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Title Not to Nationalise, but to Rationalise? Cooperatives, Leadership, and the State in the Irish Dairy Industry 1890-1932

Short Title Not to Nationalise, but to Rationalise

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Abstract

The Irish cooperative movement in the dairy industry was driven from above, first by the philanthropic Irish Agricultural Organisation Society and then by the Irish Free State.

Although the early cooperative movement has been linked with constructive unionism, this article highlights important continuities in the approach taken to cooperative creameries by the Irish Free State government in the 1920s. Using the problem of creamery management as a focus, it argues that the movement was unable to deliver on its stated goal of democratic empowerment of farmers. Instead, it was the means through which power was renegotiated between farmers, landlords, and the state in the context of two crucial transitional moments.

Keywords cooperation, dairy, management, agriculture

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The cooperative as an agricultural business form enjoyed a heyday in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹ As a project, co-operation made a number of sometimes competing promises, but at its core was the idea of democratic control of an economic enterprise, to the mutual benefit (whether economic, social, or cultural) of its members. Yet this promise of democratic empowerment of consumers and producers was often illusory, limited in practice by the prioritization of other goals including economic rationalization, the promotion of public education in farming and business techniques, and the shoring up of other sources of authority in rural society. In Ireland, the movement for economic cooperation was driven from above, first by a philanthropic organization loosely supported by the British administration in Ireland, and then, in the case of the creameries, directly by the independent Irish state. It argues that the cooperative movement in Ireland never aimed simply to preserve landlord or state power, or to empower farmers. Instead, it was the means through which power was renegotiated between farmers, landlords, and the state in the context of two crucial transitional moments: the massive, subsidized land transfers from landlords to owner-occupiers at the turn of the century,² and the shift to independent statehood in the interwar years. In both contexts, farmers held considerable potential political power, which the cooperative movement promised to channel productively toward rural stability and prosperity. The Free State government, in particular, successfully used the

¹ Giovanni Federico, *Feeding the World: An Economic History of Agriculture* (Princeton, 2005), pp. 168-70.

² McLaughlin, "Competing forms of cooperation," p. 83; N. Foley-Fisher and E. McLaughlin, "Capitalising on the Irish land question: land reform and state banking in Ireland, 1891-1938," *Financial History Review* 23: 1 (2016): 71-109; T. W. Guinnane and R. I. Miller, "The Limits to Land Reform: The Land Acts in Ireland, 1870-1909," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 45: 3 (April 1997): 591-612.

cooperative form to intervene in the dairy industry, limiting the influence of British companies and arresting the deteriorating Irish reputation for butter. The reality was more complex, as farmers struggled effectively to wield the self-governance that the cooperative movement at turns offered and withheld. At the local level, therefore, the cooperative movement tended to reinforce rather than revolutionize existing hierarchies.

The article's specific lens for making this case is the problem of managing cooperative creameries, framed by debate about the role of the state and the source of appropriate leadership. Although cooperation in Ireland extended to banking, supply stores, and other agricultural industries, it made its greatest impact in the arena of cooperative creameries.³ At creameries, farmers pooled their milk and processed it using the new centrifugal cream separator, which produced sweeter, less salty butter and had allowed farmers elsewhere, particularly in Europe, to gain an edge in the British butter market.⁴ Individual proprietors or larger business concerns, often based in Britain, established some proprietary creameries in Ireland. The Irish Agricultural Organisation Society (IAOS), by contrast, organized groups of farmers to found cooperative creameries, funded by subscribed share capital and run by a committee overseeing a paid manager and, usually, other staff as well.. Over time, co-

³ L. Kennedy, "Farmers, Traders, and Agricultural Politics in Pre-Independence Ireland," in S. Clark and J. S. Donnelly, Jr., eds., *Irish Peasants: Violence & Political Unrest, 1780-1914* (Madison, 1983), pp. 339-73; P. Bolger, *The Irish Co-operative Movement: Its History and Development* (Dublin, 1977).

⁴ M. Lampe and P. Sharp, "How the Danes discovered Britain: the international integration of the Danish dairy industry before 1880," *European Review of Economic History* 19 (2015): 432-53; C. Ó Gráda, "The Beginnings of the Irish Creamery System, 1880-1914," *The Economic History Review* 30: 2 (May 1977): 284-305, pp. 286-7.

operative creameries came to predominate.⁵ By 1915, over 100,000 Irish farmers were members of co-operative societies.⁶

The article's emphasis is on continuity across the rupture of 1922. As Part I argues, the early cooperative movement in Ireland was animated by a utopian vision of economic efficiency and a rural order that preserved a role for the Anglo-Irish landlord class. It was part of a self-conscious effort to develop an authentically Irish form of capitalism. At the same time, it was linked, through ideology and personnel, with constructive unionism: its proponents saw agricultural reform as more worthwhile than nationalist agitation. In that context, the movement's top-down approach could be seen as narrowly political. However, the Irish Free State, too, saw cooperation not as a grassroots project but as a vehicle for the extension and projection of central authority and, to some degree, planning. After 1922, the new government looked to the dairy industry as an important element in establishing economic self-sufficiency and political stability. In Part II, the article considers these

⁵ Ó Gráda, "The Beginnings of the Irish Creamery System;" W. Jenkins, "Capitalists and Co-operators: Agricultural Transformation, Contested Space, and Identity Politics in South Tipperary, Ireland, 1890-1914," *Journal of Historical Geography* 30:1 (2004) 87-111; K. O'Rourke, "Property Rights, Politics and Innovation: Creamery Diffusion in pre-1914 Ireland," *European Review of Economic History* 11 (2007): 395-417; and K. O'Rourke, "Culture, Conflict and Cooperation: Irish Dairying before the Great War," *The Economic Journal* 117 (523: Oct. 2007): 1357-79.

⁶ L. Kennedy, "Adoption of Group Innovation in Irish Agriculture 1890-1914: an Exercise in Applied History," *Oxford Agrarian Studies* 6 (1977): 57-70, pp. 66-7.

elements of continuity.⁷ The Department of Agriculture pushed privately-owned creameries out of the sector and replaced them with a system of mandatory co-operatives and state-owned creameries. This experiment in a modified form of nationalization contributes to the revision of the standard story of Irish economic policy in the 1920s: while the Department of Finance pursued a *laissez-faire* orthodoxy, the Department of Agriculture was far more innovative.⁸ Like many other nations during the interwar decades, the Irish Free State was interested in self-sufficiency and willing to experiment with new forms of state intervention.⁹ Its foray into rationalizing an industry using cooperatives provided a means of attempting state direction at one remove, while bolstering the interests of an important population and limiting the power of international corporations on Irish industry.

⁷ On administrative continuity generally, see M. Maguire, *The Civil Service and the Revolution in Ireland, 1912-38: "Shaking Hands with the Blood-stained Hand of Mr. Collins"* (Manchester, 2008); R. Fanning, *The Irish Department of Finance* (Dublin, 1978).

⁸ A. Bielenberg and R. Ryan, *An Economic History of Ireland since Independence* (New York, 2013), pp. 11-12, 75-6; Mícheál Ó Fathartaigh, *Irish Agriculture Nationalised: The Dairy Disposal Company and the Making of the Modern Irish Dairy Industry* (Dublin, 2014). But see T. K. Daniel, 'Griffith on his Noble Head: The Determinants of Cumann na nGaedheal Economic Policy, 1922-32,' *Irish Economic and Social History* 3 (1976): 55-65, pp. 55-6; J.J. Lee, "From Empire to Europe: the Irish state 1922-73," in M. Adshead, P. Kirby, and M. Millar, eds., *Contesting the State: Lessons from the Irish Case* (Manchester, 2008), pp. 36-7.

⁹ K. K. Patel, *The New Deal: A Global History* (Princeton, 2016); G. Keown, "Taking the World Stage: Creating an Irish Foreign Policy in the 1920s," in M. Kennedy and J. M. Skelly, eds., *Irish Foreign Policy, 1919-66: From Independence to Internationalism* (Dublin, 2000), pp. 42-3.

Creamery committees always preserved some of their independence in the face of direction from above. The work of managing the creamery, however, proved a particular site of tension. While the dairy farmers on the committee were, in theory, in charge of the creamery, they had to rely on the labour of a paid manager to run the business. Although both farmers and managers shared the goal of a profitable creamery, their interests could diverge: farmers generally had longer-term interest in the creamery, while managers saw their positions in terms of salary, benefits, and career advancement. A frustrated or poorly-paid manager might opportunistically seek profit in illegal or semi-legal practices. In practice, committees often struggled to exercise adequate oversight of the manager's business practices without the assistance of a more educated and powerful president or honorary president: a local landlord or clergyman, frequently, who could serve as an effective intermediary. While Ó Gráda argues that farmers maintained a hard-nosed attitude to co-operation¹⁰ and Breathnach describes them as "reluctant co-operators" who rarely participated in their creameries' governance,¹¹ more recent work by Kennelly and Mathews emphasizes the movement's Catholic and democratic character at the grassroots level.¹² This article draws on minutes and correspondence from creameries mainly located in Kilkenny and Waterford to paint a different picture, one that emphasizes the structural difficulties faced

¹⁰ Ó Gráda, "The Beginnings of the Irish Creamery System," p. 300.

¹¹ P. Breathnach, "Reluctant Co-operators: Dairy Farmers and the Spread of Creameries in Ireland, 1886-1920," in P. J. Duffy and W. Nolan, eds., *At the Anvil: Essays in Honour of William J. Smyth* (Dublin, 2012), p. 556.

¹² J. J. Kennelly, "The 'Dawn of the Practical': Horace Plunkett and the Cooperative Movement," *New Hibernia Review / Irish Éireannach Nua* 12: 1 (Earrach/Spring 2008): 62-81, pp. 79-80. See P. J. Mathews, *Revival: The Abbey Theatre, Sinn Féin, the Gaelic League and the Co-operative Movement* (Cork, 2003), p. 31.

by farmers seeking to govern their creameries effectively. Located outside of the Golden Vale, which contains Ireland's best dairy land, this region nonetheless saw a dense network of creameries develop. Significantly, they can be studied not only through correspondence with the IAOS but also through the committee minutes deposited in the Kilkenny Archives, allowing a more multi-dimensional picture of local experience to be developed. Farmers on cooperative creamery committees were not necessarily reluctant, apathetic, or disenfranchised. However, they struggled with a system that was not designed to give them the necessary tools to exercise real control over the management of their businesses, but instead to foster their reliance on local leaders.

Much of the existing scholarship on Irish cooperation, and especially cooperative creameries, is concerned with exploring the relative failure of the movement either to dominate the butter industry before the 1920s or to increase Ireland's ability to compete successfully in the British butter market in the face of new competition.¹³ Denmark, in particular, is a point of productive comparison. Scholars have pointed to various reasons for Ireland's lacklustre performance, particularly the religious and political cleavages that marked late 19th and early 20th century Irish society.¹⁴ A new strand of scholarship emphasizes that Irish cooperatives offered no institutional advantages over existing proprietary forms.¹⁵ Henriksen, McLaughlin, and Sharpe conclude that Irish cooperative

¹³ Cullen, *An Economic History of Ireland*, p. 155.

¹⁴ O'Rourke, "Culture, Conflict and Cooperation"; O'Rourke, "Property Rights, Politics and Innovation."

¹⁵ E. McLaughlin, "Competing forms of cooperation? Land League, Land War and cooperation in Ireland, 1879 to 1914," *Agricultural History Review* 63: 1, 81-112, p. 83; but see I. Henriksen, M. Lampe, and P. Sharp, "The role of technology and institutions for

creameries suffered from their difficulty in developing enforceable binding contracts which would allow cooperatives to oblige their members to do business with them.¹⁶ McLaughlin also argues that political divisions prevented cooperative banks from benefiting from adequate local management capabilities and expertise.¹⁷ This article broadens the point about management, which served as a flashpoint for the inherent tensions of a movement that both encouraged and limited democratic engagement.

I

The Irish co-operative movement portrayed itself as a democratic manifestation of a specifically Irish genius, but it was founded on the principle that Irish rural life required both local leadership and a supportive central administration to recover from decades of mismanagement. Just as W. B. Yeats and his compatriots in the Irish National Theatre wanted to reinvent an authentically Irish art through the English language, Sir Horace Plunkett, one of the IAOS's founders, saw the cooperative movement as a way to regenerate a distinctively Irish culture.¹⁸ His comrade George Russell (AE) likewise saw cooperative

growth: Danish creameries in the late nineteenth century," *European Review of Economic History* 15 (2011): 475-93.

¹⁶ I. Henriksen, E. McLaughlin, and P. Sharp, "Contracts and cooperation: the relative failure of the Irish dairy industry in the late nineteenth century reconsidered," *European Review of Economic History* 19 (2015): 412-31; I. Henriksen, M. Hviid, and P. Sharp, "Law and Peace: Contracts and the Success of the Danish Dairy Cooperatives," *The Journal of Economic History* 72: 1 (March 2012).

¹⁷ McLaughlin, "Competing forms of cooperation," p. 108.

¹⁸ "Address of the Right Hon. Sir Horace Plunkett, President of the I.A.O.S.," *The Coming of Age of the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society* (Dublin, 1915), pp. 8-9, 13. See C. King,

action as the basis for rebuilding a “rural civilization” in Ireland.¹⁹ Deeply sceptical of the notion that what the Irish needed was to become more like the English,²⁰ Plunkett argued that the Irish preference for “thinking and working in groups” could be the basis for moving beyond the standards of British political economy.²¹ Pre-colonial legacies of communal land ownership had prepared them for modern cooperation.²² Yet even as he sang their praises, both men considered Irish farmers to be profoundly damaged by their history.²³ Plunkett sometimes linked their failings to Catholicism,²⁴ but more often traced them to the negative effects of British rule, which, he argued, had stunted the Irish character in the service of

“Co-operation and Rural Development: Plunkett’s Approach,” in J. Davis, ed., *Rural Change in Ireland* (Belfast, 1999), pp. 45-57, 46; Mathews, *Revival*; L. Lane, “‘There are Compensations in the Congested Districts for their Poverty’: AE and the Idealized Peasant of the Agricultural Co-operative,” in B. T. FitzSimon and J. H. Murphy, eds., *The Irish Revival Reappraised* (Dublin, 2004); Plunkett, *Ireland in the New Century*, p. viii.

¹⁹ G. W. Russell, *Co-operation and Nationality: A Guide for Rural Reformers from This to the Next Generation* (1912; Dublin, 1982), p. 7.

²⁰ Plunkett, *Ireland in the New Century*, p. 19.

²¹ Plunkett, *Ireland in the New Century*, p. 167.

²² Plunkett, *Ireland in the New Century*, p. 21; Russell, *Co-operation and Nationality*, p. 7.

See C. Nash, “Visionary Geographies: Designs for Developing Ireland,” *History Workshop Journal* 45 (Spring 1998): 49-79, p. 61.

²³ Plunkett, *Ireland in the New Century*, p. 164.

²⁴ Plunkett, *Ireland in the New Century*, pp. 110, 121. See Kennelly, “The ‘Dawn of the Practical’,” pp. 73-4; O’Rourke, “Culture, Conflict and Cooperation.”

protecting English industry from competition.²⁵ Russell emphasized the deleterious effects of a politics too focused on national independence.²⁶

Reversing degeneration from above did not necessarily mean direct state involvement. The leaders of the cooperative movement were fearful of the effects of over-reliance on the state “to the utter destruction of self-reliance, initiative, and independence of spirit,” in Russell’s words.²⁷ In practice, the movement had a complicated relationship with the British administration, which tried to promote agricultural improvement through alliances with private or semi-private associations.²⁸ It relied on small financial grants from the government but also crossed swords with the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (DATI), founded in 1899 and increasingly unsympathetic with the project of cooperation.²⁹ Instead, the Irish cooperative movement sought to provide leadership, first, through the IAOS itself, which would provide technical expertise and education beyond the remit of the state. Second, it emphasized the importance of progressive local leadership.³⁰ Plunkett believed that Anglo-Irish landlords had a vital role to play in supplying this leadership. Sketching out the future movement in 1890, he planned to “seek pioneers among those who have leisure to

²⁵ Plunkett, *Ireland in the New Century*, pp. 18, 57-8, 152. See H. Plunkett, *The New Movement in Ireland* (Dublin, 1899), pp. 8-9.

²⁶ Russell, *Co-operation and Nationality*, p. 1.

²⁷ Russell, *Co-operation and Nationality*, p. 26.

²⁸ C. Breathnach, *The Congested Districts Board of Ireland, 1891-1923: Poverty and Development in the West of Ireland* (Dublin, 2005), p. 174.

²⁹ M. Daly, *The First Department: a History of the Department of Agriculture* (Dublin, 2002), 1; Plunkett, *Ireland in the New Century*, pp. 261-2.

³⁰ King, “Co-operation and Rural Development,” pp. 47-50; Lane, ““There are Compensations,”” p. 33.

consider the question and intelligence to master its details.”³¹ While emphasizing the need for ordinary people to provide the “motive-power” for the co-operative movement, Plunkett argued that the gentry were the natural people to “stimulate” and “direct” that power.³²

Nationalists accused the IAOS and its proponents of launching a campaign, under the cover of co-operation, to distract farmers from Home Rule and ensure a continued role for the declining Ascendancy class.³³ Indeed, both Plunkett and Russell saw their efforts to reform agricultural policy more important than the pursuit of home rule.³⁴ The cooperative movement was part of the tradition of constructive unionism which emphasized economic and social improvements rather than a change in Ireland’s constitutional status.³⁵ The division between nationalism and the ethos of the Irish cooperative movement should not, however, be overstated. In its first decade, the government of the Irish Free State developed a policy toward cooperative creameries that betrays considerable logical continuities with the vision of the pre-independence cooperative movement.

II

³¹ Plunkett, *Co-operation for Ireland*, pp. 7-8, 12-13 (quote, 7). See King, “Co-operation and Rural Development,” p. 53.

³² H. Plunkett, *Noblesse Oblige: An Irish Rendering* (Dublin, 1908), p. 25.

³³ Jenkins, “Capitalists and Co-operators,” pp. 102-3.

³⁴ Daly, *The First Department*, 2; Russell, *Co-operation and Nationality*, p. 56.

³⁵ M. McAteer, “Reactionary Conservatism or Radical Utopianism? AE and the Irish Cooperative Movement,” *Eire-Ireland* 35: 3-4 (2000-1): 148-62, pp. 155-6; C. Ehrlich, “Horace Plunkett and Agricultural Reform,” in J. M. Goldstrom and L. A. Clarkson, eds., *Irish Population, Economy, and Society: Essays in Honour of the late K. H. Connell* (Oxford, 1981).

Like the IAOS, the Irish Free State government saw cooperative creameries as a productive site for rural improvement and intervention. Rather than moral degeneration, however, the Free State sought to address what they saw as unwelcome competition and a declining reputation for Irish butter in the British marketplace. The Free State's first Minister of Agriculture, Patrick J. Hogan, quickly became one of his party's leaders on economic policy, arguing that the maximization of farmer income rather than general economic self-sufficiency should be the government's goal. Although publicly opposed to state intervention, he was nonetheless the architect of a far-reaching intervention into the dairy industry – an industry he described as “the foundation of Irish agriculture.”³⁶ That foundation, however, faced some significant challenges.³⁷ The temporary wartime boom and the subsequent fall in agricultural prices after 1920 had significant effects.³⁸ The 1924 Report of the Commission on Agriculture, which was characterized by substantial input from the staff of the DATI and a strong support for co-operation,³⁹ found that the cooperative movement was plagued by a lack of share capital, weak loyalty, and poor business methods.⁴⁰ Hogan agreed that co-

³⁶ Daly, *The First Department*, p. 127 (quote); W. Murphy, “Hogan, Patrick J. (‘Paddy’ in J. McGuire and J. Quinn, eds., *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009)); R. Ryan, “The Butter Industry in Ireland, 1922-1939,” *Irish Economic and Social History* 28 (2001): 32-46, pp. 33-4.

³⁷ Bielenberg and Ryan, *An Economic History of Ireland*, p. 49; Daly, *The First Department*, p. 99; D. Gillmor, “The Political Factor in Agricultural History: Trends in Irish Agriculture, 1922-85,” *The Agricultural History Review* 37: 2 (1989): 166-79.

³⁸ J. Meenan, *The Irish Economy since 1922* (Liverpool, 1970), pp. 302-3; Cullen, *An Economic History of Ireland*, p. 172.

³⁹ Daly, *The First Department*, p. 121.

⁴⁰ Breathnach, “Reluctant Co-operators,” p. 571; Daly, *The First Department*, pp. 118-21.

operative creameries were in a parlous state, undermined by unrepresentative committees and bank loans as well as competition with each other and the proprietary creameries.⁴¹

Cooperative and proprietary creameries, the latter often under British ownership, competed for suppliers' milk without increasing the price paid in what was described as a "milk war."⁴² From Hogan's perspective, the situation was untenable: decreased farmer income combined with foreign influence could not be allowed to persist.

A raft of legislation tackled the problem through increased regulation, marketing provisions, and, most significantly, the transformation of butter-making into an all-cooperative industry. The Dairy Produce Act (1924) imposed regulations on the manufacturing of butter.⁴³ Further legislation supported butter prices and attempted to regularize marketing.⁴⁴ Far more innovative, however, was the government's effort, based on a suggestion from the IAOS,⁴⁵ to remake the landscape of the dairy industry by eliminating proprietary creameries entirely. By its own account, the Irish state sought, thereby, to define and reduce inefficient competition. Redundant creameries reduced economies of scale and

⁴¹ Daly, *The First Department*, pp. 127-8.

⁴² W. Jenkins, "Rationalisation of Dairy Co-operatives (1950-1990) in the Slieveardagh Region, S. Tipperary," *Landscape and Life: Appropriate Scales for Sustainable Development Working Paper No. 13* (Dublin, 1994), p. 2; Ó Fathartaigh, *Irish Agriculture Nationalised*, p. 13; Ryan, "The Butter Industry," p. 36.

⁴³ Ryan, "The Butter Industry," pp. 34-6.

⁴⁴ Bielenberg and Ryan, *An Economic History of Ireland*, p. 52; Ryan, "The Butter Industry."

⁴⁵ Ó Fathartaigh, *Irish Agriculture Nationalised*, p. 16; National Co-operative Archive, Manchester (hereafter NCA), FAC/4/1/3IAOS Annual Report 1924 Draft, pp. 11-12.

increased overhead costs for farmers, but because of low butter prices, competition did not increase either prices paid for milk or the overall milk supply.⁴⁶

In 1926, the government purchased properties belonging to the Condensed Milk Company and the Newmarket Dairy Company, which had recently merged.⁴⁷ It began reorganizing those districts, selling some properties to co-operative societies and closing others.⁴⁸ In order to facilitate this transfer, it created the Dairy Disposal Company, originally conceived as a holding company.⁴⁹ Over the next several years, the remit of the Dairy Disposal Company expanded. Mícheál Ó Fathartaigh argues that it evolved from a temporary holding company “into a commercial state-sponsored company.”⁵⁰ It set up traveling creameries, separators housed in trucks, in areas where remoteness and isolation had previously made creameries unviable.⁵¹ The Creamery Act of 1928 facilitated the transfer of creameries to co-operative societies.⁵² The IAOS assisted in these transfers, providing organizers to give technical assistance to local people learning the cooperative form.⁵³ The 1928 Act also further entrenched the state’s role in directing the industry by giving the

⁴⁶ Ryan, “The Butter Industry,” p. 36.

⁴⁷ Ó Fathartaigh, *Irish Agriculture Nationalised*, p. 16; Daly, *The First Department*, pp. 128-9.

⁴⁸ National Archives of Ireland, Dublin (hereafter NAI), TAOIS/S2352, “Draft of Creamery Transfer Bill;” Ryan, “The Butter Industry,” p. 36.

⁴⁹ Ó Fathartaigh, *Irish Agriculture Nationalised*, pp. 22-3.

⁵⁰ Ó Fathartaigh, *Irish Agriculture Nationalised*, pp. 26.

⁵¹ Bielenberg and Ryan, *An Economic History of Ireland*, p. 77; Ryan, “The Butter Industry,” pp. 38-9.

⁵² NAI, TAOIS/S2352, “Draft of Creamery Transfer Bill.”

⁵³ NAI, AGO/2005/82/1501, Memorandum of work done by the I.A.O.S.

Ministry of Agriculture authority over the setting up of new creameries.⁵⁴ The legislation thus met the government's larger goal of preventing private monopolies.⁵⁵ It did so, however, not by encouraging competition in general, but by placing cooperative creameries under stricter control.⁵⁶ Further legislation in 1934 addressed the issues of licensing traveling creameries and discouraging joint farmers' dairies which manufactured butter outside of the creamery system. It also extended the state's control over the manufacture of other milk products, again with an explicit goal of preventing wasteful, costly competition.⁵⁷

Hogan's interventions in the dairy industry were widely regarded as beneficial by farmers and the IAOS, particularly in light of the global depression and local trade war that developed a few years later.⁵⁸ Historians have largely agreed, crediting the state's action with the survival of the cooperative creamery system and, in part, the stabilization of dairy farmers' incomes.⁵⁹ The policies that achieved these benefits were in stark contrast to the orthodoxies

⁵⁴ NAI, TAOIS/S2352, "Draft of Creamery Transfer Bill." See Ó Fathartaigh, *Irish Agriculture Nationalised*, pp. 65-76.

⁵⁵ Daly, *Industrial Development*, p. 48.

⁵⁶ Jenkins, "Rationalisation of Dairy Co-operatives," p. 2. See Ryan, "The Butter Industry," pp. 36-7.

⁵⁷ NAI, TAOIS/S2960, memo, Department of Agriculture, Proposed Bill to amend Creamery Act 1928, 10 July 1934.

⁵⁸ NCA, FAC/4/1/3, IAOS Annual Report (Dublin, 1931), p. 13.

⁵⁹ Breathnach, "Reluctant Co-operators," p. 572; Ryan, "The Butter Industry," p. 46; Ó Fathartaigh, *Irish Agriculture Nationalised*, p. 88; M. Adshead, "State autonomy, state capacity and the patterning of politics in the Irish state," in Adshead et al., *Contesting the State*, p. 65; Bielenberg and Ryan, *An Economic History of Ireland*, p. 199; Meenan, *The Irish Economy since 1922*, pp. 93-4.

inherited by the Department of Finance, a fact which occasioned some debate within the Oireachtas. Critics, including the Department of Finance and some from the Farmers' Party, saw the Dairy Disposal Company as a harbinger of socialism or nationalization.⁶⁰ Sir John Keane, a businessman and landowner from Waterford and an outspoken Anglo-Irish critic of the new order, urged that the IAOS and the cooperative creameries alike should be independent of state support and coercion,⁶¹ stating, presciently: "Once the State begins to get hold of any business it has to go on."⁶²

Staging its intervention through cooperatives allowed the government to forestall some of this criticism, by casting the policy as one that ultimately aimed to put control of creameries in farmers' hands. Certainly, some of the government's supporters unabashedly advocated greater state action that would go beyond the propaganda efforts of bodies like the IAOS. As Sen. Thomas Bennett, a landholder and dairy farmer, said: "People in Ireland have been educating those connected with the creameries for twenty-five years, and yet something is lacking."⁶³ In the Dáil, Denis Gorey linked state intervention with successful modernization: "the only countries that have come out on top are those where the State interfered."⁶⁴ Hogan was more measured. He assured the Senate that state intervention would be limited and temporary. The government wanted "not to nationalise, but to rationalise the dairying

⁶⁰ Ó Fathartaigh, *Irish Agriculture Nationalised*, pp. 27-9.

⁶¹ Seanad Éireann, Volume 10, 25 July 1928, 1175-6.

⁶² Seanad Éireann, Volume 10, 24 July 1928, 1131.

⁶³ Seanad Éireann, Volume 3, 19 Nov. 1924, 1086-7; P. J. Dempsey and S. Boylan, "Bennett, Thomas William Westropp," in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*.

⁶⁴ Dáil Éireann, Volume 25, 11 July 1928, 223.

industry.” That accomplished, the state would “get out of it. We will have established the dairying industry there in the hands of the farmers.”⁶⁵

Yet to the Dáil, Hogan explained the underpinning reasons for state intervention in terms that cast that ideal into doubt. First, he said, there was the eternal danger of “redundant creameries.” Significantly, he linked this danger to an excess of democratic enthusiasm. The decision about where to locate a creamery, he said, easily “aroused passions” that could all too easily lead to a split in a committee: “and then you will have redundancy all over again.” Nor were the only threats internal. There was also the danger of “foreign concerns” with “very big amounts of money” who would “be very glad to come in here in the hope of wiping out the co-operative system and taking over part of the industry from the farmers again.”⁶⁶ Hogan conjures, here, with some of the deepest fears haunting the Irish Free State in the 1920s: violent splits of the sort that had nearly sundered the new nation during the Irish Civil War, and rich foreigners bearing the threat of a return to quasi-colonial domination. Neither of these dangers could be easily addressed through local cooperation. Rather, they seemed precisely the sort of problems best dealt with by a centralized power, one that could recognize undesirable competition and take steps to stop it.

While O’Rourke suggests that the state embraced cooperation as a result of becoming a homogenous nation,⁶⁷ the Irish Free State government was, in its own way, was just as loathe as Plunkett had been to hand over the reins to ordinary farmers. The process of transferring creameries to co-operative societies soon stalled. By 1938, the Dairy Disposal Company had purchased 215 creameries, of which thirty-four had originally been cooperative; forty-nine of the 215 had been transferred to cooperatives, while seventy-two were still being operated by

⁶⁵ Seanad Éireann, Volume 10, 24 July 1928, 1150.

⁶⁶ Dáil Éireann, Volume 25, 10 July 1928, 154.

⁶⁷ O’Rourke, “Culture, Conflict and Cooperation,” pp. 1376-7.

the Dairy Disposal Company and a further ninety-four had been closed.⁶⁸ While it is true that farmers were often unwilling or unable to purchase government-owned creameries, the logic of the project had seemed to determine this outcome from the start.⁶⁹ Indeed, throughout the 1930s local creamery committees discussed and undertook amalgamations of various sorts,⁷⁰ and sometimes sought assistance from the Dairy Disposal Company for those projects.⁷¹ Only a concerted effort by milk suppliers and the Department of Agriculture in the 1970s forced the final transfer of its holdings.⁷²

III

Despite their democratic rhetoric, cooperative creameries were never designed to empower individual farmers. Instead, local elites were crucial to their success, as the struggles of several Kilkenny creameries to establish and maintain adequate management in this era show. In his study of cooperatives founded before 1900 in South Tipperary, Jenkins finds that they were founded by landlords, politicians, and Catholic clergymen, and he notes that parish priests were particularly well-suited by education and social position to serve as chairman of creamery committees.⁷³ In Kilkenny, too, landlords and clergymen played precisely the sorts of roles that Plunkett had envisioned. They helped to found creameries and provided authoritative guidance on their running. While the prominence of Anglo-Irish

⁶⁸ Ryan, "The Butter Industry," pp. 36-7.

⁶⁹ Daly, *Industrial Development*, p. 37 (quote); Daly, *The First Department*, pp. 131-3.

⁷⁰ NAI 1088/457/11, circular, 20 March 1937.

⁷¹ NAI, 1088/98/9, Riddall, 8 Dec. 1931, and see R. Langford, 11 May 1932.

⁷² Ó Fathartaigh, *Irish Agriculture Nationalised*, p. 267; Jenkins, "Rationalisation of Dairy Co-operatives."

⁷³ Jenkins, "Capitalists and Co-operators," pp. 94-5.

landlords diminished after World War I and the War of Independence, local priests remained significant for cooperative creameries, underscoring the limits of these institutions as forums for farmer self-governance.

R. H. Prior Wandesforde, Esq., the leading light of the Castlecomer creamery in Kilkenny, was exemplary of gentry leadership of the older type.⁷⁴ The cooperative creamery in Castlecomer got underway in 1913, and by 1914 had 47 milk suppliers and a net profit of £23.⁷⁵ As president of the creamery committee, Wandesforde was no mere figurehead. The committee delayed important decisions, such as the opening of a store, until he could be present.⁷⁶ In addition to supplying the fresh water needed by the creamery, he offered significant financial support. He paid for half of a new sewerage scheme in 1915.⁷⁷ Later that same year, he put up a disproportionate share of the security request by the bank for an overdraft.⁷⁸ And he offered other kinds of services in the style of a lord of the manor. Perhaps most charmingly, when the committee decided in June 1916 to put in a plot of flowers and

⁷⁴ On Wandesforde, see T. Clavin, "Wandesforde, Christopher," in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*; W. Nolan, *Fassadinin: Land, Settlement and Society in Southeast Ireland 1600-1850* (Dublin, 1979), p. 199; R. Scahill, Collection List No. 52 Prior-Wandesforde Papers, National Library of Ireland, June 2000, at <http://www.nli.ie/pdfs/mss%20lists/prior-wandesforde.pdf>.

⁷⁵ NCA, FAC/4/1/1, IAOS Annual Report 1895, p. 3; Glanbia Collection, Kilkenny Archives (hereafter GCKA), 164/8, Castlecomer Minutes 24 Feb. 1914.

⁷⁶ GCKA, 164/8, Castlecomer Minutes 20 May 1913, 4 July 1913, 9 Aug. 1913.

⁷⁷ GCKA, 164/8, Castlecomer Minutes, 22 March 1915.

⁷⁸ GCKA, 164/8, Castlecomer Minutes, 28 April 1915.

shrubs at the back of the creamery, the manager “was directed to ask Mrs. Wandesforde for the services of her gardener in striking out [the] garden.”⁷⁹

The IAOS evidently expected local Anglo-Irish worthies to take this sort of lead. When the local IAOS organizer wanted to encourage the foundation of another creamery in the Goresbridge area, he began by contacting Pierce F. Byrne, who lived at Garryduff House. Byrne was lukewarm and passed the organizer on to Captain John E. B. Loftus of Mount Loftus (“he is very good but his enthusiasm is intermittent”). Significantly, both Byrne and Loftus recognized the importance of supportive clergy. Byrne warned that his own local parish priest “is no good for that sort of thing, and it is hard to get the people together without a priest.”⁸⁰ Loftus, for his part, reassured the IAOS that his local parish priests were “very favourably inclined.”⁸¹ The organizer, however, was apparently more concerned with the role of gentry, replying to Byrne: “With representative men like you & Mr Loftus as the head of affairs, the farmers of the district would soon fall in.”⁸² Loftus was elected chairman of the Barrowvale creamery committee at its founding in 1913.⁸³ The creamery’s “biggest supplier” took the position of honorary secretary.⁸⁴ Loftus’s presence, like Wandesforde’s, was useful: early in 1914 he resolved a dispute with the Grand Canal Company over the discharge of creamery waste into the River Barrow by invoking both his ownership of the fishing rights at

⁷⁹ GCKA, 164/8, Castlecomer Minutes, 9 June 1916.

⁸⁰ NAI, 1088/98/1, Byrne to Courtney, 1 Jan 1913. See Simon Loftus, *The Invention of Memory* (London, 2013).

⁸¹ NAI, 1088/98/1, Loftus to Anderson, 3 March 1913.

⁸² NAI, 1088/98/1, Courtney to Byrne, nd.

⁸³ NAI, 1088/98/1, Courtney to Secretary, 21 May 1913.

⁸⁴ NAI, 1088/98/1, Courtney to Fant, 21 May 1913.

the particular location in question and “his position as a Conservator of Fisheries” of the river.⁸⁵

Such genteel leadership ebbed with the coming of war. In August 1914, flanked by his wife and son, Loftus performed the creamery’s opening ceremony less than an hour before departing to join his regiment on active service, nearly breaking down several times when discussing the war’s “interference with the development of local industry.”⁸⁶ The dramatic scene marked the beginning of a transition as cooperative creameries lost their close association with constructive unionism and began to be linked instead with nationalist politics, especially in comparison with British-owned proprietary creameries.⁸⁷ At the annual general meeting of April 1916 both Byrne and Loftus were replaced on the committee owing to their non-attendance at meetings, apparently replaced by men more rooted in the local farming community.⁸⁸ During the War of Independence, creameries were targets of reprisal attacks by Crown Forces who saw them, perhaps, as local gathering-places for a population into which Irish Republican Army members seemed to blend seamlessly.⁸⁹ According to one report, some forty-two creameries had been damaged by November 1920, a testament to their

⁸⁵ NAI, 1088/98/2, W. Delaney to Secretary, 23 Jan. 1914.

⁸⁶ NAI, 1088/98/3, Courtney to Secretary, 6 Aug. 1914.

⁸⁷ See McLaughlin, “Competing forms of cooperation,” p. 112; Jenkins, “Capitalists and Co-operators,” p. 103.

⁸⁸ NAI, 1088/98/4, Courtney, 4 April 1916.

⁸⁹ Bielenberg and Ryan, *An Economic History of Ireland*, p. 72; Daly, *The First Department*, pp. 77-8. See M. Cronin, “Remembering the Creameries,” in M. McCarthy, ed., *Ireland’s Heritages: Critical Perspectives on Memory and Identity* (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 175-6.

significance as community gathering places in the eyes of British forces.⁹⁰ Between 1911 and 1926, the Protestant population of southern Ireland fell by nearly a third.⁹¹ Some of the Anglo-Irish landlords who had been involved in the cooperative movement left Ireland, including Plunkett himself, who moved to England and he devoted himself to the cause of co-operative agriculture around the world.⁹²

Clergymen were thus far more likely than gentry to play significant, enduring roles in the leadership of creamery committees.⁹³ The career of Father Thomas Phelan, while exceptional, is illuminating. Phelan was, according an IAOS organizer who visited Glenmore in spring 1905, “not very strong on creameries not having any personal experience of their working but he is a right good man.”⁹⁴ He was soon a passionate convert to the cause of cooperation, getting the Glenmore Cooperative Creamery launched that autumn.⁹⁵ He

⁹⁰ NAI, MS 33,718/F(184/1), Report to November, 1920 of Co-operative Creameries and Other Societies States to have been Destroyed or Damaged by Armed Forces of the Crown.

⁹¹ E. Delaney, *Demography, State and Society: Irish Migration to Britain, 1921-1971* (Liverpool, 2000), p. 71.

⁹² British Library, London, MSS EUR E267/69/2, Sir Horace Plunkett to Lady Seton, 21 June 1923; GCKA, 228 Barrowvale Minutes, 27 May 1932.

⁹³ L. Kennedy, “The Early Response of the Irish Catholic Clergy to the Co-operative Movement,” in A. O’Day, ed., *Reactions to Irish Nationalism* (London, 1987), pp. 167-86; GCKA, 352 Muckalee Minutes, 3 March 1892, 8 June 1893, 5 June 1894, 6 June 1895, 1 March 1900 and 355 Muckalee Minutes 29 May 1923, 11 Aug. 1931; NCA, FAC/4/1/7, IAOS Annual Report (Dublin, 1934), p. 11, and FAC/4/1/8, IAOS Annual Report (Dublin, 1935), p. 5.

⁹⁴ NAI, 1088/457/1, Report, 22 March 1905.

⁹⁵ NAI, 1088/457/1, Phelan to Anderson, 9 Sept. 1905.

reassured one woman that she would still be able to rear her calves on the skim milk from the creamery; another farmer, who owned twelve cows, was persuaded to join in once Phelan explained the principle of limited liability.⁹⁶ He became a regional advocate for co-operation and for the IAOS.⁹⁷ In 1914, for example, he lectured on co-operation while laying the foundation stone for the Barrowvale creamery,⁹⁸ and from 1910 he served for the Waterford district on the IAOS committee.⁹⁹ Phelan ruled the Glenmore creamery committee firmly: when a dispute arose about banking arrangements in 1906, for example, he followed the IAOS's advice that this was "eminently a case for you to put your foot down decisively."¹⁰⁰ By 1909, Glenmore had become a model creamery in the IAOS's eyes.¹⁰¹

When, in 1916, the church moved Father Phelan from Glenmore to Piltown, it became clear that his influence on creamery fortunes was decisive.¹⁰² From being a model creamery, Glenmore became a place marked by disputes and friction. Piltown's creamery, meanwhile, saw its fortunes turn around under Phelan's new leadership. It enjoyed booming growth and profits in the 1920s, only to sink once more into debt and recrimination when Phelan's ill health removed him from active engagement with the creamery in the early 1930s.¹⁰³ Phelan served a crucial role as mediator between creamery committees, milk suppliers, and, most

⁹⁶NAI, 1088/457/1, Phelan to Moore, 6 Dec. 1905.

⁹⁷ NAI, 1088/457/2, Secretary to Phelan, 22 Dec. 1911, and Phelan to Anderson, 26 Nov. 1912.

⁹⁸ NAI, 1088/98/2, Secretary to Moore, 26 Feb 1914.

⁹⁹ Report of the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society (Dublin, 1935), 5.

¹⁰⁰ NAI, 1088/457/1, Anderson to Phelan, 25 May 1906.

¹⁰¹ NAI, 1088/457/1, Secretary to Phelan, 13 Sept. 1909.

¹⁰² GCKA, 315 Glenmore Minutes, 3 Oct. 1915.

¹⁰³ See NAI, 1088/780/5, Phelan to Riddall, 13 Dec. 1930.

importantly, creamery managers, particularly in areas requiring specialist knowledge such as accounting. In the absence of his leadership in this capacity, the creameries suffered. At Glenmore, he sought explicit training for committee men in the method of checking the books at their monthly meetings,¹⁰⁴ despite the IAOS's concern that "the more experienced managers would resent a very exhaustive check of this nature."¹⁰⁵ At Piltown, Phelan found a cooperative creamery that was not, initially, particularly interested in following his suggestion that it avail itself of IAOS accountancy inspections.¹⁰⁶ With the support of some of the committee, however, Phelan carried his point and soon became an active chairman once more.¹⁰⁷ He was successful in settling a labour dispute with the creamery employees in 1919.¹⁰⁸ The creamery was soon thriving.¹⁰⁹

In Phelan's absence, however, relations between the manager and the committee frayed in both places. In Glenmore, trouble boiled over in 1931 when the committee sought to reduce the wages of the creamery staff.¹¹⁰ At a large, boisterous annual general meeting, a further argument developed over the right of many of those present to vote, since their shares in the cooperative had never been formally transferred to them from their deceased relatives.

¹⁰⁴ NAI, 1088/457/2, Secretary to Swain, 17 May 1910.

¹⁰⁵ NAI, 1088/457/2, Minute by Adams, 18 May 191. See NCA, FAC/6/1/5, IAOS Ulster Provisional Committee Report (Belfast, 1921), p. 14.

¹⁰⁶ NAI, 1088/780/2, Anderson to Phelan, 28 Dec. 1916; 1088/780/3, Phelan to Anderson, 13 Nov. 1917.

¹⁰⁷ NAI, 1088/780/3, Phelan to Anderson, 31 Dec. 1917.

¹⁰⁸ See NAI, 1088/780/3, Phelan to Anderson, 5 April 1919.

¹⁰⁹ NAI, 1088/780/3, Anderson to Phelan, 30 June 1920, and 1088/780/4, Anderson, 1 Sept. 1921.

¹¹⁰ GCKA, 315 Glenmore Minutes, 1931.

The IAOS organizer at the meeting forcefully insisted that the cooperative's democracy was not unlimited, comparing the rules governing cooperatives with the rules that enabled Gaelic Athletic Association football.¹¹¹ This intervention convinced the farmers to assent to the legal transfer of their shares, but it did not solve the underlying dispute with the manager, who threatened strike action if the staff were not guaranteed work over the winter of 1931-32.¹¹² In August 1931, the committee formally dismissed the manager and his assistant,¹¹³ provoking a bitter dispute between Glenmore creamery and the Irish Creamery Managers' Association.¹¹⁴ In Piltown, too, the manager was dismissed at a large, argumentative annual general meeting in May 1932 amidst rumours of pilfering or at least being too willing to offer credit.¹¹⁵

The problems posed by dishonest managers were well known, and they point to the broader problem of a cooperative structure that gave committees the responsibility for overseeing managers as their agents but forced them to rely on uncertain local leadership to exercise that power effectively.¹¹⁶ Pay was obviously an issue, since low pay could tempt managers to dishonesty.¹¹⁷ C. B. Riddall, then the assistant secretary of the IAOS, admitted in 1939 that the practice of taking "secret commissions" had been "rampant in the Irish creamery industry years ago and has not yet been entirely eradicated, though the higher rates

¹¹¹ NAI, 1088/457/9, Courtney, 21 April 1931.

¹¹² NAI, 1088/457/9, Mockler to Kennedy, 14 Aug. 1931.

¹¹³ NAI, 1088/457/9, Langford, 20 Aug. 1931.

¹¹⁴ NAI, 1088/457/9, Riddall, 16 and 31 March 1932.

¹¹⁵ NAI, 1088/780/5, Kennedy, 31 May 1932 and see Courtney, 22 Feb. 1932.

¹¹⁶ On rumours of dishonest managers, see NAI, 1088/98/1, Courtney to Secretary, 2 May 1913, and Secretary to Courtney, 3 May 1913.

¹¹⁷ NCA, FAC/6/1/1, IAOS Ulster Provisional Committee Report (Belfast, 1915), p. 9.

of salary now commanded by creamery managers in comparison with those paid to them years ago account for the improvement.”¹¹⁸ But there were deeper tensions too. Managers were interested in their careers rather than a particular creamery or the broader cooperative project. As the IAOS put it in 1925, “the scope for their co-operation is limited by the system which places a premium upon competitive salesmanship and rewards opportunism at the expense of co-operation.”¹¹⁹ Creamery minute books and correspondence are rife with battles over managers. At Muckalee in 1903, the manager “was ordered to lodge all cash received for goods” with the parish priest, and he was given strict instructions about not offering credit without authority from the committee.¹²⁰ Evidently this was not sufficient: just over a month later, he agreed to tender his resignation.¹²¹ A good manager, on the other hand, could make all the difference: in 1912, the Muckalee committee increased the manager’s salary to recognize how his “careful management” had led to increased turnover, the elimination of debts, and the improvement of machinery and buildings.¹²²

To some extent, the IAOS tried to provide quality control with respect to creamery managers, but they were hindered by a conflict of interest, namely their evident desire to find positions for managers who had fallen on evil days. In 1913 the IAOS recommended a “very unfortunate” man for the job of assistant manager at Glenmore, noting that he was “a conscientious, honest hard-working man and a teetotaller.”¹²³ The committee reluctantly complied, but some of them then used their influence in the town to prevent any lodging

¹¹⁸ NCA, FAC/1/2/5, C. B. Riddall to M. Digby, 26 July 1939.

¹¹⁹ NCA, FAC/4/1/3 Report of the IAOS (Dublin, 1925), Draft.

¹²⁰ GCKA, 355 Muckalee Minutes, 4 Aug. 1903.

¹²¹ GCKA, 355 Muckalee Minutes, Minutes, 11 Sept. 1903.

¹²² GCKA, 356 Muckalee Minutes, Minutes, 27 Feb. 1912.

¹²³ NAI, 1088/457/2, Secretary to Phelan, 19 March 1913.

being available for the man when he arrived, forcing the cancellation of the appointment.¹²⁴ A bad recommendation could have serious consequences. In May 1914, the IAOS suggested a manager for Barrowvale who had “rather suffered at the hands” of his former employers and who deserved “a new start in a new Creamery.”¹²⁵ This manager was a local Kilkenny man.¹²⁶ He was hired, but he struggled to produce high-quality butter and, by 1918, was casting about for better-paid positions.¹²⁷ Unwisely, the committee allowed him to conduct some private trading on the side, intensifying the principal agent problem by giving him yet another interest separate from the committee’s own. Then, in 1920, the disastrous truth emerged: this manager had been systematically stealing from the creamery and losing the money on horses – ultimately embezzling, according to the IAOS auditor, over £2,000 “by deliberately and consistently falsifying the accounts.”¹²⁸ The IAOS recognized internally that it had some responsibility for the debacle. It had “got him the job at Barrowvale & warned him to go straight,” then compounded the problem by failing to pick up on the theft during routine inspections.¹²⁹ This is the sort of thing that someone like Phelan tried to prevent by training committee members to supervise the books, engaging IAOS auditors, and enquiring regularly about best practices in organizing and running a creamery.

¹²⁴ NAI, 1088/457/2, Phelan to Anderson, 2 April 1913.

¹²⁵ NAI, 1088/98/2, Secretary to Loftus, 2 May 1914, and see Comerford to Fant, 8 April 1914 and 27 May 1914.

¹²⁶ NAI, 1088/98/9, Courtney to Fennelly, 12 June 1930.

¹²⁷ NAI, 1088/98/5, Comerford to Fant, 9 Feb. 1918, and Comerford to Murphy, 4 July 1918.

¹²⁸ NAI, 1088/98/6, P. J. Dunne to Anderson, 11 June 1920, and 1088/98/9, Moore to Anderson, 12 May 1920, and see Courtney to Fennelly, 12 June 1930

¹²⁹ NAI, 1088/98/6, Courtney minute, 14 May 1920, on Secretary to Courtney, 13 May 1920; see Fant to Secretary, 16 May 1920, and 1088/98/9, Courtney to Fennelly, 12 June 1930.

Cooperative creameries were imagined as exercises in practical democracy, but they were also meant to serve very specific economic and political goals. The Irish cooperative creamery system, despite rhetoric to the contrary, was built in a way that reinforced and, to some extent, reimaged social hierarchies, but in no way inverted them. Without authoritative leadership in the form of local landlords, priests, or the state, the system foundered on its own structural limitations. Irish cooperation was initially the brainchild of philanthropists who sought to stabilize rural society and provide an on-going role for the Anglo-Irish gentry. It then became a vehicle for the Irish Free State to stage economic intervention at one remove with the aim of stabilizing a major export industry. McLaughlin has noted some parallels with Bohemia and Eastern Europe, where landlords and politicians were also involved in setting up cooperatives, but he emphasizes that Ireland's top-down experience of creating cooperatives was fairly distinctive in the European context.¹³⁰ The rarity of state intervention should not be overstated: even in Denmark, the state provided indirect support to the dairy industry in the 19th century.¹³¹ Significantly, the state also played an important role in the creation of cooperatives across the British Empire in the twentieth century, with active, interventionist Co-operative Departments and Registrars seeking to organize peasant farmers into cooperatives in districts ranging from India to East and West Africa and beyond.¹³² Cooperatives were powerful precisely because they were both

¹³⁰ McLaughlin, "Competing forms of cooperation," pp. 98-9.

¹³¹ I. Henriksen, M. Lampe, and P. Sharp, "The strange birth of liberal Denmark: Danish trade protection and the growth of the dairy industry since the mid-nineteenth century," *Economic History Review* 65: 2 (2012): 770-88, pp. 786-7.

¹³² See C. F. Strickland, *Co-operation for Africa*, with an introduction by the Rt. Hon. the Lord Lugard (London, 1933), pp. xii-xiii; *Imperial Conference on Agricultural Co-operation* (London, 1938), pp. 192-3; M. Nicholson, *Co-operation in the Colonies* (Manchester, 1953);

democratic and highly structured, linking older social hierarchies to new patterns of governance and trade. In the consistent problems faced by farmers trying to supervise creamery managers without recourse to those older hierarchies, the conservative logic of the cooperative is illuminated. The Irish Free State's accession to the interwar world of state direction and economic planning was conditioned by the patterns it inherited from the British administration, particularly a reliance on paternalist semi-state organizations that promised, but always deferred, democratic empowerment.

A. Eckert, "Useful Instruments of Participation? Local Government and Cooperatives in Tanzania, 1940s to 1970s," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 40: 1 (2007): 97-118, p. 97.