to the

²⁹ Enniscorthy Co-operative Agricultural Society, *Rules of the Enniscorthy Co-operative Agricultural Society Limited* (Manchester: Co-operative Printing Society Limited, 1895), p. 6.

³⁰ Percy Redfern, *The Story of the C.W.S.: The Jubilee History of the Co-operative Wholesale Society Limited. 1863-1913* (Manchester: The Co-operative Wholesale Society Limited, 1913), p. 296.

creation of a co-operative political economy. For AE, an ideal version of the Irish nation would only be attained through embedding co-operative principles from the bottom to the top of Irish society. His thought represented an important example of ideas formulated at the apex of the movement, but the successful realisation of such ideas remained rooted in the practices of local co-operative societies and their members. Later, this political economy was embraced by radical nationalists who used co-operative ideas to outline a coherent vision for future political and economic development. Therefore, the discourse of 'nation' identified with AE and his contemporaries in the co-operative movement, signified a crucial tool in order to call the state into existence and aided in the spread of co-operative organisation.

Politically, early twentieth-century Ireland divided around the issue of Home Rule, which threatened to spill over into chaos and civil war.³¹ This instability threatened to derail the IAOS's work that emphasised the need to concentrate upon a sound plan for Irish economic development. To compound matters further, the movement experienced a rupture in its relationship with the Irish Department of Agriculture, whilst enduring a wearisome economic conflict with the British co-operative movement. Therefore AE's rallying call to co-operative delegates in December 1909 reflected the need to maintain the co-operative movement's work in creating an Irish co-operative culture, despite challenging circumstances. Before examining the effects of all these developments, a survey of the work carried out by the IAOS is required.

The Irish Agricultural Organisation Society

'Co-operation is gradually altering the character of Irish rural life,' AE wrote in an early editorial for the co-operative movement's official newspaper in November

³¹ Jackson, *Home Rule*, pp. 106-141.

1905, 'but we are only at the beginning'. AE envisaged that a Co-operative Commonwealth might be brought about through the gradual building up of co-operative societies and industries. Rural Irish communities possessed the potential to bring about this Commonwealth, whereby 'everybody and every industry connected with agriculture', formed the foundations of a 'co-operative state.' AE imagined that throughout the countryside, the centre of each district would be 'the co-operative creamery, with the manager's house beside it...There will be a village hall where committee meetings will be held, lectures delivered, dramatic performances, concerts, and dances'.³² Accordingly, co-operative societies established a platform that allowed a more vibrant lifestyle to flourish. In 1943, Taoiseach Eamon de Valera delivered a speech that possessed much in common with the national vision articulated by AE. In his 'Ireland that we dreamed of' speech, de Valera articulated a vision of Ireland as a rural, traditional and non-material country.³³ Whilst easy to categorise the IAOS as an example of romantic fantasy that idealised rural existence, it actually presaged de Valera's speech with its own apposite version. Co-operative activists viewed their task as the creation of a modern, dynamic 'civilisation among the fields'.³⁴

The IAOS sought the creation of a new moral economy in Ireland, one suffused with co-operative ideals and values. Furthermore, the promotion of co-operation equated to the promotion of a rural form of modernity. Horace Plunkett summarised this objective with the slogan 'better farming, better business, better living'. By this, Plunkett meant that 'agriculture must be regarded as an industry, as a business, and as a life.' Of these three aims, that which treated agriculture as an

³² 'The Co-operative Village', *Irish Homestead*, 4 November 1905.

³³ Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland, 1900-2000* (London: Profile Books, 2005), p. 4.

³⁴ 'The Struggle between Country and Town', *Irish Homestead*, 15 August 1908.

industry and business only interested those working to promote co-operative organisation ‘as means to better living.’ Co-operative activists envisaged an ideal rural community where ‘every member... can be satisfied that remaining on the land does not imply being in the backwater of modern progress.’³⁵

Managers of co-operative societies contributed to the creation of new modes of behaviour, promoting a modern archetype of the Irish farmer. Whilst new experts achieved prominence due to their status within the movement, the dairy farmer who aligned his productivity demonstrated an adherence to co-operative principles. In his assessment of the British co-operative movement, Peter Gurney highlighted that whilst ideals can be located amongst the elite of the movement, a similar ideological effect amongst grass-roots members of co-operative societies can also be identified. In his study, Gurney argued the dividend payment that members of retail co-operatives across Britain received for their loyalty represented a material and practical ideal.³⁶ In the producer-oriented co-operatives promoted by the IAOS, a similar material ideal is identifiable around the payment Irish dairy farmers received for their milk at the co-operative creamery. The monthly creamery cheque testified to the material benefit accrued through the act of economic co-operation.

A clear enunciation of the moral purpose attached to the co-operative project in Ireland exists in the writings of Horace Plunkett. In his 1904 state-of-the-nation book, *Ireland in the New Century*, Plunkett argued that a primary motivation for his belief in co-operative organisation resided in its capacity to affect improvement in the character of those whom it incorporated. The main target for criticism in the

³⁵ Horace Plunkett, ‘Rural Regeneration’, *North American Review*, 214.791 (1921), 470-476 (p. 474).

³⁶ Peter Gurney, *Co-operative Culture and the Politics of Consumption in England, 1870-1930* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 10.

book was an Irish Catholic culture that he believed prevented progress and held Ireland back from prosperity.³⁷ As evidence of the movement's success in this direction, Plunkett reflected on the IAOS's first decade in existence:

Those who have known Ireland for the last dozen years cannot have failed to notice the advent of a wholly new spirit, clearly based upon constructive thought, and expressing itself in a wide range of fresh practical activities.

These activities included the co-operative organisation of agriculture and rural credit, efforts to revive and initiate industries, and the creation of the DATI. Taken together, these changes encouraged, 'all that was healthy in the voluntary effort of the people to build up the economic side of their life'.³⁸

The IAOS emerged during the Irish Revival in the late nineteenth century. The use of 'native materials as the basis of a scientific culture' defined the attempts of revivalists 'to inspire a new age of communal glory that would embody to a world growing weary of over-materialist conceptions of human progress a higher synthesis of tradition and modernity.'³⁹ Historical accounts of the Irish Revival focus on linguistic and literary aspects. However, the IAOS appeared as prominent to contemporary observers as other organisations. It based its popularity upon inspiring a communal archetype of an idealised Ireland. Unlike other contemporary movements, the IAOS engaged with the material conditions of farmers, through the diffusion of modern farming technologies.⁴⁰ In this respect, the co-operative

³⁷ This criticism of Roman Catholicism drew attention away from the more important practical suggestions contained in the book. In particular, Monsignor Michael O'Riordan offered a rebuttal of Plunkett's criticism of Catholicism. O'Riordan, *Catholicity and Progress in Ireland* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co, 1905). Nevertheless, Plunkett's book remained influential work. Marianne Elliott, *When God Took Sides: Religion and Identity in Ireland – Unfinished History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 200-201.

³⁸ Plunkett, *Ireland in the New Century*, p. viii.

³⁹ John Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987), p. 119.

⁴⁰ Cormac Ó Gráda, 'The Beginnings of the Irish Creamery System, 1880-1914', *Economic History Review*, 30.2 (1977), 284-305.

movement prefigured the modern national project identified in the 1950s, whilst also feeding into the intensification of national energies apparent amongst contemporary organisations in the early twentieth century. The work of the IAOS provides evidence of a ‘scientific’ approach to forging a pragmatic national project.

The work that underpinned the re-ordering of rural society frequently strayed into the mundane. From its inception, the IAOS endeavoured to know as much about the rural population and its socio-economic conditions as possible, and embarked upon the creation of a detailed study of the countryside. The IAOS published annual reports which contained a reservoir of information related to each type of co-operative society and represented an audit of a significant proportion of agricultural activity. These reports included minutes of Annual General Meetings, membership figures for each society, and a statistical breakdown of empirical data for co-operation in each county.⁴¹ The IAOS tracked social and economic trends affecting the produce they dealt in, which proved useful at times of economic crisis. As the movement expanded, the more detailed its portrait of rural life became. This enabled the IAOS to direct resources to areas where the movement appeared most vulnerable. In short, the IAOS mapped a version of the Irish state represented as an interacting network of co-operative societies which could be intervened with as necessary (see figure 1.1).

⁴¹ For example see, IAOS, *Annual Report, 1914*, appendices.

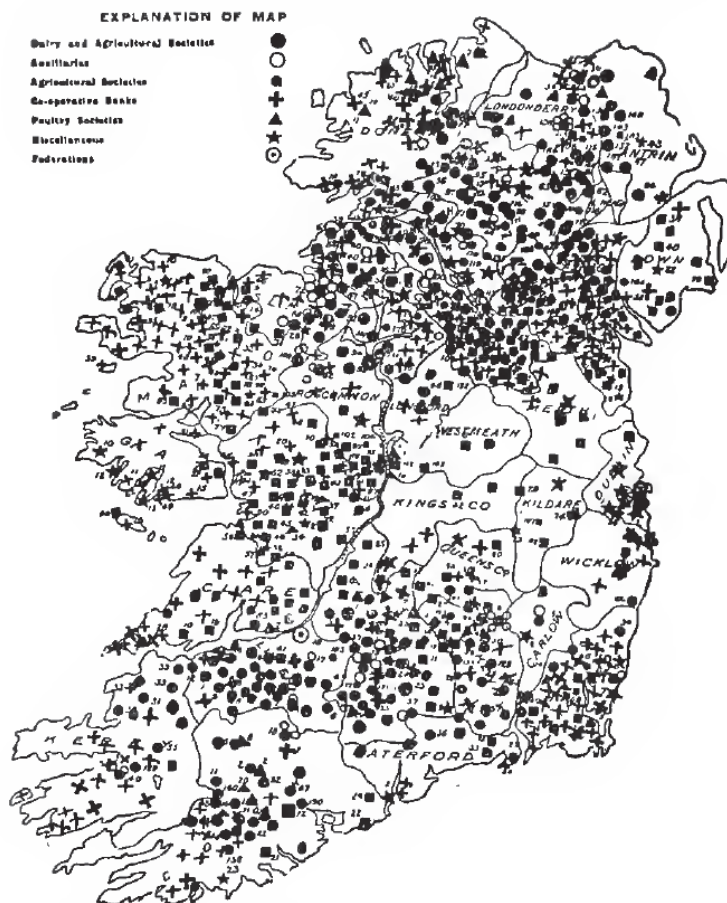


Figure 2.1: IAOS Co-operative Network in 1909 (IAOS, *Annual Report 1909*)

The co-operative movement repeatedly constituted itself as a force for progress. The movement’s leaders saw the IAOS as a means to ‘fulfil their role as cultural and intellectual leaders’. One outcome of contemporary land reforms was that various social and cultural actors from Anglo-Irish backgrounds asserted their relevance as moral leaders in lieu of the connection between landlord and tenant that had prevailed in the nineteenth century and the IAOS represented one way in which farmers might be morally reconstituted as a ‘noble peasant of the cultural revival’.⁴² Plunkett was seen as representative of this class’s attempts to assert to mould Irish

⁴² Leeann Lane, “It is in the Cottages and Farmers’ Houses that the Nation is Born”: AE’s “Irish Homestead” and the Cultural Revival’, *Irish University Review*, 33.1 (2003), 165-181 (p. 167).

farmers. However, his second-in-command in the movement, Rev. Thomas Finlay, was a Jesuit priest and as such helped to counter criticisms from some nationalists that the IAOS represented a front to continue traditional Anglo-Irish influence. The IAOS formed a site for a new co-operative élite to discuss the implications of their movement's project. IAOS annual meetings only record contributions from leaders and delegates. The individual correspondence files for co-operative societies record only the voices of the management at a local and national level. The farmer remained the focus of attention for promoting ideas and developing expertise, whilst the voice of the 'noble peasant' remained absent.

Communication between the IAOS in Dublin and co-operative societies throughout Ireland formed a central feature of the strategy to nurture a new civilization. The role of the IAOS organiser proved vital to the growth of the movement. Initially, the work of co-operative organisers involved visiting rural districts, addressing meetings of farmers and proclaiming the benefits of co-operatively organised businesses. The IAOS Secretary, Robert Anderson, recounted his experiences as an organiser consisted of long, strenuous days in order 'to bring unbelieving and tightfisted farmers into the co-operative fold.'⁴³ The organiser became the target of local opposition to the introduction of co-operative societies and meetings often descended into highly charged events. At one memorable meeting in County Clare, Anderson fled the village on account of threats by local opponents to 'cut the "livers"' out of him.⁴⁴

Organisational efforts soon bore fruit and a network of co-operative societies was established by the start of the twentieth century. The organisers' duties shifted to

⁴³ RA Anderson, *With Horace Plunkett in Ireland* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1935), p. 30.

⁴⁴ Anderson, *With Horace Plunkett*, p. 20.

directing the movement's development through the policing of societies. They regularly visited societies and assessed their output and adherence to IAOS rules. Organisers offered the following services: the provision of architectural and engineering advice; the provision of financial expertise and account-keeping; identifying potential customers; and encouraging the diffusion of new technologies, such as farm and dairy machinery.⁴⁵ The establishment of a co-operative society encouraged dairy farmers to shed antiquated methods of production and organisers reinforced ideal behaviours in order to nurture a co-operative population. For example, when the IAOS expressed disquiet at the practice of creameries renewing informal loans to members, it fell to the organiser to discourage this behaviour. In 1907, the IAOS emphasised that:

Every effort is being made by our Organisers to discourage this practice... the uses and abuses of credit are being brought home to borrowers both at meetings of Societies, and through the Organisers' visits of inspection.⁴⁶

As will be shown in chapter four, such practices remained hard to eradicate. Attendance at the annual general meeting of a society made the co-operative movement's transformative effect apparent to the local population. These meetings occurred against the backdrop of a 'new building among the steam-driven separators, butter-workers, and churns, and all sorts of scientific appliances unavailable to the isolated farmer'. As well as technological improvements to agriculture instigated by the establishment of a co-operative creamery, the new rural enterprises were administered by a democratically elected committee upon which 'the best business-

⁴⁵ Peter Gatrell has highlighted how co-operatives spread cheaper agricultural implements like ploughs amongst the Russian peasantry at the same time. Gatrell, *The Tsarist Economy, 1850-1917* (London: BT Batsford Ltd., 1986), p. 127.

⁴⁶ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1907*, pp. 8-9.

men in the community’ sat, whether ‘landlord or tenant, Protestant or Roman Catholic, Unionist or Nationalist’.⁴⁷

In 1907, the IAOS employed eight organisers, seven men and one woman, each allocated a specific region.⁴⁸ The IAOS relied upon this small number of staff to communicate the official views of the movement to the grass-roots membership. Considering the male-dominated work culture of the period, something to which the development of the co-operative movement contributed to, the employment of a woman in one of the more prominent roles in the IAOS proved remarkable.⁴⁹ This reflected an attempt to organise popularly perceived women’s industries, such as lace and flax production. However, such efforts remained supplementary to work in dairying. The benefit of assigning an organiser a specific region meant that they accumulated detailed local knowledge and represented recognisable points of contact for societies. This gave the organiser an important symbolic capital within their districts, often a valuable attribute when local disputes or problems required resolution.

Charles Riddall acted as the organiser for counties Kerry, Cork, Limerick and Waterford.⁵⁰ For the first two decades in the twentieth century, Riddall remained the major point of contact between the south-west’s societies and the IAOS headquarters in Dublin. His duties included attendance at society committee meetings, and he reported upon the legitimacy, efficiency and subjects of these occasions. Riddall’s reports and communiqués formed the basis for the reservoir of knowledge about the

⁴⁷ RA Anderson, ‘Agricultural Co-operation in Ireland’, in *Ireland: Industrial and Agricultural*, ed. by Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (Dublin: Brown and Nolan, Limited, 1902), pp. 218-234 (p. 232).

⁴⁸ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1907*, p. 15.

⁴⁹ Joanna Bourke, ‘Dairywomen and Affectionate Wives: Women in the Irish Dairy Industry, 1890-1914’, *Agricultural History Review*, 38.2 (1990), 149-164.

⁵⁰ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1907*, pp.15-16.

state of agriculture in the south-west available to the movement's executive in Dublin. This allowed the IAOS to pinpoint where the movement flourished and where it struggled. Throughout his career, Riddall expended an extraordinary amount of energy to secure the permanence of co-operative organisation and behaviour in the Irish south-west. Dublin held Riddall in high regard, as evidenced by the special responsibilities to which he attended. Following the cessation of the competition over Irish creameries, Riddall later acted as the IAOS negotiator for the takeover of the creameries which the Manchester-based CWS operated.⁵¹

Organisers resolved local problems for co-operative societies, sometimes without their knowledge. For example, following an arson attack upon the Ballinclemessig Co-operative Society in suspicious circumstances, the Tralee-based solicitor for the society, John O'Connell, communicated with Riddall. O'Connell struggled to make progress with his case, due to the society committee's failure to remain in constant communication. As a result he bypassed his clients and contacted their organiser, Riddall, to whom he confided his personal view of the committee members:

I would request that you should remain in this district working up the case till matter is disposed of. Your assistance would be invaluable. The members of the Committee are very slow. I have heard nothing from them of late. They live a long distance from Tralee + like all men of their class they keep on delaying information... till the last moment. One can hardly blame the poor men as they are mostly old and of very limited ability.⁵²

O'Connell's decision to approach Riddall derived from the former's identification of the co-operative organiser as the undisputed source of expertise. The 'poor men' who administered the society were bypassed in favour of the co-operative expert of

⁵¹ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1909*, p. 6.

⁵² Kerry Local History Archive (KLHA), Dr O'Connell Papers, John O'Connell to CC Riddall, 20 January 1909.

the type represented by Riddall who provided the important link with the IAOS in Dublin.

The IAOS employed other notable experts, such as engineers, accountants and selling agents that provided societies with important resources and information. Notable experts included James Fant, Andrew Swain and WP Clifford. These men provided auxiliary support to organisers in the field. Fant worked as a technological expert and engineer, and provided expertise to societies which required information regarding the purchase of new technologies. Swain headed up the audit branch of the IAOS, and interacted with societies when it came time to analyse their accounts and general record-keeping. Clifford worked in Dublin and the British mainland acquiring contacts and potential customers for societies. This assistance proved useful at the outset of a society's lifespan, or when a society diversified operations and needed to adapt its infrastructure. The reliance of the movement upon a miniscule staff limited the effectiveness of these experts, but their work proved crucial. In James Fant, the movement possessed a 'special creamery organiser with expert qualifications... [whose] services are always in demand, and... the IAOS could profitably employ at least four such organisers if it had the funds wherewith to do so.'⁵³ Co-operative societies in Kerry frequently utilised Fant's expertise, who supplied engineering drawings and plans for societies to make use of in upgrading and improving the infrastructure of their sites. Fant offered valuable help when societies needed help to procure the latest dairying technology for their creameries and paid visits to societies across the country as required.⁵⁴

⁵³ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1909*, p. 10.

⁵⁴ For example see, NAI/1088/70/1, J Byrne, Ballymacelligott to James Fant, 31 July 1922.

Whilst organisers acted as intermediaries between individual societies and the IAOS, on a local level, the co-operative society acted as an intermediary between local farmers and the marketplace. As the local creamery became a common sight across dairying regions, *The Irish Homestead* commented that ‘a new rural personality has come into existence. The creamery manager will more and more become an influence in the country.’ Managers constituted new authority figures within the rural community, on a par with ‘the clergyman, the doctor and the schoolmaster’. Their role at the interface between the farmer-member and the co-operative society proved important. Managers negotiated the short-term interests of the farmer by paying an acceptable ‘fair’ price for milk supplied, whilst ensuring the long-term sustainability of the society. The manager’s actions carried significant implications for the evolution of the character of local farmers, as well as the material well-being of the village. The success of co-operation in Ireland relied upon the manager acquitting his duties in accordance with co-operative principles, as:

[h]is employment is of a nature which tends to develop and widen out character. He is brought into contact with hundreds of farmers; and he alone perhaps in the community, through the fact of his being in direct contact with the greatest market in the world, and because he acts on behalf of the greatest industry in Ireland, is enabled to some extent to gauge the probable economic effect of certain political changes.⁵⁵

The creamery manager occupied a unique position in Irish society. Located at the nexus of the socio-economic activity in rural Ireland, managers formed relations with members of the society in a particular area and acted as connections to the marketplace beyond the village.

The IAOS emphasised the importance of the co-operative manager to the improvement of the rural population’s character. AE emphasised the importance of

⁵⁵ ‘Creamery Managers’, *Irish Homestead*, 9 December 1905.

the educational effect of the co-operative society upon the typical farmer in a later book. AE constructed the character of 'Patrick Moloney' in a polemical work that championed the co-operative model as the ideal arrangement for Irish society. 'Patrick' represented a typical farmer who worked outside of the co-operative movement. AE argued that this farmer needed the movement in order to shed the traditional superstitions that prevented his transformation into a co-operative subject. An important characteristic of co-operative organisation resided in the educational effect visited upon 'Patrick' through constant interaction with the manager. AE imagined such contact encouraged 'Patrick' to become:

A member of a committee getting hints of a strange doctrine called science from his creamery manager. He hears about bacteria, and these dark invisibles replace, as the cause of bad butter-making, the wicked fairies of his childhood.⁵⁶

Incorporation into the co-operative society effectively transformed 'Patrick' into a modern farmer who privileged the application of scientific knowledge to his industry. 'Patrick' replaced the superstitions of a popular folk memory that maintained the existence of fairies, with a will to eliminate bacteria harmful to the quality of the butter he produced. Working through the co-operative society helped farmers to become well-versed in a discourse of public health at the expense of the mythic aspects of a popular folk culture that the Irish literary revivalist, WB Yeats, reified and celebrated.⁵⁷ Co-operative managers disabused farmers of their old, traditional ideas and replaced them with new scientific norms that improved 'Patrick's' industry.

⁵⁶ AE, *The National Being: Some Thoughts on an Irish Polity* (Dublin: Maunsel and Co., 1916), p. 25.

⁵⁷ Yeats was criticised for celebrating the peasant belief in fairies. He defended literal belief in such phenomena, citing rationalism as the 'great sin against art'. RF Foster, *WB Yeats: A Life, I: The Apprentice Mage, 1865-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 77.

However, the IAOS complained that a dearth of good management material existed in Ireland, due to defects in the educational system. As late as 1922, leading opinion within the movement asserted that co-operative societies outnumbered good managerial candidates, ‘and pending the cultivation of such a new “race” of managers as is being cultivated in the creameries, a tremendous responsibility is thrown on the IAOS and its staff and on the committees of the societies.’⁵⁸ Therefore, the experience of co-operative societies varied from district to district, due to the management and decisions taken. Other factors played a role, such as the presence of local sources of competition, but the capabilities of managers played an important role in ensuring the success and longevity of a co-operative enterprise.

The transformation wrought upon rural society by the IAOS’s interventions was obvious to co-operative farmers. In 1906, attacks made upon the IAOS by critics who contributed to an Agricultural Inquiry by the British government provoked a strong reaction from many of the societies. In response, members publicly recorded their appreciation of the IAOS. For example, one such resolution published by the committee of the Abbeydorney Co-operative Society in north Kerry, attested to the positive effects co-operative organisation brought to the farmers of the district:

1. It has raised the value of our produce fully 25 per cent, as compared with Cork market prices, which we had to depend on formerly.
2. That the co-operative creameries have both improved the quality and increased the quantity of our butter.
3. That by co-operation we have been brought into touch with the best markets for our produce, and have thus secured a very good, if not the top, price.
4. That if by any misfortune, while the movement is still young, it should be deprived of the benefits of co-operative organisation and left to the tender mercies of the merchants as formerly, we believe prices would fall heavily, and our industry be ruined in a short time.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1922*, p. 15.

⁵⁹ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1906*, p. 85.

Farmers in areas such as Kerry recognised the benefits they derived from the radical intervention spearheaded by the co-operative movement. By the end of the first decade of IAOS activity, the propagation of co-operative principles throughout rural society contributed to the transformation in the material and political position of many farmers.

The Co-operative Movement and the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction

Horace Plunkett maintained a belief in the importance of ‘the resources of self-help’. However, vigorous competition from foreign producers meant Plunkett believed the movement needed its ‘voluntary efforts supplemented with a reasonable measure of State aid.’⁶⁰ The establishment of the DATI in 1900 reconfigured the relationship between the state and co-operative movement as they collaborated to improve the Irish countryside. The DATI straight away asserted its position as an autonomous voice for Irish industrial development by taking part in the 1901 International Exhibition in Glasgow. The Department erected an Irish pavilion at the exhibition which displayed ‘a representative selection of the characteristic products of Irish Industry.’ The Department published an accompanying handbook, which offered essays about Irish industry and natural resources, many concerned with agricultural production and education. In his preface to the collection, the head of the DATI’s Statistics and Intelligence Branch, William Coyne, singled out ‘the splendid work done by some of the great voluntary associations of Ireland in developing the

⁶⁰ Horace Plunkett, ‘The Relations between Organized Self Help and State Aid in Ireland’, *North American Review*, 67.503 (1898), 497-498 (p. 498).

material resources of this country'.⁶¹ This reference to the work of the IAOS was emphasised by essays that examined co-operation in agriculture, dairying, and credit.

Under Plunkett's stewardship, the DATI and IAOS co-ordinated workloads and enjoyed a mutually reciprocal relationship. This reflected Plunkett's belief that co-operative organisation required state support. In a speech to the National Co-operative Festival in 1901, Plunkett elaborated his position. The leadership of the Irish co-operative movement realised that 'in addition to organised self-help... the economic condition of the country required a measure of State aid'. Plunkett viewed this 'not... as a substitute for, but as a stimulant and supplement to, associated effort. The DATI provided a potent instrument to achieve the dissemination of this idea.' These economic conditions included the issue of rural emigration, which remained a long-standing feature of Irish social life throughout the twentieth century. Plunkett contrasted Irish population decline with that of mainland Britain, telling British co-operative delegates that 'our population is melting away as fast as yours is being reinforced'. However, the problem proved more serious than numerical decline, as Plunkett outlined: 'the drain from Ireland is worse from the standpoint of quality... the active and the enterprising leave us with an undue proportion of the very old and very young, of the mentally and physically unsound.'⁶² This linkage of population decline to an anxiety constructed around the physical and psychological atrophy of the rural population was cited by the IAOS as one of the justifications for co-

⁶¹ William P Coyne, 'Preface', in *Ireland: Industrial and Agricultural*, ed. by Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (Dublin: Brown and Nolan, Limited, 1902), unpaginated.

⁶² Cited in Anderson, 'Agricultural Co-operation', pp. 233-4.

operative organisation.⁶³ By strengthening a co-operative economy, Plunkett hoped that enough Irish people would remain to work in a more industrious countryside.

This collaboration between voluntary and state agencies bore some extraordinary results. In 1905, the establishment of a Home Industries Co-operative Society and Gaelic League branch in the village of Dromore, County Tyrone, provided evidence of the efficacy that co-operation between different actors provided. Praising Plunkett, *The Irish Homestead* reported that:

we doubt whether even he saw so deeply into Irish necessities as when, in conjunction with [local priest] Father Maguire, he undertook to make one parish in Ireland a model parish, and let loose three great agencies, the IAOS, the Gaelic League, and the Department upon the work.

This episode demonstrated the complex relationship and varied actors required to work together to revitalise parishes. Diffusion of the co-operative model required concerted action between national agents such as the IAOS and Gaelic League, but also important local gatekeepers such as the clergy. The appeal of co-operation went beyond economic measurement. On occasion it engendered a more positive set of social relations that transcended sectarian divisions. To highlight this, the *Homestead's* report on Dromore concluded with an extraordinary incident, which demonstrated mutual respect between local nationalists and unionists: 'We are credibly informed that at the last twelfth of July celebrations the Orangemen of Dromore asked for the loan of some Nationalist drums and their use was cheerfully allowed for the occasion.'⁶⁴

⁶³ The social production of psychological instability remained a long-held view by many in Ireland. Both medical experts and laymen 'believed that generations of emigration had siphoned off the cream and left behind a "weaker" and "vulnerable" population.' Nancy Scheper-Hughes, *Saints, Scholars and Schizophrenics: Mental Illness in Rural Ireland*, 2nd edn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 34-5.

⁶⁴ 'Irish Clergymen and Irish Civilisation', *Irish Homestead*, 7 October 1905.

Recognising the potential for a fruitful collaboration between the DATI and IAOS, the latter published a leaflet titled 'Home Rule in the Dairy.'⁶⁵ The appropriation of the language of Home Rule implied that the IAOS represented a more effective organisation in securing autonomy from Westminster than parliamentary nationalists. This provided the IPP with an uncomfortable reminder that Plunkett, a Unionist MP, achieved a significant degree of political devolution for Ireland. However, Plunkett's conciliatory approach to politics and economics failed to endear him to political opponents. In particular, the influential nationalist MP John Dillon pursued a campaign against the movement and Plunkett in parliament. Dillon believed that the movement's attempts to attain social and economic improvements eroded 'the very substance of the nationalist movement.' It did this by concentrating upon improving material conditions for rural people and potentially weakening demand for an Irish parliament. Any attempts to further the co-operative movement's influence, which he argued the DATI had achieved, needed to be resisted.⁶⁶ The publication of *Ireland in the New Century* did little to ease the pressure on co-operators, especially as the Catholic Church hierarchy resented Plunkett's control over government resources.⁶⁷

From the outset, Plunkett demonstrated an awareness of the shaky foundation of his position at the helm of the DATI. Plunkett's leadership relied upon the Westminster government's discretion as he lost his parliamentary seat at the 1900 general election. He explained this loss on 'the fact that co-operative education has

⁶⁵ IAOS, *Home Rule in the Dairy* (Dublin: Irish Agricultural Organisation Society, 1903).

⁶⁶ FSL Lyons, *The Irish Parliamentary Party, 1890-1910* (London: Faber, 1951), p. 233. Also, John Coolahan, *Irish Education: Its History and Structure* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1981), p. 92.

⁶⁷ Elliott, *When God Took Sides*, pp. 200-211.

so demoralised my politics that I am a political outcast.⁶⁸ Despite this, Plunkett directed governmental resources for agriculture during 1900-1906 and came in for criticism. His lack of a parliamentary seat left him vulnerable to attack from rivals. Dillon criticised the link between the IAOS and DATI, and questioned the Attorney-General over 'what steps he proposes to take to prevent the continuance of this illegal action'.⁶⁹ The Attorney-General responded that the relationship was legal, but by this time Plunkett's position proved untenable. The collaboration between the IAOS and the DATI ended in 1907, when Plunkett's political opponents forced him from office.⁷⁰

This isolation of the co-operative movement from access to state resources contributed to the loss of confidence which AE addressed at the 1909 IAOS conference. However, the rupture encouraged a nationalist outlook amongst members. Mr Scully, a delegate from Clonlisk, County Offaly, viewed the separation of the IAOS and DATI as an opportunity to demonstrate the movement's strength:

They were too long begging and craving from the Government, and that was what left Irishmen as they are. (Laughter) It was time the co-operators of Ireland began to do their own business. Let them prove to the department and to their enemies that they were able to do it (hear, hear), and when their enemies saw that they were able to do for themselves those enemies would become their friends.⁷¹

Scully exemplified a siege mentality amongst the delegates who viewed the movement's experience with the state as frustrating, which emphasised the importance of economic self-reliance. Co-operators viewed the DATI after 1907 as

⁶⁸ Cited in Anderson, 'Agricultural Co-operation', p. 234.

⁶⁹ Hansard HC Deb 28 November 1906 vol 166 cc65-7, http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1906/nov/28/subsidies-to-the-irish-agricultural#S4V0166P0_19061128_HOC_100 [accessed 6 January 2012]

⁷⁰ Eunan O'Halpin, *The Decline of the Union: British Government in Ireland, 1892-1920* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1987), p. 69; Trevor West, *Horace Plunkett, Co-operation and Politics* (Gerrards Cross, Bucks: Colin Smythe, 1986), pp. 76-81.

⁷¹ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1907*, p. 57.

inimical to their interests. Suspicion of the British state in Ireland increasingly defined the attitudes of Irish co-operators over the next decade.

The Irish Agricultural Organisation Society and the Co-operative Wholesale Society

By the late 1890s, co-operative movements emerged across the globe to mediate economic effects upon consumers and producers. The IAOS represented one manifestation of this development and organised its co-operative societies around the interests of agricultural producers. This caused tensions with other national consumer-oriented movements and led to the IAOS playing no role in the functions of the nascent International Co-operative Alliance. Indeed, the Irish were not alone in this, as producer movements failed to integrate into the international organisation. The contemporary French economist and co-operator, Charles Gide, noted that agricultural co-operative movements, ‘frightened by the imperialist ambitions of the consumers’ societies, are gradually leaving the [International Co-operative] Alliance.’⁷² Due to the focus on consumption by the International Co-operative Alliance, Irish co-operators concluded that the pursuit of the farmers’ interests required the movement to maintain a national focus.

The proximity of the CWS more directly affected the IAOS’s development. The attendant rivalry, hinted at on the level of international co-operative relations, played out in the south-western counties of Ireland. As both the IAOS and CWS sought to impose their respective blueprints for co-operative organisation over Irish dairy production, the fallout in the relationship possessed important implications for

⁷² Charles Gide, with preface by Diarmid Coffey, *Consumers’ Co-operative Societies* (Manchester: The Co-operative Union Limited, 1921), pp. 139-140. Also, F Hall and WP Watkins, *Co-operation: A Survey of the History, Principles, and Organisation of the Co-operative Movement in Great Britain and Ireland* (Manchester: Co-operative Union, 1937), pp. 251-252.

the continued evolution of the Irish co-operative movement, as well as Irish political culture.

Established in Manchester in 1863, the CWS displayed expansionary tendencies and set about organising its lines of production and supply to benefit consumer-members. As a staple of the British diet, the securing of a dependable supply of butter proved critical. Therefore, Irish dairy produce represented a propitious and important resource. In the mid-nineteenth century, unorganised dairy farmers proved susceptible to the purchasing power of the CWS, which established six trading depots in Ireland, in order to acquire Irish butter for its members living in industrial towns and cities. At the same time the CWS established depots in Ireland, *Co-operative News*, a British journal, summarised the spread of CWS influence as an attempt:

To bring the producer and the consumer together, to so organise labour as to produce for known wants, and to serve the consumer as nearly as possible at cost price on condition that he finds the necessary capital in the first instead of the last instance... it is really a *find*, and not an effort to him.⁷³

Percy Redfern commented that the organisation ‘grew fat on butter... [and] Ireland was the source of the supply.’ The stated aim of the CWS, to harmonise the respective interests of consumer and producer, justified the initial extension of CWS influence into Ireland during the 1870s.⁷⁴ However, the CWS only attempted to organise Irish farmers into co-operative societies with the objective of placing the interest of consumers above producers. Plunkett’s intervention at the end of the nineteenth century aimed to prioritise the farmer in the chain of exchange.

⁷³ *Co-operative News*, 23 May 1874, cited in Redfern, *Story of the CWS*, p. 95.

⁷⁴ Redfern, *Story of the CWS*, pp. 95-96.

The establishment of the IAOS in 1894 represented a landmark in relations between Irish and British co-operators. Its emergence challenged CWS interests in Ireland and offered an alternative paradigm for co-operative development. Plunkett described the IAOS's focus upon the producer as one of 'the newer tendencies in full work in this outpost of the co-operative world.'⁷⁵ It certainly represented one of the most prominent international producer co-operative movements in the early twentieth century. The IAOS capitalised upon the opportunity presented by the invention of creamery separators and sought to re-make the Irish farmer as someone that utilised new agrarian technology. The CWS acquiesced in the supply of homemade butter that dominated Irish butter production in the late nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the modernisation of dairying and the early success of the IAOS meant the CWS assumed an enthusiasm for the creamery project, recognising a potential for profit-making. By 1900, the CWS and IAOS were engaged in aggressive competition to organise the dairy industry along different lines.

The Co-operative Congress, the conference of all co-operative movements in the British Isles, endorsed the decision of the CWS to establish its own creameries in Ireland. This decision angered the IAOS who withdrew their representatives from the Irish branch of the Co-operative Union, and ended Irish representation at the Congress. Plunkett argued the actions of the Co-operative Congress forced the Irish movement into a position of 'co-operative Home Rule.'⁷⁶ From this point onwards, Irish co-operators retreated from a formal pan-movement alliance with British co-operators and focused more specifically on national development. Anderson described the resultant economic competition that occurred in the south-western

⁷⁵ Anderson, 'Agricultural Co-operation', p. 232.

⁷⁶ Anderson, 'Agricultural Co-operation', p. 232.

Ireland as ‘Civil War.’⁷⁷ To dairy farmers, the CWS operated Irish creameries along similar lines to other privately operated creameries – that of an atomised supplier with a capitalist. Critics held that the CWS encouraged a culture of dependency amongst Irish dairy farmers who relied upon milk payments from a CWS creamery committee, which they could not hold to account. This stood in stark contrast to farmers who supplied IAOS creameries. These farmers also owned the creamery and shared in any profits.⁷⁸ The IAOS aimed to safeguard its position as the most important instrument of co-operation in Ireland through the maintenance of a popular appeal capable of countering the huge resources at the disposal of the CWS. The IAOS utilised one of its most potent tools – rhetoric. The agricultural co-operative movement claimed to work for the national interest. The fact that the CWS originated from Manchester made it less popular in a period of increased nationalistic sentiment. Described by one contemporary as, ‘avowedly non-political’, the IAOS employed the discursive tools of Irish nationalism to oust its competition.⁷⁹

South-western Ireland emerged as the centre of co-operative controversy in the early twentieth century. Five of the CWS’s six pre-1874 trade depots were located in the south-western province of Munster, with the depot in Armagh the exception. With CWS resources concentrated in Munster, the conflict over creameries occurred in that province’s dairying districts. The CWS Annual for 1900 reported with satisfaction that:

The Wholesale has now 35 creameries working, with 28 auxiliaries, chiefly in the south-western counties, and has been very successful in the attempt at butter-

⁷⁷ Anderson, *With Horace Plunkett*, pp.76-85.

⁷⁸ Louis PF Smith, *The Evolution of Agricultural Co-operation*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1961), p.195.

⁷⁹ Stephen Gwynn, *The History of Ireland* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1923), p. 492.

making. No expense was spared that the creameries might compete successfully with the well-equipped Danish creameries.⁸⁰

The same report made no mention of the presence of IAOS creameries, a more proximate competitor than the Danish creameries.

In County Kerry, competition over the milk supply proved fierce with local newspapers noting the conflict. The struggle around Kerry's dairying sector proved particularly aggressive due to extra competition from a robust private creamery sector. However, the IAOS perceived of the CWS creameries as the most immediate threat due to their description as co-operative enterprises. The IAOS organiser, Charles Riddall, found that the majority of his workload for the 1900s consisted of nullifying the threat posed to the Irish movement's influence in the dairying heartlands. The foray into creamery ownership by the CWS reached its zenith in 1906 and the rivalry between the two movements became critical. In total, the CWS possessed thirty-eight Irish creameries and forty-seven auxiliaries (milk collection depots, which sent the local supply to larger, better equipped central creameries), nearly all these located in the south-west. Of these, nine central creameries operated in Kerry.⁸¹ Meanwhile, the number of IAOS creameries continued to climb in the first decade of the twentieth century as they attempted to put the squeeze on the CWS. In 1900, only five creameries aligned to the Irish movement operated in County Kerry. By 1912, this number stood at 14 (see table 1.1). This seemed small when compared to the number of co-operative creameries in other counties. However, the strength in Kerry resided in its ability to draw large memberships. Kerry possessed the highest number of member-owners per society than any other

⁸⁰ Co-operative Wholesale Society Limited, *Annual 1900* (Manchester: The Co-operative Wholesale Society Limited, 1900), p. 16.

⁸¹ Co-operative Wholesale Societies Limited, *Annual 1906* (Manchester: The Co-operative Wholesale Society Limited, 1906), p. 3.

co-operative creamery in Munster. In Kerry, the average number of members per society stood at 125, whilst the provincial average was 71. The co-operative organisation that dominated the County's dairy sector ensured a substantial supply of butter for market.

Table 1.1: Provincial statistics for IAOS creameries (IAOS, *Annual Report, 1913*)

| Province and County | No. of IAOS Creameries | No. of Shareholders on 31 December 1912 | Lbs. of Butter made |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|--|----------------------------|
| Clare | 1 | 99 | 74,306 |
| Cork | 21 | 876 | 1,589,479 |
| <i>Kerry</i> | <i>14</i> | <i>1,749</i> | <i>2,363,799</i> |
| Limerick | 55 | 3,258 | 9,591,092 |
| Tipperary | 51 | 4,150 | 6,719,417 |
| Waterford | 2 | 128 | 151,576 |
| MUNSTER | 144 | 10,260 | 20,489,669 |

Thomas Tweddell, the Vice-President of the CWS delivered a paper entitled 'Co-operation of Consumers' to a meeting of the British Association in August 1907. Tweddell argued that the organisation of consumers represented the most beneficial form of co-operative organisation. Despite initially stating that time prevented him from concentrating upon co-operative production, Tweddell broke away from his putative subject to pass comment upon the Irish movement. The work of the CWS in pursuit of the consumers' interest, represented 'Robert Owen's ideal, viz., the abolition of profit in all the wide ramifications of trade.' Tweddell considered it a misfortune therefore that instead of concentrating upon this work, their movement, 'should have spent so much of its time and energy in contending and disputing over it instead, but so it has been; this subject has been the Irish question of the Co-

operative movement – insoluble, interminable.’⁸² The ‘interminable’ aspect of this conflict emanated from the IAOS’s implicit rejection of the consumer focused economics and the possibility of *détente* between the Irish and British movements grew evermore distant. The ‘Irish Question’ therefore possessed specific connotations for the continuance of co-operative organisation – that of whether the producer or consumer should be the prioritised subject.

Knocknagoshel, a village just outside Tralee, County Kerry’s largest town, provided a practical example of the toxicity that characterised the relationship between the two organisations. In 1907, the IAOS applied pressure upon the CWS to relinquish control of their creamery there to local farmers, in accordance with previous claims to relinquish ownership if local farmers demonstrated an appetite to operate these businesses.⁸³ According to *The Irish Homestead*, the farmers of Knocknagoshel possessed enough cross-community support to establish their own producer-oriented co-operative society, and lobbied the CWS to sell them the local creamery premises. However, the CWS remained reticent and demonstrated no inclination to relinquish control. AE criticised the refusal to sell and branded the CWS as an organisation that, ‘only took up the creamery business in Ireland because of the backward state of civilisation’. He acidly argued that conditions in Kerry showed that ‘civilisation is not in such a backward state... and that the creamery might safely be sold to the local farmers without their lapsing back into barbarism.’ AE understood the CWS’s modernisation programme as one defined in opposition to the rural project undertaken by the IAOS. In this way, AE articulated the idea that a

⁸² Co-operative Wholesale Society Limited, *Annual 1908* (Manchester: The Co-operative Wholesale Society Limited, 1908), p. 140.

⁸³ Co-operative Wholesale Society, *Report and Balance Sheet for Half Year Ending June 1903* (Manchester: Co-operative Union, 1903) .

sophisticated, dynamic social arrangement could as easily be rooted in the countryside as in the city. Furthermore, the dispute at Knocknagoshel allowed AE to define the CWS as an usurious presence in Ireland: ‘Their game – let us put it plainly – has been in Ireland the game played by any gombeen trader, who lets his customers have credit so that they may remain on his books’. By likening the CWS to traditional enemies of farmers – private interests, publicans and ‘gombeen’ men – and combining this with their status as an exploiter of Irish producers, the IAOS crafted a powerful discourse that tapped into popular sentiment and sought to undermine the popular appeal of the CWS. Furthermore, AE located his attack within a language of nationalism, accusing the CWS of pursuing the ‘bondage’ of Irish farmers so that ‘the English working man may get cheaper butter at our expense.’⁸⁴ This binary of producer and consumer helped co-operators define their early twentieth century Irish subject as something delineated from the (English) consumer.

IAOS organisers utilised similar arguments to extend their movement’s appeal at a local level. The tension between the IAOS and CWS, evident in 1907, remained as prominent almost two years later. In 1907, local farmers had lobbied the Rural District Council to promote a co-operative bacon-curing plant in the town in order ‘to divert some of the big profits of the Bacon trade here from three or four large firms, into the hands of the producers – the farmers and labourers – and to give employment.’⁸⁵ In the end, the plant was never founded due to opposition and in

⁸⁴ ‘Why the Traders Leave the CWS Alone’, *Irish Homestead*, 19 January 1907.

⁸⁵ Kerry Local History Archive (KLHA), Minute Book of Listowel District, Rural District Council, ‘Proposed Co-operative Bacon Curing Plant’, 31 October 1907.

spite of support given by Horace Plunkett.⁸⁶ In December 1908, Charles Riddall arrived in Listowel to persuade locals of the benefits of organising their own creamery along IAOS-oriented lines. The local newspaper recorded Riddall's speech to the farmers around Listowel, which made a scathing attack upon the CWS:

This English Co-operative Society was... thoroughly co-operative in England, but in Ireland it stood on the very same level as a proprietary creamery. In Knocknagoshel, one of the principle points to be got over in regard to the people's connection with the English concern was the fact that the farmers... were tied hand and foot in the English institution, and it then became the task of farmers in that locality to liberate themselves from the hands of those English persons who came over to Ireland some twenty years ago posing... in many cases as philanthropists, but who had proved to be in many cases the exact opposite.⁸⁷

This verbal assault sounded the decline of the CWS's efforts to organise Irish dairying. In January 1909, the CWS ceded the co-operative territory around creameries to the IAOS, having shared 'the common experience of those Englishmen who seek to pave the bogs of Ireland with good intentions.'⁸⁸ By the end of that decade, the CWS ceased establishing creameries and sold off most of its concerns to local farmers or creamery proprietors retaining only three creameries and six auxiliaries.⁸⁹ In Knocknagoshel, farmers assumed control of the local creamery premises. Riddall argued that the prosperity of Irish farmers relied upon their 'liberation' from an English institution, thereby linking the IAOS and co-operative farmers in Kerry to larger processes of social change and intensified nationalism that underpinned this period. The outcome of this conflict held important consequences for the continued development of co-operative organisation in Ireland. The IAOS became increasingly bound up in notions of national development. The idealisation

⁸⁶ 'The Co-operative Movement in North Kerry: The Proposed Bacon Factory', *Kerry Sentinel*, 22 February 1908.

⁸⁷ 'Proposed Co-operative Creamery for Listowel', *Kerry Sentinel*, 2 December 1908.

⁸⁸ Redfern, *Story of the CWS*, p.303.

⁸⁹ Patrick Bolger, *The Irish Co-operative Movement: Its History and Development* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1977), p.198.

of the Irish producer as opposed to the British consumer affected not only the development of the Irish co-operative movement, but the entire socio-economic development of Ireland.

Conclusion

The IAOS was fifteen years old by December 1909, and AE's speech at that year's annual conference served as a rallying call to the movement. The IAOS's apparent loss of purpose in 1909 contrasted with its origins in the 1890s. Palpable enthusiasm for, and attraction to, the co-operative model amongst farmers meant that the co-operative movement established itself as an embedded fixture within the rural economy. Five years after the establishment of the IAOS, Plunkett addressed its annual conference, satisfied that 40,000 farmers, 'accepted the self-help doctrine we have preached'.⁹⁰ By 1914, this figure surpassed 100,000 members.⁹¹ AE's 1909 address indicated a wider disquiet amongst the ranks of co-operators, but the IAOS maintained an extraordinary workload. The major change prompting such anxiety related to the IAOS's separation from the DATI. Despite this, the IAOS continued to work through its network of co-operative societies to engineer improvements amongst the farming population. By creating new important roles in the guise of the co-operative expert, the movement re-cast rural social relations. Through the organiser and manager, the activities of dairy farmers became increasingly organised and policed, whilst the leadership in Dublin possessed a sophisticated insight into social dynamics of the countryside.

AE's speech reflected a larger anxiety, that of political marginalisation. By questioning the relevance of co-operation during a time of increased political

⁹⁰ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1899*, p. 7.

⁹¹ IAOS, *Annual Report 1914*, p. 7; Arthur Lynch, *Ireland: Vital Hour* (London: S. Paul, 1915), p. 366.

partisanship, AE wished to reassert the co-operative movement's ideological mission. The movement continued to obsess over the creation of improved co-operative beings by seeking to influence their members' behaviour. In pursuit of the 'Co-operative Commonwealth', activists wanted a situation whereby all social and economic institutions would be co-operatives. All economic production and distribution would take place through co-operative concerns, directing such processes as dairy production, banking, and consumption. All this combined, pointed to a vision of a united Ireland – one where unity equated to an extensive and all-enveloping community of economic and social interest. Ultimately, AE wanted the aim of the movement to be:

The creation of a nobler social order in Ireland than we have had in the past...
[and that this would] make us feel that our movement occupies no mean place
amongst those movements which are trying to regenerate our land.⁹²

This utopian vision emphasised the necessity for co-operators to keep faith in their movement, despite an unstable political context. The following chapters examine how the co-operative movement attempted to re-assert its *raison d'être* and assess how successfully it embedded the co-operative project within an emergent nation-state.

⁹² IAOS, *Annual Report, 1909*, p. 46.

Chapter 2: Ourselves Alone, 1907-1918

From Horace Plunkett's departure from the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (DATI) until the end of the First World War, the Irish co-operative movement experienced a series of challenges that threatened its ability to instigate a programme for rural improvement. The Irish Agricultural Organisation Society (IAOS) contended with hostile agricultural policymakers, attacks from nationalist politicians, and the problems associated with outfitting farmers for the demands of a wartime economy. Reflecting upon this tumultuous period, the IAOS assessed its position:

The stability of the movement for which the IAOS stands has been subjected to a crucial test during the last five years. Its steady growth and remarkably rapid development in new directions – some of a far more ambitious character than any previously undertaken by the organised farmers – afford yet another proof of the superiority of co-operative organisation under conditions of stress. The societies have not only held together, but have also improved their buildings and equipment as well as their business methods, and have increased their output to an extent greater than during any other period.¹

The IAOS saw its organisation act as a centre of stability for tens of thousands of members, as the country emerged from the convulsive effects of a politically divisive and socially unstable period. It proved itself a resilient social force, and one that grew in numerical strength during a war that swept aside traditional political fixtures within the country, including the mainstream voice of Irish nationalism, the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP).

As the co-operative movement moved into the second decade of the twentieth century, prospects seemed mixed. In its favour, the IAOS succeeded in establishing the co-operative society as a familiar institution throughout the countryside. In particular, the diffusion of creamery societies placed modern dairying technology

¹ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1919*, p. 5.

within the reach of farmers. The business model promoted by co-operative organisers placed control of the local means of dairy production under ownership of farmers. Therefore the IAOS represented the views of a significant proportion of agricultural producers and conceived of the Irish economy as a system that prioritised these interests. The IAOS further demonstrated its strength through its rivalry with the Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS). This decade-long struggle damaged the relationship between the two co-operative organisations, but by the 1910s, the IAOS was the pre-eminent co-operative force in Ireland.

Yet the decade also heralded a series of problems. The immediate challenge that beset the IAOS concerned its relationship with the DATI. The change in departmental leadership meant a reorientation in Irish agricultural policy. This led to the drastic reduction of the IAOS's involvement in delivering departmental objectives in agricultural development. The IAOS accused the DATI of promoting the interests of traders over farmers. The official governmental vision for rural development throughout this decade precluded the utilisation of the co-operative movement as an instrument of government. In peacetime, the two institutions sat uncomfortably alongside one another. Wartime compounded this relationship and contributed to the greater marginalisation of the co-operative movement by official governmental channels.

The outbreak of the First World War threatened prevailing political circumstances in Britain and Ireland. Fran Brearton has argued that this war exerted a different impact upon Ireland than in England. In England, the war symbolised a break with the past and the destruction of pre-war institutions, but in Ireland the war 'played a part in a history whose main themes and "institutions" existed long before

the Great War and continued long after it was over.’² The wartime progress of the IAOS supports this claim. The co-operative movement provided important assistance to farmers that enabled them to meet the demands made upon production during wartime through its co-ordination of expertise and resources. Co-operators helped to ensure the continued output of foodstuffs and that members shared the material rewards. Despite this, it received no appreciation from the DATI. One contemporary noted in 1917 that, ‘the IAOS has been swallowed up in the vortex of war and is playing its important part in comparative obscurity.’³ This obscurity defined its relationship with the state, but its work did not go unheeded by those who relied upon the industry of IAOS staff.

Wartime domestic experience carried important implications for the co-operative movement’s relationship with the state. Events forced co-operators to consider what such an ideal relationship for a large voluntary organisation constituted. This unresolved issue carried extra urgency by 1918, as the cessation of international conflict carried the promise of a settlement to the ‘Irish Question’. Many anticipated some degree of political autonomy after the war. In June 1918, AE produced an article for a series published in *Studies*, on the theme of ‘Four Years of Irish Economics’. AE warned readers that ‘Irishmen are threatened not only by the submarines which lie around their coasts, but by the action of the economic machinery which has grown up in their country’.⁴ Economic arrangements imposed during the war dismayed AE, but accentuated the need to assert co-operative principles as the IAOS looked to exert influence in the next decade. The

² Fran Brearton, *The Great War in Irish Poetry: WB Yeats to Michael Longley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 7.

³ Lionel Smith-Gordon, ‘Agricultural Organisation in Ireland’, *Economic Journal*, 27.107 (1917), 355-363 (p.355).

⁴ George Russell (AE), ‘The Self-Supporting Community’, *Studies*, 7.26 (1918), 301-306 (p. 301).

deterioration in a relationship with those responsible for agricultural policy worried the IAOS. This led to an articulation of increased dissatisfaction with the British state as it operated in Ireland.

This chapter analyses the importance of the co-operative movement during a period described by one contemporary as a time when ‘events crowd upon events’.⁵ The occurrence of significant historical episodes in Ireland carried grave political consequences which threatened to overwhelm the voice of co-operators. The IAOS ensured that it remained relevant and popular amongst its growing membership. The first section of the chapter examines the co-operative movement in the context of its breakdown in relations with the DATI. It contrasts the movement’s frustrated attempts to secure important resources at a national level, such as funding and expertise, with the vibrancy of a movement still embedding co-operative institutions at the level of the community. As AE held it, ‘local co-operation leads to national co-operation’.⁶ The movement’s ability to influence the national agenda depended upon the foundations it laid throughout rural Ireland.

The second section of the chapter focuses upon the movement’s evolution in thought and practice during 1914-1918. The outbreak of the First World War in August 1914 mobilised many Irish men, nationalist and unionist, who enlisted in the British army. According to DG Boyce, the war formed ‘a crucial episode in the history of modern Ireland’, one which offered ‘new possibilities for the political development of Ireland.’ John Redmond, leader of the IPP, saw the war as a way to secure Home Rule for Ireland, whilst Ulster Unionists under Edward Carson

⁵ HAL Fisher, ‘Editor’s Preface’, *Ireland*, by Stephen Gwynn (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1924), pp. 5-8 (p. 5).

⁶ AE, *The National Being: Some Thoughts on an Irish Polity* (Dublin: Maunsel and Co., 1916), p. 26.

believed that a show of loyalty to the British Empire would strengthen their political hand in any constitutional debate.⁷ However, alongside the political implications of war for Ireland, the economy became a site of experimentation and contestation. Wartime conditions placed pressure upon policymakers to intervene in the Irish economy. In particular, these policymakers prioritised a policing of agricultural activity in order to ensure a satisfactory food supply. Consequently, wartime conditions ‘gave the Irish producer very nearly a monopoly of the market in a period of rapidly rising prices’.⁸ The ability of the IAOS to promote its members’ interests related to its ability to remain a socially relevant force. How the co-operative movement acquitted its duties during this time of emergency mattered.

The domestic political context changed dramatically. The outbreak of a nationalist rebellion in Dublin during Easter 1916 shifted the tectonics of the ‘Irish Question’. Members of the secretive underground organisation, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, alongside the socialist Irish Citizen’s Army, directed a city-wide armed uprising against British rule. On 25 April 1916, its leaders announced the existence of an independent Irish Republic and the very public arrival of a nationalist opinion much advanced from the familiar demands for Home Rule. Suppressed within a week, and its leaders executed, the legacy of the Easter Rising exerted a radical change in mainstream nationalist opinion. FSL Lyons famously described the Rising’s principal political achievement as ‘the point of departure... for all subsequent Irish history.’⁹ The Rising undermined the constitutional nationalists who had dominated Irish politics. Widespread revulsion at the execution of the rebellion’s

⁷ DG Boyce, “‘That Party Politics Should Divide our Tents’”: Nationalism, Unionism and the First World War’, *Ireland and the Great War: “A War to Unite us all”?* ed. by Adrian Gregory and Senia Paseta (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 190-216 (pp. 192-3).

⁸ James Meenan, *The Irish Economy Since 1922* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002), p. 302.

⁹ FSL Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine* (London: Fontana Press, 1975), p. 369.

leaders ‘told against the Irish Parliamentary Party’ as they were ‘wiped out’ in the 1918 General Election.¹⁰ Jonathan Githens-Mazer argues that these events unleashed ‘support for radical nationalism, and [along with] the resultant rise of Sinn Féin, served to permanently close the door on a moderate and constitutional solution to Irish demands as imagined prior to the Rising.’¹¹ However, everyday experience remained stable for many living in rural communities, challenging perceptions of 1916 as a moment of sudden and radical change. The implications of the outbreak of revolutionary activity took time to filter down to the rural community. Farmers remained concerned that they continued to produce items such as butter, milk and livestock, and aimed to sell these goods at the best price upon the market. As one of the largest actors in this business, the IAOS remained an institution in demand amongst its members. The IAOS’s work amidst moments of political change implied an element of continuity within the state of Ireland.

Throughout this period, the IAOS surreptitiously exerted influence upon what Roy Foster termed the ‘new nationalism’, which asserted itself with greater confidence throughout the early twentieth century.¹² The chapter concludes with an assessment of the co-operative movement’s changed position with regard to the new hegemonic nationalist project that emerged across this period. As such, this chapter challenges the still-prevalent disparaging historical judgements of JJ Byrne and FSL Lyons regarding the political contribution made by the co-operative movement. Byrne argued that, outside of a reorganisation of dairying, co-operation ‘made little

¹⁰ Conor Cruise O’Brien, *Memoir: My Life and Themes* (London: Profile Books, 1999), pp. 19-20.

¹¹ Jonathan Githens-Mazer, *Myths and Memories of the Easter Rising: Cultural and Political Nationalism in Ireland* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006), p. 159.

¹² RF Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* (London: Penguin: 1988), pp. 431-493.

impact on the economic or social life of the country.’¹³ Lyons acquiesced in this viewpoint, arguing further that Horace Plunkett made a fundamental mistake when he stated that ‘politics had become less urgent and vital for Irishmen than economics.’ Rather, Lyons characterised the early twentieth century as a time of political ‘ferment’ from which came ‘a mood and temper sharply inimical to the well-meant efforts of Protestant landlords to lead their fellow-countrymen by co-operative paths to quiet pastures.’¹⁴ By analysing the role of the co-operative movement in the midst of political ferment, this chapter argues that the focus upon economics translated into valuable political capital. The repeated assertion of a co-operative political economy during the years preceding independence found support amongst radical nationalists. Both the co-operative movement and these new nationalists shared an outsider status and opposition to the state system that operated before 1918. Through an examination of the movement’s role in Irish society in this period, the chapter argues, that by the end of the First World War, it looked set to become an unlikely beneficiary of new political circumstances.

The Irish Co-operative Movement Before the First World War, 1907-1914

The Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction After Plunkett

Plunkett’s removal from the leadership of the DATI provoked consternation amongst local co-operative societies. The committee of the Abbeydorney Co-operative Society, County Kerry, published a resolution that emphasised the importance of the connection between the movement and the DATI:

That in a country so educationally backward as Ireland, the spontaneous growth of self-help cannot be expected as yet; we therefore consider that it is the duty of

¹³ JJ Byrne, ‘AE and Sir Horace Plunkett’, *The Shaping of Modern Ireland*, ed. by Conor Cruise O’Brien (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), pp. 152-163 (p. 162).

¹⁴ Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine*, p. 216.

the Department of Agriculture to provide the means for extending the co-operative principle among farmers, it having proved to be the most effective form of practical education.¹⁵

Up until 1907, the farmers were the main beneficiaries of a DATI and IAOS collaboration that taught farmers new farming techniques. For committees of co-operative societies, one troubling implication of the breakdown in the relationship between the IAOS and the DATI meant that co-operators would need to rely upon their own resources.

This state of affairs indicated that attempts to create a rural, counter-hegemonic project around the IAOS had stalled in 1907 with the replacement of Plunkett by TW Russell as Vice-President of the DATI.¹⁶ Over the next eleven years Russell directed DATI policy, exerting considerable influence in agrarian affairs across a period that encompassed the shift to a wartime economy. Russell's appointment created immediate friction between the IAOS and DATI, with long-term implications for Irish agricultural development. A Liberal Unionist MP from Tyrone, Russell shared nationalist politicians' resentment towards the co-operative movement's interference in agrarian affairs. The IPP acquiesced in the appointment of this unionist as the head of the only autonomous Irish government department. Russell stressed that, under his leadership, 'there would be no partnership between the IAOS and the Department.'¹⁷ *The Times* unfavourably described Russell in 1913 as someone who 'fought the [Irish Agricultural Organisation] Society with

¹⁵ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1906*, p. 85.

¹⁶ Thomas Wallace Russell (1841-1920), Liberal Unionist MP who supported tenant farmers' rights. With the passage of the Wyndham Land Act in 1903 and John Redmond's pro-imperialist leadership of the IPP, Russell's opposition to Home Rule softened. He accepted the post of Vice-President of the DATI in 1907, a post he held until 1918. James Loughlin, 'Russell, Sir Thomas Wallace', in *Dictionary of Irish Biography: From Earliest Times to the Year 2002, Volume 8*, ed. by James McGuire and James Quinn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 665-666 (p. 665-666). On Russell's early career, see Loughlin, 'TW Russell, the Tenant Farmer Interest and Progressive Unionism in Ulster, 1886-1900', *Eire-Ireland*, 25.1 (1990), 44-63.

¹⁷ Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine*, p. 215.

extraordinary bitterness and has shown much perverted ingenuity in opposing its claims and crippling its work.’¹⁸

TW Russell proved himself a capable leader of the DATI, but refused to countenance any alliance with co-operators. Nicolas Whyte argues that he proved a popular political choice as he possessed the support of the Liberal government and Irish nationalists. Russell’s decade in office produced notable achievements. He directed the DATI to develop fisheries and carry out research and experimentation in forestry. Under his leadership, the DATI also counteracted a widespread outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in 1912.¹⁹ Tensions between the DATI and IAOS occupied Russell’s period in office and created practical problems for rural development. The two largest agencies for agrarian development expended their resources promoting incompatible programmes. The DATI opposed the intervention of the co-operative movement in agrarian affairs and reduced the IAOS’s access to state resources.²⁰ Russell circumvented the co-operative movement’s expertise wherever possible, and sought to utilise that of alternative groups, such as trader organisations. Russell embarked upon a policy of ‘non-controversial co-operation’, under the auspices of which he withdrew the state subsidy to the IAOS. The ‘non-controversial’ nature referred to the official aim that co-operative societies continue to trade only if they managed to refrain from harming the interests of local independent and private

¹⁸ ‘The Irish Co-operative Grant’, *The Times*, 22 March 1913.

¹⁹ Nicolas Whyte, *Science, Colonialism and Ireland* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1999), pp. 97-98.

²⁰ For more on Plunkett’s resignation and the political machinations which saw him ousted from office, see Trevor West, *Horace Plunkett, Co-operation and Politics* (Gerrards Cross, Bucks.: Colin Smythe, 1986), pp. 76-86.

operators.²¹ This measure undermined existent co-operative organisation in the rural economy.

‘Non-controversial co-operation’ sought to roll back the co-operative sector. A major part of the DATI’s brief resided in its function to collect and collate agricultural statistics. The professional collection of agricultural statistics commenced in 1847 and provided a scientific audit of the rural economy.²² This duty fell upon the newly established DATI in 1900. The DATI collected its own information, which provided a detailed analysis and breakdown of general agricultural activity. For instance, DATI annual reports provided information about the proportion of land devoted to growing particular crops, the average potato production per acre, and related aspects of the agrarian economy, such as beekeeping.²³ Alongside this, the IAOS produced its own audit of the movement, which provided figures for the output of all their societies, such as creameries and credit societies. These were published in annual IAOS reports and provided a scientific reading of the agricultural activity conducted around its network of societies, including turnover and membership figures for each society.²⁴ As such, when read together, the official view of Irish agricultural activity grew more comprehensive by the start of the twentieth century. Under Plunkett’s stewardship, the audit work of the IAOS and the DATI complemented each other as they covered two different facets of agricultural activity in detail.

²¹ RA Anderson, *With Horace Plunkett in Ireland* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1935), p. 123; Liam Kennedy, ‘Farmers, Traders and Agricultural Politics in Pre-Independence Ireland’, in *Irish Peasants: Violence and Political Unrest, 1780-1914*, ed. by James S Donnelly and Samuel Clark (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), pp. 339-373 (pp. 350-3).

²² Saorstát Éireann, *Agricultural Statistics, 1847-1926: Reports and Tables* (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 1928).

²³ House of Commons Parliamentary Papers (hereafter HCPP), [Cd. 340], *Agricultural Statistics, Ireland* (1900).

²⁴ See IAOS, *Annual Reports*.

This state of affairs ended upon the ascension of Russell to the leadership. After 1907, the DATI ignored the work of the co-operative movement and treated advice offered by the IAOS as an unwelcome intervention. These reports provide an illuminating insight into the thinking that informed official decisions taken by the DATI. The replacement of Plunkett precipitated a changed approach to agricultural challenges. Before 1907, DATI reports received significant input from co-operative experts. For example, a 1903 report into the dairy industry investigated the problem of adulteration of Irish butter and impediments to a higher-quality product. Plunkett chaired the investigative committee, which also included Robert Anderson. Other members included representatives from the Cork Butter Market, chemists, public health officials and politicians, providing a range of views.²⁵

Under Russell, the DATI again investigated the dairy industry in 1910, and drew upon a similar diversity of views, with one notable exception. This investigation focused upon the various trade descriptions that marked out different grades of Irish butter sold within the United Kingdom. The report emphasised the differentiated relationship between the state and the voluntary sector, and the investigating committee included no representative from the IAOS.²⁶ The report drew upon evidence supplied by Anderson, but this time his expertise received less attention. Anderson's evidence reflected his long experience at the forefront of the dairy industry, employed by the largest organisation at work in the field of butter production. He argued that creamery butter needed regulation, as lower quality-butter made within households continued to be fraudulently sold as creamery produce. The official description of 'creamery butter remained too loosely defined.'

²⁵ HCPP, [Cd. 1749], *Committee on Butter Regulations, Final Report* (1903), p. 3.

²⁶ HCPP, [Cd. 5092], *Report of the Departmental Committee on the Irish Butter Industry* (1910), unpaginated minute appointing the committee.

Anderson suggested three clear proposals that the DATI could implement to improve the international reputation of Irish butter, which required the co-operation of the IAOS as the largest corporate body in the industry. These measures advised that the educational aspect of Departmental activity needed to encourage all-year dairying, introduce testing of cows to increase the quality of cattle stocks, and introduce the ‘formation of an “Irish Co-operative Creamery Control”’ to establish and maintain a high level of excellence in butter production.²⁷ He ended his abstract of evidence on the hopeful note that he felt:

confident that the Department, so far from placing any obstacles in their way, will cheerfully and cordially co-operate with the co-operative creameries and with the IAOS in supplementing and seconding any useful and practical effort which may result from the greater manifestation of the spirit of self-reliance and self-help.²⁸

The final report ignored Anderson’s evidence. In a summary description of the people and organisations from which the committee received input, the co-operative movement appeared as an afterthought:

Creamery proprietors and managers, owners of butter factories, merchants of Belfast, Dublin, and Limerick, farmers who make butter on their own farms, delegates of the Cork Butter Market trustees, of the Irish Butter Trade Association, of the Irish Creamery Managers’ Association, and of the Irish Creameries Protection Society. We have also received evidence on the subjects of our inquiry from the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society.²⁹

This list indicated the low priority accorded to the IAOS. The only substantial mention made of the co-operative movement criticised its work, describing co-operative societies as:

Extremely lax in the discharge of their duties. They do not take a sufficiently keen interest in such important matters as costs of production, cleanliness of the

²⁷ HCPP, [Cd. 5093], *Departmental Committee on the Irish Butter Industry, Minutes of Evidence, Appendices and Index* (1910), p. 475.

²⁸ HCPP, [Cd. 5093], *Departmental Committee*, p. 477.

²⁹ HCPP, [Cd. 5092], *Report of the Departmental Committee*, p. 2.

milk supply, prices realised for their produce, and other conditions upon which the success or failure of the creamery depends.³⁰

Reference to the role played by the co-operative movement in the general improvement of the dairy industry since the 1890s remained absent. This set the tone of relations between the two agricultural institutions, one official and the other voluntary. With TW Russell in control of the DATI, the IAOS looked set to remain in the political wilderness.

A Department for Traders

From 1907 to 1918 the DATI embarked upon the implementation of a new type of political economy, one which rolled back the influence of co-operative ideas. The co-operative movement retained little influence within the state's institution for agricultural development. This new official line included no room for co-operative organisation. TW Russell carried no personal liking for his predecessor and, in an attempt to differentiate the DATI under his stewardship, sided with the trading classes when it came to their grievances with the co-operative movement. Robert Anderson described Russell as an individual who 'hated the IAOS because his trader and political allies feared it.'³¹ In his inaugural address to the DATI, Russell mentioned that he had received a deputation from a delegation of traders who wanted him to end the subsidy to the IAOS. Russell accepted the traders' claims that state money founded co-operative shops to compete with their businesses, and argued that the subsidy to the IAOS needed to cease.³²

Anderson's accusation that the DATI protected the interests of traders reflected reality. For example, the DATI protected traders and shopkeepers who sold agricultural inputs such as seeds and manures from public criticism. Farmers

³⁰ HCPP [Cd. 5092], *Report of the Departmental Committee*, p. 19.

³¹ Anderson, *With Horace Plunkett*, p. 176.

³² Kennedy, 'Farmers, Traders and Agricultural Politics', pp. 351-352.

struggled to procure high-quality agricultural inputs, such as seeds for crops and grass in the early twentieth century. These formed a major component of agricultural purchases and established a source of income for many farmers. In 1912, a DATI investigation into the sale of seeds uncovered that much of the seed sold returned a suspiciously low yield of crops. Several times the DATI met with those private firms who dominated the supply chain and asked them to improve their business practices, but very little change occurred. Later seed testing showed that little change had been instigated.³³

In County Kerry, local farmers proved vulnerable to sharp sales practices. The county's major market town, Tralee, acted as a distribution centre of agricultural inputs for surrounding districts. According to the DATI report, a random sample of seed sold to farmers in the town possessed a germination rate of 45%. The report cites the case of three farmers who bought seed for growing wheat. As a result of purchasing 'this very obviously inferior seed', the three farmers in question experienced the damaging effect of 'the total loss of their wheat crop.'³⁴ Farmers remained reliant upon these traders for their seed supply, but poor regulation meant that many of them ended up absorbing losses. When the DATI uncovered evidence of sharp practice amongst private traders supplying adulterated agricultural goods, it exerted little pressure upon guilty parties and never recommended an alternative way of carrying out this business.

The split from the DATI received a mixed reaction from those involved in the promotion of co-operation. The immediate aftermath left Plunkett distressed at

³³HCPP, [Cd. 7846], *The Fertilisers and Feeding Stuffs Act, 1906; The Weeds and Agricultural Seeds (Ireland) Act, 1909; The Bee Pest Prevention (Ireland) Act, 1908; and the Destructive Insects and Pests Acts, 1877 and 1907: Summary of Proceedings and Details of Operations Under Above Acts [Period 1907-1914]* (1915) pp. 37-42.

³⁴HCPP, [Cd. 7846], *The Fertilisers and Feeding Stuffs Act, 1906*, p. 51.

the disintegration of relations between the two organisations he had worked hard to establish. AE criticised nationalist MP, John Dillon, who continued to attack the IAOS at Westminster. AE accused Dillon of a ‘misrepresentation of facts’ when he spoke of Plunkett and the co-operative movement, and re-stated the economic case in favour of the IAOS in its work towards ‘the complete reorganisation of the industries of rural Ireland’. In particular, AE recorded his impatience with the focus of Dillon and others upon the constitutional aspect to the ‘Irish Question’ at the expense of social and economic issues. Instead, the IAOS broke away from this consensus and aimed at the social question concerned with:

Industrial Home Rule. Without organisation in this sense Mr Dillon might finally have got his Parliament in College Green and found rural Ireland economically controlled and enslaved by bodies like the English Wholesale Society.³⁵

According to this reading of the political context, the work of the IAOS, against trade bodies such as the CWS, contributed more to the liberty of the Irish farmer than any concentration upon strictly political institutions.

Certain key figures within the movement privately welcomed the separation of the IAOS and DATI. Robert Anderson and Father Thomas Finlay, the Secretary and Vice-President of the IAOS, viewed the cessation of the relationship as a positive development. Anderson held deep concerns about voluntary-state collaboration and ‘could see no good in a State-controlled IAOS which would be virtually an outside branch of the Department which subsidised it.’³⁶ At the first IAOS conference after Plunkett’s removal from the DATI, Finlay’s Vice-Presidential address elucidated his optimism for the movement. Finlay believed that the

³⁵ ‘Is Co-operation a Political Dodge?’, *Irish Homestead*, 4 May 1907.

³⁶ Anderson, *With Horace Plunkett*, p. 133.

combination of DATI and IAOS efforts to develop Irish agriculture had brought about a ‘paralysis’ amongst co-operators. The state subsidy encouraged the belief:

that the work in which [co-operative activists] were engaged had been taken up by the State, they considered themselves absolved from vigorous activity in prosecuting it, and that was specially the case in a movement which, by its nature, was to be promoted chiefly by individuals whom it benefitted. They were now returning to the condition in which they must rely entirely upon themselves. They might have to face difficulties, but for himself he looked forward with confidence to the future. (Applause.)

Finlay argued that the impasse with the DATI allowed for the proper organisation of the co-operative movement. The funding cut meant a restriction of the work of co-operative organisers, but a more dedicated movement should emerge, one ‘imbued with the proper spirit.’ Not all co-operators agreed with this assessment. HF Norman, an IAOS official and former editor of *The Irish Homestead*, disagreed with Finlay and argued that the relationship between the DATI and IAOS had proved extremely beneficial for the latter.³⁷ The issue of to what extent the IAOS should collaborate with government agencies recurred frequently throughout the lifespan of the movement. How the Co-operative Commonwealth might theoretically be implemented, and the extent of the state’s role in such a process, provided a longstanding source of debate.

In 1909, the DATI discontinued its grant to the IAOS, an action which stretched the financial resources of the latter. This loss of funding encouraged conservatism amongst organisers and led to prioritisation of certain branches of the movement. The financial connection between the co-operative movement and an Irish agricultural department only re-started following political independence.³⁸ The IAOS appealed for increased contributions from the societies to meet this shortfall.

³⁷ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1907*, pp. 55-6.

³⁸ Mary E Daly, *The First Department: A History of the Department of Agriculture*, (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 2002), p. 41.

However, the level of contributions failed to match expectations and led to reliance upon private donors.³⁹ Without this support, the IAOS remained vulnerable to collapse and its work ‘sadly hampered by lack of funds.’⁴⁰

The financial woes of the IAOS looked set to end when David Lloyd George, the Liberal Chancellor of the Exchequer, announced the controversial ‘People’s Budget’ in late 1909. This budget delivered a host of measures to fund new welfare reforms and included provisions to create a Development Commission. Established in May 1910, this body encouraged development of British resources via scientific approaches to agriculture, including the ‘promotion of co-operative marketing’. The emphasis of the Development Commission lay in ‘promoting the country’s rural and agricultural development’.⁴¹ Historical views on the effectiveness of the Development Commission vary. Bentley Brinkerhoff Gilbert regards its establishment as disappointing, due to its failure to encourage new, active initiatives in land development. Instead, the Commission cultivated institutional conservatism and reliance upon old established agencies.⁴² Robert Olby agrees that the government favoured the development of already existent centres of research and expertise through the Commission, and directed very little investment into the establishment of new centres. However, the Development Commission provided evidence of the state’s interest in funding scientific approaches to solve social and

³⁹ In 1910 the amount of funding raised stood at £4,708. Of this total, £2,417 came from individual subscriptions. The total amount raised from the societies, including special contributions, stood at £1,230. See IAOS, *Annual Report, 1912*, p.22

⁴⁰ ‘The Irish Co-operative Grant’, *The Times*, 22 March 1913. Also, IAOS, *Annual Report, 1911*, p. 22.

⁴¹ Bruce K Murray, *The People’s Budget 1909/1910: Lloyd George and Liberal Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 146.

⁴² Bentley Brinkerhoff Gilbert, ‘David Lloyd George: Land, the Budget, and Social Reform’, *American Historical Review*, 81.5 (1976), 1058-1066 (p. 1065).

economic impediments.⁴³ This institutional conservatism worked to the benefit of the IAOS, which possessed a strong pedigree in the field of rural development. However, both judgements are grounded in how the Development Commission operated in the United Kingdom except Ireland. The Development Commission functioned differently in Ireland as indicated by the experience of the IAOS.

The IAOS applied to the Development Commission in order to secure replacement funding. However, in this attempt, the devolution of agricultural powers to Ireland worked against the IAOS, a strong indicator of the DATI's lack of interest in development through co-operation. The IAOS and its sister organisations, the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society and the English Agricultural Organisation Society, applied for aid from the Development Commission.⁴⁴ The latter two received grants of £1,000 and £3,000 respectively. The Irish application proved more controversial. The application procedure meant that voluntary organisations applied for a grant through their closest relevant government department. In Ireland, this meant the DATI. The IAOS submitted a funding application for the Development Commission through the DATI in January 1911. Russell delayed the application. In November 1911, Russell reiterated his reasons for terminating the DATI grant to the IAOS and therefore why he did not endorse the application to the Development Commission. Firstly, he cited the controversial and political nature of the IAOS, which became publicly associated with a hostile attitude towards the IPP. Secondly, and more importantly, 'certain trading interests in this country naturally objected to

⁴³ Robert Olby, 'Social Imperialism and State Support for Agricultural Research in Edwardian Britain', *Annals of Science*, 48.6 (1991), 509-526.

⁴⁴ The IAOS inspired the establishment of the English Agricultural Organisation Society in 1900 and the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society in 1905. These two societies mirrored the structures and governance model established by the IAOS. John Morley, *British Agricultural Cooperatives* (London: Hutchinson Bentham, 1975), pp. 20-22, and Malcolm Sargent, *Agricultural Co-operation* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Gower, 1982), pp. 18-19.

state aid being accorded to the formation of societies that were intended to enter into competition with them in the exercise of their legitimate trading operations.⁴⁵

In a series of letters published in *The Times* in December 1911, Plunkett addressed what he termed a crisis in rural progress. Plunkett argued that Russell's actions threatened the co-operative movement's attempts to build 'a new social economy'.⁴⁶ AE echoed this argument in the *Irish Homestead* later that year. Whilst the IAOS's English counterpart received money applied for without difficulty, the IAOS struggled to survive. AE launched an appeal for donations with the hope that 'the organised farmers of Ireland will take note of the difference of treatment of the IAOS in Ireland and the AOS in England.'⁴⁷ In 1911, the IAOS temporarily withheld payment of wages to employees, who only received payment following a donation of £1,800 by Horace Plunkett.⁴⁸ Robert Anderson believed that, without Plunkett's generosity at this juncture, the IAOS would have disbanded whilst its application to the Development Commission lay unprocessed.⁴⁹ The practical situation placed the blueprint for a co-operative society in jeopardy.

Support for the IAOS came from an unexpected source. The Westminster government valued the work of a vibrant, voluntary sector, implementing projects of rural modernisation. The Irish Chief Secretary, Augustine Birrell, personally intervened and placed the case of the IAOS before the Cabinet in Westminster, and cited his disapproval of Russell's actions.⁵⁰ The Development Commission granted the IAOS an immediate sum of £2,000 in 1913 to be distributed through Birrell's

⁴⁵ Daly, *First Department*, p. 43.

⁴⁶ Horace Plunkett, *The Crisis in Irish Rural Progress: Being Three Letters Reprinted from The Times* (London: John Parkinson Bland, 1912), pp. 1-3.

⁴⁷ 'The Position of the IAOS', *Irish Homestead*, 2 September 1911.

⁴⁸ West, *Horace Plunkett*, p. 86.

⁴⁹ Anderson, *With Horace Plunkett*, p.175.

⁵⁰ Digby, *Horace Plunkett*, p. 146.

office. Subsequently, the Commission offered a generous annual grant of up to £4,000 per annum, on the basis of £1 for every £1 subscribed by members. This measure incentivised efforts to raise ample funds from the societies. The benefit to the IAOS became apparent. Morale improved on account of the grant as it provided financial security.

The grant's conditions introduced important limitations upon the IAOS's activities. The Commission banned the IAOS from creating co-operative shops. This narrowed the range that forms of co-operative organisation could take, and separated the junior retailing branch of the organisation from the larger, established productive branch. The link between co-operative societies and the Dublin-based IAOS was reformed. Previously, the IAOS offered assistance to all co-operative societies, but under new conditions 'contributory affiliation' became 'a condition of receiving advice and assistance from the Society.'⁵¹ Whilst this constrained various co-operative activities, the most politically important outcome of this decision lay in the Development Commission's decision to circumvent the authority of TW Russell. This undermined the political autonomy of the DATI and occurred whilst political tensions in Ireland grew evermore volatile.

The high regard in which central government held the IAOS, and the importance it placed upon its developmental role in Irish rural society, overrode the legitimate and fragile governmental apparatus in place. The Development Commission's intervention guaranteed the co-operative movement's continued

⁵¹ HCPP, [Cd. 6735], *Copy of Treasury Letter, dated 1st April, 1913, Respecting the Conditions on which a Grant will be made to the [Irish Agricultural Organisation] Society, from the Development Fund (1913).*

involvement in agrarian matters.⁵² *The Irish Homestead* welcomed the Commission's findings as a vindication of the co-operative movement's work, describing the financial aid as a measure that allowed it to 'carry on its agricultural programme in the future as in the past.'⁵³ Even whilst struggling on a tight budget, the IAOS maintained its work organising farmers. Their organisational efforts demanded the attention of foreign governments with an interest in agricultural development. In a submission to an American Commission investigating the state of agricultural co-operation in Europe, the IAOS asserted confidence in its efforts up to that date. It described its achievements by 1913 with satisfaction, and looked to the next phase of a co-operative revolution: 'The hardest part of it [their work] is done. The change of feeling in the country has been effected. Rural Ireland is ready to be completely organised'.⁵⁴ By the outbreak of the First World War, the co-operative movement still performed an important role in driving agricultural progress.

The IAOS Amongst the Societies, 1907-1914

Whilst the political figures at the elite end of the dispute between the DATI and the IAOS wrangled over finances, the work of the latter continued at a furious pace on a local level. The popularity of the co-operative business model continued to increase its appeal amongst the rural population, and membership continued to expand. At the point of the split with the DATI in 1907, 913 co-operative societies, with a total of 82,311 members, were affiliated to the IAOS. By the outbreak of the First World War, these figures had increased to 1,023 co-operative societies and membership figures reached 106,212 (See Table 2.1).

⁵² Patrick Bolger, *The Irish Co-operative Movement: Its History and Development* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1977), pp. 105-106; Kennedy, 'Farmers, Traders and Agricultural Politics', pp. 351-3.

⁵³ 'The IAOS and the Development Commission', *Irish Homestead*, 19 July 1913.

⁵⁴ American Commission to Investigate Agricultural Credit and Cooperation., *Agricultural Cooperation and Rural Credit in Europe* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1913), p. 888.

Table 2.1: Co-operative societies and members, 1907-1914 (IAOS, *Annual Reports, 1907-1914*).

| Year | No. of Societies (Creameries, credit societies, etc.) | Membership |
|-------------|--|-------------------|
| 1907 | 913 | 82,311 |
| 1908 | 881 | 85,939 |
| 1909 | 835 | 91661 |
| 1910 | 880 | 94,512 |
| 1911 | 934 | 97,318 |
| 1912 | 947 | 101,991 |
| 1913 | 985 | 104,702 |
| 1914 | 1,023 | 106,212 |

The work of IAOS organisers and officials continued at a furious rate, which prompted a visiting American commission to describe them as ‘the hardest worked people in Ireland.’⁵⁵ The most important aspect of work towards engendering the Co-operative Commonwealth remained the stability of the movement at a local level. As seen in the previous chapter, the major work of co-operative organisers lay in their policing of co-operative societies. The prevailing conditions before 1914 bred conservatism throughout the ranks of the IAOS, as the organisation sought to consolidate its control of dairying. Therefore, no dynamic shift in the type of work they engaged in occurred in these years. In 1907, Father Finlay pleaded with the movement to ensure its work remained ‘imbued with the proper spirit – the spirit of co-operation applied on the scale on which federations were built up’. In order to guarantee that work was carried in the ‘proper spirit’, Finlay argued organisers needed to restrict their work and focus on societies already in existence.⁵⁶ Reflecting this objective, the work of IAOS organisers before the First World War ensured that

⁵⁵ American Commission, *Agricultural Cooperation*, p. 888.

⁵⁶ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1907*, pp. 55-56.

existent co-operative societies continued to function as usual. The embedding of habitual co-operative behaviour and quelling local tensions remained the most important task for the organiser. Creameries received the most attention from organisers, a strategic decision influenced by the squeeze on financial resources. This made practical sense as creameries represented the most economically successful type of co-operative society.

Another preoccupation related to the educational improvement of co-operators. Organisers aimed to embed 'Better Business' via the cultivation of its society network. Again, disassociation with the DATI limited this aspect of their work. Nevertheless, organisers continued to police the activities of the co-operative societies, hoping to diffuse new agrarian techniques that helped the Irish farmer to remain competitive. The structure of the IAOS encouraged a modern form of agriculture to gradually take root in the countryside. For example, in December 1913, regional organiser Charles Riddall wrote to the Abbeydorney Co-operative Society. Riddall alerted the society to an opportunity to have an eminent expert address their farmers on the topic of 'continuous cropping, and the production of milk in Winter.'⁵⁷ The expert, Thomas Wibberley, had published work on farming methods and been invited to address farmers in the nearby districts of Ardfert and Lixnaw. The connection between the IAOS and individual societies provided an efficient mechanism for an expert such as Wibberley to address large numbers of farmers and diffuse advice that encouraged practical innovations.

Nevertheless, by 1914 this educational function of co-operation had produced significant results. Co-operative societies needed to take care of their financial

⁵⁷ National Archives of Ireland (NAI)/1088/2/2, CC Riddall to T O'Donovan, Abbeydorney, 19 December 1913.

business as well as the production workload. The task of keeping track of a society's accounts fell to the manager. Candidates for managerial posts needed to demonstrate their ability to stay abreast of the latest advances in dairying techniques. All potential managers needed to demonstrate proficiency in engineering, bacteriology, and general business methods.⁵⁸ In earlier years, these skills proved unsatisfactory. In 1905, John O'Connell, a Tralee-based solicitor, returned the accounts to the manager of Lixnaw Co-operative Society. O'Connell politely noted that a 'little confusion has arisen in this case owing to the form of the accounts furnished by you which of course no doubt are understood by you but not by everyone.' Helpfully, he wrote in pencil the figures as he believed they should be presented.⁵⁹ However, a decade later the financial practices of societies achieved a marked improvement, due to regular interventions into society business by IAOS-appointed accountants. Whilst imperfect, accounts submitted at the end of the financial year witnessed a marked improvement, especially in the case of creameries, 'in which the transactions are most numerous and complex and where a very complete and elaborate system of account-keeping now prevails.'⁶⁰

Besides nurturing a practical side of co-operation, organisers faced situations whereby they needed to ensure that societies remained solvent in the face of challenges and internal problems. The coalescence and resolution of grievances and jealousies amongst local members of a community occurred around the site of the co-operative society. Its democratic structure and pluralistic ownership model made it a suitable location for local disputes to be aired. Co-operative societies represented

⁵⁸ NAI/AGF/92/2/1573, Creamery Managers, Sample Examination Timetable, March 1919.

⁵⁹ Kerry Local History Archive (KLHA), Dr O'Connell Papers, John O'Connell, Tralee, to the Manager, Lixnaw Co-operative Society Dairy Society, 4 February 1905.

⁶⁰ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1914*, p. 6.

sites of local economic power and inclusion on the local committee proved an important indicator of an individual's importance within the community. However, committee members became visible targets for local resentment. From the start of the movement's existence, local co-operative meetings assumed notoriety as lively social occasions and offered an opportunity for communal catharsis. Existent local resentments could be vented at these meetings. Quite often though, disputes carried no long term significance and occurred as minor flashpoints indicative of frustrations held by individual members. For example, the chairman of the Ballinclemessig Co-operative Society was assaulted by another member. However, the society's solicitor advised the chairman from pursuing a legal action 'even though it would certainly aggravate the offence when the person assaulted was at the time chairman of a lawfully constituted meeting'.⁶¹ These meetings acquired a reputation as raucous affairs where local grievances were aired.

A satirical song entitled 'Tales from A Kerry Creamery', by 'Shemus' revolved around an imagined meeting and captured the colour of one of these events. The song appeared in a Christmas edition of *The Irish Homestead*, which offered readers a festive bounty of cultural pieces, such as short stories, poems and essays. The song's subject matter focused upon the events of a meeting, told from a harassed secretary's point of view. Although published as a humorous appraisal of a co-operative meeting, the song suggests that whilst resentments to the way business was organised existed amongst certain farmers, sometimes violently expressed, very little was done to reform how these societies operated. From the outset, the song's narrator reveals sets out a picture of local disquiet:

⁶¹ KLHA, O'Connell Papers, John O'Connell, Tralee, to the Michael O'Connor, Secretary, Ballinclemessig Co-operative Dairy Society, 12 October 1910.

Twass the day uv the Ginerol Meetin', an' a stormy meeting too,
For we hadn't a pinny profit, an' the shareholders all looked blue;
From answerin' curus queschuns me brain was addled quite –
Sure 'twass only the mercy o' heaven we hadn't a fakshun fight.

In the course of the song, local grievances are aired, accusations are made about the competency of the creamery's staff and at one point the dairymaid 'got a "rubbin' up" that she'll sartinly raymimber.' However, the song concludes that the members accepted conditions as they existed before the meeting took place. Despite the fear that events might take a nasty turn, the final verse confirms the survival of the system and its continuation as normal: 'the ould Committee's ray-elected, an' the sthaff wor "let off wid a caution."' ⁶² Society meetings offered members a local forum whereby dissatisfaction and jealousies might be given a public hearing, but where ultimately order would be imposed by the methods prescribed by the society's conventions.

Nevertheless, the fear that co-operative societies might collapse due to internal disagreements remained a constant anxiety amongst co-operative committees. Abbeydorney Co-operative Society in north Kerry offers one example of this. The local priest in Abbeydorney, Father Crimmins, served as the society's Chairman. Founded in 1895, the success of the society meant it soon expanded its business operations. In 1910 it established an auxiliary society in the village of Kilflynn. This auxiliary collected the milk from local farmers on a daily basis before transporting the milk to Abbeydorney, where the creamery converted the milk into butter. Members of the Abbeydorney Co-operative Society in Kilflynn resented the location of the central creamery in a neighbouring district. The society's annual general meeting in 1911 provided a forum for members to air grievances and replace

⁶² Shemus, 'Tales of a Kerry Creamery', in *A Celtic Christmas: The Irish Homestead Christmas Number*, ed. by HF Norman (Dublin: Irish Agricultural Organisation Society, 1898), 17-18.

the committee if required – an infrequent occurrence. Father Crimmins feared an assault on his position at the meeting and wrote to Dublin requesting the IAOS to send an organiser to attend. Crimmins laid out the scenario for Anderson: ‘The clique is making mighty efforts, + as it has many friends + conversions will muster stronger than I thought.’⁶³ Deposition of this nature represented a loss of local status and influence. Fortunately for Crimmins, although no correspondence indicates what occurred at the meeting, the feared coup never materialised and Abbeydorney experienced no upheaval on account of ‘the clique’. Nevertheless, Crimmins’ anxiety indicates the importance attached to being on the committee of the local co-operative society.

Not all societies escaped these internal tensions unscathed. In extreme cases, local tensions surfaced through acts of violence directed against the co-operative society. This echoed the still-recent violence carried out against landlords during the nineteenth century.⁶⁴ In County Kerry this violence sometimes became directed towards the co-operative society represented a new feature of such disturbance. The co-operative society in the early twentieth century replaced the landlord as a source of rural tensions, partially filling the vacuum created by the decline of this unpopular figure. The arson attack upon the Ballinclemessig Co-operative Society provides one such example, and was a case which acquired a high profile amongst co-operators. Founded in 1902, Ballinclemessig Co-operative Society started life amidst acrimony. The first meeting held on 8 April 1902, immediately split the society on the issue of where the creamery should be located. Ballinclemessig won the support of a slight majority of members, over the neighbouring village of Causeway. Mr Hannon, an

⁶³ NAI/1088/2/2, Rev F Crimmins, Abbeydorney, to RA Anderson, Dublin, 13 February 1911.

⁶⁴ Margaret O’Callaghan, *British High Politics and a Nationalist Ireland: Criminality, Land and the Law under Forester and Balfour* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1994).

organiser from the IAOS, 'announced that any person who wished to withdraw could do so within 6 days', on account of the decision. The co-operative creamery added prestige to the locale where it resided. It housed modern technology and marked out a particular locality as a place of relative importance. This led to the exodus of many of the initial members, including the provisional chairman, Father McCarthy.⁶⁵ The controversial introduction of the creamery to Ballinaclemessig presaged a violent outrage against the society several years later, in an episode that caught the attention of the movement nationwide. On the evening of 12 December 1908, the Ballinaclemessig Co-operative Society experienced an arson attack which destroyed the premises. A former member of the committee emerged as the prime suspect for the attack. The society's solicitor, John O'Connell, believed that 'the evidence as to malice is pretty strong'.⁶⁶ Despite evidence of a break-in, the Ballinaclemessig Co-operative Society failed to secure a judgment in its favour and the former committee member was found innocent. With the premises destroyed, along with the creamery equipment and account books, it further emerged that the committee had never taken out an insurance policy.

Events like the destruction of the creamery in Ballinaclemessig could produce unexpected effects. At Ballinaclemessig, the attack strengthened co-operative organisation within the community. The local population recognised the importance of the co-operative society to its economic interests and rallied around to ensure its survival. For many inhabitants, the society provided more than an outlet for milk supplies; it provided some people with a source of employment and offered a diverse

⁶⁵ KLHA, O'Connell Papers, Undated note, ca. 1902, detailing observations about first meeting of Ballinaclemessig Co-operative Society

⁶⁶ KLHA, O'Connell Papers, Correspondence Books, John O'Connell, Tralee to Michael O'Connell, Causeway, Kerry, 15 February 1909.

range of services including the purchase and marketing of local butter and the advancement of loans to farmers in lieu of milk to be received.⁶⁷ Furthermore, the arson attack encouraged those people who previously remained aloof from the creamery to join the society. The society's solicitor noted that 'several persons who had refused to become shareholders before the burning have done so since'.⁶⁸ The IAOS highlighted Ballinclemessig in a propaganda exercise to emphasise the vibrancy of the co-operative ethos that existed amongst farmers in Kerry. The IAOS cited the inhabitants there as people:

nothing daunted by their misfortunes... re-erected and re-equipped a most up-to-date creamery in record time... this example of co-operative determination will be approved throughout the country.⁶⁹

This episode demonstrated the adherence of rural inhabitants to the institutions that represented their preferred type of political economy. For the locals of Ballinclemessig, co-operation combined a method of business with a moral political economy that empowered those who subscribed to it.

The Co-operative Movement and the First World War

The Movement on Trial

The outbreak of the First World War caused a seismic change within Irish society. Political debates around Home Rule became side-lined as the government emphasised strengthening the war effort. According to Margaret Digby, Horace Plunkett 'had from the first seen that food supplies would be one of the keys to victory, and he had been anxious for the IAOS to use its powers to increase food

⁶⁷ KLHA, O'Connell Papers, Correspondence Books, John O'Connell, Tralee to Michael O'Connor, Rathmorrel, 24 September 1907.

⁶⁸ KLHA, O'Connell Papers, Correspondence Books, John O'Connell, Tralee to Registrar of Friendly Societies, Dublin, 6 April 1909.

⁶⁹ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1909*, p. 9.

production in Ireland.’⁷⁰ Plunkett believed that the war represented a new challenge for the strength of co-operative principles, one which differed from its recent problems. The war offered a test ‘of the character and a capacity of the rural democracy, the condition of whose life and work we [the IAOS] have striven all these years to improve.’⁷¹ The role played by the IAOS in spreading technological advancement throughout Ireland became an example of the way it prepared the country for the effort required to meet wartime demands. In 1914, the IAOS executive issued a patriotic rallying cry:

Without the co-operative movement, the scarcity of labour, consequent on the war, would probably result in a still further diminution of the acreage under tillage; with it the shortage of labour can be to a great extent counterbalanced by the more general use of labour saving machinery. *The movement is on its trial* [emphasis added].⁷²

The challenge for Irish co-operators lay in the execution of their duties at a moment of grave concern.

The outbreak of the First World War led to a rapid increase in the output of agricultural produce in the British economy.⁷³ Food supply formed a major concern of British government during the war and Irish agriculture remained a central plank to Britain’s economic performance. The DATI and IAOS initially united in appeals that Irish farmers carry out their patriotic duty through an application of their resources to the greatest national advantage. JR Campbell, an official at the DATI, urged farmers to concentrate upon tillage farming and increased efforts to extend

⁷⁰ Margaret Digby, *Horace Plunkett: An Anglo-American Irishman* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1935), p. 207.

⁷¹ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1914*, p.7.

⁷² IAOS *Annual Report, 1914*, p. 7.

⁷³ Alan S Milward, *The Economic Effects of the Two World Wars on Britain* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1972), p. 50.

dairying in Ireland to cover winter months.⁷⁴ The IAOS publicly pleaded with the DATI to co-ordinate their work for the sake of the war effort and to put ‘an end to all friction between the official and voluntary agencies’.⁷⁵ Beyond these words, no substantial change in official practice occurred, and the two remained at cross-purposes for the duration of the war.

In 1915, a DATI investigation into Irish agriculture invited Horace Plunkett onto the Departmental Committee, in a supposed thawing of the relationship with co-operators. The report’s major conclusions included the promotion of increased tillage, and a vague call to improve the farmers’ position. Alone amongst the Committee, Plunkett dissented from the majority’s findings, and refused to support the report. He proposed an amendment to the report which argued that any rise in food production depended upon ‘at least as much voluntary effort as upon governmental action’. This attempt to give official approval to the work of the IAOS failed, as his amendment lost by eleven votes to four. Instead, he submitted a Minority Report, in which he argued that an increase of food production required the adoption of the co-operative method. In submitting this report, Plunkett claimed to ‘speak for tens of thousands of farmers, whose wishes and opinions I am in a position to know.’⁷⁶ Plunkett’s plea remained unheeded, and the minority report was ignored. The failure of the IAOS and DATI to reconcile differences and work together represented a lost opportunity to improve Irish agriculture. Notably, a

⁷⁴ JR Campbell, ‘The War and Irish Agriculture’, *Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction Journal*, 15.1 (1914), 10-19 (pp. 12-15); IAOS, *Annual Report, 1915*, p. 7.

⁷⁵ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1915*, p. 5.

⁷⁶ HCPP, [Cd. 8016], *Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland. Report of the Departmental Committee on Food Production in Ireland.* (1914-1916), pp. 11-12.

failure to promote standardisation harmed Irish producers in the longer term, and led to the loss of goodwill amongst customers after the war.⁷⁷

Despite this situation, the IAOS provided socio-economic ballast for Irish farmers during the war, and demonstrated an ability to adapt the economic functions of societies where necessary.⁷⁸ As early as 1911, AE argued that ‘the power to continuously adjust production to the needs of the market is one of the greatest advantages of association among farmers.’⁷⁹ The IAOS directed specialised resources where and when required, and disseminated information to large sections of the population. For example, the manager of the Abbeydorney Co-operative Dairy Society requested copies of a pamphlet produced by the IAOS to disseminate amongst its members. The IAOS dispatched 200 copies of its ‘War and the Food Supplies’ pamphlet, which offered advice to their members.⁸⁰ The IAOS remained in contact with a large number of farmers and therefore remained alive to their members’ requirements and anxieties.

The IAOS expanded its repertoire of forms of co-operation to enable societies to adapt to wartime conditions. The Co-operative Reference Library proved useful in this matter. The IAOS established the Library following the receipt of a Carnegie Trust grant in 1914. The Library emerged as an international centre of co-operative expertise and its founders saw its purpose, ‘as a centre of information for practical workers and others interested in the development of agricultural and

⁷⁷ Meenan, *The Irish Economy*, pp. 302-3.

⁷⁸ This mirrored the experience of other countries with large agricultural sectors. For example, agricultural co-operative societies in Russia mediated the economic demands made upon peasants and leading co-operative figures viewed the outbreak of war ‘as an opportunity to create a more systematic programme of agronomic research and assistance.’ Peter Gatrell, *Russia’s First World War: A Social and Economic History* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2005), p. 46.

⁷⁹ George W. Russell, ‘The Problem of Rural Life’, *Irish Review* 1.8 (1911), 365-372 (p. 368).

⁸⁰ NAI/1088/2/2, T O’Donovan, Abbeydorney to Anderson, Dublin 14 August 1914, and Anderson to O’Donovan, 15 August 1914.

industrial co-operation.’⁸¹ The Library published wartime studies, which investigated issues such as food supplies, the establishment of co-operative bakeries, and hygienic concerns around urban milk supply. These studies shared a common purpose with previous research, to improve Irish socio-economic conditions via new business methods and processes.⁸² Drawing upon such research, the IAOS encouraged the establishment of milling facilities attached to co-operative creameries, in order to increase and diversify the productive capacities of co-operative societies.

Changed demands stemmed from government food policy, which became more interventionist. After 1917, the government’s agricultural objectives aimed towards increased food production to enable British self-sufficiency. Food production campaigns during 1917-1918 encouraged larger yields of vital food staples such as wheat, oats and potatoes.⁸³ The potato crop yield for Ireland grew by 27% and annual corn production stood at 545,000 tons more than the respective pre-war figures. The concentration upon corn production led to a fall in other crops, such as barley and grain. This led to a decrease in food for livestock and a subsequent fall in the numbers of cattle affected the dairy industry during the war. Butter exports fell for two reasons. Firstly, producers felt the maximum price set for butter by the food controllers remained too low. Secondly, wartime prosperity within Ireland increased

⁸¹ Lionel Smith-Gordon and Cruise O’Brien, *Co-operation in Ireland* (Manchester: The Co-operative Union Limited, 1921), p. 26.

⁸² These reports were, D Houston, *The Milk Supply of Dublin: Report of a Bacteriological Investigation of the City of Dublin Milk Supply* (Dublin: The Co-operative Reference Library, 1918); Cruise O’Brien, *Co-operative Mills and Bakeries*, Series: Miscellaneous Publications No. 2 (Dublin: Co-operative Reference Library, 1918); Lionel Smith-Gordon and Cruise O’Brien, *Ireland’s Food in War Time*, Series: Miscellaneous Publications No. 1 (Dublin: Co-operative reference Library, 1914); TB Ponsonby, *Agricultural Labour: Standardisation as a Means of Improving the Conditions of Rural Employment* (Dublin: Co-operative Reference Library, 1917); Robert N Tweedy, *Industrial Alcohol* (Dublin: Co-operative Reference Library, 1917).

⁸³ L Margaret Barnett, *British Food Policy During the First World War* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985) pp. 193-208.

domestic demand for butter. Consequently, many creameries moved into cheese production, as it offered a better price than butter.⁸⁴ Irish co-operative creameries also benefitted from the reduced competition from Danish creameries during the war, which gave them unrivalled access to the British marketplace. A flagship society such as Abbeydorney Co-operative Society witnessed an improvement in the quality of its milk supply, combined with stable membership figures. For the year 1915-1916, the society benefitted from a significant increase in the amount of milk supplied, from 109,180 gallons in July 1915, to 129,245 gallons 12 months later.⁸⁵

During the war, co-operative societies shored up their position in the community. A major advantage co-operative creameries possessed lay in their ability to adapt functions. Co-operative creameries diversified in order to meet economic demands, whilst simultaneously expanding their utility to members. The IAOS played a crucial role by enabling creameries to expand their modes of production. Some societies, such as Abbeydorney established flour mills.⁸⁶ More importantly, many creameries began to produce cheese. This was because of the high prices offered for cheese by the government as a way to meet the demand for protein required for British diets.

Irish cheese production expanded during the war years, from 10,000 tons for export in 1914 to 286,000 tons by 1919.⁸⁷ *The Irish Homestead* framed the switch to cheese production within a discourse that emphasised 'Economy, patriotism, health, all call for a greater use of this valuable food'.⁸⁸ Across the south-west of Ireland, the

⁸⁴ Daly, *First Department*, pp. 58-60.

⁸⁵ NAI/1088/2/3, IAOS Organiser's Report for Abbeydorney Co-operative Society, 11 September 1916.

⁸⁶ NAI/1088/2/3, T O'Donovan, Abbeydorney, to RA Anderson, Dublin, 22 January 1915.

⁸⁷ Daly, *First Department*, pp. 58-60.

⁸⁸ *Irish Homestead*, 17 August 1918.

region's creameries switched to cheese production. The decision of one creamery encouraged other neighbouring ones to follow suit. Those which failed to switch, risked losing out financially. The manager of Newtownsandes Co-operative Society decided to establish cheese-making facilities in response to other nearby creameries switching production from butter to cheese. He wrote to the IAOS in Dublin of the necessity to maintain parity with rival co-operatives stating, 'if they can do this we must follow suit or go under.'⁸⁹

Co-operative societies sought the aid of the IAOS to equip creameries with the proper technology for cheese-making. Again, the role of IAOS organisers proved crucial to the establishment of these cheese-making facilities, and creamery inspections revolved around policing this new manufacturing process. Cheese production provided lucrative returns as the government guaranteed a fixed price more attractive than that for butter. The IAOS regarded the shift to cheese production as highly significant for the south-west:

The most notable of the developments attributable to the war is the widespread adoption of cheese-making in Munster, and to a less extent other parts of Ireland. Few creameries in Munster that have failed to engage in it have been able to meet the stress of competition.⁹⁰

The congestion of creameries emerged as a problem throughout this region, and the ability to diversify into alternate production beyond butter, helped ensure that the co-operative sector remained competitive within the Irish dairying industry. However, cheese production proved to be a temporary feature of Irish creamery production due in large part to the low quality of the produce. By the 1920s, creameries once again focused on the production of butter.

⁸⁹ NAI/1088/751/6, Thomas de Lacy, Newtownsandes to CC Riddall, 27 February 1918.

⁹⁰ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1919*, p. 9.

Materially, Irish farmers experienced a good war. Nationalist MP Stephen Gwynn later reflected, ‘socially and economically the war brought floods of money into Ireland... agriculture had a golden time, and all the profits of agriculture went to the occupiers of the land.’⁹¹ The benefits of the land reforms became obvious to farmers during the war. By 1920, agricultural prices were three times higher than in 1913. In particular, the farmers with larger landholdings made a lot of money due to their ability to exploit the prices paid for crops.⁹² The poet Patrick Kavanagh, growing up in rural Monaghan during the war, recalled, ‘every Sunday coming home from Mass I heard all around me: “It’s a great war for the farmer. Cattle up four pounds a head.” “The German’s a good soldier. Up the German.”’⁹³ Kavanagh’s reminiscence captured the wartime prosperity that farmers welcomed. However, this belied the complicated transformation taking place amongst the co-operative network.

Farmers who subscribed to the IAOS shared in this boom for Irish agriculture. By 1915, 248 out of 344 co-operative creameries engaged in the trade of other goods outside of butter. This ‘agricultural trade’ encompassed a wide range of services, including the sale of agricultural inputs, and indicated an increased diversification amongst the network of co-operative societies.⁹⁴ Creameries moved into the production of new consumables, such as cheese and flour. The IAOS remained a popular agent amongst the rural population. Although the number of societies contracted slightly, the membership remained stable, even experiencing a growth from 106,212 to 117,484 members (see table 2.2). The IAOS’s economic

⁹¹ Stephen Gwynn, *Ireland* (London: Ernest Benn, 1924), p. 73.

⁹² Bell and Watson, *A History of Irish Farming*, p.247.

⁹³ Patrick Kavanagh, *The Green Fool* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 58.

⁹⁴ Bolger, *The Irish Co-operative Movement*, p. 208.

position strengthened on account of the war, which gave the movement's co-operative principles a strong material grounding. By 1918, farmers understood that connection to the local co-operative society promoted their interests and improved their industry. Despite official antipathy towards the IAOS, the movement's overall progress up to 1918 indicated that co-operative principles amongst farmers increased in popularity. Farmers looked towards the IAOS as a source of empowerment and familiarity during a period of increased social and political uncertainty. The IAOS helped the rural population to share in the rewards offered to agriculturalists during the war.

Table 2.2: Number of co-operative societies, 1914-1918. (IAOS, *Annual Reports, 1914-1918*).

| Year | No. of Societies (Creameries, credit societies etc.) | Membership |
|-------------|---|-------------------|
| 1914 | 1,023 | 106,212 |
| 1915 | 991 | 102,591 |
| 1916 | 958 | 106,301 |
| 1917 | 947 | 113,640 |
| 1918 | 950 | 117,484 |

The IAOS also offered an analysis of prevailing socio-economic conditions which fed into a wider critique of the British state. In an article entitled 'Economic Independence', AE argued that wartime experience strengthened the case for Irish economic self-sufficiency. He pointed to one society in Kerry, probably Abbeydorney, that invested a £2,000 overdraft into economic development, where:

grain was bought and the mill worked to the utmost extent possible, with the result that members were able to get feeding stuffs for cattle and pigs, and there has been more prosperity in the district than at any time in its history.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ 'Economic Independence', *Irish Homestead*, 15 June 1918.

AE believed that co-operation formed an economic basis for a desirable Irish social contract. Although economic conditions such as fixed prices played an important part in this prosperity, AE asserted that only the local co-operative society provided farmers with the tools and philosophy to attain the highest level of prosperity. The war demonstrated the continued relevance of the IAOS as an important social actor. Although officially the movement's influence waned, its popularity amongst the rural population continued to rise. The IAOS possessed the foundations to perform an influential role in post-war Ireland. The next section examines the way in which co-operators developed a stringent critique of the state system in Ireland during wartime and looked for a radical change in the aftermath of conflict.

The Co-operative Movement and the Wartime State

By the outbreak of the First World War, half of all Irish milk converted for butter at a creamery passed through a co-operative society.⁹⁶ The IAOS identified itself as excluded from the official war effort and resented the lack of official recognition for its work in support of its network of societies. Until the war, the co-operative movement's attitude towards the state remained ill-defined. Much of its discourse around any interaction with the state focused upon the dysfunctional relationship with the DATI. As shown above, co-operators viewed the distance between the DATI and IAOS as either a positive or negative development. However, a critical theorisation of the co-operative movement's relationship with the state only emerged in the course of the First World War, instigated by the changing role of government. The IAOS exerted control over a large proportion of vital economic machinery and products. This meant that leading co-operators hoped for an improvement in the movement's standing amongst policy-makers. Instead, the war encouraged the

⁹⁶ Daniel T Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (London: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 333.

movement's alienation from the state. Grievances with the DATI before 1914 continued to fester, and dissatisfaction spread to British government in general. Irish co-operators grew increasingly frustrated with governmental arrangements.

In 1916, AE published *The National Being*, in which he articulated a vision of an idealised Irish polity. This book represented an attempt to flesh out the social and economic values that best suited the Irish nation. *The National Being* sits amongst a significant body of works, literary and journalistic, that contributed so vibrantly to the Irish Revival from the late nineteenth century onwards. AE's concern with the social and economic aspect of the 'Irish Question' marks it out as an exceptional contribution. He anticipated that some form of political independence would be granted to Ireland, in accordance with the Home Rule Bill passed in 1914, and sought to re-make the case for a greater role for co-operative societies in Irish society. AE wrote in an idiosyncratic style that incorporated his deep personal interest in mysticism, and he characteristically defined the state as 'a physical body prepared for the incarnation of the soul of the race. The body of the national soul may be spiritual or secular, aristocratic or democratic, civil or militarist'. AE viewed the state in Ireland as a manifestation of the country's governmental institutions, and wrote 'if there is anything in the theory of Irish nationality, we will apply original principles as they are time to time discovered to be fundamental in Irish character.'⁹⁷ AE believed these fundamental principles suited to the Irish character included a healthy dose of co-operation.

Attitudes towards the state influenced an emergent nationalist conception of the economy in Ireland, a process which the co-operative movement helped shape.

⁹⁷ AE, *The National Being: Some Thoughts on an Irish Polity* (Dublin: Maunsel and Co, 1916), p. 2.

Manu Goswami argues that the evolution of national economics partially stemmed from ‘the transnational ascendancy of statist developmentalist frameworks in the late nineteenth century.’ This ascendancy ‘presented a profound challenge to the political-economic imaginary and regulatory order that underwrote Britain’s globe-spanning imperial economy.’⁹⁸ Contemporary understandings of the state in Ireland derived from two main factors. Firstly, the political context in Ireland, whereby debate and discourse revolved around the potential application of Home Rule, centred discussion about the state on access to governmental resources. Secondly, from the co-operative movement’s viewpoint before 1918, the fractious relationship with the DATI coloured this understanding. The state functioned unsatisfactorily for Irish co-operators.

AE believed that the physical form of the Irish state remained obscure but pliable. Despite passionate discussions around self-government, AE lamented the lack of effort devoted to the ‘speculation over our own character or the nature of the civilization we wished to create for ourselves. Nations, rarely... start with a complete ideal.’⁹⁹ In Ireland, ideas about the state came entwined in discourses around the contested claims for political independence. Consequently, physical territory and ideas associated with the nation informed contemporary understandings of the state. For AE, the nation, and therefore the state, relied upon the ideas and character of its people. Therefore the IAOS represented an important agent in the state-building process. Starting from the point of view of the rural subject, the IAOS, through its interventions and organisational work, strove towards the remaking of the Irish

⁹⁸ Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 280.

⁹⁹ AE, *National Being*, p. 3.

population. Through the farmer, the IAOS sought to embed values of co-operation within ‘the national soul’.

Changes in government policy during the war shaped co-operative attitudes. Agriculture formed the dominant economic sector in Ireland, and the progression of the British government’s agricultural policy during the war fit into two phases. Until December 1916, the policy followed a laissez-faire direction. From 1917 onwards, the formation of a coalition government under Lloyd George provoked a more interventionist approach.¹⁰⁰ As the government intervened in food policy, the co-operative movement became frustrated and alienated from the overall policy consultation. The movement’s public perception towards the state shifted. AE wanted the voluntary efforts co-ordinated by the IAOS to remain unimpeded by creeping state interference. Expecting ‘the State or a State Department to undertake this [agricultural] work is to ask a body influenced and often controlled by powerful capitalists, and middle agencies which it should be the role of the ...[IAOS] to eliminate.’¹⁰¹ Lack of faith in the state reflected co-operative experience under DATI policy. The war intensified this position, as the direction of government policy failed to meet the expectations of co-operators.

From 1917 onwards, the co-operative movement critiqued the arrangement of economic powers under the British wartime state. Lloyd George’s government, in combination with the DATI, undermined attempts to assert a co-operative form of political economy. The government established the Food Production Department in 1917, with the aim of organising the arrangement of agricultural production, labour

¹⁰⁰ PE Dewey, *British Agriculture in the First World War* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 23.

¹⁰¹ AE, *National Being*, p. 53.

and technology.¹⁰² The 1917 Corn Production Act directed resources towards intensified production and output in corn and potatoes.¹⁰³ In Ireland, the practical implementation of government regulations fell under the responsibility of the DATI. The Department introduced new rules and orders, including compulsory tillage orders, minimum wage rates, a guaranteed price for grain and a temporary suspension of land purchase and redistribution. *The Irish Homestead* appealed to its readers to play their part in responding to these demands. The journal carried adverts that explained to farmers that an increased emphasis on tillage farming would not harm those who relied on live stock as a source of income and equated an increase in tillage farming as a way to stimulate milk production: ‘More tillage means more men, more cattle, more work, more prosperity.’¹⁰⁴

In their survey of British co-operation, Fred Hall and William Watkins noted that ‘it was in the protection of the consumer... that war-time collectivism was seen in its extremest (sic) forms.’¹⁰⁵ The First World War precipitated a new form of state intervention that Hall and Watkins, as intellectuals within the British co-operative movement, broadly welcomed. The Food Controller, appointed by the government, established local committees that organised an equitable distribution of food, commandeered supplies when required, and eventually introduced compulsory rationing. To the IAOS, this ‘tyrannical’ arrangement promoted interests inimical to their producer-oriented variant of co-operation. In particular, these controls provoked a strong response from AE. *The Irish Homestead* attacked the new agricultural policy of 1917. Annoyed at the apparent invisibility of the IAOS to governmental

¹⁰² Dewey, *British Agriculture*, pp. 91-93.

¹⁰³ Daly, *First Department*, pp. 58-61

¹⁰⁴ *Irish Homestead*, 10 February 1917.

¹⁰⁵ F Hall and WP Watkins, *Co-operation: A Survey of the History, Principles, and Organisation of the Co-operative Movement in Great Britain and Ireland* (Manchester: Co-operative Union, 1937), p. 197.

agents, AE criticised the state's decision to use other 'bodies to undertake new organisation of food production':

We see continual reference to urban councils, district councils, boards of guardians, traders and merchants who are to supervise, procure land, re-allot it, get seeds, fertilisers, implements, and generally to control all this work. We have not seen the slightest official recognition of the existence of farmers' associations and co-operative societies, of which there are well over one thousand in Ireland.¹⁰⁶

The DATI refused to acknowledge co-operators as an instrument through which to work. The IAOS resented its position as a governmental outcast, whereby all institutions of local government and trading associations collaborated in the execution of agricultural policy. By 1917, the relationship between the two largest agricultural institutions in Ireland had grown toxic. This led to accusations that the DATI regarded the farmers 'as people of no importance in agriculture, their organisations as bodies which need not be considered'. The *Homestead* continued that the co-operative movement's building up of 'a gigantic business by voluntary associations of farmers is regarded as another instance of their lack of intelligence because it was built up in disregard of the Department's advice.'¹⁰⁷ By the final months of the war, the IAOS felt alienated from any position of political influence.

This theme of a future under an unsympathetic state recurred frequently in *The Irish Homestead's* editorials throughout the war. AE feared that the expansion of the state would submerge the co-operative movement via a new form of tyranny, arguing that, once a nation embarks upon policies of compulsion, serious consequences abounded. The state sided with social groups the movement viewed as anathema to its efforts to create a better society. AE viewed the state 'with profound mistrust, because we dread its alliance with the meanest and most greedy elements in

¹⁰⁶ *Irish Homestead*, 13 January 1917.

¹⁰⁷ *Irish Homestead*, 13 January 1917.

society, the profiteers and Gombeen men, the class who furnish political parties with funds and who are therefore in a position to affect the policy of State departments.’ Under the cover of the wartime economy, the conflict between co-operators and long-standing economic rivals became an increasingly intense struggle for influence and access to state-controlled resources. AE attacked those who accepted this situation as:

people with the ideas of an infant school who suppose that the State or its officials are always nobly moved or inspired to act solely for the general good. The State allies itself with the party which seems to it economically most powerful... and this leaning to the economically powerful, even when that power is based upon pure greed and ferocious profiteering, has been evident through all the years of the war... The State made a deal with the profiteers early in the war. It said to them... “Go you and fleece the people. We will allow you to keep forty per cent of the extra plunder and we will take sixty per cent.” That is exactly what the legislation about excess profits means, that and nothing else. The State at present is the prime profiteer, the profiteer of the profiteers. That is why we fear the future with the State dominating every factor in national life.¹⁰⁸

Suspicion of the state’s actions coincided with a general shift in the attitude amongst the co-operative leadership towards the British state system in Ireland by 1918. Even Horace Plunkett, a long-time unionist, advocated Home Rule. He viewed the solution to Irish social and economic problems as requiring Irish government. In 1917, Plunkett chaired the Irish Convention, which investigated how Home Rule might be applied to Ireland without resort to partition. The Convention failed to produce a satisfactory result, due to the unwillingness of many nationalists and unionists to participate.¹⁰⁹

Under AE’s watch, the co-operative movement’s journal argued for the exercise of economic autonomy amongst farmers as the most effective way to guard against state tyranny. The fear that wartime controls might continue indefinitely alienated co-operators further. After the War, emergency controls appeared as ‘a

¹⁰⁸ ‘The Allies of the State’, *Irish Homestead*, 20 January 1917.

¹⁰⁹ West, *Horace Plunkett*, pp. 157-176.

policy which Great Britain will apply to her British children as well as to her Irish stepchildren.’ This reading suggested that the Irish people were at one remove from the rest of the British population, an incongruity emphasised by AE’s belief that Irish economic principles required constant enunciation. In the final months of the war, the co-operative movement once again attempted to rally supporters around its founding principles. AE’s economic arguments on the theme of autonomy grew closer in spirit to the overtly political arguments used by nationalist critics of the British state:

if you want political attention create economic organisations. Control trade, and you will be recognised by the State. Let your business be controlled by others than yourselves, and the state will listen to those who control your trade, not to you. The state deals with principles, not with the rank and file.¹¹⁰

As political independence appeared an ever closer reality, AE urged farmers to rely only upon themselves and their organisations. The dividing line between economic and political independence grew indistinct, as all threads of the Irish question became entwined. Whatever the ultimate constitutional settlement for Ireland, the will to play a prominent role remained central to co-operative thinking. However, the position of the co-operative movement to influence a future Irish state developed in an unexpected way by 1918. The failure to find an accommodation with the DATI from 1907 onwards, combined with an alienation from the government during the war, moved the co-operative movement into a position whereby it critiqued the state as it operated in Ireland. This pushed the movement into a closer accommodation with an unexpected force – radical nationalism.

¹¹⁰ ‘The State and Organisation’, *Irish Homestead*, 20 July 1918.

The Irish Co-operative Movement and the New Nationalists, 1907-1918

During this nadir in the relationship between Irish co-operators and policymakers, the movement contributed to the reinvention of modern Irish nationalism. The co-operative movement's corroded relationship with the state as it functioned in Ireland manoeuvred it into a closer relationship with nationalists. Up to 1918, those who wielded political power sought to constrain the IAOS's ambitions and weaken its effectiveness in the countryside. As a consequence, the co-operative movement attracted the support of dissident nationalists who gravitated towards a reenergised Sinn Féin party after 1916. In his study of Irish nationalism, Patrick Maume argued that the displacement of constitutional nationalism by the separatist Sinn Féin party entailed little change in nationalist tactics around mobilisation of support, and even in attitudes to violence and constitutionalism.¹¹¹ This break showed that Irish nationalism was by no means internally unified. However, by devoting attention to the contribution made by co-operators to Sinn Féin ideology, an intellectual division is tangible.

Discrepant views between nationalists evolved from barely acknowledged disagreements in the late nineteenth century to a perceptible gulf by the outbreak of the First World War. Karen Stanbridge argues that the experience of the First World War encouraged an international consensus that linked the concept of the 'nation' to a condition of 'self-determination'. This increased demand for political self-determination within Ireland and strengthened the case of the Irish separatists.¹¹² Both constitutional and separatist nationalism incorporated aspects of the Irish

¹¹¹ Patrick Maume, *The Long Gestation: Irish Nationalist Life, 1891-1918* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1999).

¹¹² Karen Stanbridge, 'Nationalism, International Factors and the "Irish Question" in the Era of the First World War', *Nations and Nationalism*, 11.1, (2005), 21-42, (pp. 31-34).

cultural revival. The lukewarm attitude of constitutional nationalists to an issue such as the promotion of the Irish language stood in stark contrast to that of separatists, who appropriated such agendas in order to emphasise the Irish nation as culturally distinct from the United Kingdom.¹¹³ This section locates an important division between the constitutional and separatist traditions connected to attitudes towards co-operation. Separatists increasingly advocated social and economic principles associated with the co-operative movement before the War. The philosophy of IAOS ideologues, which reified the modern rural community as the building block of the nation, informed the socio-economic thought of Sinn Féin. The co-option of ideas associated with co-operative activists by radical nationalists, the same ideas put into practice across Ireland in the course of the early twentieth century, eventually provided the IAOS with a platform to shape the development of the Irish nation-state in a profound way. This section examines the roots of this strange alliance, and shows how the contested political situation that constrained the IAOS saw it attract new allies.

Nicholas Whyte defined the fallout between the DATI and the IAOS as ‘a reflection of the deeper political divide in Ireland, [TW] Russell now being supported by Nationalists and the IAOS mostly by Unionists.’¹¹⁴ This assessment represents an oversimplification of the political dynamics attached to support for the co-operative movement. The IAOS drew support from some unionists. Notably, Horace Plunkett represented the Unionist party at Westminster between 1892 and 1900. Moreover, constitutional nationalist politicians criticised the IAOS and ‘stated

¹¹³ Stanbridge, ‘Nationalism, International Factors’, pp. 25-26; John Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987).

¹¹⁴ Whyte, *Science, Colonialism and Ireland*, p. 98.

repeatedly on public platforms, that co-operation was nothing more or less than an insidious attempt to frustrate their efforts to obtain Home Rule.¹¹⁵ In particular, John Dillon attacked the co-operative movement with such vigour that Trevor West argues ‘he seemed to regard [the IAOS] as an opposing political party.’¹¹⁶ A 1913 news report on the co-operative movement’s receipt of funding from the Development Commission captured a sense of the difficulty caused to members of the IPP. The funding gave ‘a moral, as well as an economic stimulus, to the co-operative campaign in Ireland.’ However, the episode also highlighted a generational gulf that opened up amongst the ranks of Irish nationalism:

The Government’s action will be most unwelcome to the Nationalist politicians, for whom it means a great loss of prestige. Their leaders have consistently attacked and vilified the co-operative movement in spite of the growing doubts and uneasiness of some of the younger members of the party.¹¹⁷

This vendetta against the co-operative movement became a toxic issue for the IPP in the long-term. The attitude of the Parliamentary Party and the DATI combined to grant the co-operative movement an outsider status within Irish political culture. Yet the movement continued in its project to transform Irish society. The popularity of co-operative organisation amongst farmers proved more significant in guaranteeing the existence of an active co-operative sector than did attempts by the DATI to undermine it.

The replacement of the IPP by Sinn Féin as the leading voice of Irish nationalism marked a watershed in Irish political history. The fallout of the Easter Rising, combined with an increasingly unpopular war, encouraged popular support for Sinn Féin. What is apparent is that predating even these events, a new political school captured the imaginations of the younger generation. Stephen Gwynn, a

¹¹⁵ Anderson, *With Horace Plunkett*, p. 88.

¹¹⁶ West, *Horace Plunkett*, p. 85.

¹¹⁷ ‘The Co-operative Grant’, *The Times*, 22 March 1913.

Parliamentary Party MP, believed that many amongst the younger generation adhered to ideas emerging from nationalists such as Arthur Griffith, founder of Sinn Féin. Although a small cadre before 1914, ‘Sinn Féin, rather than Parliamentarianism, was the growing creed, and it based its claim on different grounds and had a different outlook.’¹¹⁸ Co-operators could claim a closer kinship with rural opinion than could the Parliamentary Party and DATI. The ‘different outlook’ identified by Gwynn was uppermost in the identity of the new nationalists. These new ideologues moved away from orthodoxies associated with the constitutional nationalism and cast around for distinctive ideas of their own. The Irish Revival provided the basis for these. The promotion of the Gaelic language, Irish literature, and co-operation gained a popular currency amongst this group. During the public controversy around state funding of the co-operative movement, the vibrant link between co-operators and other cultural activists provided a supply of public voices that defended the co-operative movement from its critics.

James Owen Hannay, writer, Anglican clergyman and Gaelic League activist, defended the IAOS from the attacks by TW Russell.¹¹⁹ Better known by the pen-name George Birmingham, he rejected the politics of the IPP and viewed British liberalism as a hypocritical doctrine. Instead, his political philosophy led him towards the belief that ‘the Gaelic League, the co-operative movement and Sinn Féin could bring about a true national revival based on individual self-reliance and free

¹¹⁸ Gwynn, *Ireland*, p. 97.

¹¹⁹ James Owen Hannay (1865-1950), had a distinguished career as a clergyman and prolific writer. In the early twentieth century, he became interested in Irish current affairs, with a particular interest in the land question and Gaelic revival. He wrote under a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality on account of his clerical duties. Patrick Maume, ‘Hannay, James Owen (“George A Birmingham”)', in *Dictionary of Irish Biography: From Earliest Times to the Year 2002, Volume 4*, ed. by James McGuire and James Quinn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 444-448.

discussion.’¹²⁰ Birmingham praised the ‘economic gospel of Sir Horace Plunkett’ and described the co-operative movement as ‘an affair of common sense.’ Yet ‘the official Nationalists, the men of a pledge-bound Parliamentary party, hate it heartily.’¹²¹ As an admirer of Plunkett’s work, Birmingham attacked TW Russell’s policy of ‘non-controversial co-operation’ in an article for *The Irish Review*. He characterised this policy as disingenuous politicking and argued that Russell knew ‘perfectly well that there is no such thing as non-controversial co-operation. All co-operation amongst farmers must provoke the hostility of someone.’ Birmingham continued to highlight the importance of co-operative institutions, noting the inescapable controversy that surrounded their establishment:

Co-operative creameries excite the fury of the butter merchant. Egg societies enrage the gentlemen at present occupied in packing stale eggs in dirty straw. Even Raffeissen (sic) banks injure the business of the local trader whose customers are tied to him by their debts, and the publican-politician whom it suits to have a financial hold over the farmers. When Mr Russell spoke of the non-controversial co-operation which he would organise, he meant either that he would organise no co-operation at all or else that he would organise co-operation in the teeth of the protests of the very class through whose influence the money was withheld from the IAOS.¹²²

Russell’s policy excluded the co-operative movement whenever possible, but Birmingham recognised the powerful implications of a co-operative intervention to the rural community. It reordered local economic connections, but in favour of the farmer over the trader.

In 1914, Justin Phillips, a commentator in *The Irish Review*, shared Birmingham’s concern over the direction of DATI policy. Phillips described TW Russell as someone who bowed ‘down before the sacred vested interests of our middlemen’. Such a policy ensured that traders took advantage of the farmers who

¹²⁰ Maume, ‘Hannay’, p. 445.

¹²¹ George A Birmingham, *Irishmen All* (London: T.N. Foulis, 1914), pp. 111-112.

¹²² George A Birmingham, ‘Politics in the Nude’, *Irish Review*, 1.10 (1911), 469-476 (p. 471).

were ‘supplied with adulterated seeds and manures, charged exorbitant prices for everything they purchase, and paid little or nothing for what they have to sell. Such is the Department's solution of the problem of how to make Irish farming more profitable.’¹²³ Phillips accused the DATI of no longer representing farmers’ interests. Instead, Phillips argued that, in order to promote agricultural development, ‘organisation amongst the farmers, for co-operative production, purchase, and sale, is essential in modern conditions.’¹²⁴ Both Birmingham and Phillips displayed a nationalism attuned to the social aspect of the Irish Question, that is, the interests of the farmer became a central part of any resolution to that political controversy. The co-operative movement emerged as the best promoter of this social group’s interest under this reading.

Birmingham’s and Phillips’ critiques of the DATI featured in the same journal. *The Irish Review* appeared monthly and showcased writing on the topics of Irish literature, science and politics. In social and economic subjects, particularly those related to agriculture, the editorial line of *The Irish Review* supported a co-operative solution to promote Irish development. It published work by Irish writers, some of whom later became leading participants in the Easter Rising in 1916, including its co-founder, Thomas MacDonagh.¹²⁵ In 1911, AE contributed a series of articles on his favoured theme of building up the new rural civilization. The journal gave a public platform to nationalist proponents whose opinions did not fit with the orthodoxy propounded by IPP members. In particular, it sought ‘to give expression to the intellectual movement in Ireland.’ This movement included a broad range of

¹²³ Justin Phillips, ‘The Policy of “The Department”’, *Irish Review*, 4.38 (1914), 68-74 (p. 70).

¹²⁴ Phillips, ‘The Policy of “The Department”’, p. 68.

¹²⁵ WJ McCormack, *Dublin 1916: The French Connection* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2012), pp. 74-96.

people, all of whom shared a common interest in ‘the application of Irish intelligence to the reconstruction of Irish life.’ The first editorial stressed that ‘science and economics will claim an increasing share of attention as our people progress towards the command of their resources.’¹²⁶ *The Irish Review* only existed for three years, finishing in 1914, but many of its contributors exerted considerable influence upon the later evolution of Irish politics. It took in a wide range of topics, including literature, art and science.

One of the more astute analyses of the co-operative movement that appeared in the pages of *The Irish Review* occurred at the height of the IAOS’s wrangling with the Development Commission and DATI. This coincided with a wider political backdrop of continued negotiations and debates around Home Rule. An article by ‘an Ulster Imperialist’ put forward a singular assessment of the political situation, which identified a seldom-noted political schism. The anonymous contributor outlined various positions regarding the Home Rule debate, alongside potential political developments if the Home Rule Bill either failed or succeeded. The author argued that, if the bill failed, nationalist Ireland might divide into two camps, and identified respective nationalist attitudes to the co-operative movement as the major fault-line:

The conflict between Nationalists of the Co-operative movement and Nationalists of the TW Russell party would probably split a new line of cleavage across the whole body of Irish politics, giving rise to a new party which would contain nearly all the constructive elements of Irish life, whether Unionist or Nationalist, centreing (sic) upon an agrarian policy, and becoming inevitably a Home Rule party in which gradually but the best of our citizens would be very much of one mind.¹²⁷

This analysis of Irish nationalism proved insightful.

¹²⁶ Editor, ‘[Untitled Introduction]’, *The Irish Review*, 1.1 (1911), 1-6 (p.1).

¹²⁷ An Ulster Imperialist, ‘An Appreciation of the Situation’, *Irish Review*, 2.13 (1912), 1-11 (p. 9).

The Home Rule Bill passed through Parliament in 1914, but its political success proved short-lived. The outbreak of the First World War fatally delayed the implementation of Irish Home Rule.¹²⁸ The establishment of the Ulster Volunteers and Irish Volunteers, labour troubles, the First World War and the Easter Rising were all events which crowded the political context.¹²⁹ Sinn Féin emerged as the popular vehicle for Irish nationalist opinion, following the failure of the IPP to negotiate a subsequent settlement around the specifics of Home Rule in 1916, and complicated further by the 1918 conscription crisis. The IPP's position in support of the war effort proved damaging by 1918 and it remained associated with the unpopular attempts by the Westminster government to impose conscription upon Ireland during the final months of the war.¹³⁰ The anonymous writer who predicted the creation of a cleavage that erupted along the lines of the debate over the direction of agricultural policy proved perceptive. The decline of constitutional nationalism removed one of the major political impediments to the furtherance of a co-operative ideology within contemporary political discourse. In the short term, the dispute with the DATI limited the effectiveness of the IAOS in its work in agriculture, as it worked outside the institutional framework built up around agriculture. The leaders of the co-operative movement grew embittered with the state, whilst Sinn Féin nationalists stood for the usurpation of these institutions. Sinn Féin wanted to subvert the state with policymakers and socio-economic ideas that embodied Irish characteristics. The 'Ulster Imperialist' recognised the existence of different

¹²⁸ Paul Bew, *Ideology and the Irish Question: Ulster Unionism and Irish Nationalism, 1912-1916* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 118-120.

¹²⁹ Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland, 1900-2000* (London: Profile Books, 2005), p. 111.

¹³⁰ Historians have highlighted the 1918 conscription crisis as a factor that increased support for Sinn Féin. See Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland*, pp. 181-183; Michael Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland: The Sinn Féin Party, 1916-1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 156; Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985*, pp. 39-40; Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine*, pp. 392-394.

nationalist approaches to the 'Irish Question', grounded in distinct socio-economic blueprints for Irish development. Those nationalists who favoured the co-operative movement articulated a distinct vision for Ireland at variance with the contemporary situation, which eventually became more popular than parliamentarianism. The subsequent collapse of this tradition presented the co-operative movement with an unlikely opportunity to reform Ireland through the emergent counter-hegemonic project that Sinn Féin embodied.

Conclusion

The politicisation of the Irish co-operative movement was mirrored elsewhere. Crucially, wartime experience politicised the British co-operative movement. In 1917, the Co-operative Congress voted overwhelmingly to seek direct parliamentary representation. This incursion into politics represented a seminal moment in British co-operative history, which culminated in an alliance with the British Labour party. Previously, the British co-operative movement had resisted involvement in politics. The decision reflected the movement's 'business grievances of the government of the day, against which political pressure was to be mobilised by the new initiative.'¹³¹ British co-operators emerged from the experience of war committed to an extensive promotion of their values, which meant a pragmatic foray into political action. A similar will seized the Irish co-operative movement, which ended the war with a grim determination to reassert its distinct values. The war changed the philosophy of the IAOS. Although the IAOS never created a formal political party, it arguably found one that enunciated a great deal of its social and economic principles in Sinn Féin.

¹³¹ Sidney Pollard, 'The Foundation of the Co-operative Party', *Essays in Labour History, 1886-1923*, ed. by Asa Briggs and John Saville (London: The Macmillan Press, 1971), pp. 185-210 (p. 185).

Throughout the early twentieth century, co-operative ideas around the economy and the role of the state gestated amongst those sympathetic to securing a more advanced conception of political independence than that offered by a Home Rule settlement. Jonathan Githens-Mazer argues that after May 1916, the IPP ‘became increasingly alienated from and unrepresentative of the Irish nation.’¹³² This same judgement holds for the DATI under TW Russell. A paradoxical outcome of the co-operative movement’s inability to court state support before 1918 placed the organisation outside the recognised institutions of the state. Without uncomplicated access to state assistance, the co-operative movement emphasised the importance of economic self-determination through voluntary economic combination. This made the movement an attractive source of intellectual and practical ideals to a new generation of nationalists, intent on seizing political power. Previous battles with the CWS had strengthened the impression of the IAOS as a patriotic organisation that worked in the national interest.

Stephen Gwynn highlighted the importance of the co-operative movement’s efforts in organising the country in the years preceding political independence. Gwynn described Plunkett’s work spreading ‘the doctrine of agricultural co-operation’ as ‘a necessary part of Ireland’s training.’¹³³ The IAOS viewed the outbreak of war as a test of its principles of organisation. By 1919, co-operative organisation had succeeded in embedding its project across a substantial portion of the country, and the co-operative principle shaped working reality for many farmers. These farmers now looked to the promise of political independence and identified

¹³² Githens-Mazer, *Myths and Memories*, p. 159.

¹³³ Gwynn, *Ireland*, p. 188. Before becoming an MP, Gwynn had praised Plunkett and the co-operative movement. Colin Reid, *The Lost Ireland of Stephen Gwynn: Irish Constitutional Nationalism and Cultural Politics, 1864-1950* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), p. 44.

the IAOS as one of their great advocates. By its conclusion, the co-operative movement proved itself a vital part of the country's social and economic infrastructure, and one with a social and economic blueprint ready to be taken up by a new generation of nationalists ready to seize political power. Writing in 1917, Lionel Smith-Gordon and Laurence Staples captured this millennial feeling and articulated the belief that in the imminent political settlement:

some such constructive movement as this [co-operative movement] lies the ultimate hope of sanity, unity and peace, and that when Irishmen appreciate this fact, as they are now beginning to do, they will rally to the call and this will bring us with wondrous speed well upon the road to the Co-operative Commonwealth.¹³⁴

The survival of war stood to the credit of co-operative organisation during the war. Co-operative ideas became synthesised within an advanced nationalist critique of the state, and their popularity continued to expand. The next few years brought a painful transition to political independence and a new phase in attempts to create a co-operative Ireland.

The 1918 General Election confirmed the political transformation of nationalist Ireland. Sinn Féin emerged the largest party on the island, winning seventy-three seats and establishing its own revolutionary government called Dáil Eireann in Dublin. Besides Sinn Féin, Unionists won twenty-six seats, mainly in the north-east and the IPP returned only six candidates.¹³⁵ These results gave a political platform to separatist nationalists, which included those who read journals such as *The Irish Review* and *The Irish Homestead*. This outcome promised that the promotion of a co-operative political economy appeared likely. The next chapter examines the relationship between the co-operative movement and Sinn Féin. This

¹³⁴ Lionel Smith-Gordon and Laurence S Staples, *Rural Reconstruction in Ireland: A Record of Co-operative Organization* (London: PS King and Son, 1917), p. 262.

¹³⁵ Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland*, p. 164.

connection with a burgeoning nationalist elite waiting to take control of governmental resources gave the movement significant influence in the long-term development of the Irish nation-state.

Chapter 3: The Co-operative Movement and Revolution, 1919-1921

The newly constituted revolutionary Dáil Eireann government proclaimed its 'Democratic Programme' on 21 January 1919, which stated that 'it shall be the duty of the Republic to adopt all measures necessary for the recreation and invigoration of our Industries, and to ensure that their being developed on the most beneficial and progressive co-operative lines.'¹ This document outlined the social and economic priorities of a new Irish government and prioritised the welfare of the population alongside the desire to nurture industry and exploit national resources. As the quote suggests, part of the task set by the members of this Irish alternative to British government was the stimulation of the Irish economy along co-operative lines. The 'Democratic Programme' suggested that new nationalists adopted ideas and the rhetoric associated with co-operative organisation in their strategy for an Irish form of modernisation. As shown in the previous chapter, the emergent generation of nationalists which seized governmental power, had grown up at the same time that co-operatives emerged all over the island to become a part of rural society and Irish political culture. By 1919, co-operation was no longer the exclusive preserve of the IAOS. Rather, co-operation featured within economic and political discourses that demanded change.

The end of the First World War coincided with a new phase in the 'Irish Question'. Two governmental structures competed for legitimacy. Dáil Eireann was a revolutionary nationalist government set up in opposition to the British state in

¹ Dáil Éireann, 'Democratic Programme of Dáil Éireann', *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 1, 21 January 1919, <<http://historical-debates.oireachtas.ie/D/DT/D.F.O.191901210015.html>> [Date accessed 11 September 2012].

Ireland and consisted of 73 Sinn Féin MPs elected at the 1918 General Election.² Between 1919 and 1921 members of the Dáil spent much of their time evading capture by the police and security forces. However, its existence and attempt to promote limited governmental programmes represented a real and subversive attempt to create a counter-state.³ In contrast, the co-operative movement came through the war having provided a source of continuity to members despite political upheaval. Co-operative societies still organised work practices in the countryside, whilst members derived the benefit from control over their own industry. In 1920, the movement reached a high watermark in its popularity and a newfound confidence encouraged experimentation in new forms of co-operative organisation. General purpose societies began to materialise in rural villages with the ambitious aim of bringing both producer and consumer interests together. Nevertheless, the co-operative movement remained outside the official institutions of the state and the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (DATI) maintained an indifferent attitude towards the IAOS. At a national level, the IAOS advocated its model of economic organisation as a blueprint for modernisation and as something that inculcated an economically self-sufficient population. The revolutionary Dáil's 'Democratic Programme' reflected efforts to promote co-operative ideas amongst a new cadre of policymakers. In this sense, co-operation became a part of the discussion about what the future Irish state might resemble.

Prevailing criticism of the 'Democratic Programme' is that much of the theory contained in the document failed to convert into practical policies. Arthur

² RF Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* (London: Penguin, 1989), p. 495; JJ Lee, *Ireland, 1912-1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 40.

³ Arthur Mitchell, *Revolutionary Government in Ireland: Dáil Éireann, 1919-1922* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1995), p. 43.

Mitchell argues that the Dáil appeared to lose interest in the ‘Democratic Programme’ almost immediately.⁴ JJ Lee emphasises the social conservatism of the Dáil for this failure.⁵ Some members of the Dáil distanced themselves from the ‘Democratic Programme’, with one Minister later referring to the document as ‘largely poetry’.⁶ However, whilst rhetoric might have proved more ambitious than what materialised during 1919-21, concerted efforts to tackle problems related to economic development and land ownership preoccupied the nationalist administration. In these attempts, a commitment to co-operative principles amongst some members of the Dáil can be identified. The IAOS became a part of the Dáil’s attempts to establish an alternative government in Ireland. In relation to agricultural development, the co-operative movement offered a ready-made instrument through which rural policies might be implemented. Nationalist intellectuals advocated co-operative principles in order to differentiate their governance from the British administration. In this respect, AE proved to be an influential figure as his ideas attracted the attention of these nationalists. The Dáil’s restricted ability to effect change reflected its limited resources and fugitive status. Yet, from the vantage point of the IAOS, the shift in the political landscape raised the possibility of advancing attempts to construct the Co-operative Commonwealth. However, efforts towards this objective met with frustration.

⁴ Mitchell, *Revolutionary Government*, pp. 45-6

⁵ Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985*, p. 41.

⁶ Following the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922, Vice-President of the Executive Council of Dáil Éireann, Kevin O’Higgins, dismissed the ‘Democratic Programme’ as ‘largely poetry’. O’Higgins was the Assistant Minister for Local Government during 1919-1921 and played an important role in steering the post-independence government through instability and civil war. He was assassinated by Republicans in 1927. Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985*, p. 124; John Patrick McCarthy, *Kevin O’Higgins: Builder of the Irish State* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006).

The Dáil represented a potent symbol of popular resistance against British power in Ireland and acted as ‘a source of legitimacy for fighting men in the guerrilla war that followed.’⁷ Violence and revolution characterised the period between the end of the First World War and the establishment of the Irish Free State. Important works examining social change and conflict emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, including David Fitzpatrick’s regional study of the Irish War of Independence and Emmet O’Connor’s work on the Irish labour movement.⁸ However, the predominant focus still remains upon military aspects of the campaign for independence as well as the personalities and developments associated with ‘high’ politics. Michael Laffan argues that the Irish revolution neither attempted to instigate radical change, nor did it provoke the emergence of a radical social agenda. Instead, it took ‘nationalist, political and military forms’.⁹ However, it is this question of what constituted the ‘nationalist’ form that requires deconstructing. Recent examples of this exist in the work of Fergus Campbell, who highlights the issue of land as a major source of agrarian disturbance that fed into wider unrest. Campbell constructs a history whereby the revolutionary impulses found in the Sinn Féin movement offered continuity with the land agitations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁰ Nationalism drew energy from rural grievances and dissatisfaction with

⁷ Brian Farrell, *The Founding of Dáil Éireann: Parliament and Nation Building* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1971), p. 80.

⁸ Examples of important work in the field of socio-economic change produced in the 1970s and 1980s are David Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life, 1913-1921: Provincial Experience of War and Revolution* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1977); Emmet O’Connor, *Syndicalism in Ireland, 1917-1923* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1988).

⁹ Michael Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland: The Sinn Féin Party, 1916-1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 315. Also, Joost Augusteijn ed., *The Irish Revolution, 1913-1923* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002); John M Regan and Mike Cronin, ‘Introduction: Ireland and the Politics of Independence, 1922-49: New Perspectives and Re-considerations’, in *Ireland: The Politics of Independence, 1922-49*, ed. by Mike Cronin and John M Regan (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 1-12 (pp. 1-2).

¹⁰ Fergus Campbell, *Land and Revolution: Nationalist Politics in the West of Ireland, 1891-1921* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

the status quo, but also embraced sophisticated ideas about Irish forms of economic behaviour grounded in the everyday lives of the rural population.

The Home Rule Act had been passed in 1914, but suspended due to the outbreak of war. The end of the war brought an expectation that some form of Home Rule would be implemented. However, Dáil Eireann's establishment challenged the envisaged solution of Home Rule by instead demanding a more advanced form of political independence in the shape of the Irish Republic. At the same time, co-operation moved into the political mainstream as the Dáil looked to the IAOS to provide a means of implementing policies. Nevertheless, the co-operative movement remains absent from the historiography of the revolutionary period. The new nationalist hegemonic project spearheaded by Sinn Féin drew on older traditions. These included agrarian populism, revolutionary Fenianism, the urbane intellectualism of figures such as Arthur Griffith, and the constitutionalism of the Home Rule movement they displaced in 1918. In this intellectual diversity lay both the strength and weakness of the Sinn Féin movement. Whilst Sinn Féin possessed a broad appeal, it ultimately failed to satisfy all of its constituents. Yet the intellectual contribution of the co-operative project formed an important part of a new nationalist political economy after 1918. The impact of co-operative ideology upon Sinn Féin and the labour movement is missing from treatments of the independence process.

This chapter examines the tumultuous Irish War of Independence (1919-21) through the lens of the co-operative movement. During the War of Independence, co-operative creameries were targeted by Crown forces in reprisal for rebel activity. In absence of being able to identify the perpetrators of guerrilla attacks, the 'Black and Tans' tried to destroy the economic basis of local rural communities. As the country

moved towards some form of constitutional autonomy, the movement survived this campaign of state violence and became an important component of rural life after independence. The reasons for this resided in the movement's deep roots within the rural economy and its centrality to the working lives of Irish farmers established in previous decades and reinforced during the war.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section examines the appropriation of co-operation by strident, confident nationalists and repositions the co-operative movement as an important intellectual influence within Irish politics. Such scrutiny highlights the importance of co-operative organisation to the nation-building project as it underwent its most intensive phase during decolonisation. One of the co-operative movement's strengths emanated from its broad, populist appeal. Despite the much vaunted non-political status of the movement, co-operators proved willing to fashion long-standing alliances across Irish society. As the legitimacy of British authority in Ireland diminished, the attraction of co-operative organisation to a burgeoning generation of Irish legislators proved of paramount importance to the longevity of the IAOS within a new Irish nation-state. The second section examines the co-operative movement's trajectory of development. The First World War exerted a profound effect upon agriculture and the cost of living. The co-operative movement's response to such change provided a crucial indication of its capacity to bring about the Co-operative Commonwealth. Finally, the chapter explores how the movement survived the War of Independence and argues that despite challenging circumstances, its broad cross-sectional support provided the resilience required to endure state-sponsored violence. At the level of local experience, the survival of a state-sponsored campaign of violence transformed the co-operative movement into a

national institution. By the end of 1921, the Irish co-operative movement was well-positioned to act as an institution for social and economic development in an independent Irish state.

Co-operation, Nationalism and Labour

Co-operation and Sinn Féin

From 1919 to 1921, two competing governmental structures existed in Ireland. Sinn Féin toppled the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) as the major advocates of political autonomy, instead demanding the establishment of an Irish Republic. The British state remained the official source of power in Ireland, but Sinn Féin's establishment of Dáil Eireann was an attempt to create an alternative legitimate government. A revolutionary situation arose, whereby several opposing interests established themselves as the legitimate claimants of governmental authority in Ireland.¹¹ As such, the establishment of Dáil Eireann represented a serious challenge to British power in Ireland, which manifested in both political and military forms. The outbreak of violence in Ireland disrupted the uneasy political situation that existed by 1919 and affected the network of co-operative societies, which will be addressed in greater detail later in the chapter. Dáil Eireann's effort to construct an alternative state system was hampered by limited financial resources and its status as a proscribed institution. The Dáil's subsequent attempts to govern utilised the expertise of existent institutions. The co-operative movement offered one pragmatic means through which the Dáil attempted to implement rural policies.

The escalation of violence after 1919 sparked the interest of a new wave of foreign writers and journalists keen to understand the dynamics of political change

¹¹ This definition of a revolutionary situation is taken from Charles Tilly, *Popular Contention in Great Britain, 1758-1834* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 237.

and conflict in Ireland. The co-operative movement caught the attention of these writers as it stood out amongst the variegated social forces operating in post-war Ireland. In part, the reason for this attention stemmed from AE – a well-known international figure and someone associated with the message of co-operation. Henry Wallace, the American rural expert and Vice-President between 1941 and 1945, recalled hearing about AE from his grandfather who convinced the young Wallace to visit Europe in order to study agriculture. In particular, Wallace's grandfather persuaded Henry to meet up with AE. Before he embarked for Europe in 1912, Wallace recalled that his grandfather 'had me read to him every day or two for half an hour from AE's editorials as they appeared in the *Irish Homestead*.' When Wallace eventually met AE he remembered 'it was... with real appreciation that I sat down to talk with the famous artist, writer, and agricultural economist.'¹² AE made himself accessible to many people, including international visitors keen to discuss political questions of the day. As such, those curious individuals who visited AE were directed towards the Irish co-operative movement.

In 1920, Ruth Russell, a journalist with the *Chicago Tribune*, published an account of her visit, entitled *What's the Matter with Ireland?* As Russell travelled across an Ireland descending into violence and social unrest, she attempted to understand the changed nature of the 'Irish Question'. Russell believed that the problem resided in Ireland's social and economic problems and she concluded that the cause of unrest lay in the fact that Ireland was poor: 'poor to ignorance, poor to starvation, poor to insanity and death. And that the cause of her poverty is her exploitation by the world capitalist next door to her.' Whilst travelling she

¹² Henry A Wallace, 'AE: A Prophet out of an Ancient Age', *Colby Library Quarterly*, 4.2 (1955), 28-31 (pp.28-29).

encountered strong views as to how Ireland's problems might be solved. In urban areas she met with labourers who argued that a Worker's Republic provided the surest means of ending poverty, whilst in the 'villages and country places where the co-operative movement is growing strong, there are those who believe that the new republic must be a co-operative commonwealth.'¹³

Ruth Russell visited AE's home for one of his regular Sunday soirees where a host of intellectuals discussed a range of topics touching upon politics, arts, and economics. Russell became aware of the high regard in which AE was held by these peers, and described him as 'the north star of Ireland' and someone 'who gives ear to all sincere radicals, Sinn Féiners and "Reds"'. She noted that the opportunity to talk with AE at his home 'goes far... towards easing the strain on the taut nerves of the Sinn Féin intellectuals who attend them.' AE's geniality allowed him to discuss major political issues with those close to the heart of the Irish nationalist project and to push forth his views on 'the peaceful revolution of co-operation.'¹⁴

Russell devoted a chapter of her book to the role played by the co-operative movement in tackling rural poverty and revitalising the countryside. She encountered a movement that promoted rural development and encouraged a spirit of self-reliance amongst its practitioners. Russell approached AE because of his co-operative expertise, and he instructed her to visit the work of co-operators in Donegal, which she later did. Speaking to Russell before violent unrest reached its apogee, AE assessed the contemporary situation as one where 'Ireland can and is developing her own industries through co-operation.' AE confided a lack of faith in the British

¹³ Ruth Russell, *What's the Matter with Ireland?* (New York: The Devin-Adair Co, 1920), pp. 13-14.

¹⁴ Russell, *What's the Matter*, p. 102.

government's ability to provide the necessary support for Irish farmers. He supported 'the building of a co-operative commonwealth on co-operative societies', but felt English rule prevented this outcome:

She [Ireland] is developing [industries] without aid from England and in the face of opposition in Ireland. England, you see, is used to dealing with problems of empire—with nations and great metropolises. When we bring her plans that mean life or death to just villages, the matter is too small to discuss. She is bored.¹⁵

Russell recorded AE's belief that Ireland needed a plan that prioritised the rural village, which he believed was the foundation stone of the nation. According to such a view, English, or rather British, governmental priorities failed to account for the economic realities of Irish rural life.

Irish co-operation attracted the interest of other notable visitors. The example of the movement's work enthused Ibrahim Rashad, an Egyptian nationalist who published his travelogue, *An Egyptian in Ireland*, in 1920. Having studied economics and lived in England for most of his life, Rashad wanted Egypt to attain 'her political emancipation, her economic freedom [and] her social uplifting'. Rashad wrote his travelogue as part of what he viewed the duty of every 'intellectual among the rising generation in every country, especially in those countries which circumstances have placed in a backward position, to investigate and to make known those movements in other lands from which their own people may learn.' Like Ruth Russell, Rashad was drawn to AE, and cited him as an influential individual: 'His views of ideals and realities... fill the young and ardent with the desire to do great things. His inspiring influence on the rising generation cannot be exaggerated.' AE provided Rashad with an informal education on Ireland and co-operation. As a result, Rashad became

¹⁵ Russell, *What's the Matter*, p. 107.

enthused by the possibilities for national revival offered by co-operative organisation as practiced by the Irish:

Here the spirit of association and power of organisation seemed to have full play in many of the ways of life. As applied to political and social questions they appeared to be as effective as when applied to economics. I now discovered that my enthusiasm for the Co-operative Movement was to lead me further than the desire merely to improve the economic position of my people. It was to show me what the power of organisation and force of associated effort can do in every department.¹⁶

An outside observer, Rashad observed one of the Irish co-operative movement's most powerful attributes. The control over one's industry brought about by the mutual ownership of a creamery, encouraged a desire for political autonomy also. Therefore, the economic effect of co-operation carried political consequences. Rashad left Ireland convinced that co-operation offered a means to attain social, economic and political autonomy and enthusiastic about the possibilities co-operative organisation held for an assertion of nationalist identity.

Within Ireland, key personalities in the nationalist movement formed close links to the co-operative movement, reflecting this influence in their own work. Co-operative ideas engendered a profound impact upon the intellectual development of Irish nationalism, which shaped the ideology of an emergent hegemonic project. In particular, AE's influence carried considerable weight amongst Sinn Féin intellectuals throughout the early twentieth century. His books and journalism provided constant commentary upon many developments and ensured that a co-operative discourse featured within the melee of political debate. The publication of his landmark text, *The National Being*, found an attentive audience amongst these political nationalists. Prominent Sinn Féin intellectuals such as Darrell Figgis, Aodh de Blacam and Patrick Little (editor of the Sinn Féin journal, *New Ireland*) all

¹⁶ Ibrahim Rashad, *An Egyptian in Ireland* (n.a.: Privately Printed by the Author, 1920), pp. 2-3.

displayed this book's influence within their own writing.¹⁷ The language of co-operation provided these writers with a rhetorical device that granted coherency to the vision of an imagined Irish nation they set out to create. Co-operative societies represented working institutions of which most Irish people would have been aware.

Darrell Figgis's important contribution to the intellectual development of Sinn Féin bore the imprint of co-operative discourse. Figgis, a regular visitor to AE's house, spent several stints in prison on account of his political activities. He published nationalist propaganda and enjoyed close access to Sinn Féin leaders, becoming a trusted confidant to Arthur Griffith, the Vice-President of the Dáil. After independence, he played an important role in writing the Irish Free State's first constitution.¹⁸ Figgis's career offers evidence of the political capital co-operative ideals possessed amongst the nationalist elite. Figgis published an admiring biography of AE in 1916. This book argued that AE's economic and social philosophy provided an ideal foundation for an Irish nation-state by offering 'a distinct nationality with its own conception of civilization; and [AE] would house that nationality in a distinct State worthy of the praise of noble men.'¹⁹ In 1917, Figgis identified the co-operative society as the means through which Irish farmers had already set about building the modern state. Although Figgis believed that Ireland existed already as a nation, it had yet to graduate to the rank of 'a Sovereign State.' Figgis argued that farmers seized hold of the co-operative ideology as a means by which to recapture a sense of an old statehood that existed in an imagined,

¹⁷ Mitchell, *Revolutionary Government*, p. 45.

¹⁸ William Murphy, 'Figgis, Darrell', in *Dictionary of Irish Biography: From Earliest Times to the Year 2002, Volume 3*, ed. by James McGuire and James Quinn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 775-777.

¹⁹ Darrell Figgis, *George W. Russell: A Study of a Man and a Nation* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1916), p. 134.

pre-British, Gaelic past. These farmers ‘turned their co-operative societies into rural communities that were a re-birth in modern conditions of their old stateships.’²⁰ According to Figgis, the conditions for a native, Gaelic state already existed in rural communities engaged in economic co-operation. Farmers created one aspect of an independent Irish state by interacting with their local co-operative societies. As such, rural co-operatives represented splinters of an Irish modernity that proved the nation was ready to ascend to the position of a sovereign state.

Aodh de Blacam, one of Sinn Féin’s chief propagandists, wrote in support of the case for Irish independence. De Blacam viewed Sinn Féin as reflecting the mood of the nation, which he defined as rural.²¹ This reification of the rural represents an important motif of the separatist nationalist élite, who were largely from an urban, middle-class, professional background.²² Between 1918 and 1921 de Blacam published several books in which he established terms of reference that argued for a national policy to promote and protect the agricultural mode of life.²³ De Blacam asserted that ‘every Irish social thinker envisages the Gaelic polity as a rural polity.’ This definition of ‘Gaelic’ was important as it equated rurality with a more genuine type of Irish society. De Blacam stated that Irish people regarded the ‘great industrial cities of Britain or America... as horrible perversions of the natural order.’ He conceded that the ‘Irish objection of urban concentration is factitious’, but continued

²⁰ Darrell Figgis, *The Gaelic State in the Past and Future or ‘The Crown of the Nation’* (Dublin: Maunsel & Co. Ltd, 1917), p. 53.

²¹ Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland, 1900-2000* (London: Profile Books, 2005), p. 195.

²² Tom Garvin, *The Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1981), pp. 100-113; Garvin, *Nationalist Revolutionaries in Ireland, 1858 – 1928* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 33-56

²³ Aodh de Blacam, *Towards the Republic: A Study of New Ireland’s Social and Political Aims* (Dublin: T Kiersey, 1918); de Blacam, *What Sinn Féin Stands For: The Irish Republican Movement: Its History, Aims and Ideals Examined as the Their Significance to the World* (Dublin: Mellifont Press Limited, 1921).

‘when all allowances are made it is deep-rooted in the Irish mind.’²⁴ De Blacam was convinced of the central importance of co-operation in the attempt to resolve the ‘Irish Question’. He asserted that ‘the future of Ireland lies in Co-operation no observer of the times can doubt.’ De Blacam understood that the work of the co-operative movement resulted from the long-term, gradual extension of the principle throughout the country, but its continued success relied upon an ability to renew support amongst new generations: ‘Co-operation... had to be preached, as in the wilderness, for the space of a generation, but today every young man of intelligence... accepts co-operation as the progressive policy.’²⁵

For de Blacam and others, the adoption of co-operative values set Sinn Féin apart from the constitutional nationalists. Whereas the IPP treated the co-operative movement with outward hostility, Sinn Féin embraced its ideas. The IPP represented an older generation and therefore, the past. By contrast, Sinn Féin exuded a youthful appeal that underpinned attempts to position themselves as harbingers of the future. Sinn Féin intellectuals emphasised that it was the *young* farmer who sought to tread ‘the progressive path’. The archetypal Sinn Féin supporter read ‘modern Irish literature, and finds every one of the intellectual leaders of the country preaching co-operation [and] sees no one defending the cause of the old *régime* of traders who grew rich on selling bad seeds and inferior manures.’²⁶ This ‘Young Ireland’ views the fruition of their ambitions through co-operation, and the old traditional enemies of the co-operative movement are conflated with the apparatus of the older order in the process of deconstruction.

²⁴ De Blacam, *What Sinn Féin Stands For*, p. 151.

²⁵ De Blacam, *Towards the Republic*, pp. 26-27.

²⁶ De Blacam, *Towards the Republic*, pp. 27-28.

De Blacam also highlighted the co-operative movement's attempts to enrich cultural life through pioneering measures such as the establishment of rural libraries. For example, the Enniscorthy Co-operative Society displayed its modern credentials when it established a cinema for the local community. In this way, co-operation provided a mechanism which contained 'the possibility of Irishising the people's amusements,' and in the near future societies could become 'the most effective patrons of Irish music, Irish drama and Irish talent that these [the public] have ever enjoyed.'²⁷ Linking the spread of co-operation to notions of cultural development echoed the objectives that animated the cultural revivalists in the 1890s.²⁸ The commitment to co-operative principles amongst leading Sinn Féin individuals remains difficult to ascertain. Nevertheless, whether the intention behind an appropriation of the language of co-operation represented a cynical ploy to attract popular support or genuine belief in its social and economic principles is not the crucial issue. Co-operation emerged as a trope that peppered Sinn Féin discourse. By utilising a language of co-operation, Sinn Féin made a strong case that their utopian vision of an Ireland freed from the influence of British government was possible. By pointing to the contemporary activity of co-operative societies already at work throughout the countryside, it already partly existed.

AE welcomed these nationalist overtures with caution. On one level, he applauded this interest in co-operative ideals which seemed 'to have many voluntary propagandists, for we find Irish papers on all sides reporting speeches in which the future Ireland is spoken of as a Co-operative Commonwealth.' However, he

²⁷ De Blacam, *Towards the Republic*, pp. 27-28.

²⁸ PJ Mathews, *Revival: The Abbey Theatre, Sinn Féin, the Gaelic League and the Co-operative Movement* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2003), p. 31.

questioned what politicians meant when they used such language, suspecting the appropriation of co-operative principles as populist measure. He challenged the:

new propagandists of the Co-operative State, whose advent in the field of co-operative effort we welcome, to define more clearly the kind of social order they are working for, and the steps by which they propose to attain what they desire.²⁹

AE demonstrated a cynicism towards those who articulated support for a co-operative political economy whilst in pursuit of electoral successes. His note of caution, sounded in April 1919, signified an example of AE's insightfulness as the social order articulated by Sinn Féin over the next two years remained a rather obscure one.

Despite concerns expressed by AE, forthcoming reforms from the revolutionary Dáil demonstrated some measure of support for co-operative principles and institutions in pursuit of their counter-state. Early Dáil activity displayed a practical commitment to co-operative principles beyond the pages of intellectual treatises, which could be said to fall within what Arthur Griffith termed 'the spirit of self-reliance'.³⁰ Ernest Blythe, the Dáil's Director of Trade and Commerce, argued in 1919 for the organisation of the Irish economy along co-operative lines, stating that this provided 'the only feasible method of combating foreign trusts and combines.'³¹ Blythe had worked at the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (DATI) during Horace Plunkett's time as Vice-President when co-operative principles characterised official agricultural policy.³² Under Blythe's direction, a

²⁹ 'The Co-operative Commonwealth', *Irish Homestead*, 12 April 1919.

³⁰ Arthur Griffith, *The Resurrection of Hungary: A Parallel for Ireland with Appendices on Pitt's Policy and Sinn Féin*, 3rd edition (Dublin: Whelan and Son, 1918), p. 141.

³¹ Blythe quoted in, Mitchell, *Revolutionary Government*, p. 47.

³² Patrick Buckley, 'Blythe, Ernest (de Blaghd, Earnán)', in *Dictionary of Irish Biography: From Earliest Times to the Year 2002, Volume 1*, ed. by James McGuire and James Quinn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 616-624 (p. 616)

pragmatic relationship between the IAOS and the Dáil emerged that fostered co-operation between the two institutions.

On 6 May 1919, Sinn Féin's executive urged all party branches to support the establishment of co-operative societies. In order to co-ordinate a strategy, the Dáil formed a commission to study 'the whole question of co-operation in Ireland'. The commission's committee included prominent IAOS figures like AE, Fr. O'Flanagan, Edward Lysaght as well as Dáil Director for Agriculture, Robert Barton. By August 1919, Griffith produced a pamphlet urging co-operative organisation be applied to matters of trade and distribution and President de Valera sent word from America that he 'endorsed the idea of the Co-operative Commonwealth'.³³ By late 1919, the Dáil showed interest in the day-to-day operations of the IAOS. The IAOS co-opted Robert Barton onto its governing committee.³⁴ Two years later, Ernest Blythe joined Barton at the IAOS, giving Sinn Féin a valuable insight into the workings and organisational structure of the Irish co-operative movement.³⁵ This provided an important link between an insurgent government-in-waiting and the premier agency of rural expertise. Such connections provided the basis for a long-term relationship that stretched into the post-independence era.

Arthur Mitchell argues that Sinn Féin's commitment to co-operatives declined within months. Instead, the party revealed itself as an efficient electoral machine, which concentrated attention and resources upon local elections in 1920.³⁶ However, this is to oversimplify the objectives of Sinn Féin during the revolutionary period. Winning elections formed an immediate priority for Sinn Féin, but its

³³ Mitchell, *Revolutionary Government*, pp. 47-48.

³⁴ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1919*, pp. 2-3.

³⁵ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1921*, pp. 2-3.

³⁶ Mitchell, *Revolutionary Government*, pp. 48-49.

activities during 1919-21 showed that it was more than an electoral machine. Social issues informed the political culture in the midst of a constitutional crisis. For example, the question around land ownership remained contentious. The importance of the 1903 Wyndham Land Act, which legislated for the handover of most farmland to the tenant farmers, has been emphasised as an act that settled the land question.³⁷ However, Fergus Campbell highlights the persistence of land ownership and distribution as a controversial issue in this period.³⁸ In December 1919, a Dáil committee established to investigate the possibility of creating a central co-operative bank, resulted in the foundation of the National Land Bank (Banc na Talmhan). The National Land Bank was registered under the provisions of the 'Industrial and Provident Societies Acts as a co-operative institution' and founded to 'secure for the benefit of the Irish people the use of Irish money in Ireland, and to establish a financial centre for their interests.'³⁹ According to a later description, the National Land Bank represented a reaction by Sinn Féin to counter 'troubled times... and its object was to provide credits for farmers.'⁴⁰

The Dáil appointed Lionel Smith-Gordon as the Bank's Managing-Director. Smith-Gordon made an interesting choice. Described by one contemporary as a person of 'high standing', Smith-Gordon fit the criteria required as manager by virtue of being 'a gentleman who has considerable experience in connexion with agricultural banking operations.'⁴¹ Smith-Gordon was born in England and educated

³⁷ Barbara Lewis Solow, *The Land Question and the Irish Economy* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 192-193; Michael Wheatley, *Nationalism and the Irish Party: Provincial Ireland, 1910-1916* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), chapter 2.

³⁸ Fergus Campbell and Kevin O'Shiel, 'The Last Land War? Kevin O'Shiel's Memoir of the Irish Revolution (1916-1921)', *Archivium Hibernicum*, 57 (2003), 155-200 (pp. 172-173).

³⁹ EJ Riordan, *Modern Irish Trade and Industry* (New York: EP Dutton and Company, 1920), p. 259.

⁴⁰ 'Free State National Land Bank', *The Times*, 21 July 1926.

⁴¹ Riordan, *Trade and Industry*, p. 260.

at Eton and Oxford.⁴² He was employed as a Professor at the University of Toronto until 1912, where he ‘became very much interested in the co-operative movement in Ireland. I [Smith-Gordon] went there and soon became a revolutionist.’⁴³ Smith-Gordon worked at Dublin’s Co-operative Reference Library in 1914, and championed the role of co-operative organisation in Irish and European economic development in his many publications. By the time he was appointed to the management role of the new National Land Bank, Smith-Gordon showed an acute appreciation for Irish nationalism, which sprang from his intense interest in co-operation.

Lionel Smith-Gordon’s work at the National Land Bank brought him into close association with Sinn Féin officials and he cut a prominent figure in contemporary Irish politics. He used his position to promote the expansion of co-operative organisation in Ireland, but this became tempered with a commitment to radical nationalism. Commentators who attacked the conduct of Sinn Féin went as far as to single out Smith-Gordon as a target for opprobrium. In September 1921, the playwright and Ulster unionist, St. John Ervine, launched a scathing attack upon Sinn Féin in *The Times*. Ervine’s critique rested on his ability to demonstrate his impeccable Ulster credentials by tracing his ancestry there for at least 300 years. That record granted Ervine ‘some claim to the title of Irish’. In stark contrast, leading Sinn Féin figures failed the Irish test on those grounds. Ervine outlined the key members of Sinn Féin, who he then attacked as incapable of demonstrating a claim to genuine Irishness. Ervine identified Eamon de Valera, the leader of Sinn Féin, as

⁴² ‘Sir Lionel Smith-Gordon’, *The Times*, 9 December 1976.

⁴³ ‘Titled Englishman, Dublin Banker, Spends Week Here’, *The Evening Independent* [St Petersburg, Florida], 14 January 1924.

‘a citizen of the United States, born in New York of a Spanish father and an Irish mother’; Arthur Griffith was ‘a Welshman, who, like Medea, is “sullen-eyed and full of hate”’; and Erskine Childers, ‘the most extreme adviser of Sinn Féin’, was in the end, ‘a very gallant Englishman’. Amongst the leading figures of the Sinn Féin movement, Ervine asserted that ‘one of the ablest officials the Sinn Féiners possess in their non-political activities is an Englishman, Mr Smith-Gordon.’⁴⁴ This ‘non-political activity’ referred to his work in leading the National Land Bank.

Ervine provoked a strong reaction from Smith-Gordon who defended himself against the accusation of ‘Englishness’ in the same newspaper. ‘Honoured by being mentioned among the *dramatis personae* of Mr Ervine’s Wonderland’, Smith-Gordon rubbished the claim that he was ‘an official possessed by Sinn Féin’. Instead he categorised his occupation as a means to ‘serve my country as a manager of a registered company.’ Nevertheless, Ervine’s attack revealed a deep-seated anxiety about Smith-Gordon’s own identity. He stressed ‘I am not an Englishman, by blood, temperament, domicile, citizenship, or outlook’, and claimed that ‘I try to atone for an alien upbringing by living in and for my country.’⁴⁵ By managing the National Land Bank, Smith-Gordon had become associated with Sinn Féin and aided the perpetuation of the revolutionary Dáil as a legitimate political administration. The job of manager allowed Smith-Gordon to further insert himself within a national project that had started with his work for Plunkett and allowed him to reveal his credentials as a patriotic Irishman.

⁴⁴ St. John Ervine, ‘Ulster and Sinn Féin’ *The Times*, 7 September 1921.

⁴⁵ Lionel Smith-Gordon, ‘Nationality and Sinn Féin’, *The Times*, 12 September 1921.

As Director of the National Land Bank, Lionel Smith-Gordon played a crucial role in the later Irish Free State's financial system and remained an ardent supporter of the independent nation-state. However, before that, in 1920 and 1921, he helped embed the co-operative society as a developmental instrument amongst Irish policymakers. Smith-Gordon laid out his ambitions for the new National Land Bank in 1921:

The ideal is to create co-operative communities of men who will work in harmony with one another and help one another to get the highest possible yield out of the land, to standardise the produce, to brighten the life of the countryside, and to do away with the existing class distinctions and feelings of bitterness which arise from unequal distribution of wealth and opportunity.⁴⁶

In this way, the Dáil viewed the National Land Bank as a key instrument to fund the vitalisation of Irish industry and society. With the co-operative ethos at the forefront, the institution's charter asserted that, 'The National Land Bank is an Irish institution founded to assist in the rebuilding of Ireland's prosperity, the restoration of her population and the securing of her economic independence.' The constitution of this new financial body concluded that 'It is a National Bank with a National Ideal.'⁴⁷ The National Land Bank was founded with a nominal share capital of £406,000.⁴⁸ It received an initial £203,000 investment from the Dáil. By June 1921 the bank had loaned out £315,000. Most of this money funded land purchase, but several loans funded other industries such as fisheries. All this money passed through co-operative societies, which were utilised as instruments of nationalist development.⁴⁹ This limited level of investment failed to solve all problems around land ownership, but

⁴⁶ Lionel Smith-Gordon, cited in Mitchell, *Revolutionary Government*, p. 89.

⁴⁷ National Library of Ireland, Dublin, (NLI) P2282, 'The National Land Bank: Its Constitution and its Aims' (ca 1921), p. 4.

⁴⁸ 'Free State Banking Policy', *The Times*, 22 July 1926.

⁴⁹ Mary E. Daly, *The First Department: A History of the Department of Agriculture*, (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 2002), pp.68-70; Mitchell, *Revolutionary Government*, pp. 86-92.

showed a commitment by the nationalist administration to utilise the existent co-operative network to tackle social problems.

Sinn Fein and the IAOS shared certain values and objectives, which reflected their emergence at a similar juncture in the cultural development of the Irish state.⁵⁰ Close personal associations played an important role in fostering connections between the political and economic movements. The IAOS's work established a receptive rural audience hungry for the discourse constructed around independence expounded by Sinn Féin. For many farmers the linking of the economic freedom they enjoyed through their co-operative society segued into Sinn Féin's message of political autonomy.

Co-operation and Labour

Co-operative principles proved malleable and developed a political appeal beyond Sinn Fein. With its collectivist political economy, co-operation also proved attractive to a confident Irish labour movement. Organised labour advocated co-operative ideas, albeit with different priorities compared to the IAOS. The leading intellectual light of the labour movement before 1916 was James Connolly. Connolly played a leading part in the 1916 Easter Rising and his reputation increased following his execution. He had engaged with the co-operative movement in his writings on the history of labour in Ireland and found much to admire. In his major work, Connolly attempted to establish a genealogy of labour history – a challenge to received orthodoxies promoted within the contemporary historiography – concluding that the 'Co-operative Commonwealth' represented an appropriate form of social organisation for Ireland. However, Connolly's conception possessed socialist

⁵⁰ Mathews, *Revival*, pp. 1-4.

connotations, lacking from that advanced by the IAOS. From organised labour's perspective, a focus on the consumer instead of the producer better represented a realisation of working-class aspirations. As such the interests of the farmers' co-operatives promoted by the IAOS and the workers' co-operatives proposed by Connolly and later, trade union leaders, were opposed. Whilst he remained complimentary towards figures such as AE, Connolly highlighted the dearth of co-operative organisation in urban areas. If co-operation were to take root in Ireland, rural and urban co-operators needed 'to find a common basis in order that one might support and reinforce the other.'⁵¹ Connolly identified the failure to achieve this objective as an inherent flaw in the IAOS's vision. Instead, an industrial plan based upon the interests of all workers under the leadership of one single trade union, offered the most effective way of achieving a 'Social Administration of the Co-operative Commonwealth in the future.'⁵² This consumerist Co-operative Commonwealth resonated within the Irish trade union movement, which continued to use the concept after the death of Connolly.⁵³

Connolly debated ideas about co-operation with Fr. Thomas Finlay, the Vice-President of the IAOS. Connolly argued for a socialist conception of the Commonwealth.⁵⁴ Finlay believed that an increased level of labour activism, presented a danger for the IAOS, as it threatened to involve them in a form of materialistic politics. As a Jesuit, Finlay found this prospect distasteful. As such, he went to great lengths to distinguish the Co-operative Commonwealth of his

⁵¹ James Connolly, *Labour in Ireland: Labour in Irish History; The Re-conquest of Ireland* (Dublin: Maunsel & Roberts Ltd, 1922), pp. 320-321.

⁵² Connolly, *Labour in Ireland*, pp. 327-328.

⁵³ Keith Harding, 'The "Co-operative Commonwealth": Ireland, Larkin and the *Daily Herald*', in *New Views of Co-operation*, ed. by Stephen Yeo (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 88-107 (pp. 88-89).

⁵⁴ *The Workers' Republic*, 1 July 1899; Donal Nevin, *James Connolly: 'A Full Life'* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2005), pp. 128-129.

movement from that of the labour movement.⁵⁵ Despite Finlay's reticence to embrace the materialism of labour, the co-operative movement could provide a home for sympathetic intellectuals. During the 1913 Lockout, AE declared support for Dublin's striking workers and published an open letter addressed to the 'aristocracy of industry':

You may succeed in your policy and ensure your own damnation by your victory. The men whose manhood you have broken will loathe you, and will always be brooding and scheming to strike a fresh blow.⁵⁶

This drew praise from Connolly who was one of the leaders of the locked-out workers.⁵⁷ In private, AE confessed to a lack of confidence not evident in his famous pronouncement. He believed his actions had cost his job as editor of the *Irish Homestead*, although in the event he received no censure and continued in post.⁵⁸

Potential for a fruitful relationship between labour and co-operators existed. These possibilities were explored at the end of the war. The experience of war suggested a convergence in the aims of the co-operative and labour movements. The leaders of the Irish Labour Party contributed to the Dáil's Democratic Programme, which contained a commitment to using co-operative principles in economic development. In an earlier draft, Tom Johnson, leader of the Labour Party, included the sentence:

It shall be the purpose of the government to encourage the organisation of people into trade unions and co-operative societies with a view to the control and administration of industries by the workers engaged in the industries.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Thomas J Morrissey, *Thomas A. Finlay, SJ, 1848-1940: Educationalist, Editor, Social Reformer* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), pp. 108-109.

⁵⁶ 'Open Letter to the Masters of Dublin', *Irish Times*, 7 October 1913.

⁵⁷ Connolly, *Labour in Ireland*, p. 324.

⁵⁸ Richard J Finneran and Mary M Fitzgerald, eds, *Some Unpublished Letters from AE to James Stephens*, (Dublin: The Cuala Press, 1979) pp. 1-3, letter sent 8 November 1913. For an account of the lockout see, Padraig Yeates, *Lockout: Dublin 1913*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2001).

⁵⁹ Cited in Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland*, p. 196.

After the war and in the wake of the Russian Revolution, the British government viewed the most immediate threat to its authority in Ireland coming from the trade union movement. The confidence of international labour movements increased and became subjects of enthusiasm and suspicion. In Ireland, the Russian Revolution galvanised the labour and co-operative movements and contributed to demands for social change. In February 1918, Johnson reflected upon the Russian Revolution in an article entitled, 'If the Bolsheviks Came to Ireland'. Johnson argued that the Irish equivalent to the Russian soviets could be found in:

the trades councils, *the agricultural co-operative societies*, and... the local groups of the Irish Republican Army. An Irish counterpart of the Russian revolution would mean that these three sections, co-operating, would take control of the industrial, agricultural and social activities of the nation.⁶⁰ (Emphasis added)

This rhetoric provided little reassurance to the British government about the threat militant Irish workers posed to its authority and also raised the revolutionary potentialities attached to co-operative societies.

Irish co-operators echoed Johnson and welcomed developments in Russia. *The Irish Homestead* issued forth about how the Russian Revolution represented an international vindication of co-operative principles. In the immediate aftermath of November 1917, AE wished that:

revolutionaries in Ireland were afflicted with something of the Russian madness and realised, as the Russians do, that economic institutions are at least as of much importance as political institutions... A co-operative society is an economic republic.⁶¹

This emphasis on an economic aspect to the republican ideal remained consistent with the movement's discourse, accounting for its appeal to multiple political projects at work in the country. Over a year later, this positive appraisal of Russian

⁶⁰ Cited in Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life*, p. 210.

⁶¹ 'The True Character of the Russian Revolution', *Irish Homestead*, 17 November 1917.

social order remained a part of the journal's political outlook. In an article entitled, 'All Co-operators Now!' AE presented Russia as a potential archetype for the future Irish state:

We are not advocating compulsory co-operation in Ireland, but we find it impossible to be indignant with a State which carries the co-operative idea so far as the Russian Republic has done... there is only one country in the world where all distribution is on co-operative lines, and, personally, we hope that system will never be upset, whoever may come or go as leaders of the Russian people.⁶²

AE's enthusiasm for the revolution did not survive beyond 1920 when the Bolsheviks nationalised the co-operative movement there.⁶³ However, in 1919 his admiration led him to consider how co-operative organisation under the IAOS might become more comprehensive. The labour movement and IAOS diverged in how to achieve this end.

The largest and most militant trade union in Ireland was the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU). Founded by Liverpool-born trade union activist, James Larkin, in 1908, the union possessed 14,500 members in 1916. By 1919, these figures grew to 101,917.⁶⁴ The labour movement's radicalism manifested during 1917-1923 through a variety of tactics, such as strikes and workplace takeovers. Terms such as 'Workers' Republic', 'industrial unionism' and 'co-operative commonwealth' peppered the labour movement's rhetoric. The ITGWU propounded a revolutionary syndicalist ideology that encouraged the creation of a working class political movement under the leadership of the trade union. As such a rural militancy emerged from the ITGWU's 'efforts to develop a working-class counter-culture, through co-operatives, May Day parades, aeríochtaí [festivals], and

⁶² 'All Co-operators Now!', *Irish Homestead*, 29 March 1919.

⁶³ Henry Summerfield, *That Myriad-Minded Man: A Biography of George William Russell 'AE' 1867-1935* (Gerrards Cross, Bucks.: Colin Smythe, 1975), pp. 191-192.

⁶⁴ NLI Ms. 27,034, ITGWU Return to Registrar of Friendly Societies 1917-25.

labour newspapers.⁶⁵ In County Kerry, labour organisations turned to co-operative principles to secure the economic interests of their members. In November 1918, *The Irish Homestead* reported the establishment of a workers' co-operative store in Tralee.⁶⁶ The following January, the ITGWU established another co-operative store in the market town of Listowel 'for the benefit of the workers'.⁶⁷ Located in Kerry's most urbanised areas, these stores reflected the ITGWU's desire to use co-operative methods to benefit the local consumers, the same group from which the trade union's members were drawn.

The IAOS exhibited an uneasy relationship with organised labour. By May 1919, antagonisms between co-operators and the trade union movement emerged. AE hoped that workers continued to establish co-operative societies, but grew anxious about their autonomy from the IAOS's authority. AE suggested that trade unions might be better served through incorporation into the IAOS. He wondered if:

trade union leaders would communicate with the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society, so that investigation may be made, and it may be seen whether labour would be better advantaged by coming in with farmers in starting a single strong society catering for both.⁶⁸

Such collaboration never occurred, which confirmed a distance between co-operating farmers and organised labour. Rural labourers looked to the ITGWU for leadership, whilst the IAOS represented landowning farmers. This reflected the inability of the IAOS to make significant progress into towns. The IAOS ceded influence over urban interests to a mixture of private industry, commercial interests and trade unions. This situation confirmed the IAOS's reputation as a rural producers' organisation. The

⁶⁵ Emmet O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland, 1824-2000*, 2nd edn (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2011), pp. 106-107.

⁶⁶ 'Co-operation in Tralee', *Irish Homestead*, 30 November 1918.

⁶⁷ 'Listowel Co-operative Store', *Irish Homestead*, 25 January 1919.

⁶⁸ 'Warding Off Antagonism', *Irish Homestead*, 3 May 1919.

labour movement's preference for a consumer-oriented policy on co-operative organisation differed to that promoted by the IAOS. This highlighted the fact that the IAOS could no longer claim to be the sole champion of the Co-operative Commonwealth in Ireland. However, the challenge offered by the labour movement moved the IAOS to give serious consideration to the issue of rural consumption, which will be explored below.

New Explorations in Co-operation

The IAOS's position at the outset of 1919 offered co-operators cause for optimism. Wartime saw an increase in agricultural producers' income and farmers rallied around the IAOS. In 1920, membership for the movement reached a peak of 157,766.⁶⁹ This figure represents the number of shareholders, which accounted for heads of households and suggests that co-operatives impacted upon a greater number of people. These figures reflected a greater affluence amongst farmers and a greater willingness to subscribe to a co-operative society. The increase also suggests that a greater number of rural inhabitants recognised that co-operative societies were useful in that they offered one way to acquire cheap agricultural implements at a time of rising living costs. Another result of the war saw an overall increase in the co-operative movement's trade turnover by 21.7% in 1919 compared to 1914. The IAOS's overall financial position improved. Subscriptions to the IAOS increased by 30% in 1918 compared to 1917, which reflected the new prosperity of farmers. However, the movement remained reliant upon annual funding from the Development Commissioners.⁷⁰ Despite the movement's cheerfulness, the wartime boom turned into a post-war slump. The subsequent fall in agricultural prices meant

⁶⁹ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1921*, p. 7.

⁷⁰ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1920*, p. 7.

that ‘farmers faced hard times in the early 1920s.’⁷¹ The effects of this agricultural depression wielded important long-term implications for the development of Irish agriculture and co-operation that will be explored in the following chapter. Of more relevance for this chapter is an awareness of the underlying anxieties around agriculture when the co-operative movement tried to cope with the impact of the War of Independence.

A major concern for the IAOS stemmed from the fall in wartime dairy production. In part this reflected the wartime concentration upon tillage farming at the expense of other agrarian sectors. TW Russell retired from the DATI leadership in late 1918 due to poor health and was replaced by Hugh Barrie, an Ulster Unionist MP who remained in post until November 1921.⁷² However, from the outset, Barrie’s time in office was beset by poor health and he made less impact in office than either of his two predecessors. TP Gill, Secretary of the DATI, carried out many of Barrie’s public duties.⁷³ In late 1919, IAOS officials managed to gain representation upon a key investigative committee established by the DATI, which represented a thawing in relations compared to before the war. Robert Anderson and Harold Barbour took a prominent role in the committee that examined the causes behind the declining Irish milk supply.⁷⁴ The method of procedure utilised sought to extract as much evidence from actors involved in dairying and wrote to ‘numerous associations and societies connected with the industry’. These ‘associations and

⁷¹ Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland: A New Economic History, 1780-1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 390.

⁷² ‘Mr HT Barrie Resigns’, *The Observer*, 20 November 1921.

⁷³ For example, TP Gill ‘Address to the Council of Agriculture’, *Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction Journal*, 20.1 (1919), 12-19.

⁷⁴ House of Commons Parliamentary Papers (HCPP) [Cmd. 808] Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland, *Report of the Departmental Committee on the Decline of Dairying in Ireland* (1920), p. 4.

societies’ referred to creameries and they provided ‘a very large amount of evidence’. Creameries acted as instruments that allowed the state to monitor the performance of an important sector of Irish agriculture. From the south-west, six creameries from Limerick and Kerry submitted milk returns, which showed a 16% reduction in milk supply during a period that covered the implementation of wartime controls (Table 3.1). As the largest actor in the creamery industry, the co-operative movement served an important service to the ability of the state in Ireland to collect and analyse this economic data.

Table 3.1: Declining Milk Supply to Six Creameries in Counties Limerick and Kerry (HCPP [Cmd. 808], p. 6)

| Year | 1916 | 1917 | 1918 |
|------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Milk Supply (Gallons) | 4,067,000 | 3,840,000 | 3,420,000 |

A struggling dairy industry offered a serious cause for concern to the IAOS as its reputation and strength derived from its creamery sector. Furthermore, a serious challenge resided in the presence of the private creamery sector. The rates paid to milk suppliers varied across districts, dependent upon the concentration of creameries. In the southwest of the country, fierce competition between co-operative and private creameries persisted.⁷⁵ This competition between creameries undermined the IAOS’s attempts to shape the Irish farmer into a co-operative subject. Co-operative society committees accused private creameries of unscrupulous price-fixing. In August 1919, co-operative societies in Kerry held a conference which broached the subject of co-ordinating their work in an effort at

⁷⁵ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1919*, p. 11.

combating the methods of Proprietary Creameries in paying artificial prices for milk in districts where Cooperative Societies exist while paying much lower prices per gallon in districts where they are no Cooperative Societies.⁷⁶

The conference forwarded this resolution to the IAOS who expressed their sympathy.

At this time, the private sector weakened the co-operative sector's hold over the dairy industry. In 1908, the IAOS had introduced a controversial binding rule, which locked members into a permanent relationship with their co-operative society, and forbade them to supply milk to any other creamery. If a member refused to supply good milk to their society, the committee penalised that member at the rate of one shilling per cow for each day milk was withheld.⁷⁷ This echoed the Danish system which bound farmers to the co-operative society for up to a period of seven to ten years and operated with successful results.⁷⁸ Unlike Denmark, the binding rule in Ireland continued indefinitely. In 1919, the case of Ballymacelligott Co-operative Society versus Richard McEllistrim saw private rivals take legal action to overturn this binding rule.

The source of this legal conflict originated in County Kerry. Ballymacelligott Society was a thriving co-operative society that expanded its operations during the war. In 1912, the society possessed two creameries and an annual turnover of £8,000. By November 1920, it possessed four creameries and a turnover of £58,500. In 1916, the committee there decided to call a special meeting of the members and

⁷⁶ National Archives of Ireland (NAI)/1088/2/4, T O'Donovan, Abbeydorney, to RA Anderson, Dublin, 27 August 1919.

⁷⁷ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1908*, p. 7.

⁷⁸ Henriksen, Morten Hviid, and Paul R. Sharp, 'Law and Peace: Contracts and the Success of the Danish Dairy Cooperatives', *Journal of Economic History*, 72.1 (2012), 197-224; KH O'Rourke, *Culture, Politics and Innovation: Evidence from the Creameries* (Dublin: Department of Economics and IIS, Trinity College, 2001), <http://www.tcd.ie/Economics/TEP/2001_papers/TEPNo20KO21.pdf> [accessed 28 August 2012] (p. 19).

held a vote on adopting the binding rule, which it did. By enforcing the binding rule, the society penalised a member, Richard McEllistram, because he supplied milk to a creamery operated by JM Slattery and Sons. According to Ballymacelligott's manager, John Byrne:

The non-Co-operative Society thereupon got... Mcellistram (sic) (whose sons they had employed as managers in their concern) to bring an action against this society to declare the rules invalid as in restraint of trade.⁷⁹

Slattery wanted to entice co-operative suppliers and McEllistram's position served their purpose to challenge the society's rule. Aided by Slattery, McEllistram brought his case to trial, which reached the House of Lords in early 1919.

The IAOS recognised the threat posed by this legal action to its organisation and paid for the Ballymacelligott Society's defence. Although a local affair, the case became a test of the national movement's ability to withstand an assault on its position by the private sector. The outcome of the case held the potential to undermine the industry's future development. A majority decision found in favour of McEllistram on the grounds that the binding rule imposed 'restrictions further than were reasonably necessary for the protection of the society, the rules were unenforceable as being in unreasonable restraint of trade.' The only dissenter, Lord Parmoor, argued that the contract between a co-operative society and its members possessed a 'distinctive character' whereby 'business can be instituted and carried on in a co-operative basis.'⁸⁰ Parmoor's words offered little comfort. The IAOS suffered

⁷⁹ NAI/1088/70/1, John Byrne's Affidavit Concerning Events Surrounding the Burning of the Society, 9 April 1921.

⁸⁰ 'McEllistram v Ballymacelligott Co-operative Agricultural and Dairy Society Limited [1918-19] All E R Rep Ext 1294', in *Lexis Library*, <http://www.lexisnexis.com/uk/legal/results/enhdocview.do?docLinkInd=true&ersKey=23_T18046105861&format=GNBFULL&startDocNo=0&resultsUrlKey=0_T18046105862&backKey=20_T18046105863&csi=279847&docNo=1&scrollToPosition=0> [Accessed 29 August 2013]. Also see MJ

a heavy financial loss of £3,850 and appealed to members for financial help as they fought the case ‘in the interests of the movement’ against ‘a powerful and well-organised trade combination’.⁸¹ The verdict showed that private creameries remained a threat to the IAOS.

Table 3.2: Financial Position of IAOS in 1919 (IAOS, *Annual Report, 1920*).

| <i>Type of Society</i> | Turnover for 1919 (£) | 1919 Turnover in 1914 Prices (£) | Turnover for 1914 (£) | Increase % |
|---|------------------------------|---|------------------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Dairy Society</i> | 7,047,079 | 2,818,856 | 2,731,628 | 3 |
| <i>Agricultural Societies</i> | 1,279,471 | 511,788 | 197,146 | 160 |
| <i>Poultry Societies</i> | 246,599 | 98,639 | 65,487 | 51 |
| <i>Credit Societies</i> | 33,834 | 13,533 | 52,926 | -256 |
| <i>Misc. Societies</i> | 696,649 | 278,659 | 187,826 | 48 |
| <i>Flax Societies</i> | 47,791 | 19,116 | 2,328 | 721 |
| <i>Federations</i> | 1,807,160 | 722,864 | 429,383 | 68 |
| <i>Total Turnover for Movement</i> | 11,158,583 | 4,463,433 | 3,666,724 | 21.7 |

In 1920, the general economic position of the co-operative movement offered cause for concern. The creamery business remained the IAOS’s largest asset, but throughout the war this sector remained static and increased turnover by only 3% (see table 3.2). Although unspectacular, this figure showed the ability of co-operative creameries to hold its position despite the contraction of milk supplies and the threat posed by private competition. Creameries remained a crucial economic institution for the rural population. Farmers in the south-west of Ireland, where more than half of Irish milk production occurred, remained reliant upon the creamery as a source of

Trebilcock, *The Common Law of Restraint of Trade: A Legal and Economic Analysis* (London: Carswell, Sweet & Maxwell, 1986), p. 324.

⁸¹ ‘Private Interests and the Co-operative Movement’, *Irish Homestead*, 2 August 1919; Patrick Bolger, *The Irish Co-operative Movement: Its History and Development* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1977), pp. 205-206.

income.⁸² Besides dairying, other sectors appeared fragile. An ailing co-operative credit movement collapsed during the war and its business activity contracted by 256%. Wartime affluence convinced the movement's leadership that 'the need for cheap credit diminished.'⁸³ This collapse proved indicative of the IAOS's neglect of co-operative credit after 1914. In other areas, flax societies increased trade by 721%, but accounted for less than half a per cent of the IAOS's total business. Poultry societies expanded trade by 50%, whilst trading federations increased turnover by 68%. Both sectors remained a minor part of the co-operative movement's total business.

The most important development of co-operative organisation in the post-war period concerned growth in the distributive side of the movement. The IAOS brought the issue of rural consumption into focus in response to the increased cost of living and the labour movement's interest in co-operative organisation. Agricultural societies worked as local mass-purchase organisations, allowing farmers to buy unadulterated agricultural inputs cheaper than from local traders. The IAOS viewed agricultural societies as necessary for the diffusion of new agricultural machinery, but growth in this sector proved disappointing before 1914.⁸⁴ Agricultural co-operative societies increased economic output by 160% during the war and diversified their functions. The more expansive activity conducted by these societies during the war 'brought home to farmers the necessity of complete control over their industry, and to agricultural labourers the vital importance of procuring the necessities of life on terms commensurate with their wages.' By 1920, 271

⁸² Bolger, *The Irish Co-operative Movement*, p. 210.

⁸³ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1919*, p. 14.

⁸⁴ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1908*, pp. 9-10.

agricultural co-operative societies existed and the IAOS wanted them to become omnivorous institutions that encompassed a broad range of business and supplied staple commodities for rural inhabitants.⁸⁵

A concern with establishing distributive co-operative societies occurred after the war. In 1920, the IAOS proclaimed that ‘the distributive movement has begun to capture rural Ireland.’ The development of agrarian distribution represented one way in which the IAOS attempted to bring the apparent divergent interests of Irish producers and consumers closer together. The IAOS was careful to attribute this development to the spontaneous initiative of farmers and labourers. The extension of co-operation into rural distribution provided evidence of the desire amongst farmers to control their own futures and the establishment of new agricultural societies proved ‘the fixed decision of the people to “self-determine” their own economic destiny.’ The IAOS viewed these new agricultural societies as pioneering enterprises and referred to them as ‘general purpose societies’.⁸⁶

Establishing or expanding a co-operative society became one way in which rural inhabitants responded to changed market conditions. At this time, AE directed American journalist, Ruth Russell, to visit one of the new types of society in Dungloe, County Donegal. AE directed Russell there to understand

the poverty of the Irish countryside, of the extent that the poverty is due to the gombeen men... and of the ability of the co-operative society to develop and create industry even in such a locality.⁸⁷

Templecrone Co-operative Society in Dungloe had been established in 1906 by a local co-operative activist named Patrick Gallagher.⁸⁸ It started as a small store to

⁸⁵ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1919*, pp. 12.

⁸⁶ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1920*, p. 16.

⁸⁷ Russell, *What's the Matter*, pp. 107-109.

make collective purchases of manures for local farmers, but expanded to serve the requirements of the local population. In his autobiography, Gallagher recounted the impact of Templecrone Co-operative Society as one that freed the local population from indebtedness to local traders and shopkeepers by loosening their financial hold upon locals: ‘Thank God the slave mind is gone. If it is in any other part of Ireland today, it is not in the Rosses [in Donegal].’⁸⁹

At Dungloe, Ruth Russell encountered a thriving society involved in many aspects of local life, which encouraged ‘the hints of growing industry’. These included a bacon-curing plant, the co-operative production and sale of eggs, the rental of modern farm machinery to members, a bakery, orchard, beehives, and a woollen mill, which employed local women who no longer planned to emigrate to America or Scotland ‘as their older sisters had had to plan’. The society’s managers planned to develop other local industries such as fishing and local transportation. Besides offering affordable provisions, the society provided locals with a space for social interaction. The co-operative hall held dances, lectures and other entertainments. Furthermore, the society pioneered a concern for the social welfare of members, employing a nurse ‘to care for the mothers at child-birth... the first nurse who ever came to work in Donegal.’⁹⁰ General purpose societies renewed the challenge against the co-operative movement’s traditional rivals, such as shopkeepers. Russell concluded that Templecrone Co-operative Society prevented

⁸⁸ Patrick Gallagher (1871-1966) was a co-operative pioneer from Donegal. He moved to Scotland in 1889, where he saw the economic benefits provided by co-operative societies. He returned to Donegal in 1902 determined to establish a co-operative society and the Templecrone Co-operative Society was established under his chairmanship in 1906, and still trades today. Trevor West, ‘Gallagher, Patrick’, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/65846?docPos=2>> [accessed 14 August 2013].

⁸⁹ Paddy the Cope (Patrick Gallagher), *My Story*, rev. edition (Dungloe: Templecrone Co-operative Society, n.d.), p. 173.

⁹⁰ Russell, *What’s the Matter*, pp. 115-123.

the economic exploitation of local inhabitants, which echoed Horace Plunkett's original call for co-operative organisation.

Another example of such pioneering work occurred on the other side of the country in Rathmore, County Kerry. Rathmore's farmers established a general purpose society at the start of 1919, which combined a creamery and shop representing:

one of the newer type of creameries which it is believed will be the general type in the future. It was organised with the object of undertaking the manufacture of dairy products and the supply of all the requirements of its members.⁹¹

War exposed the limitations of single-function societies. Most creameries had diversified beyond butter production into other consumables like cheese, but this was deemed insufficient. A business policy focused upon butter and cheese production, left members dependent on a narrow field of production for their well-being. The IAOS hoped that 'the general purpose type of society of which Rathmore is an example, promises much more success.'⁹² As things transpired, general purpose societies like Rathmore and Templecrone proved exceptional. Nevertheless, in the immediate aftermath of war, the wider co-operative movement anticipated their establishment represented a significant leap forward in the extension of the IAOS throughout the economy.

Co-operators welcomed Rathmore Co-operative Society with fanfare. A ballad published in *The Irish Homestead* conflated Home Rule with the economic liberation provided by the co-operative centre:

Home Rule is coming to Erin's shore,
And home industry to sweet Rathmore,

⁹¹ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1920*, pp. 10-11.

⁹² IAOS, *Annual Report, 1920*, p. 11.

The Farmers' Factory will shortly crown,
Our handsome rising Blackwater town...
The landlords reigned, but their day did come,
So the proud fat dealers today are dumb,
For the farmer rises now with a smile,
Who forces bread from his native soil.
Sure we all have shade from the farmers' wing,
He feeds the tramp, and he feeds the King,
He steers the ship, and he runs the train,
And he wins the battle fought on the plain...
So no more we'll pay for our goods too high,
But the best of stuff at low prices buy,
Down with high prices for evermore,
And up the farmers, and up Rathmore.⁹³

The song, written by the 'Bard of Rathmore', linked farmers' control over their industry through the co-operative as a victory over landlords and exploitative dealers. It also pre-empted the application of Home Rule. The ballad emphasised a simple message that agriculture underpinned the whole social structure. Farmers were the foundation upon which the nation was constructed.

Rathmore Co-operative Society registered for business on 6 May 1919.⁹⁴ One local inhabitant believed the society's establishment led to Rathmore 'gradually becoming the shopping and social centre of east Kerry and part of West Cork.'⁹⁵ The society operated a creamery, but its central objective also saw it 'engage very largely in a general store trade'. Organiser Charles Riddall assured the IAOS that the society's prospects looked good. The society proved popular and attracted support from 'all members without distinction [who] are extremely keen.' Until this date, Rathmore remained untouched by the co-operative movement. Most local butter was produced within the home. The society's establishment encouraged the adoption of modern dairy techniques by opening a creamery, but also appealed to conservative inhabitants by selling home-made butter through the co-operative store. The

⁹³ 'Farmer's Factory in Rathmore', *Irish Homestead*, 10 May 1919.

⁹⁴ NAI/1088/798/1, Anderson, Dublin, to John O'Leary, Rathmore, 6 May 1919.

⁹⁵ Jeremiah Murphy, *When Youth was Mine: A Memoir of Kerry, 1902-1925* (Dublin: Mentor Press, 1998), p. 40.

management hoped that the prices paid for creamery butter would encourage the conversion of local agriculturalists into modern co-operative dairy farmers. Before it opened, the society acquired 70 members who bought 1,000 shares.⁹⁶ This expanded to 208 members by July. Despite Riddall's early optimism, opposition soon emerged. Another IAOS organiser reported at the end of July that the creamery competed for local milk with the Lakelands Dairy Company, whilst because the society operated a shop, 'the local shop-keepers are offering all the opposition they can to the project.'⁹⁷

The establishment of Rathmore Co-operative Society revealed the importance of the interventions of IAOS employees in the process of local modernisation. As organiser, Charles Riddall provided advice on hiring employees and manager, and arranged for the services the movement's official accountant to be placed at their disposal.⁹⁸ IAOS engineer, James Fant, offered his services during the construction of the society's premises, although the committee at times ignored this advice. Fant described Rathmore's building progress as 'slow and disappointing'.⁹⁹ However, the appointment of a new manager in August 1920 saw increased collaboration between the society and the IAOS as Fant helped with the acquisition and installation of new creamery machinery. By early 1921, Rathmore Co-operative Society possessed the necessary machinery to become an established creamery and the shop began trading.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ NAI/1088/798/1, Riddall, Limerick, to Anderson, Dublin, 3 May 1919.

⁹⁷ NAI/1088/798/1, JH McKee, Rathmore, to Anderson, Dublin, 26 July 1919.

⁹⁸ NAI/1088/798/1, Riddall, Limerick, to O'Leary, Rathmore, 31 January 1920.

⁹⁹ NAI/1088/798/2, James Fant's Report re Attendance at Rathmore Committee Meeting, 13 September 1920.

¹⁰⁰ NAI/1088/798/2, various correspondence between Fant and de Lacy, Rathmore, 3 September 1920, 27 November 1920, 28 November 1920 and 18 December 1920.

The IAOS exuded new-found confidence in 1919 as exemplified by its promotion of general purpose societies. This recasting of the ‘old “agricultural society”’ emerged amidst a period where it was ‘difficult to forecast the economic future of the country at such a time of stress and uncertainty’. The general purpose society represented the IAOS’s attempt to link ‘the success of farming... with the spread both of agricultural and distributive co-operation.’ The IAOS believed that the general purpose society promoted the national interest and epitomised the movement’s ‘most representative type of institution’. The general purpose society sought to create a union of interest ‘not merely between persons of varying political and religious beliefs, but between farmer and labourer, producer and consumer, countryman and townsman.’ At the IAOS annual conference in 1920, leading activists referenced the Dáil’s enthusiasm for co-operation and welcomed the fact that a cross-section of ‘political opinion in Ireland... accepted the co-operative movement as a recognised... element in national welfare.’¹⁰¹ A period of renewed, popular enthusiasm about co-operation beckoned. However, these developments also occurred against a backdrop of violence and unrest. During 1920-21, co-operative societies found themselves targets of state-sponsored violence and the site of political and social tensions that upset the progress made by the movement since the war.

¹⁰¹ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1920*, p. 17.

The Irish Co-operative Movement and the Irish War of Independence

Frantz Fanon described decolonisation as ‘always a violent phenomenon.’¹⁰² This summarises the Irish experience as the country moved towards some form of political independence from Britain. In 1920, competing claims to legitimate authority between Irish nationalists and the British government, spilled over into widespread violence. Confrontations between members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) against the Royal Irish Constabulary, and later the military Auxiliaries and ‘Black and Tans’ (referred to as such due to the appearance of their uniforms) occurred as the government despatched a military deterrent as part of its security policy.¹⁰³ This decision led to an escalation in violence. From 1919 until the announcement of a truce in July 1921, Ireland endured guerrilla warfare, raids, imposition of martial law, industrial strike action, and the spread of terror. Much of the violence and subversive activity occurred in rural areas, with a particular concentration in the south-west of the country.¹⁰⁴ The ensuing Irish War of Independence disrupted social and economic life and co-operative societies were on the receiving end of state violence. Consequently, the co-operative movement experienced the most serious threat to its existence yet.

Co-operatives and State Violence

In his memoir, Patrick Gallagher recalled the War of Independence and described the government’s robust policing policy in strong terms: ‘The Black and Tans were worse than savages let loose. They were murdering, ravishing and burning.’¹⁰⁵ Arson attacks perpetrated by both Crown forces and the IRA were a feature of the War of

¹⁰² Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 27.

¹⁰³ Colm Campbell, *Emergency Law in Ireland, 1918-1925* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 21.

¹⁰⁴ Peter Hart, *The IRA at War, 1916-1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 34-37.

¹⁰⁵ Paddy the Cope, *My Story*, p. 154.

Independence.¹⁰⁶ This section argues that the decision to target co-operatives formed a central component of British government's security policy. During 1920 and the first half of 1921, co-operative societies across the country were attacked by Crown forces. By 1 January 1921, 42 co-operative societies suffered severe damage to their premises, and in some cases complete destruction. Robert Anderson claimed that each creamery destroyed put 800 farmers out of business.¹⁰⁷ These attacks placed severe strain upon the movement, with local societies forced to close and national resources stretched to breaking point. This destruction was the work of British ex-servicemen, pejoratively known as the 'Black and Tans'. Peter Hart has described these recruits to the British security forces as the main perpetrators of violence.¹⁰⁸ Hart suggests that the violence carried out by the Black and Tans emanated from this lack of discipline or as a reprisal to attacks by members of the IRA. However, it will be shown that a regular response to such occurrences was a deliberate attack upon local co-operative societies as a way to punish a community. As such, the rest of this chapter is concerned with showing how one overlooked effect of the War of Independence is the economic damage that occurred to rural industry as a result of a deliberate policy of state-sponsored violence.

During 1920, local newspapers reported these attacks upon co-operatives. In response to IRA activity, security forces would attack local co-operatives at night. IAOS employees grew used to news of attacks upon co-operatives in places like County Kerry. The attack upon Lixnaw Co-operative Society in October 1920 occurred during the early hours of a Sunday morning. Uniformed men 'attempted to

¹⁰⁶ Julia Eichenberg, 'The Dark Side of Independence: Paramilitary Violence in Ireland and Poland After the First World War', *Contemporary European History*, 19.3 (2010), 231-248.

¹⁰⁷ Daly, *First Department*, p. 78.

¹⁰⁸ Peter Hart, *The IRA and its Enemies: Violence and Community in Cork, 1916-1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 81-82.

burn the creamery’ and although the society remained working, its ‘cheese, butter and all the utensils were destroyed.’¹⁰⁹ Several days later a similar attack occurred at the Abbeydorney Co-operative Society. This attack was carried out by ‘3 lorries of armed men, some wearing khaki, and the majority [Royal Irish Constabulary] uniforms’. Crown forces set fire to the creamery causing £2,000 of damage and looted the stocks of butter and cheese.¹¹⁰

The result of such a security policy in Ireland affected co-operative societies, many of which teetered on the brink of collapse during 1920 and 1921. Throughout the IAOS acted as a vital ally to farmers during this period. Whilst co-operative leaders carried out a public campaign to raise awareness of state brutality against the movement, the response to attacks by organisers helped safeguard the welfare of local societies. This even included societies such as the Rattoo Co-operative Society in north Kerry, which allowed its affiliation to the IAOS to expire. Charles Riddall informed Dublin in late 1919 that ‘there is no bothering about this Society [Rattoo] for the present. No doubt they will return to the fold as so many other Societies have done.’¹¹¹ In November 1920, as news of attacks upon neighbouring societies filtered through, the IAOS leadership wired Rattoo Co-operative Society to ascertain news concerning its position. Rattoo replied that it remained secure ‘for the present’.¹¹² In the event, Rattoo remained unharmed and free from attack, but the concern displayed by the IAOS proved a crucial factor in convincing the committee to re-start its affiliation. In particular, the society’s committee appreciated a publicity campaign spearheaded by Horace Plunkett and AE that raised awareness of the damage

¹⁰⁹ ‘Scenes in Kerry’, *Kerry People*, 30 October 1920.

¹¹⁰ ‘Terrorism in Kerry’, *The Kerryman*, 30 October 1920. See also, ‘The Burning of Irish Creameries’, *Manchester Guardian*, 30 October 1920.

¹¹¹ NAI/1088/800/2, Riddall to Anderson, Dublin, 6 October 1919.

¹¹² NAI/1088/800/2, William O’Connell, Rattoo to Anderson, 4 November 1920.

wrought upon co-operative societies (see below). They pledged a special subscription of ‘funds for carrying on the campaign in Great Britain against the destruction of Societies.’¹¹³ In return for their subscription, Rattoo Co-operative Society received the promise of support and expertise of IAOS organisers if an attack occurred.

IAOS organisers placed themselves in danger on several occasions to carry out their responsibilities. On 12 May 1921, the Chairman of Rathmore Co-operative Society notified Plunkett House in Dublin to inform them of an attack. Crown forces destroyed the general purpose society’s entire premises four days before the scheduled opening of the creamery. This included the shop, creamery and brand new machinery.¹¹⁴ The attack occurred at a crucial point in the society’s development and threatened to derail the co-operative project within the area. The IAOS despatched an organiser, Nicholas O’Brien, to Rathmore who arrived ‘after much inconvenience and personal risk.’ Taxis refused to transport him to the district and he arrived a day later than scheduled on 31 May 1921. O’Brien’s timing proved fortunate. He reported that on 30 May, the entire village ‘was cleared out about 2 o’clock [a.m.]... and had some other experiences also.’ On visiting the society he noted that ‘[t]he building was completely destroyed, nothing but the walls stand and they too have suffered probably from bombs. The stocks in store were completely burned out.’ O’Brien advised Rathmore’s management to continue the store trade ‘in an implement shed at the rear of the main building’, which remained the sole viable option.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ NAI/1088/800/2, WP Clifford, Limerick, to William O’Connell, Rattoo, 19 March 1921.

¹¹⁴ NAI/1088/798/3, James Daly, Rathmore, to Anderson, 12 May 1921.

¹¹⁵ NAI/1088/798/3, NW O’Brien, ‘Report of Visit to Rathmore,’ 1 June 1921.

The actions of the government forces spread fear throughout the local population and businesses like Rathmore Society suffered on account of this. The manager complained to James Fant that store business declined in the wake of attack because 'the people are afraid to come in.' The Committee decided to implement a cut in the manager's wages, and released his assistant from employment.¹¹⁶ Restoring the fragile trust network that existed around the society proved difficult. The fear that armed forces targeted co-operatives damaged the business of societies such as Rathmore. Local inhabitants refrained from utilising the co-operative store, and the creamery remained closed. Rathmore staggered into the 1920s struggling to re-summon the initial enthusiasm of local members lost to alternative retail and productive centres. Once considered the IAOS's flagship general purpose society Rathmore's decline mirrored the general decline of agricultural societies after 1921 – an economic experiment stalled by violence.

Attacks upon co-operatives prevented members from utilising the services of their society and local suppliers and customers utilised alternative outlets. As a consequence, competition between private and co-operative creameries intensified under the cover of violence. Correspondence between the IAOS and local societies suggests the economic rivalry took on a sinister dimension. The Ballymacelligott Co-operative Society was attacked in November 1920. Rumours abounded that private creamery owners encouraged such attacks upon co-operatives, and accusations of collusion between the military and the private sector surfaced. In a message to James Fant, IAOS Secretary Robert Anderson described recent troubling events there 'as a result of a dead set made upon it by Crown forces, at the instance,

¹¹⁶ NAI/1088/798/3, Thomas de Lacy to James Fant, 2 July 1921 and 5 July 1921.

to some extent I believe at least, of local creamery proprietors.’¹¹⁷ In a statement that detailed the destruction of the Ballymacelligott creamery the manager, John Byrne, linked the attacks to the recent court case with Richard McEllistrim. He accused agents of Slattery’s creameries of spreading:

false and malicious reports concerning me and members of the Co-operative Society with a view to undermine the loyalty of the members [and]... to set the forces of the Crown against the Staff and members of the Committee of the Co-operative Society. I regret to say and I charge that these false and malicious reports have been accepted and acted upon by the forces of the Crown. I was arrested in 1916 and interned for 3 months without charge or trial. The trade and business of the Society suffered as a consequence.

The resultant violence of 12 and 13 November practically ruined the society and resulted in the worrying development whereby ‘a number of the members have gone over to the Non-Co-operative concern.’¹¹⁸ This attack suggests that police commanders viewed co-operatives as sites of anti-British sentiment. Furthermore, the accusations set to paper by Anderson and Byrne suggest that the War of Independence provided cover for private creameries to extend their own interests and direct the violence against their competitors.

In February 1921, the *Manchester Guardian* framed the effect of British policy as heralding ‘the economic decay of Ireland’:

the burning of creameries, the destruction of farmsteads... the withdrawal of labour from the land, through imprisonment or outlawery, the stoppage of co-operative organisation are steadily depreciating the productivity of Irish agriculture.¹¹⁹

During 1921, Crown forces modified their reprisal tactics to close down businesses instead of carry out attacks. On 27 May, the *Manchester Guardian* reported that ‘a number of creameries in the South of Ireland have been closed by order of the

¹¹⁷ NAI/1088/70/1, Anderson to Fant, 1 July 1921.

¹¹⁸ NAI/1088/70/1, John Byrne’s Affidavit, 9 April 1921.

¹¹⁹ ‘Ireland’s Economic Decay’, *Manchester Guardian*, 8 February 1921.

military'. These orders discriminated against co-operative creameries. This policy formed a response to incidents such as the destruction to transport networks carried out by local republicans. These tactics rendered stocks held at co-operative societies 'useless for the time being, and the effect of the order... is to harm the country people as much as possible.'¹²⁰

In March 1921, Crown forces in County Kerry again disrupted the work of co-operative societies. The cost of closures and interruptions proved extremely high and the financial burden alone placed added stress upon a society's membership. The solicitor representing Ardfert Co-operative Society detailed the outrage at his client's premises in an account prepared for the Kerry County Council office in pursuit of a compensation claim a year later:

On March the 21st 1921 at Ardfert Crown Forces surrounded the Creamery and ordered the Staff to go out. The Staff were detained for a week in a "round up" and when they returned, butter to the value of £625. 10. 0 was stolen, cream to the value of £200 had gone waste as had also the Cream in two Auxiliary Creameries to the value of £800. Wages for week £14, Consequential loss £1,200, Llyod's (sic) Insurance, Riot and Civil Commotion £300, Mare shot dead and consequential loss £97. 0. 0 – Claim: £3236. 10. 0¹²¹

The military also closed down a creamery at Kilflynn owned by the Abbeydorney Co-operative Society whilst local private creameries continued to trade. Abbeydorney's manager wrote to Dublin after the closure of the society's creamery at Kilflynn, highlighting, 'the funny thing is that Slattery's Creamery, which is in a stone throw of ours, was not closed at all, with the result, that a large

¹²⁰ 'Creameries Closed by Military as a Punishment to Farmers', *Manchester Guardian*, 27 May 1921.

¹²¹ Kerry Local History Archive (KLHA), O'Connell Papers, John O'Connell, Tralee to Manager, Ardfert Co-operative Society, Ardfert, 19 April 1922. This letter contained a copy of the account O'Connell provided to the County Council. Due to gaps in O'Connell's archive it is unclear whether the society was successful in recovering much of these losses.

number of our suppliers have gone to them.’¹²² The weakening of the connection between members and their society offered cause for worry. A few nights later, Slattery’s creamery was forced to temporarily close, but the military granted them permission to open again on 9 June. This option was not offered to the co-operative society. Nevertheless, the membership there decided to re-open without permission ‘and let the military do what they wished.’ The result of this decision saw their machinery sabotaged after one day by unknown persons.¹²³ Nicholas O’Brien sent his assessment of these events to Robert Anderson:

It is regrettable (sic) that local friction should cause any further trouble, but I fear that the interests of proprietary creamery owners in Co. Kerry have been the cause of much damage to co-operative property. Of course there has been no definite proof of this, but there is a strong feeling that this is the case, as proprietors have not suffered near as much as co-operatively owned creameries... I hope that when matters settle, if they ever do, we may be able to remedy much of this ill feeling by making an effort to wipe out proprietary opposition.¹²⁴

In a handwritten note attached to the report, James Fant supported O’Brien’s analysis, writing that the ‘feeling expressed above is well founded and people in Tralee and district are fully aware of the reasons for the “glove” (sic) treatment accorded to certain proprietary creameries.’¹²⁵ Fant’s scribbled aside suggests that the experience of organisers who worked in localities where attacks took place suspected collaboration between the private creamery owners and Crown forces. What is clear is that reprisal tactics rekindled socio-economic tensions between co-operative and private creameries that had remained dormant during the First World War.

¹²² NAI/1088/2/4, O’Donovan, Abbeydorney, to Irish Co-operative Agency Society, Limerick, 24 March 1921.

¹²³ NAI/1088/2/4, O’Donovan to Anderson, 15 June 1921.

¹²⁴ NAI/1088/2/4, Nicholas O’Brien to Anderson, 22 June 1921.

¹²⁵ NAI/1088/2/4, O’Brien to Anderson, 22 June 1921 [handwritten addition by James Fant, 30 June 1921].

Another consequence of violence was to transform co-operative societies into public sites around which a stringent critique of the British state in Ireland coalesced. As a consequence of violence, the IAOS abandoned its apolitical position and criticised the British government's policy in Ireland. Horace Plunkett highlighted the repressive tactics for a British audience. In September 1920, Plunkett wrote to *The Times* in London, protesting against reprisals carried out against Irish creameries. He appealed for readers' sympathy and stated that he 'would not drag the Irish Agricultural Cooperative Movement into the Anglo-Irish controversy at its acutest stage without compelling reasons.' Plunkett argued that the attacks damaged more than buildings. Local trust networks encouraged by co-operative organisation disintegrated as farmers refused to invest or deal with co-operative businesses 'because they believe that these are specially marked out as objects of reprisal by the guardians of the law.'¹²⁶ The repressive policy lessened the inclination of farmers to behave co-operatively and engendered animosity towards the British state. Army reprisals destroyed more than buildings and machinery attached to co-operative societies, they also diminished the hard-won social capital these institutions accrued over the previous years.

On 9 October 1920, the British Prime Minister delivered a speech in Carnarvon, Wales in which he outlined a defence of British policy in Ireland and referenced Plunkett's outcries. David Lloyd George used the speech to address criticisms of his Irish policy from members of his own Liberal Party, which included the notable figures of Herbert Asquith and Lord Grey. The Prime Minister rejected the demands made to grant Ireland a Dominion-status Home Rule, which would have

¹²⁶ Horace Plunkett, 'Irish Creameries', *The Times*, 7 September 1920.

included Irish political over their own military and naval bases. Furthermore, Lloyd George defended the violent behaviour of the police and military in suppressing rebellious activity in Ireland. Horace Plunkett was identified as one of the few Irish people who could be said to favour the option of Dominion Home Rule over that of the republic. Lloyd George dismissed his ability to represent any serious opinion in Ireland by declaring that ‘Sir Horace Plunkett... cannot even speak for his creameries.’¹²⁷ This reference to Plunkett and the creameries reflected an increased contemporary awareness in Britain that co-operative creameries had become the targets of the police repression. In that context, Plunkett’s inability to ‘speak for his creameries’, seemed a callous reference to damage to the economic infrastructure by the Lloyd George.

AE also pursued a campaign in British newspapers.¹²⁸ In 1920, he published a pamphlet entitled ‘A Plea for Justice’, which called for a public inquiry into the attacks by ‘[t]he armed forces of the Crown... [who] burned down factories, creameries, mills stores, barns and private-dwelling houses.’ AE identified the rationale behind these attacks as the most efficient way to punish a community for guerrilla activity in the locality. Their response, backed by the government, ‘led to the wrecking of any enterprise in the neighbourhood the destruction of which would inflict widespread injury and hurt the interests of the greatest number of people.’¹²⁹ The publicity campaign attracted influential support within Britain and drew attention to grim realities in Ireland. In particular, the *Manchester Guardian*, reported on the breakdown of law and order in the Irish countryside. Headlines such

¹²⁷ ‘To Pacify Ireland by Stern Methods, Says Lloyd George’, *New York Times*, 10 October 1920.

¹²⁸ AE, ‘Irish Creameries’, *The Times*, 23 August 1920; ‘Ireland and the Empire at the Court of Conscience’, *Manchester Guardian*, 22 September 1921.

¹²⁹ AE, *A Plea for Justice: Being a Demand for a Public Enquiry into the Attacks upon the Co-operative Societies in Ireland* (Dublin: The Irish Homestead, 1920), p. 2.

as ‘The Burning of Irish Creameries’, ‘Outrages in Co. Kerry’ and ‘Blow to the Co-operative Movement; Farmers Punished for Work of IRA’ characterised the reportage of the Irish situation by that paper.¹³⁰

This publicity campaign highlighted the effect of the British government’s policy in Ireland and public criticism increased. In Britain, political opinion opposed to the British government’s policy of state-sponsored violence built their critique around the attacks made upon co-operative societies. The British Labour Party sent an investigative commission to Ireland in November 1920 to consider two concerns: firstly, to consider the case for Irish freedom, and secondly, from its concern over the ‘degradation which the British people are now suffering in consequence of the policy of repression and coercion which has been carried out in its name.’¹³¹ The Commission visited areas affected by violence in order to interview witnesses, reconstruct attacks, and visit the remains of damaged property. It also spent time with representatives of the Irish co-operative movement. In early December the Commission received Robert Anderson, AE, and Paul Grogan of the IAOS, and managers of victimised co-operative creameries ‘who gave evidence on the economic hardships created by the wrecking of the machinery, plant, and buildings.’¹³²

The Labour Commission offered severe criticism of the British government’s policy from a non-Irish perspective. A significant portion of the Commission’s report dealt with the destruction of Ballymacelligott Co-operative Society and the deaths of two employees and injury of two others. The Commission disputed the

¹³⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 30 October 1920, 12 November 1920, and 27 May 1921.

¹³¹ The Labour Party [Great Britain], *Report of the Labour Commission to Ireland* (London: The Caledonian Press, 1921), p. 1.

¹³² ‘Labour Mission’s Peace Effort’, *Manchester Guardian*, 3 December 1920.

official version of events put forth at Westminster by the Chief Secretary of Ireland, Sir Hamar Greenwood. Greenwood informed the House of Commons that a party of journalists and police escort had been set upon by 'about seventy armed men' who fired at them from the creamery. This 'act of war' justified the reprisal. The Labour Party disputed this account as a 'caricature of what actually happened,' and offered an alternative constructed from 'well corroborated' evidence. The commission ascertained that no shots were fired from the creamery and that 'none of the men who were killed or wounded were carrying arms... no arms or ammunition of any kind were found in the creamery.' After the commission's visit to Ballymacelligott Crown forces raided the house of the creamery manager and killed another two men found there. The commission described the whole incident 'as discreditable to the Government as any of the occurrences for which the Government or its agents have been responsible.' It concluded that no basis existed for the attack and called for an independent inquiry.¹³³

The British Labour Party adopted a position contrary to the government's policy in Ireland, deeming it as inappropriate and counterproductive. The success of the IRA resided in the fact that it enjoyed popular support within communities and the actions taken by the Crown forces exacerbated an already volatile situation. The Labour Party's report established that British security forces targeted civilian businesses in reprisal to local guerrilla activity. The Labour commission argued that the attacks sought to 'cause the maximum economic and industrial loss to an Irish countryside or city' and that these 'reprisals have been scientifically carried out'. The policing policy of the Crown force represented not so much a spontaneous

¹³³ Labour Party, *Report of the Labour Commission*, pp. 51-53.

reaction to local violence, but a calculated attempt to subdue the local population. Erhard Rumpf has argued that the presence of dairy co-operatives in an area encouraged the formation of IRA units in an area due to its cultivation of 'community spirit'.¹³⁴ However, this point has been convincingly disputed by Peter Hart who argues that this claim is beyond substantiation.¹³⁵ Nevertheless, the Labour Report suggested reciprocity, if not causality, between the presence of co-operatives and IRA activity when it claimed that the 'destruction of creameries and manufactories only serves to stimulate recruiting by increasing the number of desperate men.'¹³⁶ The campaign of violence in the second half of 1920 coincided with the moment when the majority of IRA men acted on a part-time basis into 'Active Service units'. According to Francis Costello, each act of reprisal carried out by the Crown forces 'resulted in more young men joining the IRA'.¹³⁷ The Labour Party's conclusion demonstrates that the destruction of local co-operative creameries was a factor that further alienated rural opinion from the British state. The co-operative movement represented one of the most prominent business networks in Ireland and the destruction of societies affected whole communities.

The British government's reprisal policy continued to be applied with increased desperation until the announcement of the Truce on 11 July 1921. Co-operative creameries proved popular institutions in rural areas and as such, the attacks carried out upon them equated to an assault on all those who relied upon them. Affected communities suffered maximum disruption as police reprisals

¹³⁴ E Rumpf and AC Hepburn, *Nationalism and Socialism in Twentieth Century Ireland* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1977), pp. 55-58.

¹³⁵ Hart, *IRA at War*, p. 49.

¹³⁶ Labour Party, *Report of the Labour Commission*, pp. 7-8.

¹³⁷ Francis Costello, *The Irish Revolution and its Aftermath, 1916-1923* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2003) p. 83.

paralysed the socio-economic hubs that mattered for so many people. State violence revealed the extent to which many people relied upon the co-operative apparatus built up over the course of three decades.

The Truce, July-December 1921

The announcement of a truce between the Dáil and the British government on 11 July 1921 came as a relief. The prospect of conciliation brought a conclusion to the fighting between Republicans and Crown forces, as participants on both sides looked to achieve some sort of settlement. However, uncertainty about what might occur next made for a period of confusion. The negotiation of the Anglo-Irish Treaty dominated the news that autumn and winter, which culminated in the establishment of the controversial and contested Irish Free State in 1922.¹³⁸

The Truce granted struggling co-operative societies a period of respite and attention turned to the immediate work of reconstruction. The larger, established co-operative creameries demonstrated their resilience during these months. The Ballymacelligott Society, which lost its central creamery, directed milk supplies to auxiliary creameries based in the neighbouring villages of Gortatlea and Polatty. This ownership of auxiliary creameries was important for the recovery of large co-operative creameries as they were able to restart tentative production. The manager's fear that members would switch their allegiances to rivals proved unfounded. John Jones, Ballymacelligott Society's President, informed Robert Anderson that the 'loyalty of the Society's members is to be commended through all the harassing... their determination not to be beaten down was inspiring.' Jones thanked the IAOS

¹³⁸ Alvin Jackson, *Ireland, 1798-1998: Politics and War* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1999), p. 257; Lee, *Ireland, 1912-1985*, p. 47. For an account of the Anglo-Irish Treaty negotiations, see The Earl of Longford, Frank Pakenham, *Peace by Ordeal: An Account, From First-Hand Sources, of the Negotiation and Signature of the Anglo-Irish Treaty 1921* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1935).

for their support during the months that followed the attack in November 1920 stating that its work ‘will not be forgotten by the people of Ballymacelligott for many a day.’¹³⁹ The nationwide recovery of the co-operative movement depended upon the loyalty of local members combined with the guidance and expertise of the IAOS.

An important aspect of the crisis of the previous two years was the level of sympathy elicited for Ireland abroad. In America, fundraising efforts got under way when a loan fund was established to aid the affected co-operative societies. The American Committee for Relief in Ireland was set up in New York following a report by a delegation sent to Ireland by the American Society of Friends in February 1921. The delegation investigated the ‘economic distress in Ireland, [and]... has not been equalled in scope by any other investigative body, either Irish, British, American, or of any other nationality.’ The delegation estimated that 25,000 families required relief and argued that due to the ‘crippling of the co-operative creameries in Ireland, 15,000 farmers... are suffering severe loss and are faced with even more deeply serious distress in the immediate future.’¹⁴⁰ A special creamery expert travelled as part of the delegation to ‘give special attention the destroyed creameries... [and to help] rehabilitate an essential industry.’¹⁴¹ The Irish White Cross emerged out of this delegation’s report. Based in Ireland and managed by the Dublin Quaker businessman, James G. Douglas, the White Cross was ‘an Irish organisation, independent of any religious and political body... [that administered]

¹³⁹ NAI/1088/70/1, John Jones, Ballymacelligott, to Anderson, Dublin, 3 July 1921.

¹⁴⁰ James G Douglas, *Memoirs of Senator James G Douglas: Concerned Citizen*, ed. by J Anthony Gaughan (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1998), pp. 138-140.

¹⁴¹ ‘American Relief for Irish Distress’, *Manchester Guardian*, 11 February 1921.

funds either for immediate relief or for reconstruction.’¹⁴² Injured co-operatives sought this loan capital to restart business as soon as possible.¹⁴³ The IAOS lobbied the fund on behalf of co-operatives. This money proved important to those societies recovering from severe damage and provided the capital to rebuild creameries and replace broken machinery. For example the IAOS secured a White Cross loan worth £2,500 to stabilise Ballymacelligott Co-operative Society.¹⁴⁴ Less well-established societies experienced painful reconstructions and struggled to reassert a presence in the community.

In Rathmore, economic opponents frustrated the recovery of the co-operative society. A fundraising drive to help rebuild the local economy in the aftermath of terror got underway. However, some local figures criticised these efforts when made aware of plans to direct funding towards rebuilding co-operatives. For example, the application to the White Cross by the Rathmore Co-operative Society reignited dormant tensions. Rathmore’s manager wrote to Charles Riddall, explaining ‘there is... bitter opposition to the Coop here, as a matter of fact two Traders who collected the village for White Cross have refused to hand up the subscriptions when they heard [the] Creamery had applied for loan.’¹⁴⁵ Local opposition to the co-operative society manifested through attempts to frustrate the reconstruction of the local co-operative infrastructure.

The IAOS placed great emphasis upon aiding societies like Rathmore. In August, James Fant visited Rathmore and reported that the society required urgent

¹⁴² ‘Rebuilding Destroyed Irish Industries’, *Manchester Guardian*, 13 May 1921.

¹⁴³ Bolger, *The Irish Co-operative Movement*, p. 212.

¹⁴⁴ NAI/1088/70/1, Anderson to Fant, 1 July 1921, concerning status of Ballymacelligott Co-operative Society.

¹⁴⁵ NAI/1088/798/3, de Lacy to Riddall, 19 July 1921.

financial aid. The reconstruction of the society would be a crucial step in the reinvigoration of the area and:

would form the centre of a local industry much needed in the locality to aid and develop dairying and allied agricultural industries – the only source of income [for] hundreds of small farms and others in this district where much of this land is reclaimed bog and mountain land... Knowing the efforts that these people have made to establish their creamery the amount of local free labour by horse and man that has been given and their efforts to help themselves I would specially request the fullest application for financial aid to give them a fresh start.¹⁴⁶

With dairying considered the major source of income for local farmers, the priority in the society's reconstruction was given to the creamery.

The collapse of the retail business at Rathmore Co-operative Society allowed private trading interests to once again assert local dominance. These same figures were opposed the re-opening of the co-operative shop. In villages like Rathmore, the War of Independence allowed traders opposed to the general purpose society to reassert their position in the local economy. A society like Rathmore faced another problem different to that affecting a creamery society like Ballymacelligott. The attack upon the shop meant a loss of stock and capital. This left the society with debts that needed to be carried by the members who were less willing to pay again. Furthermore, the closure of the shop meant that initial enthusiasm for the society's retail business declined. Initially, the store business suffered because locals feared being caught in a further reprisal. By October, weekly turnover at the shop was £120, whereas before the attack in May, the shop had a comparable turnover of £300. Also, the society was owed £1,100 from members.¹⁴⁷ In organiser Nicholas O'Brien's assessment, 'the store trade has fallen away considerably and I believe that unless

¹⁴⁶ NAI/1088/798/3, Fant, Report of Visit to Rathmore, 2 August 1921.

¹⁴⁷ NAI/1088/798/3, NW O'Brien's Report, 18 October 1921.

something is done... the store business will dwindle away altogether.¹⁴⁸ By the end of 1921, the local population appeared to have returned to buying goods from local shopkeepers and traders once again. In contrast, Templecrone Co-operative Society in Donegal survived the War of Independence unscathed and continued to develop its retail business.¹⁴⁹

Rathmore Co-operative Society limped through the next decade harried by problems, before being passed onto a semi-state body, the Dairy Disposal Company, in 1930. By 1936, an anonymous employee recommended the dissolution of Rathmore Co-operative Society, describing it and others like it as, ‘to all intents and purposes failures.’¹⁵⁰ Flagship societies like Rathmore emerged from the War of Independence in disarray. The general purpose society receded on the list of IAOS priorities as it sought to capture the attention of an incoming Irish administration. From this point, the IAOS shunned experimentation and instead consolidated their already significant achievement in dairying. The IAOS focused again upon the interests of the producer and efforts to harmonise these interests with the consumer declined.

Although chastened by the experience of preceding years, Irish co-operative activists remained ambitious and committed to promoting their principles and institutions. Over the course of the next few years, the task of stabilising and rebuilding co-operative societies occupied IAOS employees. Their recovery faced further challenges as the post-war period slid into a global recession, resulting in a depressed market for agricultural produce. National economic success depended on

¹⁴⁸ NAI/1088/798/3, O’Brien’s Report, 28 October 1921.

¹⁴⁹ See Gallagher, *My Story*.

¹⁵⁰ NAI/1088/798/7, Unsigned Memo, Secretary of Dairy Disposal Company to Secretary of the IAOS, 9 March 1936.

the ability of co-operative societies in underdeveloped districts to effect change. In districts like Rathmore, where traditional and inefficient methods of production persisted and agricultural holdings were poor, co-operative institutions encouraged economic improvement and revitalised living conditions. However, opposition to co-operative societies in the form of private creameries and traders reasserted their position in the rural economy during 1919-21. As the political development of the Irish state prepared to enter a new phase, the challenges that faced the co-operative movement remained strikingly familiar.

Conclusion

In March 1922, Horace Plunkett delivered a speech that anticipated the imminent task of state-building which faced the Irish people. Plunkett believed that the co-operative movement must play a central role in such work. He highlighted that the IAOS already performed an 'immense amount of essential public work which no Government could undertake, but without which... no Government could economically and efficiently develop agriculture.' Following events of 1920-1921, few argued against this point. Co-operative societies sat at the heart of so much of the social and economic activity in rural Ireland. Plunkett seized the opportunity to reiterate his old mantra that the incoming Irish government needed to adopt the principle of 'better farming, better business, better living'.¹⁵¹ The IAOS found itself well-placed to play an active and important role in that task.

A debate exists within Irish historiography about the nature of the Irish revolution. Michael Laffan has argued that whilst a political revolution occurred, the

¹⁵¹ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1921*, 44-48.

new nationalist elite brought no radical social agenda, nor displayed a desire for social change. Fergus Campbell challenged this view through an examination of the attitudes of Sinn Féin to the question of land reform. He concluded that although no social revolution occurred that redrew class structures, a nuanced nationalist response to social and economic pressures existed.¹⁵² Similarly, under the cover of violence, conflict over the direction of Irish agricultural production occurred, with implications for future development. The British state suppressed co-operative businesses whilst private creameries traded relatively unhindered. The fact co-operative societies endured the violent attention of state representatives further bound its model of economic organisation to a nationalist political economy. In this way, one of effect of the War of Independence was to convert co-operative organisation into feature of post-independence official power in Ireland.

The First World War transformed the political terrain in Ireland. Ideas associated with the IAOS found a receptive and influential audience. The incoming generation of nationalist politicians, administrators and experts grew up familiar with aspects of the co-operative political economy and looked set to apply them to future challenges facing the Irish economy. By summer 1921, having survived the crisis of state violence, the network of co-operative societies became a part of the national project. Co-operatives promoted Irish social and economic progress but had also endured victimisation at the height of the nationalist repudiation of British power. Having occupied a marginal position within the governmental system during the war, the IAOS projected itself as an integral component of the independent Irish

¹⁵² Campbell, *Land and Revolution*, p. 283.

economy after 1918. The IAOS looked to exert its hard-won influence in the continuous state-building process.

Although the IAOS's political capital appeared to be in the ascendant, the co-operative network faced disaster at the level of local societies. The eruption of violence in rural Ireland instigated a law-and-order policy that targeted co-operatives. The irony of British policy in Ireland was that whilst security forces injured co-operative societies, the state continued to fund the IAOS through the Development Commission. Alongside this, the spectre of collusion amongst sections of society opposed to co-operatives suggested itself to some organisers. As Ireland prepared for independence, the movement reflected upon the period which witnessed the infliction of damage upon co-operative property and the danger endured by members and employees. The IAOS concluded that:

The whole rural population in several districts had to carry on life under conditions that were... discouraging and frequently full of risk both to themselves and to their industry.¹⁵³

Despite the violence, the movement emerged from its darkest period yet and the IAOS could assert that 'no stronger proof of the inherent vitality of the movement has ever been recorded.'¹⁵⁴ The survival of the movement through a moment of violent crisis reflected an adherence to co-operative organisation amongst the rural population. Many, although not all, people in rural areas rallied to the support of these societies ensuring they remained key players in national development. The co-operative movement looked to ensure that glimpses of a Co-operative Commonwealth became embedded within the new Irish Free State.

¹⁵³ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1921*, p. 5.

¹⁵⁴ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1921*, p. 5.

Chapter 4: The Irish Free State – A Co-operative Commonwealth? 1922-1932

On 7 January 1922, Dáil Eireann narrowly accepted the Anglo-Irish Treaty and established the Irish Free State.¹ During the political debates of December 1921, the leaders of the co-operative movement proved emphatic in their support of the Anglo-Irish Treaty. This indicated a desire to secure a close accommodation with the incoming government. AE urged the Irish people to support the Treaty or risk plunging Ireland back into ‘scenes of bloodshed far beyond anything known for centuries’. He argued that acceptance of the controversial Treaty would bring Ireland closer to that ‘solemn moment when full responsibility for our own civilisation and social order will be flung upon the shoulders of the Irish people.’² However, AE believed that the state in turn must recognise the importance of the co-operative movement’s efforts in helping to make the idea of the Irish nation manifest. In February 1922, AE asserted that:

The principles [the IAOS] has advocated have overflowed from the agricultural sphere into the national being... we think the farmers who have enriched the movement by their varied application of the co-operative principle have reason to be proud of its effect on the thought of their country.³

AE believed that the new state owed a debt to co-operative farmers and leaders. Perhaps sensing an opportunity afforded by the introduction of a new government in Dublin, the IAOS looked to position co-operative societies and farmers at the heart of any plans for national development. As such, the establishment of the Irish Free

¹ A subsequent act of parliament passed on 6 December 1922 confirmed its status as an legally autonomous Dominion of the British Empire. DW Harkness, *The Restless Dominion: The Irish Free State and the British Commonwealth of Nations, 1921-1931* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1969), pp. 21-29.

² ‘The New Era’, *Irish Homestead*, 17 December 1921.

³ ‘Its Future Work’, *Irish Homestead*, 11 February 1922.

State provided an opportunity to place co-operation at the centre of a developmental agenda and redefine the relationship between the state and IAOS.

After 1922, the co-operative movement remained a relevant organisation to the rural population and co-operative societies contributed to Irish development. This chapter argues that co-operative expertise was embedded within an Irish governmentality. However, there is little recognition of this in the prevailing views on Irish political culture. Basil Chubb's influential work on government in Ireland identified 'the British influence [as] the most important in determining the pattern of much of Irish political thought and practice' and classified Irish agriculture as 'wholly geared to British needs.'⁴ Garret Fitzgerald, Irish Taoiseach during the 1980s, later articulated a similar view when he described the effect of British policy upon Irish development throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as 'a form of exploitation of the Irish small farm structure... an exploitation which had been carried forward into the first half of the post-independence period.' Not until Ireland became an enthusiastic supporter of the European Community in the 1970s did this dependency start to recede.⁵ Chubb also highlights the impact of nationalism, Irish Catholicism, authoritarian attitudes and anti-intellectualism as defining characteristics of government in Ireland.⁶ This chapter extends Chubb's analysis by arguing that ideas of co-operation and reliance upon a co-operative conception of economic organisation also defined Irish government and political culture.

Previous chapters have shown that co-operation helped frame nationalist thinking about the form an independent Irish state might take. In the context of

⁴ Basil Chubb, *The Government and Politics of Ireland*, 3rd ed. (London: Longman, 1992), pp. 3-5.

⁵ Garret Fitzgerald, *Reflections on the Irish State* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2003), pp. 20-21.

⁶ Chubb, *The Government*, pp. 1-21.

political and economic realities of the 1920s, any hopes for a utopian outcome to nationalist aspirations dissipated.⁷ It has been argued by several historians that from 1922 the Irish people ‘became victims of their own aspirations’ and post-independence governments failed to build the ‘Gaelic Jerusalem’.⁸ However such a failure did not preclude serious efforts to construct the Irish state. The establishment of the Free State proved anticlimactic and accords with Clifford Geertz’s view that the aftermath of independence is a deflating experience.⁹ However, this chapter assesses how well-integrated the principle of co-operative organisation became within the governmental structures of the Irish Free State. I will begin by establishing the context of the postcolonial moment in Ireland. This will allow the position of the co-operative movement during the 1920s to be located against a backdrop of the political, economic and military uncertainties that shaped the creation public policy. Thereafter, the chapter will consider the creation of agricultural policy in the Free State and argues that the co-operative movement played a central role in developing and implementing this policy. In particular, the 1924 Report of the Commission on Agriculture is analysed to highlight the agricultural priorities for the new government. This report emerged out of a two year consultation between policymakers, economists and agricultural experts, including co-operators, and set out a governmental template with important implications for socio-economic development. More important for the central argument of this thesis, the Commission’s Report and governmental strategies that arise from it are utilised

⁷ A collection of essays examining the Irish case referred to the period as ‘The Years of the Great Test’. Francis MacManus, ed., *The Years of the Great Test, 1926-1939* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1967).

⁸ Alvin Jackson, *Ireland, 1798-1998: Politics and War* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1999), pp. 258-262; John M Regan and Mike Cronin, ‘Introduction: Ireland and the Politics of Independence, 1922-49: New Perspectives and Re-considerations’, in *Ireland: The Politics of Independence, 1922-49*, ed. by Mike Cronin and John M Regan (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 1-12, (p.2).

⁹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 234-5.

to demonstrate that co-operation formed a key thread in the emergence of a form of Irish rule and furthermore that the co-operative movement acted as an instrument of the state. This assertion is a contentious one and sets out to revise a central understanding of Ireland in the twentieth century. By underlining the work of co-operators on both a national and local level, this chapter will revise the definition of the state in Ireland and the way in which it operated. As a way of conclusion, a short note is made on the position of co-operation in the 1930s.

In revising a historical understanding of the Irish state, the chapter takes Akhil Gupta's anthropological work on the state and development as an entry point. Gupta shows that research on the state that focuses upon:

large-scale structures, epochal events, major policies, and "important" people... failed to illuminate the quotidian practices of bureaucrats that tell us about the effects of the state upon the everyday lives of rural people.¹⁰

Applying this insight to Ireland reveals that a popular understanding of the state occurred at the local co-operative society for many people that lived in the countryside. Dairy farmers attended co-operative creameries on a daily basis to supply milk and relied upon it as a source of income. During the 1920s, as will be reviewed later, the revitalisation of co-operative credit societies insulated farmers against the effects of an agricultural depression. Furthermore in the south-west, they helped dairy farmers mitigate the worst effects of an epidemic outbreak that depleted cattle stocks. Many of the reforms that emanated from the Commission on Agriculture's Report provide evidence of a renegotiation of the relationship between the state and the IAOS. Applying Gupta's insight to post-independence rural Ireland shows that the state was constructed, and simultaneously revealed itself, at the site of

¹⁰ Akhil Gupta, 'Blurred Boundaries: The Discourse of Corruption, the Culture of Politics and the Imagined State', *American Ethnologist*, 22.2 (1995), 375-402 (pp. 376-378).

the co-operative society. This chapter therefore revises current understandings of the Irish state, which is often presented as the institutions and individuals associated with national and local government. The frequent, and often mundane, interactions that occurred at creameries and credit societies proved as relevant to the lives of a rural population as contemporary debates about the controversial decision to adopt the Treaty.

Before embarking upon the argument, a certain qualification needs to be made. The analysis of the chapter moves between an examination of co-operative organisation on a national and local level and argues for the relevance of the movement in shaping institutions and practices of the independent nation-state. However, the incomplete nature of local co-operative society records makes it difficult to make an empirical case for the movement's importance to Irish state-building. Nevertheless, there are discernible trends that can be observed that show the co-operative movement's relationship with the state intensified in this period. Within the correspondence files for individual societies and the reports of the co-operative organisers, there is enough evidence to suggest various social and economic developments taking place at the site of the co-operative society. Also, the Agricultural Commission's Report and the records for the Department of Agriculture show an unprecedented level of collaboration between the institutions of the state and the co-operative movement during the 1920s.

The analysis of the co-operative movement's part in the state-building process ends in 1932 with the electoral defeat of the Cumann na nGaedheal government. Cumann na nGaedheal was the political party that emerged from pre-independence Sinn Féin in support of the Treaty and guided the Irish Free State

through its first tumultuous decade of independence. By concluding the study at that point it will be argued that the co-operative movement became an integral part of the Treatyite political culture and an effective part of the state infrastructure. Furthermore, it will be shown that the modernising project pursued by the IAOS since the end of the nineteenth century remained active beyond political independence and the principle of co-operative organisation managed to assert itself within the new state.

Political Realities

The Challenge of Independence

An understanding of the position of the Irish co-operative movement and its relationship with the Irish government needs to take account of the socio-political context into which the new state emerged. The IAOS approached this new political phase with pragmatism and abandoned any utopian pretensions: ‘the co-operative commonwealth will remain a hope of the future rather than a gradually realised economic device or an immediately practicable ideal.’¹¹ This realistic statement summarised the position of the co-operative movement at the end of the War of Independence, but also reflected a general political moment. From 1922, the Irish Free State government faced a broad array of challenges. The Sinn Féin party split into Pro-Treaty and Anti-Treaty factions, with the former rebranded as the Cumann na nGaedheal party in 1923 to form the first governing party of the Free State.¹² A flurry of activity characterised this government’s decade in power as it sought to

¹¹ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1923*, p. 14.

¹² Ciara Meehan, *The Cosgrave Party A History of Cumann na nGaedheal, 1923-33* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2010).

establish its own sovereignty.¹³ Foreign policy emerged as a major priority as the government worked to renegotiate its relations with Britain and the rest of the Commonwealth in order to extend its autonomy as well as establish relations with other states and the League of Nations.¹⁴ The question of the partition of Ireland also preoccupied the government. The establishment of a Boundary Commission as a concession of the Anglo-Irish Treaty offered the possibility of a renegotiation of the border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State.¹⁵ On the domestic front, the government's policy objectives centred upon defending the state from internal dissent, establishing a rule of law, trade policy, reducing national expenditure and developing agriculture.¹⁶

The IAOS looked to exert influence over the area of agricultural development. In 1923, the organisation stated that Irish agriculture remained:

one of the few stable elements in the changing world through which we have recently passed, and though its position to-day is crucial, no ultimate fears of its recovery can be entertained. [Furthermore that]... co-operative principles and practice in relation to that industry are sound.¹⁷

The Irish Free State remained an agricultural nation. The 1926 Census provided statistical support for such attitudes, showing that 53% of the population engaged in agricultural occupations. Government publications argued that through realising the untapped potential of agriculture in Ireland no reason existed, 'why this country cannot in time have a largely increased population with an improved standard of

¹³ John M Regan, *The Irish Counter-Revolution, 1921-1936: Treatyite Politics and Settlement in Independent Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1999).

¹⁴ On these efforts see Michael Kennedy and Joseph Skelly eds, *Irish Foreign Policy, 1919-1966: From Independence to Internationalism* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2000).

¹⁵ Paul Murray, *The Irish Boundary Commission and its Origins, 1886-1925* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2011).

¹⁶ Donal Corcoran, 'Public Policy in an Emerging State: The Irish Free State, 1922-25', *Irish Journal of Public Policy*, 1 (2009), <<http://publish.ucc.ie/ijpp/2009/01/corcoran/05/en>> [accessed 19 August 2013].

¹⁷ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1923*, p. 7.

living.¹⁸ The Free State remained integrated within the British economy where it ended up sending most of its agricultural exports. In 1924, agriculture, food and drink accounted for 98% of national exports with 86% of this output bound for the United Kingdom.¹⁹

Akhil Gupta's work has demonstrated that the concept of 'development' emerged as the *raison d'etat* in postcolonial states and that agriculture forms a critical link in the forging of the modern nation.²⁰ Patrick Hogan, Minister for Agriculture, argued this point when he noted 'national development in Ireland... is synonymous with agricultural development.'²¹ By its long-term efforts to organise agriculture in Ireland the IAOS had ensured its relevance to Cumann na nGaedheal's plans. Furthermore, utilisation of the co-operative movement served another government purpose. If the IAOS could be harnessed by the state to deliver rural policy, then the co-operative movement might serve the dual objective of prioritising agriculture whilst controlling public expenditure.

Attempts by the new government to vitalise agriculture occurred at an inopportune moment. The Free State emerged against an international backdrop of agrarian depression. The Secretary of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (DATI) until 1921, TP Gill, summarised the fragility of Irish agriculture within the international nexus of trade and capital after the First World War: '[t]he universal war has shaken and broken the economic fabric of the world, and, this

¹⁸ Saorstát Éireann, *Agricultural Statistics, 1847-1926: Reports and Tables* (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 1928), p. lxxv.

¹⁹ Mary E Daly, *Industrial Development and Irish National Identity, 1922-39* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1992), p. 15.

²⁰ Akhil Gupta, *Postcolonial Developments: Agriculture in the Making of Modern India* (London: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 38.

²¹ Daly, *Industrial Development*, p. 16.

being an era of interdependence, Irish agriculture is closely affected.²² The slump in prices that occurred in 1920-21 affected agriculture and left farmers exposed in a rural economy where sources of agricultural credit proved limited. Farmers found the 1920s a tough economic climate as the agricultural price index declined between 1920 and 1931.²³

As Minister of Agriculture, one of Patrick Hogan's priorities centred on the improvement of Ireland's export capabilities. Britain remained the primary buyer of agricultural goods and therefore Hogan concentrated on ensuring Ireland remained competitive in that overcrowded marketplace.²⁴ According to contemporary economist George O'Brien, Hogan's policy 'did not involve any breach of continuity in the tradition of Irish farming'.²⁵ Hogan concentrated upon reinforcing established patterns through improving the quality of both inputs (e.g. bulls, milk) and outputs (butter, eggs, bacon).²⁶ Despite the economic and political context, the Free State government inherited a substantial infrastructure from the British state and stability was promoted by the resumption of long-standing structural processes. For example, the resumption of systemic emigration after 1922 decreased pressure upon resources.²⁷ Cormac Ó Gráda argues that from the 1920s 'the increasing role of governmental and government-supported agencies was probably a benign influence'. The work of agencies such as the DATI (renamed the Department of Agriculture

²² National Archives of Ireland (NAI)/AGF/2005/68/80, Evidence of TP Gill to Commission on Agriculture, 16, 17 & 18 January 1923.

²³ Kieran A Kennedy, Thomas Giblin and Deirdre McHugh, *The Economic Development of Ireland in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 37.

²⁴ Eunan O'Halpin, 'Politics and the State, 1922-1932', *A New History of Ireland, Volume VII: Ireland 1921-1984*, ed. by JR Hill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 86-126 (p.113).

²⁵ George O'Brien, 'Patrick Hogan: Minister for Agriculture, 1922-1932', *Studies*, 25.99 (1936), 353-368 (p. 360).

²⁶ Cormac Ó Gráda, *A Rocky Road: The Irish Economy Since the 1920s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 145.

²⁷ JJ Lee, *Ireland, 1912-1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 69-71.

after 1922) and IAOS produced statistical data detailing economic activity throughout Ireland. These agencies also encouraged an improvement in the quality of output and alerted farmers to new techniques. In short, investment made to these bodies ‘was not money wasted in the pre-1925 period.’²⁸

The debate about whether Irish national development pursued an agricultural or industrial paradigm was resolved in favour of the former.²⁹ The next significant move made by the government was to decide upon a free trade policy as opposed to protectionism. Writing in *The Irish Economist* in January 1923, the country’s foremost agricultural economist, Joseph Johnston, assessed Ireland’s capacity for industrial development and argued in favour of a free trade policy.³⁰ The lack of a viable industrial base meant Johnston believed that ‘agriculture will remain our staple industry. It will remain the broad foundation on which all other industrial developments will be solidly and securely built.’ For Johnston, the proper economic function of government lay in the creation of an improved transport infrastructure and raising the standard of education. He further argued that any proposed improvement relied upon the efforts of farmers themselves, both as individuals and through co-operation.³¹ In June 1923, the government established a Fiscal Inquiry Committee to investigate the potential effects of a movement away from free trade. The Committee included free trade supporters such as economist George O’Brien,

²⁸ Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland Before and After the Famine: Explorations in Economic History, 1800-1925* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), p. 172. This argument contrasts with James Meenan who argued that voluntary organisations were irretrievably weakened by the time of independence. Meenan, *The Irish Economy Since 1922* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press), pp. 34-5.

²⁹ O’Halpin, ‘Politics and the State’, p. 115.

³⁰ Joseph Johnston (1890-1972), economist at Trinity College, served on a series of state bodies during 1920s to 1940s, including the Agricultural Commission. His work as an agricultural economist made him a highly regarded expert. Gerry McElroy, ‘Johnston, Joseph’, *Dictionary of Irish Biography: From Earliest Times to the Year 2002, Volume 4*, ed. by James McGuire and James Quinn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 1013-1014.

³¹ Joseph Johnston, ‘Free Trade or Protection for Irish Industries?’ *The Irish Economist*, 8.1 (1923), 54-65 (pp. 64-65).

and its conclusion advocated a continuation of a free trade policy. The Department of Finance supported these findings.³² Throughout the 1920s, the Irish economy remained ‘an open one’ attached to a free trade orthodoxy, which served the interests of agriculture.³³

The partition of Ireland also played into the question of economic development and the co-operative movement’s role in it. At the end of 1920, the British government passed the Government of Ireland Act which established a six-county Northern Ireland.³⁴ Although a politically contentious issue, partition made the Free State’s emphasis upon its rural and agricultural character less problematic. The north-eastern counties that remained within the United Kingdom contained the most industrialised section of the island. This allowed Free State intellectuals and policymakers to make the case for agricultural development as a natural pursuit of the national comparative advantage.

After 1922, the Free State government demanded that the IAOS divide itself into two separate organisations to reflect the new geo-political reality. Patrick Hogan advocated this change to prevent ‘the effect of releasing, for expenditure in the Northern Area, money subscribed in the Southern Area.’³⁵ The Ministry of Finance adopted this principle and on 31 August 1922, the IAOS divided into two organisations. The body responsible for co-operative development in Northern Ireland was reconstituted as the Ulster Agricultural Organisation Society.³⁶ The two

³² Ronan Fanning, *The Irish Department of Finance, 1922-1958* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1978), pp. 202-206; Lee, *Ireland*, pp. 118-120.

³³ Ó Gráda, *A Rocky Road*, p.46; Lee, *Ireland, 1912-1985*, p. 108; Meehan, *The Cosgrave Party*, pp.129-130.

³⁴ Murray, *The Irish Boundary Commission*, p. 60.

³⁵ NAI/FIN/1/3086, Patrick Hogan to the Post-Master General, 22 May 1922.

³⁶ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1923*, p. 6.

centres of IAOS influence before 1922 belonged to the south-western and north-eastern regions where dairying formed a popular mode of farming. With the loss of the north-eastern centre, the IAOS's numerical strength decreased. In 1922, the IAOS possessed 1,102 co-operative societies, but the loss of its north-eastern societies saw this figure drop to 608.³⁷ Although this reform represented a serious restructure of the movement, the IAOS offered little protest and the partition of the movement passed without fanfare. Four-fifths of the total employment in dairying and bacon curing was concentrated in the south-western province of Munster.³⁸ The south-west emerged as a crucial region in plans for economic improvement as the engine of the Free State's butter production.

The Co-operative Movement and Civil War

More pressing than the issue of partition for the Free State government was the outbreak of internal military conflict. The Irish Civil War broke out in June 1922 and lasted until a ceasefire was declared in May 1923. The Anglo-Irish Treaty was the issue at stake, but the Pro-Treatyites believed that the irredentist republicans went further than dispute the terms of that agreement by calling 'into question the proper basis of the social and political order in Irish society.'³⁹ The capture of Dublin's Four Courts in April 1922 by Republican forces opposed to the Treaty set down a challenge to authority and legitimacy of the new state. The government responded in June by using the newly established National Army to crush the occupation.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, over the next year a guerrilla warfare campaign between the republican IRA and the Irish National Army occurred in the countryside that saw a resumption

³⁷ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1922*, p. 9; IAOS, *Annual Report, 1924*, p. 6.

³⁸ Desmond A Gillmor, 'Land and People, c. 1926,' in *A New History of Ireland, Volume VII: Ireland, 1921-84*, ed. by JR Hill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 62-85, (p. 70).

³⁹ Bill Kissane, *The Politics of the Irish Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 1.

⁴⁰ Michael Hopkinson, *Green Against Green: The Irish Civil War* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1988), pp. 115-122.

of violence between former comrades. The most intense fighting occurred in the south-west of Ireland in Counties Kerry, Cork and Limerick.⁴¹ The Civil War lasted for around a year by which point the National Army quelled Republican anti-Treatyites. However, the legacy and memory of the war affected the political culture for decades.⁴² The resultant loss of life can only be estimated with conservative estimates placing it at 800 National Army deaths, with an almost certainly higher figure for Republicans. No records exist for the numbers of civilian dead.⁴³ The huge material cost of the war offered a major concern for the new government intent on deficit reduction. Damage to infrastructure cost over £30 million with compensation and defence remaining high recipients of government expenditure.⁴⁴

The Irish Civil War impacted upon the co-operative movement on a national and local level during 1922-1923. Horace Plunkett had been appointed to the Senate (the upper chamber of the new Irish parliament) by the President of the Executive, William Cosgrave. The honour had been accorded in recognition of Plunkett's efforts in furthering the interests of Ireland throughout his career. However, a tactic of militant Republicans during 1922-1923 was to attack the homes of Senators. In January 1923, Plunkett's home in Kilteragh, Dublin, was destroyed in an arson attack. Plunkett departed for England that year and as a result his influence in Irish affairs waned. Although he remained as IAOS President until his death in 1932, his

⁴¹ Kissane, *Politics of the Irish Civil War*, p. 4; Peter Hart, *The IRA at War, 1916-1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 41.

⁴² Anne Dolan, *Commemorating the Irish Civil War: History and Memory, 1923-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁴³ Hopkinson, *Green Against Green*, p. 273.

⁴⁴ Michael Hopkinson, 'Civil War and Aftermath, 1922-4', *A New History of Ireland: 1921-1984*, ed. by JR Hill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 31-61 (p. 54).

direct involvement in Irish co-operation ended.⁴⁵ The Civil War also reduced AE's interest in co-operative matters. AE supported the Irish Free State and appealed to the *Irish Homestead's* readers to support the government in 'the conflict between Builders and Destroyers'.⁴⁶ In September 1923, the *Irish Homestead* became incorporated into the *Irish Statesman*, a journal intended as an intellectual foundation to the Free State. AE carried on as editor of the *Statesman*. Reportage on co-operation remained a feature, but the remit of the journal concentrated much more upon issues of national and international politics.⁴⁷ As Secretary of the IAOS, Robert Anderson provided the main source of leadership throughout this tumultuous period. His unionist credentials left him wary and suspicious of Republican activity during the Civil War. Anderson's leadership provided continuity in a period of transition and he helped negotiate a new relationship between the movement and the government during the 1920s.⁴⁸

On a local level, the unfolding civil war disrupted business. Co-operative societies strived for normalcy following the recent violent attacks by Crown forces, but recovery became frustrated by the resumption of violence in 1922.⁴⁹ In County Kerry, the Civil War was particularly brutal and events in the final months of the conflict ensured a lingering resentment in the county long after the cessation of violence.⁵⁰ The Civil War disrupted the everyday business of co-operative societies.

⁴⁵ Trevor West, *Horace Plunkett, Co-operation and Politics* (Gerrards Cross, Bucks.: Colin Smythe, 1986), pp. 197-216.

⁴⁶ 'Fate of the Irish Laodiceans', *Irish Homestead*, 3 February 1923.

⁴⁷ Henry Summerfield, *That Myriad-Minded Man: A Biography of George William Russell 'AE' 1867-1935* (Gerrards Cross, Bucks.: Colin Smythe, 1975), pp. 218-227; Nicholas Allen, *Modernism, Ireland and Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 36.

⁴⁸ James J Kennelly, 'Normal courage: RA Anderson and the Irish Co-operative Movement', *Studies*, 100 (2011), pp. 319-330.

⁴⁹ Meenan, *The Irish Economy*, p. 35.

⁵⁰ Gavin Foster, 'In the Shadow of the Split: Writing the Irish Civil War', *Field Day Review*, 2 (2006), 294-303 (pp. 295-6). For more on the Civil War in Kerry see Tom Doyle, *The Civil War in Kerry*

Republicans destroyed trains and rail stations in an attempt to render government impossible.⁵¹ Nicholas O'Brien's reports for the IAOS, noted the negative effects of the civil war upon co-operative business. The region's co-operative societies struggled to ship butter from Tralee due to the closure of that town's ferry service. For example Rattoo Co-operative Society shipped via a smaller harbour in Fenit, where 'it is very difficult and costly to get the butter on board and it is only through very hard work that it can be done owing to broken roads etc.'⁵² Newtownsandes Co-operative Society experienced an alarming drop in milk supply. Daily milk volume fell by 300 gallons, a fifth of the normal supply, 'owing to the cutting of the roads locally.'⁵³ Nevertheless, the infrastructure that the co-operative movement painstakingly established over preceding decades remained largely intact and offered the new government one potential way of attending to the needs of farmers and achieving economic improvement.

The movement of the National Army through County Kerry in late 1922 and 1923 disturbed societies. On 26 November 1922, National Army troops occupied the creamery at Rathmore and erected a machine gun there. In December no members attended the society's Annual General Meeting 'owing to military operations in the district that day'. Organiser Nicholas O'Brien assured Robert Anderson that the 'Committee have done everything to oblige the troops since their advent to

(Cork: Mercier Press, 2008); T Ryle Dwyer, *Tans, Terror and Troubles: Kerry's Real Fighting Story, 1913-1923* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2001).

⁵¹ Donal O'Sullivan, *The Irish Free State and its Senate: A Study in Contemporary Politics* (London: Faber and Faber, 1940), p. 99.

⁵² NAI/1088/800/3, NW O'Brien to RA Anderson, 1 October 1922. Also Abbeydorney Co-operative Society struggled to get butter to Fenit harbour due to broken roads. NAI/1088/2/4, O'Brien's Report to Anderson, 6 October 1922.

⁵³ NAI/1088/751/8, O'Brien to Anderson, 17 October 1922.

Rathmore.⁵⁴ An attempt to hold the meeting on 19 December saw only seven of three-hundred members attend. O'Brien concluded 'it is quite possible that the poor attendance was due to a certain extent to the fact that sniping is an almost everyday occurrence in the village.'⁵⁵

Co-operative societies were affected by personal antagonisms caused by the Civil War. In January, the National Army held Thomas de Lacy, the manager of Rathmore Co-operative Society, as prisoner on account of his son 'who is beyond my control being with the Irregulars'. 'Irregular' was the pejorative term used for Anti-Treatyite republicans. As a result de Lacy confided in Robert Anderson that he and his family were under 'grave suspicion of helping the irregulars due to stories on the part of the people I am most anxious to clear out of Rathmore family + all'.⁵⁶

Anderson responded:

I am very much afraid that the fact that your son appears to be actively engaged with the Irregulars practically deprives us in the IAOS of doing what we would very much like to do for you. I think if your son take it upon himself to adopt such a course as he appears to have adopted, you are no longer morally or in any other way, bound to shield him.⁵⁷

The lack of sympathy from Anderson proved indicative of the more general perspective of the IAOS. Whilst Civil War politics destabilised social relations in rural communities for years afterwards, the leadership of the IAOS remained resolute in its support for the new state.

⁵⁴ NAI/1088/798/4, O'Brien's Report on Visit to Rathmore, 2 December 1922.

⁵⁵ NAI/1088/798/4, O'Brien's Report on Visit to Rathmore, 20 December 1922.

⁵⁶ NAI/1088/798/4, Thomas de Lacy to Anderson, 15 and 16 January 1923.

⁵⁷ NAI/1088/798/4, Anderson to de Lacy, 19 January 1923.

Co-operativising the State: The Agricultural Commission and Rural Reform

During its first two years, the Irish government appointed a plethora of commissions to investigate a variety of issues. These included commissions to investigate tax, financial policy, the police service, the postal service and agriculture.⁵⁸ Denis Gwynn's contemporary assessment of the first five years of the Free State argued that, 'anyone who has visualised the organisation, whether economic or social, of the Free State, it must be apparent that no Ministry in the Government of the country is of equal importance, in the ordinary life of the people, with the Ministry of Agriculture.'⁵⁹ The Agricultural Commission represented the most important such commission as it held the most significance for national development. The Commission's conclusions established a governmental template for the Free State's most significant economic sector. The Commission included politicians from the Cumann na nGaedheal, Labour and Farmers' Parties as well as two recognised economic experts, George O'Brien and Joseph Johnston. Johnston was already a passionate advocate of co-operative organisation and took a leading role in the Commission's proceedings.⁶⁰ The Agricultural Commission met for the first time in November 1922 to investigate the condition of agriculture and provide the Free State with 'an assured basis for future expansion and prosperity'. It sat fifty-six times in public and thirty-eight times in private sessions over the next two years, and cross-examined 121 expert witnesses including IAOS experts such as Robert Anderson and Father Finlay.⁶¹ The Commission's Report, submitted to Patrick Hogan in April 1924, represented a document of Irish technocratic planning and formed the basis for

⁵⁸ Corcoran, 'Public Policy'.

⁵⁹ Denis Gwynn, *The Irish Free State, 1922-1927* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1928), p.285.

⁶⁰ Roy HW Johnston, *Century of Endeavour: A Biographical and Autobiographical View of the Twentieth Century in Ireland* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 2006), p.40.

⁶¹ NAI/AGF/2005/68/401, Preface to the Report of the Agricultural Commission.

governmental thinking on rural matters for decades afterwards. This section takes the Agricultural Commission and the policies it inspired to argue that a symbiotic relationship evolved between the co-operative movement and the state throughout the 1920s.

The Irish Homestead welcomed the decision to establish the Agricultural Commission. AE hoped that the Commission would range further in its deliberations than mere reconstruction and consider the task of ‘building up a rural civilisation.’ AE placed the Commission within a wider narrative of the evolution of national character, arguing that it should stimulate a conversation about what constituted the Irish mentality. AE described this mentality as ‘virgin soil. Yet... like all virgin soil, once it was cultivated it would be immensely productive.’ Through this process of ‘cultivation’ AE believed that the Agricultural Commission might provide a means by which ‘we can begin to build up national life, trying to remedy defects and to burnish up our national virtues.’⁶²

Co-operators embraced the opportunity to deliver evidence to the Commission. However, sometimes the consultation process revealed the political partisanship that coloured the thinking of activists. Such slips revealed aspects of the Irish mentality, but perhaps not as envisaged by AE. For example, the evidence supplied to the Commission by the organiser, WP Clifford, expressed the belief that the co-operative movement sat better positioned ‘to assert itself’ in the new nation-state. Under cross-examination from George O’Brien, Clifford exhibited the strident belief that political independence provided the necessary conditions for the promotion of organised co-operation within governmental structures:

⁶² ‘The Agricultural Commission’, *Irish Homestead*, 28 October 1922.

O'Brien: What reason have you for assuming that the State will be favourable to the co-operative movement? ...It seems to me that you are delivering yourself into the hands of a powerful agency?

Clifford: The co-operative movement will be a popular agency. I am sure it will be able to assert itself.

O'B: Do you think that the co-operative movement in Ireland would have received better facilities for the last twenty years if the whole question of financing had been in the hands of the department of Agriculture?

C: No, it was believed to be a Branch of the English Government in Ireland.

O'B: You think the millennium has come, and that the future Irish Government will do everything right?

C: I believe it is fair to infer that they will do a lot better than the British in the past. At least our experience so far has gone to prove that, disturbed as the state of the country has been.

Clifford expected political independence to instigate a change in the Department of Agriculture's attitude towards the IAOS. He equated the DATI with a 'Branch of English Government in Ireland'. DATI policy after Plunkett's ejection in 1907 frustrated co-operative organisation, which may be why Clifford suspected it was anathema to Irish interests. As an organiser, Clifford's work meant that he spent most of his time in the countryside amongst the societies. As such, his nationalist view may reflect an element of the cumulative opinion he encountered through this work. Clifford also proved suspicious of the civil service. When asked by O'Brien if he believed 'that the spots in the leopards in Merrion Street [where government buildings and civil servants were based] will change?' Clifford responded, 'No, you will have to boil some of them.'⁶³ As such, Clifford hoped political independence represented a millenarian moment whereby the sources of power in Ireland might be purged of British influence, which he believed would initiate an attendant improvement to the co-operative movement's fortunes.

The Agricultural Commission's Report stated in its introduction that:

⁶³ NAI/AGF/2005/68/35, Evidence of WP Clifford to Agricultural Commission, 9 March 1923. For more on the early civil service see Martin Maguire, *The Civil Service and the Revolution in Ireland: 'Shaking the Blood-Stained Hand of Mr Collins'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008).

Agriculture is the foundation on which the commercial and business life of the country is based, and the circumstances that affect agriculture react sensibly through the entire economic life of the nation.⁶⁴

Tough economic conditions combined with historical precedents to encourage a certain hard-headed approach to agricultural reform. ‘Under such conditions,’ the report’s authors asserted, ‘a bad season may precipitate a famine. Ireland has had a bitter experience of this. Any closer [land] settlement policy must, therefore, be handled with great care, or it may produce calamitous results.’ The need to avoid a similar catastrophe to that of the mid-nineteenth century famine justified the emergence of a pragmatic attitude in which the smallholder no longer held a privileged position within governmental discourse. Instead the report iterated that ‘large holdings... afford a better standard of living to a smaller population.’⁶⁵

Dissent from these conclusions existed. Thomas Johnson and Michael Duffy of the Labour Party submitted a Minority Report that differed from the central findings in important ways. Johnson and Duffy highlighted that population decline remained a problem and pointed out that Denmark and Holland, two countries with large agricultural sectors, did not experience similar demographic trends. The Majority Report failed to address this issue, instead pointing to a need to deflate agricultural wages to reduce farmers’ costs. Johnson and Duffy criticised the majority for committing ‘the error of treating every holder of agricultural land as an agriculturalist and the farming community as homogenous.’ The majority overlooked the small farmer in favour of ‘the large farmer who depends wholly on wage labour and sells his produce for export.’ The Minority Report called for a limit to the

⁶⁴ NAI/AGF/2005/68/401, Report of the Agricultural Commission, p. 2.

⁶⁵ NAI/AGF/2005/68/401, Report of the Agricultural Commission, p. 11.

maximum holding that any farmer could own to increase the number of people capable of remaining on the land.⁶⁶ The government ignored this advice.

In the end, the Agricultural Commission's majority report established a blueprint for Ireland's long-term economic direction, which reflected the influence of co-operative political economy. Agricultural production and marketing deserved the main share of allocated funding, whilst improvement relied upon 'a better understanding both of the theory and practice of farming'. The Commission concluded that:

*We firmly believe in the co-operative system, as calculated to promote better business methods, and, we consider that the state may, with advantage spend substantial sums in the teaching of practical co-operation.*⁶⁷ [Emphasis added]

The utilisation of co-operative principles to overcome economic challenges established continuity with the revolutionary Dáil's experimentation during 1919-1921. Putting the report into practice promised to synchronise the relationship between the government and the co-operative movement. Whilst the government may achieve a certain amount through funding and provision of education, 'agricultural recuperation must rest with the individual farmer, whether working singly or organized in co-operation with his fellows.'⁶⁸ This finding outlined a limited role for the state, with co-operative societies envisaged as carrying out much of the practical work of government.

The Agricultural Commission aimed at the creation of an Ireland imbued with the principle of 'self help through mutual help', and stressed the importance

⁶⁶ NAI/AGF/2005/68/401, Report of the Agricultural Commission, pp. 89-102.

⁶⁷ NAI/AGF/2005/68/401, Report of the Agricultural Commission p. 9.

⁶⁸ NAI/AGF/2005/68/401, Report of the Agricultural Commission p. 66.

upon ‘the immense advantages of unrestrained [v]oluntary (sic) effort’.⁶⁹ Accordingly, the state’s role was to provide a context that allowed co-operation to flourish and enabled the population to instigate their own improvements to their industry. The Commission highlighted key areas for rural reform that occupied experts throughout the 1920s. Some recommendations worked better than others, yet the level of success achieved in each area carried long-term implications for economic development. The major proposed interventions included the reorganisation of the co-operative movement, the standardisation of the co-operative marketing and an attempt to re-stimulate co-operative credit provision. These reforms engineered towards a more co-operative economy are explored below.

Reorganisation of the Co-operative Movement

The Agricultural Commission identified dairying as ‘the foundation on which the whole structure of our agricultural economy depends.’⁷⁰ Therefore an invigorated agricultural sector required a good working relationship between the government and IAOS, which remained a pre-eminent dairying force. Despite attempts to promote distribution-oriented general purpose societies during 1919-1921, the movement reverted once again to a concentration upon creameries. In evidence given to the Agricultural Commission in 1923, Robert Anderson confirmed this, arguing that any gains in the distribution side of co-operation ‘are always in connection with some other activity either a Creamery or a poultry co-operative effort. The co-operative stores [are]... not a conspicuous success anywhere.’⁷¹ A wider benefit accrued from the concentration upon dairying than the manufacture of better butter. Dairying encouraged a mixed-farm economy and led to greater diversity of agricultural

⁶⁹ NAI/AGF/2005/68/401, Report of the Agricultural Commission p. 41.

⁷⁰ NAI/AGF/2005/68/401, Report of the Agricultural Commission, p. 46.

⁷¹ NAI/AGF/2005/68/6, Evidence of RA Anderson to Agricultural Commission, 13 December 1923.

outputs.⁷² Dairy farmers used the land more intensively than the graziers concentrated in the Irish midlands as they possessed a higher density of cattle per acre and tended to own pigs, calves and poultry.⁷³ Therefore, the national health of agriculture relied disproportionately upon a successful creamery sector. Working through the IAOS represented an attractive course of action for the Department of Agriculture.

In 1922, the Irish government approved a state grant for the IAOS to replace the Development Commissioner's funding which had 'contributed in no small degree to the success of the co-operative movement in Ireland.'⁷⁴ The decision represented a financial endorsement of the co-operative movement's work by the Irish government. The Agricultural Commission identified co-operation as the most effective tool to improve farmers, but believed that 'co-operation is imperfectly understood and practiced in the country.' However its report expressed concern with the movement's organisational structure and recommended government intervention:

The right co-operative spirit implies a new outlook in both business and social life and this change of mind can only be reached through slow and patient steps... It has not been our duty to inquire into the domestic arrangements and inner working of this society [IAOS], but we recommend the government to make such enquiry before it finally decides on the amount and conditions of any state grant.⁷⁵

Annual renewal of the state subsidy provided the government with an opportunity to re-make the IAOS and embed it within the workings of the state. Furthermore, Ernest Blythe's budget statements earmarked significant sums of capital for the co-operative movement under the categorisation of 'abnormal expenditure'. In 1927,

⁷² TW Freeman, *Ireland: Its Physical, Historical, Social and Economic Geography* (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1950), pp. 202-204.

⁷³ Saorstát Éireann, *Agricultural Statistics*, p. xxii.

⁷⁴ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1921*, p. 39.

⁷⁵ NAI/AGF/2005/68/401, Report of the Agricultural Commission, p. 46.

Blythe spent £85,000 in special loans for co-operative creameries, which accounted for more than half of the abnormal expenditure granted to the Department of Agriculture.⁷⁶ Whilst reduction of the national debt remained the guiding financial principle, Blythe was willing to deviate from this position to insulate vital sections of the Irish economy.

The IAOS recognised that its creamery network needed overhauling and an expanding workload throughout the 1920s placed pressure upon the IAOS's 'administrative, organising and inspectorial work'. This led to the temporary abandonment of publishing annual reports during 1924-1930.⁷⁷ During these years the government and IAOS collaborated to rationalise the creamery movement in Ireland. To achieve this, the Department of Agriculture surveyed the machinery of the IAOS. In 1926, the Department proposed that:

Meetings of the Committee of the IAOS should be attended by a representative of the Minister who will keep him informed of their proceedings and convey to them such information and advice as he may deem helpful for their guidance.⁷⁸

The IAOS assented to proposed changes suggested by the Department. These included a restructured executive Committee to incorporate six representatives of the Minister of Agriculture.⁷⁹ These representatives reported to Hogan on the subject matter discussed at IAOS meetings. Typical reports included a breakdown of annual IAOS expenditure and detailed decisions taken by the Committee.⁸⁰ This provided the Department of Agriculture with significant influence over the IAOS and ensured the co-operative movement remained transparent for the purposes of government.

⁷⁶ Gwynn, *The Irish Free State*, pp. 260-261.

⁷⁷ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1931*, p. 5.

⁷⁸ NAI/AGF/2005/82/1497, Confidential Report, Reorganisation of the IAOS, Internal Minute, Department of Agriculture, undated [1926].

⁷⁹ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1924*, pp. 31-32.

⁸⁰ NAI/AGF/2005/82/1495, Proposed Re-organisation Scheme of IAOS, 1924-1928, 31 October 1927, B McAuliffe's Report of Meeting to Dr Smith, Department of Agriculture, 31 October 1927.

However, government scrutiny of the co-operative movement went beyond the IAOS. In 1924, the government passed the Dairy Produce Act that brought creameries under tighter regulation. This legislation required all creameries and exporters of dairy produce to register with the Department of Agriculture in order to trade. All registered premises then remained open to inspection and all produce became subject to surprise testing. A failure to comply led to prosecution and a revocation of license. The legislation also demanded that all premises maintained a high standard of cleanliness and hygiene, and even policed the outward presentation of creamery employees. Creamery inspectors regulated butter quality and capped the acceptable level of moisture at sixteen per cent.⁸¹

Whilst creamery inspections occurred under the old DATI, the Dairy Produce Act granted the state greater powers of intervention and laid greater responsibility with the individual society. Departmental inspectors visited creameries, inspecting certain premises more than once a month. These inspections focused upon issues such as ventilation, lighting of premises, cleanliness of staff and quality of butter.⁸² The Department of Agriculture encouraged the standardisation of all creamery premises, which required the extensive reconstruction of certain societies. This increased the IAOS's responsibility for the maintenance of creameries. For example, following an inspection of the creamery at Rathmore, the Department ordered management to install modern machinery, which included vats for milk storage, refrigeration technology, hot water tanks, and the erection of cold storage rooms. Creamery managers then passed these orders onto IAOS engineers whose expertise

⁸¹ Saorstát Éireann, *Dairy Produce Act, 1924*, <<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/1924/en/act/pub/0058/print.html>> [Accessed 13 September 2012] (Part 4, sections 35-38).

⁸² NAI/AGF/92/3/655, *The Dairy Disposal Company Ltd.; Re Inspection and Registration of Tubrid Creamery, Ardfert, County Kerry, under Dairy Produce Act 1924*, 30 Oct 1925 – 5 March 1930.

they remained reliant upon in order to meet these criteria.⁸³ Co-operative societies relied upon the IAOS to meet the Department's recommendations. For example, the manager of Rathmore Co-operative Society wrote to IAOS engineer, James Fant, a month after the Department ordered the creamery to improve:

the Dept are urging pretty hard the carrying out of their recommendations + I hope you will not take me as pressing unduly on you to kindly have specifications sent out at earliest convenient date.⁸⁴

The Department of Agriculture refused to countenance lax behaviour on the behalf of these societies and through inspections and follow-up visits placed pressure upon co-operative societies to meet expected high standards. The effect of regular inspections raised the standard of milk supplied by farmers and relieved 'the manager of the unpleasant duty of rejecting milk which is impure or stale.'⁸⁵ This improved relations around societies as a common source of discord tended to emanate from the censure of member by the management for supply of low quality milk. Official inspections reduced this pressure upon the manager.

The government built up a detailed understanding of Irish dairying. Dairy inspectors proved well-positioned to criticise when necessary and observe where interventions might best be directed. In 1925, dairy inspectors gathered to discuss the application of the Dairy Produce Act. Delegates debated where improvements should be targeted. Topics ranged from how to deal with suppliers of unhygienic milk to the possibility of dairy inspectors co-opting the police force to monitor creameries. However, the most urgent topic that received their consideration related to the diffusion of creameries. Within a year, dairy inspectors concluded that 'in some

⁸³ NAI/1088/798/6, de Lacy, Rathmore, to James Fant, 23 February 1928.

⁸⁴ NAI/1088/798/6, de Lacy, Rathmore, to James Fant, 21 March 1928.

⁸⁵ RA Anderson, *With Horace Plunkett in Ireland* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1935), pp. 236-7.

districts there were far too many small creameries, several of which were running at a loss.’ The inspectors proposed an amalgamation of many of these societies, but felt that the Department of Agriculture ‘could not usefully intervene.’ Instead, they asserted that ‘the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society would perhaps be in a better position to deal with matters of this kind.’⁸⁶ The Department of Agriculture required the support of the IAOS to effect a serious change in this direction.

The government instigated two important reforms to this end. These were the creation of the government-backed Dairy Disposal Company in 1927, followed by the 1928 Creamery Act. Together, these actions effectively gave the co-operative movement a state-sponsored monopoly over Irish dairying. The IAOS and Department of Agriculture agreed that more creameries operated than milk supply justified. This surfeit of creameries encouraged a concentration in the south-west where dairy farming was well-established, but provided no incentive to stimulate dairying in other regions. Already in 1907, Father Finlay argued that in the movement’s formative period the number of creameries grew too rapidly. Finlay advocated a smaller number of creameries, rather than the large amount ‘in whose members the spirit of co-operation was defective.’ He argued when this happened:

there would remain the men who stood faithful to the flag twenty years ago, and a spirit would be developed which would maintain co-operation on a more stable and satisfactory basis than it had been resting on during the last few years.⁸⁷

However, overwhelming desire to oust proprietary competitors meant that the IAOS remained committed to unchecked growth and Finlay’s warning went unheeded.

⁸⁶NAI/AGF/92/3/570, Conference with Dairy Produce Inspectors, 29 Sept – 2 October 1925.

⁸⁷ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1907*, pp. 55-56.

The debate about a more streamlined co-operative movement emerged again during the Agricultural Commission. Denis Hegarty, secretary of the Irish Creamery Manager's Association (ICMA), argued that a decline in the quality of Irish butter occurred during the First World War, a fact he witnessed as a wartime member of the Butter Export Committee. The resurgence of international competition after the war concerned Hegarty. He identified that the most important limitation affecting Irish dairying related to the fact that 'the creameries in the best districts in Ireland are in very many cases too numerous, which means severe competition for milk, leading to many abuses.' Aware of local competition, co-operative creamery managers accepted milk of dubious quality to secure the loyalty of local suppliers. Hegarty highlighted that Danish creameries suffered from no such impediment and 'the Danish Dairy Manager is only concerned with turning out butter of the highest quality.' The legal precedent established by the *McEllistram vs. Ballymacelligott* judgment in 1919 prevented Irish co-operatives from imposing a legal obligation upon its members to supply milk to one creamery. This meant Irish farmers found creameries willing to buy their milk regardless of quality in order to prevent the milk supplying another creamery.⁸⁸ At a second session, Hegarty reiterated this point. Lower standards in Irish butter production stemmed from the presence of 'creameries at every cross roads'.⁸⁹ Two or three creameries operated in a district where one would have sufficed. The Agricultural Commission's final report found 'that steps should be taken to wind up all such non-effective societies.'⁹⁰ The

⁸⁸ NAI/AGF/2005/68/95, Evidence of D Hegarty, Secretary of the Irish Creamery Manager's Association to the Agricultural Commission, 8 March 1923.

⁸⁹ NAI/AGF/2005/68/95, Evidence of D Hegarty, 19 April 1923.

⁹⁰ NAI/AGF/2005/68/401, Report of the Agricultural Commission, pp. 43-44.

Commission recommended a policy of rationalisation similar to the argument made by Fr. Finlay in 1907.

The longstanding economic rivalry that existed between co-operative and proprietary creameries reached a fierce pitch during this period. Despite some contraction, 580 creameries still operated in the Free State, with 180 of these proprietary concerns. Irish co-operative creameries vastly outnumbered proprietary ones, but in the south-west, co-operatives still struggled against a stubbornly persistent private sector. The Agricultural Commission concluded that many co-operatives struggled to compete with ‘the financial resources of proprietary vested interests’.⁹¹ County Kerry housed 57 creameries, 10% of the national total and represented a contested battleground for supremacy.⁹² Proprietary creameries undermined co-operatives in these districts. For example, the struggling Rathmore Co-operative Society competed with a local creamery owned by the Lakeland Company. Rathmore’s manager accused Lakeland of utilising sharp practices and informed Robert Anderson that Lakeland sold low-quality, blended butter and marketed this product as high-quality creamery produce. He advised Anderson to ‘have the matter investigated as Irish Creamery Butter has been tampered with too often + too long and it is now a national + not a local question.’ Anderson informed the Department of Agriculture of these practices utilised by private creameries.⁹³ In July 1924, James Fant warned the IAOS, ‘this Society [Rathmore] will need very careful watching otherwise the local prop. Creamery will wipe it out.’⁹⁴ However,

⁹¹ NAI/AGF/2005/68/401, Report of the Agricultural Commission, p. 42.

⁹² Saorstát Éireann, *Agricultural Statistics*, pp. xx-xxi.

⁹³ NAI/1088/798/5, de Lacy, Rathmore, to RA Anderson, Dublin, 29 September 1923; Anderson to Secretary, Department of Agriculture, 2 October 1923.

⁹⁴ NAI/1088/798/5, James Fant’s handwritten note in NW O’Brien’s report of Visit to Rathmore Co-operative Society, 8 July 1924.

the co-operative movement possessed one distinct advantage. The private sector lacked a coherent agency akin to the IAOS as each company pursued its own singular interests. The evidence compiled by the IAOS, and sent to the Department of Agriculture, informed the government's view of Irish dairying. This contributed to an institutional bias that proprietary creameries failed to counter. The IAOS's intimate connection to each individual society allowed the organisation to present the government with a coherent picture of the state of dairying.

In 1924, the largest creamery proprietor, the Condensed Milk Company of Ireland, hovered on the brink of collapse as a result of competition with co-operatives. The Condensed Milk Company owned 113 creameries and the loss of these threatened to upset dairy production. Therefore, the government viewed the company as too important to fail and temporarily nationalised the business.⁹⁵ Against the backdrop of falling prices paid for agricultural produce, this decision set an important industrial precedent as other creamery owners filed for bankruptcy and petitioned the government to buyout their premises. Proprietors attempted to offload creameries at as high a price as possible and co-operatives proved unable or unwilling to pay inflated prices. Thomas de Lacy, the manager of Rathmore Co-operative Society, expressed disgust at the prices private creamery owners in Kerry requested. De Lacy equated these owners with the traditional enemy of farmers: 'Most undoubtedly,' he wrote to the IAOS's Secretary, 'Creamery Proprietors are a worse form of Landlordism than that of the Landlords.' He reported that at a recent meeting of co-operative societies in Kerry, a resolution passed that urged TDs [Irish

⁹⁵ John O'Donovan, 'State Enterprises', *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, 8.3 (1950), 327-348 (p. 330).

MPs] of all political parties to compel suppliers of proprietary creameries to instead direct their milk to co-operatives.⁹⁶

The government recognised the collapse of private dairying as an opportunity ‘to arrange for the purchase of the interests controlling a considerable number of such [surplus] creameries’.⁹⁷ In 1927, the government created its first state-sponsored agency, the Dairy Disposal Company (DDC). The government wanted the DDC to take over surplus proprietary creameries, which then acted as a clearing house that administered them until either a local co-operative took them over or absorbed the milk suppliers. Where a creamery proved unnecessary due to congestion, the DDC closed it down. Most of the creameries purchased by the DDC were located in Cork and Kerry, and led to the near extinction of the private creamery sector in those counties.⁹⁸ The government’s actions consolidated the position of the IAOS and allowed their creameries to concentrate upon matters related to quality improvement and policing suppliers.

In 1928 the government built upon the establishment of the DDC and introduced the Creamery Act. This legislation tightened regulations around creamery operations to further secure the gains made by reorganisation. The Act prevented the creation of any more creameries unless granted specific permission by the Minister of Agriculture.⁹⁹ The Act also locked in suppliers to their local co-operative creamery, and stated that if a society issues shares to milk supplier ‘it shall not be

⁹⁶NAI/1088/798/6, De Lacy, Rathmore, to Kennedy, IAOS, 15 December 1927.

⁹⁷ Department of Agriculture of Saorstát Éireann, *Saorstát Éireann, Agriculture: A Note on Some Outstanding Features of the Irish Free State’s Agricultural Resources* (Dublin: Department of Agriculture, Saorstát Éireann, 1928), pp. 23-4

⁹⁸ Mary E Daly, *The First Department: A History of the Department of Agriculture*, (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 2002), pp. 128-133.

⁹⁹ Saorstát Éireann, *Creamery Act, 1928*, <<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/1928/en/act/pub/0026/print.html>> [Accessed 13 September 2012] (Section 13).

lawful without the consent of the Department signified in writing for any other society to take any supply of milk from such person.’¹⁰⁰ This tied Irish milk suppliers to a co-operative creamery in a similar fashion to the Danish model and effectively overturned the House of Lords’ controversial decision to illegalise the locked-in relationship. The Creamery Act showed the willingness of the Irish state to regulate and intervene in agricultural matters. The legislation also shored up the position of the co-operative movement within the dairy industry. Also, it prevented the establishment of co-operative societies in districts with little potential supply, which ensured that all creameries operated on a sound economic basis.

By 1931, the DDC purchased 170 proprietary creameries. This effectively ended private sector involvement in Irish butter production. Of these, forty-four creameries converted into co-operatives, seventy-nine closed down permanently and forty-seven remained under the control of the DDC. The DDC absorbed seventeen co-operative creameries during the same period. The IAOS organisers negotiated the transfer of former proprietary suppliers to the nearest co-operative creamery, as well as the conversion of DDC administered creameries into co-operative societies.¹⁰¹ The state-sponsored body emerged as an *ad hoc* solution to the problem of reorganisation, and ensured that the co-operative movement remained the dominant force in Irish dairying. The reorganisation occurred at an opportune moment as the Wall Street Crash in 1929 presaged another period of great uncertainty within the industry. However, without government support throughout the previous decade, the consequences might have been more devastating. As it was, co-operative creameries survived the Great Depression and remained vital economic societies. The

¹⁰⁰ Saorstát Éireann, *Creamery Act, 1928*, (Section 10).

¹⁰¹ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1931*, pp. 14-15.

Agricultural Commission had emphasised the need for reorganisation of the co-operative movement. Whilst the impetus for this reform came from the government, the IAOS organising staff helped facilitate the successful application of these reforms. Since 1907, the co-operative movement operated apart from government institutions in Ireland. Independence brought about a new approach that saw increased collaboration between policymakers and co-operative experts.

Co-operative Marketing and Improvement of Agricultural Produce

Improving the reputation of Irish dairying formed a prominent strand of the Agricultural Commission's deliberations. In the post-war period, Irish farmers proved slow to adopt new marketing techniques or respond to consumer feedback with the result that Irish butter carried a mixed reputation on the British market. Cormac Ó Gráda concludes that Irish farmers 'responded lackadaisically to the opportunities presented by the First World War.'¹⁰² By the 1920s, the short-term gains won during the war had dissipated. That decade saw a resumption of fierce international competition between dairy producers. Irish farmers competed with new competitors. The introduction of refrigeration in the 1920s allowed New Zealand farmers to supply butter, meat and cheese to the British market.¹⁰³ A substantial problem for Irish butter related to the inability of creameries to co-ordinate their marketing. All creameries, including co-operatives, marketed their produce as individual concerns. Butter quality varied from one creamery to another, with a harmful impact upon the reputation of all exports. After the First World War, Danish butter regained its competitive advantage. By 1923, Danish farmers reasserted their

¹⁰² Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland: A New Economic History, 1780-1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 389-390.

¹⁰³ GA Fleming, 'Agricultural Support Policies in a Small Open Economy: New Zealand in the 1920s', *Economic History Review*, 52.2 (1999), 334-354.

dominance of the British market (table 4.1). Furthermore, new competitors made the British marketplace a congested a field for dairy farmers.¹⁰⁴

Table 4.1: Danish Butter Exports to Britain, 1891-1923 (NAI/AGF/2005/68/401 Report of the Agricultural Commission, p. 26).

| Years | Annual Average - Tons |
|--------------|------------------------------|
| 1881-1885 | 15,351 |
| 1891-1895 | 47,212 |
| 1901-1905 | 74,686 |
| 1911-1915 | 97,645 |
| 1915 | 102,900 |
| 1916 | 93,900 |
| 1917 | 60,300 |
| 1918 | 14,200 |
| 1919 | 35,900 |
| 1920 | 73,300 |
| 1921 | 90,400 |
| 1922 | 93,500 |
| 1923 | 110,521 |

The Agricultural Commission wanted to raise the international profile of Irish dairy produce and hoped to use the co-operative movement to provoke sector-wide improvement through a more collaborative approach to marketing. The Commission identified ‘the present system of marketing farm produce... [as] wasteful and uneconomic’.¹⁰⁵ Evidence from the continent showed that co-operative marketing raised the small farmer’s productivity most effectively.¹⁰⁶ As such, the Agricultural Commission looked to the IAOS to organise marketing of creamery produce and argued that ‘if farmers were to combine to sell their produce in larger

¹⁰⁴ Meenan, *The Irish Economy*, p. 35.

¹⁰⁵ NAI/AGF/2005/68/401, Report of the Agricultural Commission, p. 20.

¹⁰⁶ Ó Gráda, *Ireland*, p. 261.

quantities than at present, many of the economies inherent in large scale transactions could be effected.’ Any effort towards this end ‘must be the result of the farmer’s co-operative and other organizations.’ The Department of Agriculture’s role was envisaged as one that provided technical support and the report concluded, ‘what is contemplated in this connection is a large scale development of co-operative marketing.’¹⁰⁷

The IAOS long regarded the failure to unite co-operative farmers behind a single, recognisable brand as a major shortcoming to its work. Previous attempts to standardise co-operative creamery produce failed. In 1910, the IAOS launched its Co-operative Creamery Butter Control Scheme. The voluntary subscription of individual societies to the scheme enabled the IAOS to contract a dairy bacteriologist to monitor the butter made at each creamery. When the bacteriologist approved the quality of this butter, the society received the Control Mark which conveyed a particular standard of excellence to the consumer.¹⁰⁸ However, the majority of co-operative societies never embraced the scheme. Within four years, the IAOS Committee lamented the disappointing support and pronounced that ‘with the exception of less than half a dozen creameries... [the Control Scheme] has almost become a dead letter.’¹⁰⁹ This problem magnified during the First World War. Irish creameries experienced little competition for consumers of dairy produce and all grades of butter made its way to the British marketplace.¹¹⁰

The Agricultural Commission received various recommendations about how to establish a national brand. The ICMA believed that improvement of Irish butter

¹⁰⁷ NAI/AGF/2005/68/401, Report of the Agricultural Commission, p. 20.

¹⁰⁸ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1910*, pp. 89-90.

¹⁰⁹ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1914*, p. 10.

¹¹⁰ Meenan, *The Irish Economy*, pp. 302-303.

required a national grading system, but that this should be carried out on a voluntary basis.¹¹¹ WP Clifford of the IAOS argued that a degree of compulsion was required. Clifford believed that the creation of a national brand offered an important method to improve the quality and reputation of Irish butter. However, he argued that for this to occur, ‘every Irish creamery should be open to inspection and should be compelled to send samples regularly and frequently to surprise butter inspections... linked up with bacteriological examination and research.’¹¹² The 1924 Dairy Produce Act partially covered these concerns, but the mechanism of such a marketing scheme required working out. A scheme co-ordinated by the IAOS offered a realistic possibility for success. Support for co-operative marketing transcended certain political divisions. Even the Labour Party supported this recommendation. Thomas Johnson and Michael Duffy, who authored the minority report, supported the majority on this issue, stressing ‘the necessity of this being on a large scale.’¹¹³ The co-operative movement represented the only agent capable of improving Irish butter as it alone possessed the necessary reach and economy of scale.

The IAOS rejuvenated its Butter Control Scheme in 1924. However, most societies proved uninterested. The manager of Rattoo Co-operative Society responded to an IAOS appeal with a pessimistic assessment of his committee’s enthusiasm for the scheme. William O’Connell wrote to inform Robert Anderson that the matter would be placed before the committee at the next meeting, but ‘if participation in the scheme entails any expense in the way of further subscription this

¹¹¹ NAI/AGF/2005/68/95, Evidence of D. Hegarty.

¹¹² NAI/AGF/2005/68/35, Evidence of WP Clifford.

¹¹³ NAI/AGF/2005/68/401, Report of the Agricultural Commission, p. 104.

Society will not join.’¹¹⁴ This attitude characterised the attitude throughout the movement and the effort to reignite interest in the Butter Control Scheme failed.

The next major bid to generate interest in a co-operative marketing scheme occurred in 1927. This coincided with the collapse of the private creamery sector and the creation of the DDC. When alternatives to offload milk existed outside the local co-operative creamery, the willingness to accept substandard milk hurt attempts to create a national high-quality brand. Irish co-operatives needed to constantly re-establish their utility to local farmers. The removal of private competition promised to unleash the unrealised potential of co-operative creameries. The IAOS collaborated with the trade organisation for creamery managers, the ICMA, to make this latest attempt at standardisation successful. In 1927, the IAOS launched a new central marketing organisation, Irish Associated Creameries (IAC). Denis Hegarty of the ICMA became the secretary of this new organisation. The co-operative societies that subscribed to the scheme promised to distribute all produce through the IAC for a period of three years, for which they received a negotiated price.

The IAC marketing scheme recorded impressive initial results. Throughout its first year, IAOS organisers set out to convince co-operative society committees of the benefit attached to joining the IAC. The IAOS monitored uptake to the scheme through its employees. Charles Riddall, promoted to the position of IAOS Assistant Secretary, wrote to Denis Hegarty to inform him that the decision of Rattoo Co-operative Society to affiliate with the IAC ‘would not have been made but for the attendance of our Organiser, Mr O’Brien.’¹¹⁵ Rattoo Co-operative Society’s

¹¹⁴ NAI/1088/800/3, William O’Connell, Rattoo, to RA Anderson, 19 May 1924.

¹¹⁵ NAI/1088/800/3, CC Riddall, IAOS, Dublin to D Hegarty, Irish Associated Creameries, Dublin, 22 July 1927.

affiliation to the IAC demonstrated the society's enthusiasm for taking an active part in the national movement it lacked in previous years. In this regard, relationships between IAOS employees and individual co-operative societies formed a key component to their success. The close attendance to the demands of societies by organisers like Nicholas O'Brien and Charles Riddall, reminded the national leadership that they drew their strength from working relationships built up throughout the countryside. The emergence of the IAC also coincided with attempts by certain societies like Rathmore to rebuild their creamery businesses that faltered in the early 1920s. The manager at Rathmore informed the new IAOS Secretary, Henry Kennedy, that he 'had no difficulty in getting the [committee] meeting to consent to become members of the IAC'.¹¹⁶ Despite setbacks, Rathmore Co-operative Society supported the IAOS in its drive to improve the marketing co-operative produce, which suggested that individual societies viewed themselves as one component in a national federation of co-operatives.

On a national level, this view seemed to be borne out as support for the IAC proved immediate and widespread. Within a year, eighty per cent of all co-operative creameries subscribed to the IAC. The Department of Agriculture hoped that this uptake would lead to 'more economic marketing due to reduction in freight charges and cost of handling and the elimination of injurious competition between creamery and creamery on the British market.'¹¹⁷ By 1928, the IAC's ability to attract so many creameries suggested to the Department that co-operative societies reached a point where they all co-operated with each other.

¹¹⁶ NAI/1088/798/5, de Lacy, Rathmore, to Henry Kennedy, Dublin, 22 March 1927. Henry Kennedy replaced Anderson as Secretary of the IAOS in 1926.

¹¹⁷ Department of Agriculture, *Saorstát Éireann*, p. 24.

Such enthusiasm proved transient. This widespread embrace of national co-operative marketing brand failed to endure. Co-operative creameries unaffiliated to the IAC traded without the restriction of a set maximum price. As a result, enthusiasm for the scheme declined. A year after joining the IAC, the manager of Rattoo Co-operative Society requested that Henry Kennedy despatch an organiser to visit. Nicholas O'Brien arrived to find an unsettled committee who pointed out that 'creameries outside the Scheme were getting at least 8/ per cwt. nett more for their butters'.¹¹⁸ At Rattoo, O'Brien uncovered ebbing support for the marketing scheme. Although a minority, some societies remained outside of the IAC. The example of only one nearby creamery operating outside of the IAC's constraints undermined the commitment of those who agreed to participate. For example, Lixnaw Co-operative Society neighboured Rattoo and refused to affiliate. This created a source of local tension and encouraged hostility amongst Rattoo's milk suppliers towards the IAC. The co-operative committee at Rattoo directed the creamery manager to break the IAC contract and sell the society's produce elsewhere. Furthermore, the committee stated that if the IAC intervened, the 'Society will attack the IAC in the press with a view to bringing about its liquidation.'¹¹⁹ The frustration and anger engendered amongst certain local committees threatened to damage the relationship between the IAOS and individual societies, in spite of the reliance upon the national organisation in the past.¹²⁰ Standardisation of dairy produce failed due to this tendency to convert support into antipathy.

¹¹⁸ NAI/1088/800/3, Jerry O'Connor, Rattoo to Kennedy, Dublin 7 September 1928.

¹¹⁹ NAI/1088/800/3, NW O'Brien to Kennedy, Dublin, 15 September 1928.

¹²⁰ Rattoo Co-operative Society relied upon IAOS support during the War of Independence. See chapter 3.

Tensions between the local and national leaderships defeated the attempt to make a success of the IAC. Nicholas O'Brien noted wide disapproval for the IAC amongst the farmers of north Kerry. Committees of individual societies felt threatened by restrictions imposed under the IAC's attempts to co-ordinate the distribution of all dairy produce. At the Abbeydorney Co-operative Society, O'Brien noted that the attempt to frame co-operative marketing as a national issue backfired as co-operative committee members felt this undermined the local authority they possessed. Rather than strengthen the relationship between local and national institutions, the IAC alienated individual societies from the co-operative movement's national leadership. O'Brien filed his views on the subject in a report to Dublin:

The most serious thing about our work at present is the wave of discontent of which you speak and, of course, it follows that discontent with the IAC means diminished confidence in the IAOS. However, I am an optimist and we will weather the present squall. The IAC will set itself right.¹²¹

O'Brien's optimism proved misplaced. The initial support for the IAC dissipated, and even damaged the standing of the IAOS amongst farmers.

The Irish government wanted a national co-operative brand as this would allow Irish producers to compete with international rivals. However, the establishment of a strong national brand failed to take place and revealed the limited extent to which the Agricultural Commission's recommendations could be implemented. The fact that twenty per cent of co-operative creameries refused to subscribe to the IAC, including some of the biggest in the country, undermined the ability to create a unified national brand. Mary Daly argues that due to this disparity amongst co-operative creameries, the purchaser of Irish butter remained 'well

¹²¹ NAI/1088/800/3, NW O'Brien to Kennedy, 22 September 1928.

positioned to exploit the different creameries pricewise.’¹²² The failure of the IAC also highlighted the limitations of co-operative behaviour in practice. By 1930, with the onset of another global depression, the IAC ceased trading and the attempt to create a national brand ended in failure.

This episode also revealed the IAOS’s limited ability to influence the behaviour of its members. Local co-operative committees resisted the interventions of the IAOS, which they regarded as a threat to their own authority and position as leading community figures. Although a failure, the attempt to standardise showed how centres of local power had built up around co-operatives throughout the early twentieth century. More than any other venture, the standardisation drive revealed the limitations of co-operative behaviour amongst the farming population. Although farmers voluntarily associated around the institution of the local co-operative, the sense that they belonged to a national movement failed to penetrate their consciousness. Localism existed deep within Irish political culture before independence, and remained a mode of life resistant to change.¹²³ Farmers identified with co-operative methods in business, but in order to secure a local monopoly. They organised around co-operative societies in order to advance self-interest. The will to standardise found in the Agricultural Commission’s report, recognised the fact that Irish farmers needed to compete on the international stage. However, County Kerry’s farmers proved more concerned with competition from several miles away, than competitors in Denmark or New Zealand. The elimination of the threat from private creameries by the mid-1920s amplified this inclination. Following the triumph of the

¹²² Daly, *The First Department*, p. 140.

¹²³ Tom Garvin, *1922: The Birth of Irish Democracy* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2005), pp. 67-96; D George Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp.386-387.

co-operative model in dairying, societies turned their attention to the perceived threat posed by other co-operative societies. In short, co-operative societies failed to co-operate with other co-operative societies.

Co-operative Credit

The Agricultural Commission placed a great emphasis upon the creation of a vibrant co-operative credit sector. The IAOS's failure to build an effective co-operative credit society in previous years was revealed as a serious misjudgement. Farmers felt a squeeze upon living standards. The Agricultural Commission found that in 1924, the farmer 'receives 40 per cent more for his produce' compared to 1914. However, 'his cost of living has risen 80 per cent and the expenses and requirements of his trade have risen, in some cases, over 100 per cent.'¹²⁴ The Commission used the opportunity to interview members of the IAOS to raise the possibility of reintroducing co-operative credit societies as an important source of rural credit. Hardly any co-operative credit societies functioned by 1922. The IAOS Annual Report for that year stated that many credit societies which technically remained only maintained 'a moribund existence.' Belatedly, the IAOS acknowledged that co-operative banks provided an invaluable service to a district by 'utilising the small deposits (which otherwise go out of the district if not out of the country) to irrigate and fertilise the parish through the local society.'¹²⁵ The neglect of agricultural credit by the IAOS represented a failure to nurture a more co-operative economy.

HF Norman, Assistant Secretary of the IAOS, submitted evidence to the Agricultural Commission on the historical importance of co-operative credit to rural society. The emergence of local co-operative banks in the late 1890s sprang from the

¹²⁴ NAI/AGF/2005/68/401, Report of the Agricultural Commission, p.3.

¹²⁵ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1922*, p. 17.

fact that ‘the joint stock banks did not lend as freely to the smaller type of farmer. I do not think that they still lend money to the very small farmer unless he has very sufficient security’. Norman observed that credit societies offered an effective way of educating farmers to behave with greater financial responsibility. In considering loan applications, a credit society’s committee paused to ‘consider the economic character of the borrower. They must also consider if he is a good mark for the money, his general character for thrift as well as other matters, all these things have to be taken into account.’. Farmers who used co-operative credit societies, ‘began to be thrifty, they began to add to their stock and laid the foundations of modest prosperity and from having been previously men that were pulling the devil by the tail they became fairly prosperous.’¹²⁶ Credit societies assessed the reliability of borrowers in order to nurture financial responsibility. As such, credit societies also established one way that committees might discriminate against less wealthy members of the community who might not embody the necessary requirements to be ‘a good mark for the money’.

Co-operative credit societies bound their members together through a shared economic interest. They encouraged financial mutuality, whereby members hoped to prosper indirectly by investments made in other farmers. Unlike loans offered by the joint-stock bank or shop-keepers, co-operative credit societies drew upon ‘the expert knowledge of the community’ and placed this ‘at the service of the man who gets the loan’. The process of loan applications opened up the business of individual farmers to the scrutiny of their peers. Credit society committees granted loans ‘for a purpose likely to effect economy.’ Norman recorded that he heard of ‘many cases in which

¹²⁶ NAI/AGF/2005/68/164, Evidence of HF Norman to the Agricultural Commission, 23 May 1923.

the borrower thinking he would take a loan for one particular purpose, has been induced to take it up for another purpose which in the studied opinion of the committee was more likely to pay him.’¹²⁷ Therefore credit societies provided an insight into the extent which members of a community depended and influenced each another. They also allowed committee members to extend their local power by influencing the purpose of the loan granted.

A new type of idealised farmer can be ascertained from Norman’s evidence. Norman stressed that when considering the position of ‘the large farmer... you are dealing with men with some education’. The role of the co-operative society held a different role for these subjects. Norman emphasised that the importance of co-operative credit societies lay in the aid they offered to ‘the small farmer who live mainly in backward districts... [Where] the habit of having the purpose of the loan criticised leads to the development of a proper sense of credit amongst borrowers.’¹²⁸ The small farmer, long the target of the co-operative movement’s improving discourse, remained defined by ‘backwardness’. Instead, the larger farmer, with access to greater agricultural resources, embodied the characteristics of an educated, modern rural subject. Whilst Norman spoke about past efforts to provide assistance through co-operation for smaller farmers, he emphasised an idea which gained currency after independence. Larger farmers personified and became a form of shorthand for the desirable characteristics spoken about by agrarian experts.

The small farmer’s position as an idealised subject within co-operative discourse declined after independence. Back in 1904, Plunkett praised the farmers’

¹²⁷ NAI/AGF/2005/68/164, Evidence of HF Norman, 23 May 1923.

¹²⁸ NAI/AGF/2005/68/164, Evidence of HF Norman.

adoption of co-operative organisation as something that worked in the interests of all farmers, small holders and large farmers alike. This mutual regard was central to the success of the movement in its earlier years and without this ‘vein of altruism, the “strong” farmers would have held aloof and the small men would have been discouraged by the abstention of the better-off and presumably more enlightened of their class.’¹²⁹ By 1922, attitudes towards this small farmer amongst co-operative leaders hardened. Father Finlay paid lip-service to this figure by telling the Agricultural Commission that the aim of the IAOS remained ‘to raise the economical position of the small farmer and moderately sized farmer to a level of economic culture with the large farmer’.¹³⁰ IAOS organiser WP Clifford provided a more hard-headed opinion when he stated, ‘the small holding has not been a success. You don’t find successful creameries there as a general rule. The most successful district from a dairying point of view is the medium farm.’¹³¹ These medium farmers exerted growing influence within rural society, and co-operative societies aided this process. The expertise supplied to the Agricultural Commission by these co-operative activists differed in tone to the rhetoric contained in the minority report, which lamented the lack of focus on the small farmer. In this way, the IAOS provided an expert-backed justification for the government to silently remove support for smaller farmers and agricultural labourers.

Co-operative committees acted as important power-brokers and helped dictate the local society’s concentration upon these wealthier members of the rural community. Robert Anderson illuminated the process by which someone became a

¹²⁹ Horace Plunkett, *Ireland in the New Century: with an Epilogue in Answer to Some Critics* (London: J Murray, 1905), p. 210.

¹³⁰ NAI/AGF/2005/68/58, Evidence of Rev TA Finlay.

¹³¹ NAI/AGF/2005/68/35, Evidence of WP Clifford.

member of a co-operative society. The committee decided upon eligibility for membership of a society based upon the condition that 'his character is all right... where the application is rejected the Committee are not under any obligation to state their reasons for objection.'¹³² This process gave the committees significant discretionary powers to direct a locality's social and economic make-up. The larger farmer emerged as a new ideal co-operative subject.

Co-operative credit societies appeared the best vehicle to raise the economic position of small farmers. By the early 1920s, the parlous state of co-operative credit caused concern for those investigating the agrarian question. In an attempt to suggest reasons why this was the case, Norman contrasted the development of Irish credit societies with the more successful German Raiffeisen movement. In Germany, the local co-operative infrastructure started with the establishment of a credit society and other types of co-operatives issued forth afterwards. In Ireland, the opposite occurred. Creameries sprung up without reference to a local credit society and therefore bypassed the necessity for a society devoted to the provision of credit.¹³³ Instead, creamery societies often provided an informal, but unsound, credit function. Co-operative creameries frequently paid advances to members in lieu of milk to be supplied. However, these loans often proved permanent and placed societies in financial difficulty. For example, in April 1922 the Ardfert Co-operative Society threatened the widow of a deceased member with legal action in order to retrieve over £175 due to the society for unpaid advances.¹³⁴ Like other co-operative societies in Kerry, Ardfert suffered significant losses and damages as a result of the

¹³² NAI/AGF/2005/68/6, Evidence of RA Anderson.

¹³³ NAI/AGF/2005/68/164, Evidence of HF Norman.

¹³⁴ Kerry Local History Archive (KLHA), Dr O'Connell Papers, Ardfert Society vs. Jane Dowling

violence during the War of Independence and recalled its loans in an attempt to shore up its financial position. Members became over reliant upon their creamery as a source of income.

The Rathmore Society suffered as a result of its lax attitude to the supply of credit. In 1924, another attempt to restart its retail business failed. Nicholas O'Brien reported in June that the 'Store Department has been closed for the past few weeks owing to the large amount of money outstanding for store goods... too much credit was given.'¹³⁵ Co-operative societies already had enough to deal with during the 1920s and the problems associated with the provision of bad credit undermined such attempts. Father Finlay believed that farmers drew too heavily upon the financial resources of societies when they already possessed ample funds in the bank and suggested to the Commission that 'we require a little tightening of the reins.'¹³⁶ Norman thought that the interest taken in the revitalisation of co-operative credit after independence offered an opportunity for the state to address this: 'I think that the State might do something... to show its interest in these societies when they regard them as useful, and in general sound institutions.' Part of Norman's purpose in giving evidence to the Commission focused upon the need for a regulatory role performed by the IAOS. Therefore he recommended that he 'would make any encouragement by the State [in establishing credit societies] contingent on the affiliation of the Society to the... IAOS, because I consider these societies require a good deal of supervision.'¹³⁷ Norman remained careful to ensure that the IAOS remained an important agent in fostering any new wave of credit societies.

¹³⁵ NAI/1088/798/5, NW O'Brien, Report of Visit to Rathmore Co-operative Society, 14 June 1924.

¹³⁶ NAI/AGF/2005/68/58, Evidence of Rev TA Finlay.

¹³⁷ NAI/AGF/2005/68/164, Evidence of HF Norman.

The Agricultural Commission's report criticised the general financial position of co-operative societies, equating the practices of many as 'a negation of the true purpose of co-operation, whereby each member should bear his appropriate share of the responsibility'. Too many societies suffered from undercapitalisation and 'the character and training on the people engaged has been deplorable.' Overreliance on informal credit by farmers proved detrimental to the inculcation of self-reliance. Three major criticisms emerged from the report. Firstly, members needed to subscribe a higher level of capital to their co-operative societies to end reliance upon bank loans. Secondly, 'a few "strong" men' bore financial responsibility for the society and therefore the local farming community. Finally, societies proved too willing to give credit.¹³⁸ In order to remedy this, the Agricultural Commission decided that co-operative credit societies needed resuscitating. The report criticised the IAOS's long-term concentration upon creameries. Promotional efforts needed to focus elsewhere than those societies which contributed 'more liberally than credit banks to the central funds'. A thriving co-operative credit sector promoted financial responsibility amongst farmers and tied them closer into a community of economic interest. The Agricultural Commission lobbied the government to expand the co-operative credit sector with the argument that 'the existence of a number of active and solvent credit banks is evidence of mutual trust, which is the spirit of co-operation.'¹³⁹ Thus began attempts to achieve what Robert Anderson described as the 'capitalisation of honesty.'¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ NAI/AGF/2005/68/401, Report of the Agricultural Commission, pp. 42-3.

¹³⁹ NAI/AGF/2005/68/401, Report of the Agricultural Commission, p. 44.

¹⁴⁰ Anderson, *With Horace Plunkett*, p. 251.

Efforts to revive the co-operative credit sector were well-timed. In 1925, a memo prepared by the Department of Agriculture emphasised the importance of co-operative credit societies in protecting farmers from ruin. A potentially devastating outbreak of fluke disease threatened to wipe out Ireland's dairy cattle stocks. The Department's support for the extension of co-operative credit targeted those regions most affected:

The Department's Agricultural Credit Scheme operates through the medium of approved Agricultural Credit Societies in districts where farmers have in recent months suffered losses of livestock, mainly as a result of Fluke disease.¹⁴¹

The outbreak of fluke, a parasitic worm which attacks the livers of cattle, threatened the livelihoods of many dairy farmers. This need to avert an agricultural crisis confirmed to the Department of Agriculture the importance attached to reviving co-operative credit societies. IAOS organisers devoted themselves to the propagation of a new wave of credit societies.

County Kerry responded well to this drive. In 1922, only the Newtownsandess Co-operative Credit Society existed in Kerry.¹⁴² By 1928, this number climbed to fourteen. The fluke outbreak affected Kerry. Milk supplies dropped and creamery managers paid higher prices to prevent suppliers going elsewhere. The Ballymacelligott Co-operative Society's accounts for 1924 show a society financially overstretched and which responded to the fall in milk supply by paying an increased price to suppliers (Table 4.2). Co-operative societies took advantage of loans offered by the Department of Agriculture to shore up the financial position of the members.

¹⁴¹ NAI/AGF/92/3/879, Riddall and Norman Correspondence to Department of Agriculture, re Memo, 'Agricultural Credit', 5 August 1925.

¹⁴² See NAI/1088/751/3, Newtownsandess Co-operative Credit Society Correspondence Files.

Ballymacelligott Co-operative Society established a credit society in 1925. In June 1925 the committee applied for an initial loan of £1,000 after guaranteeing initial deposits of £1,000 from interested members who needed to replenish cattle stocks.¹⁴³ IAOS support of Ballymacelligott Credit Society proved critical. Robert Anderson lobbied the Department of Agriculture on the society's behalf putting forward a case for a government advance. The Department responded by sending Anderson a cheque for £826, which he forwarded to the secretary of Ballymacelligott Society.¹⁴⁴ The government matched deposits lodged by members at a ratio of two to one in order to incentivise farmers to place deposits in the new society.¹⁴⁵ Further loans from the government resulted - £840 on 23 December 1925; £931 on 1 March 1926; £1,032 on 24 March 1926; and £1,140 on 30 March 1926.¹⁴⁶

Table 4.2: Ballymacelligott Co-operative Society Statement of Accounts for Year Ended 31 December 1924 (Source: NAI/1088/70/2)

| Unit | 1923 | 1924 |
|------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Gallons of Milk | 653,535 | 510,423 |
| Pounds of Butter Made | 267,687 | 211,021 |
| Gallons per lb. of butter | 2.44 | 2.41 |
| Paid for milk per gallon | 5.69 pence | 6.71 pence |
| Received per Pound of butter | 17.37 pence | 19.9 pence |
| Total Sales | £20,844 | £18,267 |
| Total Expenses | £3,870 | £3,452 |

Credit societies sparked a recovery from the fluke epidemic as farmers replenished their herds. Charles Riddall's report for 4 February 1926 showed that Ballymacelligott Co-operative Credit Society accrued 111 members, who drew

¹⁴³ NAI/1088/70/2, John Byrne, Ballymacelligott to Dr Smith, Secretary of Department of Agriculture, June 1925.

¹⁴⁴ NAI/1088/70/2, RA Anderson to Dr Smith, 9 December 1925; Smith to Anderson, 12 December 1925.

¹⁴⁵ NAI/92/3/879, Department of Agriculture Memo entitled, 'Agricultural Credit', 5 August 1925.

¹⁴⁶ NAI/1088/70/2, Dr Smith to RA Anderson, 23 December 1925, 1, 24 & 30 March, 1926.

modest amounts from the new bank. The average loan granted was about forty pounds, whilst the largest single loan was fifty pounds. Early enthusiasm was high. By 4 February 1926 local members had deposited a combined total of £1,814 and received £1,666 from the Department of Agriculture. An important feature of the government loans related to the fact that no interest was charged on them for the first three years. The society primarily issued loans for the purchase of milk cows. Riddall visited again a fortnight later and noted that the membership climbed to 153. Riddall described Ballymacelligott as an area that revolved around the creamery business and observed that ‘the people in the locality generally are thrifty and, potentially at least, well off.’ This relative prosperity partly derived and consolidated by the co-operative societies that serviced areas like Ballymacelligott over the previous decades. However, local co-operative farmers seemed a distant descendant of the once invoked small farmer. Riddall detailed with satisfaction that traditional opponents to co-operation derived no benefit from the new society’s existence:

No case of a shopkeeper having been admitted to membership or having been granted a loan or of any deposit having been received from a shopkeeper has come under my personal notice in this or any other credit societies in the County Kerry which I have recently visited.¹⁴⁷

The establishment of co-operative credit societies shored up the position of local dairy farmers and cemented the successful embedding of a local co-operative infrastructure in north Kerry.

The workings of co-operative credit societies offered evidence of the local power accrued by committee members. These committees used informal discretionary powers to exclude certain members of the community from the benefits

¹⁴⁷ NAI/1088/70/2, CC Riddall, Reports on Ballymacelligott Co-operative Credit Society, 4, 17 and 18 February 1926.

of membership to the local co-operative. When asked by one such committee member about the criteria to be met when admitting members to one of these new societies, Robert Anderson responded: 'The chief consideration to which they should give attention would be the character of the applicant rather than upon the security the society should rely for repayment' Anderson emphasised the importance of the applicant's character when working out who qualified for a loan: 'Every loan must be secured by two persons besides the borrower, but the known good character of the borrower is of far more importance than anything else from the Society's point of view.'¹⁴⁸ The question around what constituted 'good character' remained open to interpretation.

Evidence suggests that committees interpreted 'good character' in terms of an individual's economic position and refused loans to smaller farmers. The emigration of small farmers and labourers remained an important feature of land development in Ireland throughout the twentieth century, with smallholdings consolidated under the ownership of larger farmers.¹⁴⁹ Throughout the 1920s, the co-operative society emerged as an institution that exacerbated this process. One member of the Tralee Co-operative Credit Society complained to the Department of Agriculture that the society's committee rejected his loan application without satisfactory justification. Michael O'Sullivan described himself as 'a small farmer holding over twenty-one acres of good land on which I have only two cows presently... the farm is capable of carrying eight'. He requested a loan of fifty pounds to replenish his small herd and described conditions in the rural hinterland around Tralee as ones of 'dire distress...

¹⁴⁸ NAI/1088/70/2., RA Anderson to John Byrne, 7 September 1925.

¹⁴⁹ Robert E Kennedy, *The Irish: Emigration, Marriage and Fertility* (London: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 207-208.

amongst small farmers here'. Despite being a member the loan application was refused. In frustration O'Sullivan accused 'large farmers and cattle dealers [of] drawing the money which I'm sure was intended for the small farmers.'¹⁵⁰ Such decisions supported HF Norman's ambition told to the Agricultural Commission in 1923 that he 'would now rather see some of the larger farmers who have room for development in their business as agriculturalists and who need capital going to the agricultural bank for it.'¹⁵¹ Throughout the 1920s, co-operative committees exerted control over the direction societies by policing the distribution of vital resources such as credit. The larger farmers with more potential for development benefitted, whilst the small farmer became marginalised. Involvement in co-operative societies marked a member out as a respectable and 'strong' farmer.

Combined efforts between the IAOS and Department of Agriculture resulted in the establishment of 52 new credit societies, whilst many 'moribund' societies restarted in earnest. By 1931, 114 credit societies provided credit, with only one of the new wave of societies winding up in that time. Like the development of co-operative credit in the previous generation, new societies remained reliant upon state funding for initial sums of capital. The government earmarked a sum of £100,000 to provide initial start-up capital to new credit societies, which only received this money in proportion to deposits invested by prospective members.¹⁵²

Co-operative credit societies provided the government with an effective instrument to placate an unsettled and vulnerable rural population. In a period where the legitimacy of the state formed a central part of the political discourse, the

¹⁵⁰ NAI/1088/70/2, Dr Smith, Department of Agriculture to HF Norman, IAOS, 7 December 1925.

¹⁵¹ NAI/AGF/2005/68/164, Evidence of HF Norman.

¹⁵² IAOS, *Annual Report, 1931*, p. 16.

government gained the support of farmers by directing funding through a revived co-operative credit network. In 1927, the government created a state-sponsored agency, the Agricultural Credit Corporation (ACC), to improve lending to farmers.¹⁵³ The ACC collaborated with the IAOS to co-ordinate the release of loan capital to its national network of co-operative societies. These societies lent to farmers in order to purchase more dairy cows and stimulate levels of butter production.¹⁵⁴ The ACC distributed about £1,000,000 to farmers through the co-operative credit network by 1932.¹⁵⁵ This body also issued loans to co-operative creameries to improve premises and purchase new equipment following the dairy industry's re-organisation.¹⁵⁶ The creation of the ACC confirmed the enmeshed role of the state and co-operative movement in driving Irish development. Through the instrument of the co-operative society, the government recapitalised depressed rural communities, and demonstrated its commitment to the improvement of Irish agricultural produce.

Co-operation in the 1930s

In 1932, the Irish government published *Saorstát Éireann: Official Handbook* to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the foundation of the Irish Free State. The publication's timing coincided with the handover of government from Cumann na nGaedheal to Fianna Fáil. This represented a significant political moment for the young state, as it meant the transfer of power from the political party which supported the Treaty to one which opposed it, and Civil War tensions threatened to resurface. The book offered a defence of the Cumann na nGaedheal administration,

¹⁵³ Ó Gráda, *A Rocky Road*, p. 145.

¹⁵⁴ Anderson, *With Horace Plunkett*, pp. 260-261.

¹⁵⁵ JP Colbert, 'The Banking and Currency System,' *Saorstát Éireann: Official Handbook*, ed. by Bulmer Hobson (Dublin: The Talbot Press, 1932), pp. 97-108 (p. 103); Daly, *The First Department*, p. 137.

¹⁵⁶ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1931*, p. 16.

arguing that the political, social and economic institutions which underpinned the Free State provided satisfactory evidence that the previous decades of struggle represented a worthwhile price. The main source of the Free State's claim to political success related to its work towards the modernisation of Irish society born out of free political institutions. Bulmer Hobson, a veteran nationalist, edited the book, which offered an opportunity to survey the progress made 'at the end of the first decade of national freedom'. Hobson stated that centuries of conflict between English government and Irish people meant that Cumann na nGaedheal, 'assumed control of a country reduced by war and misgovernment to a state bordering on chaos' and its record needed to be understood in this context. Ireland required 'an immense work of political, legal, social and economic reconstruction'. In the end, Hobson concluded:

Constructive work and development in every direction which, under the old regime, could never have been attempted are now possible, and the energies which for generations were absorbed in the struggle for political autonomy set free for the work of social and economic reconstruction.¹⁵⁷

The book contained a series of essays that detailed different aspects of life in the Free State. Topics ranged from literature and history to banking and agriculture. Joseph Hanly, an Inspector of Agricultural Science, authored an essay that argued agriculture formed the historic basis of Ireland's economy and that 'Gaelic Civilization Ireland was entirely rural'. He cited the abundance of evidence found in Gaelic literature, both 'direct and implied', to show that Ireland possessed a long and successful tradition as an agricultural nation.¹⁵⁸ Hanly reminded readers that the IAOS pre-dated the Free State and referred to the important role played by the co-operative movement when it 'undertook the work of advising farmers on agricultural

¹⁵⁷ Bulmer Hobson, 'Introduction', *Saorstát Éireann: Official Handbook* (Dublin: The Talbot Press, 1932), pp. 15-16.

¹⁵⁸ Joseph Hanly, 'Agriculture', *Saorstát Éireann: Official Handbook* (Dublin: The Talbot Press, 1932), pp. 115-127 (p.115).

matters as well as co-operation [and]... carried out a great amount of pioneer work'. The Free State reaped the benefit of this work and the government continued to utilise co-operative societies to improve the quality of agricultural output. Hanly encapsulated an official view of national development that prevailed by the early 1930s. In the end, 'agriculture is not only the most important industry of the Irish Free State, but that in view of the valuable resources of the country, each aspect is capable of very great development.'¹⁵⁹

In an uncompromising book published a year earlier, Hanly went into more detail about his ideal form of the Irish nation-state. In *The National Ideal*, Hanly envisaged a Gaelic, Catholic state that used co-operative institutions to realise a superior national archetype. On the front cover was an etching by the artist Sean Keating. Keating's illustration echoed a soviet realist style that portrayed an idealised, rural family looking towards a source of light upon which is emblazoned the image of a crucifix, sickle and anvil. Under the image is stated, '*Dia, Tír is Teanga*', which translates as 'God, Country and Language' (see figure 4.1). One contemporary reviewer for a Jesuit journal described this frontispiece as 'at once severely spiritual and pointedly practical in its lesson'.¹⁶⁰ Hanly believed that Irish nationality remained in a 'convalescent' condition.¹⁶¹

In economic terms, Hanly argued that all forms of activity needed to work in subservience to an idealised form of an Irish nationality which he equated to 'a supreme form of co-operation'. For Hanly, the Irish past showed that strong English influences had promoted an individualistic and selfish conception of development.

¹⁵⁹ Hanly, 'Agriculture', pp. 125-127.

¹⁶⁰ TC, 'Review of "The National Ideal"', *Studies*, 21.83 (1932) 499-500 (p. 500).

¹⁶¹ Joseph Hanly, *The National Ideal: A Practical Exposition of True Nationality Appertaining to Ireland* (Dublin: Dollard Printinghouse, 1931), pp.185-7.

To counter this effect ‘co-operation must be made a gigantic implement for national economic cultivation in Ireland.’¹⁶² Hanly’s conception of an ideal co-operative organisation moved away from the non-political and non-sectarian version originally preached by Horace Plunkett. Hanly’s version of co-operation anticipated the rise of a corporatist tendency that gradually emerged in the Ireland during the 1930s and 1940s. The ideological thrust of this tendency advocated the organisation of socio-economic structures compatible with Catholic social teaching, such as a series of vocational councils, in order to combat the perceived defects of Irish bureaucracy.¹⁶³ The idea of co-operation as a desirable basis for national behaviour showed how deeply embedded elements of its ideology became within contemporary political discourse. However, co-operation remained open to interpretation and susceptible to a change within political culture. Nevertheless, as Ireland continued to define its position as an independent nation-state in the 1930s, co-operation remained a recognisable and familiar paradigm along which future success might derive.

¹⁶² Hanly, *The National Ideal*, pp.270-271.

¹⁶³ Brian Girvin, ‘The Republicanisation of Irish Society, 1932-48’ *A New History of Ireland, Volume VII: Ireland 1921-1984*, ed. by JR Hill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 127-160 (p. 153); Michel Peillon, ‘Interest Groups and the State in the Republic of Ireland’ *Irish Society: Sociological Perspectives*, ed. by Patrick Clancy, Sheelagh Drudy, Kathleen Lynch and Liam O’Dowd (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1995), pp. 358-378 (pp. 368-370).

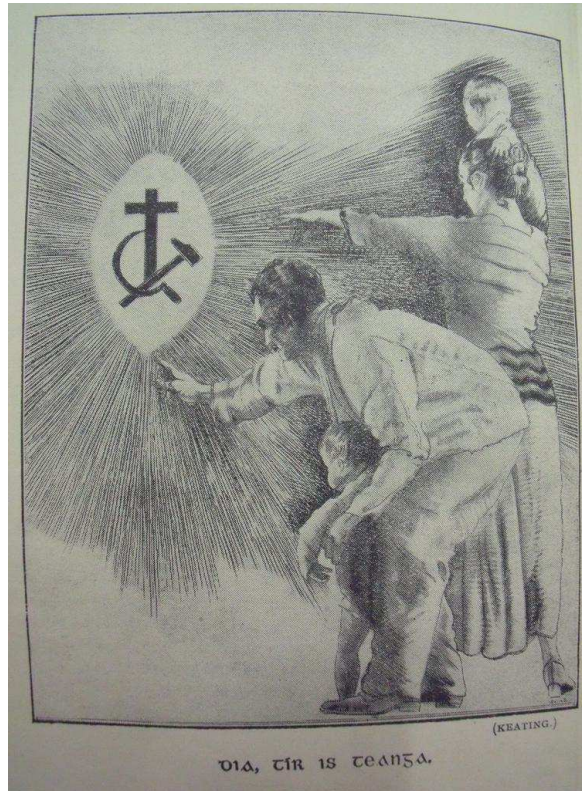


Figure 4.1: Frontispiece by Sean Keating to Joseph Hanly's *The National Ideal*.

Conclusion

From 1922 onwards, the Irish Free State projected itself as an agricultural country. Intellectuals, policymakers and civil servants made the case for agricultural development as the natural economic policy and the co-operative movement featured in this process. The IAOS used its influence to affect the trajectory of the Irish Free State's agricultural policy after 1922. Nationalists believed that agricultural improvement provided the best means to achieve successful economic development and national prosperity. Even as the Irish government adopted a policy of economic protectionism after 1932, the production of agricultural produce remained a major concern. The economist and co-operative advocate, Joseph Johnston, was no supporter of the new Fianna Fáil government's chosen trade policy, but conceded that 'the main problem of the Irish economy now is, not the creation of new

industries, but the expansion of the home market for the products of our agriculture and of existing industries.’¹⁶⁴ Whilst a debate about whether to adhere to free trade or to embrace protectionism occurred on an international level, in Ireland the commitment to the promotion of agricultural production remained entrenched as the economic orthodoxy until the 1950s.¹⁶⁵

The economic record for Irish agriculture until 1932 was mixed. A global fall in prices at the end of the 1920s affected all Irish farm produce. Disappointing price movements during the 1920s and 1930s meant dairying experienced no spectacular economic return and butter exports dropped from a value of £4.6 million in 1929 to £3.3 million in 1930.¹⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the Irish share of the British market in butter, eggs and cattle remained stable throughout the 1920s.¹⁶⁷ George O’Brien argued that the Department of Agriculture utilised the maximum potential of agricultural resources and developed pre-existent branches of production within the Free State. The stimulation of food production allayed fears of future famine and Patrick Hogan’s policies ‘ensured that any public money spent on agriculture would be employed productively by being devoted to the building up of the efficiency of the industry’.¹⁶⁸ Patrick Hogan remained Minister for Agriculture until the fall of the Cumann na nGaedheal government and has been assessed as ‘a talented and hard-working minister’ who instigated much-needed improvement in the quality of agricultural inputs and outputs. His decision to establish state agencies such as the

¹⁶⁴ Joseph Johnston, *The Nemesis of Economic Nationalism and Other Lectures in Applied Economics* (London: PS King and Son, Ltd, 1934), p. 94.

¹⁶⁵ Tom Garvin, *Preventing the Future: Why Was Ireland So Poor For So Long?* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2004), p. 145.

¹⁶⁶ Lee, *Ireland*, pp. 113-115.

¹⁶⁷ Daly, *The First Department*, p. 141.

¹⁶⁸ O’Brien, ‘Patrick Hogan’, pp. 360-361.

ACC proved influential interventions.¹⁶⁹ It has been the aim of this chapter to show the work of co-operative societies facilitated this work. The IAOS and the co-operative movement represented the most vital productive branch in Irish agriculture, as recognised by the public investment it received throughout the 1920s. With the help of the state they outlived the proprietary creamery sector and by 1929, the movement experienced a record year in terms of its quantity of production, albeit not financially. One effect caused by the depression in the 1930s meant that the Irish co-operative movement became ever more reliant on the state.¹⁷⁰

Despite the tough economic context, structural reforms carried out after independence ensured that Irish agriculture sat on firm foundations. The co-operative movement confirmed its position as a vital part of the state infrastructure after 1922 and the word ‘creamery’ became synonymous with the co-operative variety. The IAOS concentrated upon encouraging improved quality and quantity in production and secured a monopoly over the dairying industry and the movement extended its influence. The reorganisation of dairying initiated by the Agricultural Commission encouraged the diffusion of co-operative creameries into new regions. Creameries emerged as socio-economic institutions in the Irish midlands, which represented a region where grazier farming long proved preferable to more labour-intensive dairying.¹⁷¹ Reorganisation expanded the frontiers for co-operative dairying and new creameries such as the Donaghmore Co-operative Society in County Laois became longstanding fixtures.¹⁷² By 1929, forty-six new creameries had been established in

¹⁶⁹ Ó Gráda, *A Rocky Road*, pp. 144-145.

¹⁷⁰ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1934*, p. 7.

¹⁷¹ RF Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* (London: Penguin, 1989), p. 426.

¹⁷² For a history of Donaghmore Co-operative Society, see Teddy Fennelly, *A Triumph Over Adversity: The History of Donaghmore Co-operative Creamery Ltd, Founded in 1927* (Portlaoise: Arderin Publishing Company, 2003).

the Free State, some of these ‘built in districts where creameries did not exist before.’ The *Irish Times* reported that some of these creameries were created by ‘a colony of progressive emigrants’ from County Kerry. ‘These people brought with them the dairy farming tradition’ and cattle which ‘were already known as good milkers.’ This diffusion of the creamery system into new territory represented ‘the efforts of the Department of Agriculture and the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society in regard to the development of the Irish butter industry on a sound basis, so as to enable it to hold a foremost position on the markets of the world.’¹⁷³

The co-operative movement contributed to the emergence of a new post-independence rural archetype. The 1920s witnessed an abandonment of rhetoric that conceived of the peasant as a subject in need of instruction, a blank canvas waiting to be imprinted with co-operative values. Instead, the robust farmer with a medium to large holding emerged as the post-independence archetype. Patrick Hogan’s policies favoured these farmers, but as has been shown the evidence offered by IAOS experts to the Agricultural Commission supported this view. In addition, the practices of co-operative credit societies by the mid-1920s, demonstrated an institutional bias towards more financially secure farmers. The independent government recognised the ‘strong farmer’ as an essential fixture for the Irish economy, preferable to the smaller producers and the co-operative movement reflected this view after 1922.

Limitations to the co-operative project existed. The reorganised co-operative movement failed to cross over from a rural organisation for producers to one that addressed the interests of consumers. Furthermore, the attempt to create a national brand for dairy produce revealed the level of resistance that existed amongst

¹⁷³ ‘New Creameries in Free State’, *Irish Times*, 25 May 1929.

individual co-operative societies towards the increased level of intervention that occurred after the publication of the Agricultural Commission's Report in 1924. This state intervention also created a certain amount of resentment amongst co-operative committees towards the IAOS. The failure of certain co-operative societies to co-operate with others outside their immediate sphere of influence remained a major flaw in the practice of co-operation. The Co-operative Commonwealth that AE and Plunkett dreamed of remained a distant proposition.

Horace Plunkett died in March 1932, but lived to see the movement he created leave an extraordinary impact upon Ireland. Co-operative societies helped ensure political stability in the Irish Free State. Although the government won the Civil War, residual resentment remained towards its legitimacy. However, the decision to resurrect the co-operative credit sector and flood the Irish countryside with interest-free loans during a cattle epidemic secured the tacit acceptance of the government by farmers. More accurately, co-operative societies embodied the state for much of the rural population. For many rural people, the state revealed itself at the site of the local co-operative. Whether through financial support from credit societies or the everyday business of working through the creamery, a popular understanding of the state and its effect upon the population was understood through the co-operative movement's network. People's everyday understanding of the state and the ways in which it impacted upon their lives, came from the co-operative movement. By the 1930s, the state and the co-operative movement were enmeshed.

Conclusion

In 1922, the poet WB Yeats recalled a ‘moment of supernatural insight’ in the late nineteenth century when he became certain of the fact that ‘Ireland was to be like soft wax for years to come.’¹ As a foremost participant in the Irish cultural revival, Yeats understood that what was at stake in that moment was an opportunity to wield cultural and intellectual influence in order to inculcate a particular configuration of the Irish nation. The emergence of a host of cultural, political, and social movements at the end of the nineteenth century provide salutary evidence of the significant energies expended upon various drives to modernise Ireland towards such an end. Yeats approached this work from the perspective of one who believed that definition to Irish character and culture could be cultivated through developing a national literature. As such, Yeats placed himself amidst the social and cultural experimentation that had taken place in the previous generation and had been codified within the institutions and practices of the Irish Free State. This thesis has shown that one of the most important groups that contributed to this experimentation was the Irish co-operative movement, which sought to revitalise Irish character through economic interventions. I have argued that the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society (IAOS) exerted a significant influence upon the form taken by the Irish state through the efforts made by co-operative activists to mould the ‘soft wax’ of Irish society.

This thesis questions widely held assumptions about a crucial period in the history of the Irish state whilst arguing that critical ideas about the nation emanated from the sphere of economics and social organisation. By deciding upon a period

¹ WB Yeats, *Autobiographies* (New York: Scribner, 1999), p. 169.

that stretches from the movement's inception to the end of the first decade I have set out to show how the co-operative movement remained a significant social actor that continued to insert its programme of modernisation in the Irish countryside despite changes to Ireland's constitutional status. Therefore, this analysis emphasises how a social and economic organisation shaped a state system that survived the political transitions of the shift from British to Irish rule.

Historians have suggested that the nature of political conflict between nationalists and unionists formed the dominant feature of the 'Irish Question'.² A focus upon the co-operative movement re-replaces social and economic anxieties at the heart of early twentieth century Irish political discourse, thus emphasising a central, yet overlooked, component of the 'Irish Question'. The thesis has shown how co-operators conceived of rural Ireland and understood their role within it, before explaining how the movement became embedded within rural Irish society. This process was contested by a variety of different actors, but by the outbreak of the First World War, co-operative societies played a central role in organising rural work even if this occurred outside of the official circuits of power. Later chapters examined the movement during the revolutionary period and beyond tracing its influence in the governmental structures of the Irish Free State. The trajectory of the co-operative movement to an eventual position of influence within the Free State reveals the significance attached to tracking the development of interstitial movements and ideologies in a larger process of nation-state building.

² Paul Bew, *Ideology and the Irish Question: Ulster Unionism and Irish Nationalism, 1912-1916* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Michael Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland: The Sinn Féin Party, 1916-1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

In this thesis I have argued that the work of state-building in Ireland occurred gradually and in a variety of settings. The relationship between the population and the co-operative movement represented an important component to this process, but has hitherto remained overlooked in the historiography. Drawing on the correspondence files of individual societies has revealed that a complex sequence of interactions between managers, IAOS officials, and organisers occurred around the co-operative society. These interactions manifested a type of modernised rural district desired by the co-operative movement's leaders, a goal which led to a continuous disciplining of farmers. At a local level, the impetus behind state formation in Ireland can be located in the interactions between expert and farmer that took place in farms and creameries. On the level of national politics, the co-operative movement was relevant to the state-building process through the IAOS. This body contributed to parliamentary inquiries and commissions, helped frame debates between agricultural policymakers and experts. Co-operative ideas were located in a range of important texts. IAOS annual reports and Sinn Féin penned treatises shaped a discourse of Irish identity and development. In these ways, the co-operative movement helped embed in the minds of Irish governors the necessity of remaining tied to the pursuit of an agrarian economic strategy and the role to be played by co-operative societies in pursuit of that objective.

By pursuing its own conception of modernisation, the co-operative movement attempted to bring about a new type of Irish population, economy and society. Led by the IAOS, activists sought to embed a co-operative form of organisation in the countryside that shaped economic arrangements and which gave farmers mutualised and democratic control over their own industry. Indeed, it has been shown that co-operative organisers and engineers played a significant role in

converting the IAOS's vision of an ideal countryside into practice. Ultimately, the Co-operative Commonwealth remained an unrealised utopian ideal. The co-operative movement in Ireland remained confined to the countryside and failed to make significant advances into urban centres. The interests of Irish consumers remained subordinated to that of producers in the IAOS rhetoric. The refusal of co-operative societies to co-ordinate their activities in line with other local co-operatives was a great limitation to the co-operative project. Instead, inter-co-operative rivalry remained an entrenched feature of economic activity in Ireland.

This picture suggests that the attempts by the IAOS to engender its blueprint for the organisation of Irish society proved ineffective. However, despite its limitations, perhaps even because of them, the co-operative movement's interventions proved significant for the long-term development of Ireland, a finding that contradicts prevalent disparaging judgements made about the co-operative movement in this period.³ The Irish peasantry were shaped by the interventions carried out by co-operative organisers, and the rural community became the crucible within which a host of reformers attempted to engender improvement. As such, rural producers were the largest segment of the Irish Free State's population and represented reified economic subjects.⁴ Moreover, co-operative societies helped spread new technologies throughout the rural economy. For example, the spread of creamery separators changed the face of Irish dairy production, allowing dairy

³ Giovanni Federico, *Feeding the World: An Economic History of Agriculture, 1800-2000* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 136; Timothy W Guinnane, 'A Failed Institutional Transplant: Raiffeisen's Credit Cooperatives in Ireland, 1894-1914', *Explorations in Economic History*, 31 (1994), 38-61; Liam Kennedy, 'The Early Response of the Irish Catholic Clergy to the Co-operative Movement', *Irish Historical Studies*, 21.81 (1978), 55-74; Kennedy, 'The Roman Catholic Church and Economic Growth in Nineteenth-Century Ireland', *Economic and Social Review*, 10.1 (1978), 45-60; Cormac Ó Gráda, 'The Beginnings of the Irish Creamery System, 1880-1914', *Economic Review of History*, 30.2 (1977), 284-305.

⁴ Mary E Daly, *Industrial Development and Irish National Identity, 1922-39* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1992), p. 15.

farmers to remain competitive with their international counterparts. Taken together, these outcomes alone held important implications for Irish development in the long term.

Much of the co-operative movement's work occurred at a grass-roots level. Co-operative societies redrew local fields of relations wherever their influence extended. This allowed the IAOS to occupy a unique position, whereby the cumulative experience of local organisation informed its role on the national level. This material of local politics informed the terms of national debate. Consequently, the IAOS succeeded in converting its support in the countryside into substantial influence on the national stage. Whilst the political landscape in Ireland underwent a considerable change across the period reviewed, the co-operative movement managed to retain a position of strategic importance between the state and communities. Although this position remained fragile, the vision of a rural civilisation propagated by the co-operative movement contributed to a 'rural fundamentalism' that persisted within the political culture throughout the twentieth century. This Irish rural fundamentalism emphasised the necessity of agriculture to provide the basis of national prosperity.⁵ The established foundations of rural communities and the prioritisation of agricultural development allowed the co-operative movement to attain a prominent platform to impact upon the direction of socio-economic policy beyond 1922.

The co-operative movement's evolution in Ireland points to long social and cultural continuities as much as any great rupture. As such, the establishment of the

⁵ Damian F Hannan and Patrick Commins, 'The Significance of Small-Scale Landholders in Ireland's Socio-Economic Transformation', *The Development of Industrial Society in Ireland*, ed. by J.H. Goldthorpe and CT Whelan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 79 – 104 (pp. 101-102).

IAOS in the late nineteenth century points to a considered response by social reformers to long term, gradual adjustments set in place by the Great Famine in the 1840s. Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, the rural economy was characterised by emigration, which complemented a move from subsistence farming to more commercialised agricultural practices.⁶ This brought about a period whereby Irish farmers were intensively integrated into a global capitalist economy. The rise of international competition left farmers vulnerable. Informed by economic developments in Britain and Denmark, figures like Horace Plunkett concluded that co-operative societies offered farmers one way of mediating these significant transitions experienced throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The outbreak of the First World War and the subsequent War of Independence, culminating in the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922, can be interpreted as cementing political change in Ireland. The events of these years represented a significant rupture in terms of the demands made upon farmers. These events also marked a definite change in the role played by co-operative societies in countryside. The new burdens placed upon farmers during the First World War were mediated by co-operative societies and the network of traveling co-operative experts, who helped equip farmers with the correct tools to adapt to new production methods as well as insulate them against the rising cost of living. Violent events prevented many creameries from functioning during the revolutionary situation that prevailed during 1919-21. However, the network of societies proved resilient enough to endure such challenges and remained a significant fixture in the rural economy.

⁶ Timothy W Guinnane, *The Vanishing Irish: Households, Migration, and the Rural Economy in Ireland, 1850-1914* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997).

It has been argued that by coming through challenging circumstances, the co-operative movement became 'nationalised' in the sense that supporters of Irish political autonomy accepted the presence of co-operative societies in the Irish economy. Taking up Patrick Joyce's point about the historically anomalous position of Ireland, this study has attempted to show that Ireland existed as a specific point where ideas with international antecedents became 'greened', or part of a distinctive Irish critique of British rule.⁷ These revolutionary years represent the moment whereby the co-operative movement, as a network built up interstitially, became political insiders after 1922. The character of rural society that prevailed in the Irish Free State during the 1920s and 1930s owed a great deal to many of the features promoted by the IAOS ever since 1894.

Co-operation influenced the thought of Sinn Féin nationalists who ascended to official administrative power in Ireland by the 1920s. By exploring the intellectual development of the co-operative movement, it has been shown that the political economy of co-operation impacted upon the development of Irish nationalism in the early twentieth century. One way in which Sinn Féin nationalists differentiated themselves from the constitutional nationalists that long dominated Irish politics was in the attitude towards co-operative societies. Sinn Féin's appropriation of a pro-co-operative position positioned them as sympathetic to the socio-economic concerns of the farming population. Before the First World War, Sinn Féin had been the preserve of an urban bourgeois intelligentsia. By the end of the First World War, Sinn Féin reflected the interests of the rural population. By displaying a more sympathetic attitude to co-operative organisation, and later implementing policies that relied upon

⁷ Patrick Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* (London: Verso, 2003), p. 258.

a vibrant co-operative sector, the Irish nationalists that ascended to administrative power after 1922 reserved a special status for co-operative societies within their economic planning. A pragmatic approach to government in the 1920s encouraged reliance by the Cumann na nGaedheal administration upon co-operative societies. However, a growing consensus by Sinn Féin intellectuals that viewed co-operatives as *national* economic instruments suggests a degree of sincerity in their support amongst some nationalists. Nevertheless, whether ideological or pragmatic, co-operative societies were utilised as important governmental instruments.

Similarly, the co-operative movement demonstrated the limiting influence of governmental factors upon its own development. Although the co-operative movement shaped the generation of nationalists that ascended to office in the 1920s, this process proved to be a dialectical one. Co-operative experts and activists acquiesced to shifting demands and expectations made by those who wielded political influence in order to curry favour. The IAOS's desire to retain funding meant that a loss of autonomy was necessary. Sinn Féin's increased power after December 1918 saw members of Dáil Eireann become involved in the workings of the IAOS committee. However, the willingness to mould its governmental template during the 1920s in order to wield influence with the Department of Agriculture was best illustrated by the abandonment of the commitment to promote the interests of small farmers. Instead a tacit agreement emerged amongst the IAOS and the government that ensuring the larger farmers remained productive and competitive was the most urgent priority of an economic policy constructed in the midst of an economic slump and civil war. In return, the IAOS received a preferential treatment and the network of co-operative creameries and credit societies formed an important branch of Irish rule.

This thesis points to new ways to approach Irish history by calling for a reassessment of the institutions of the state, especially with regard to how they emerged and assumed the form they did. This thesis has used the co-operative movement to offer a new interpretation of the state-building process in Ireland and show how much of this work occurred in ordinary working spaces and business organisations. Also, by following the influence of the co-operative movement upon the nationalist project in Ireland, this thesis has argued that the political economy of nationalism contained important co-operative ideas that carried a long-term influence upon Irish development. The historical study of Ireland has meant that many of these institutions are viewed as emerging from political crises and conflict, but equally, there are other long-term, gestating factors that inform this process. Whilst the co-operative movement maintained a complex and shifting relationship with state institutions, this thesis has shown that it exerted significant influence upon the form taken by the state in rural Ireland. By tracking the development of organisations, regions and practices that receive less attention than the overtly political conflicts and personalities, a more nuanced understanding about the nature of the Irish state can be uncovered.

The thesis has also opened up new avenues for historical research into the nation and the state. Ireland's reputation as an 'anomalous state' has meant that much work remains to be carried out into understanding how and why the state developed the way it did. As a case-study, Ireland offers fertile ground for research and can enrich historians' work on the emergence of states and nations. Viewing the nation-state as constantly emerging from a state as given and a state yet to be constructed creates an opportunity to consider the role of unofficial and supposed non-political actors to influence this process. The focus on the Irish co-operative

movement has shown that states and nations are shaped as much by interstitial actors than by those considered official government actors. How successful these actors are in attaining their objectives is a less important question than understanding the actual impact of their interventions. The Irish co-operative movement never brought about a Co-operative Commonwealth that organised the economy in a co-operative fashion. Nevertheless, as has been argued, the movement left a deep impression upon Ireland.

The existence of a robust co-operative movement in Ireland, which articulated a distinct vision for national development, mattered. This thesis has shown how the co-operative movement in Ireland was involved in the practice of state-building and frequently played a prominent role. The IAOS led this movement and saw its role ‘to render self-help effective through organisation, in the working lives of the agricultural population.’⁸ The co-operative model became embedded in Ireland despite a wide range of challenges and shaped the conduct of agricultural business. A political economy of co-operation became integrated into the political culture by the time Ireland achieved an element of independence. Furthermore, by deliberately analysing the movement over a long period that looked beyond the moment of political independence, the influence of social and economic debates to the ‘Irish Question’ are highlighted. The thesis has shown the importance of employing an integrated local and national perspective upon the issue of political and social change, and emphasised the role of modernising projects to the construction of national identity and long-term socio-economic development. Importantly, by attempting to make Irish farmers into the ‘co-operative subject’, the IAOS left a legacy inscribed into the institutions of the Irish Free State.

⁸ IAOS, *Annual Report, 1915*, p. 25.

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