Competing forms of cooperation? Land League, Land War and cooperation in Ireland, 1879 to 1914*

by Eoin McLaughlin

Abstract

Two distinct forms of cooperation emerged in response to structural changes in the agricultural sector of the Irish economy in the late nineteenth century: the Land League and the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society (IAOS). This article argues that the Land League fostered cooperation among tenants and agitated for government intervention to reduce rents and transfer landownership from landlords to tenants, whereas the IAOS encouraged the imitation of continental forms of cooperative agricultural enterprise. This article analyses the relationship between both forms of cooperation and finds that the Land League and subsequent Land War did not hinder the adoption of cooperation enterprise and were instead complementary to cooperative organization. However, the article argues that the IAOS cooperatives were ideologically motivated and misguided and that cooperative enterprises introduced offered no institutional advantages compared to incumbent institutions.

'We were told that Irishmen can conspire but cannot combine'.[1]

Two distinct forms of cooperation emerged in response to structural changes in the agricultural sector of the Irish economy in the late nineteenth century: the Land League, founded in Castlebar, Co. Mayo in 1879, and the cooperatives associated with the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society (IAOS), founded in 1894. These economic and social movements differed in their institutional structures and functions. Moreover, their elites represented opposed views of constitutional politics. The Land League fostered cooperation among tenants and agitated to reduce rents and transfer landownership from landlords to tenants. In contrast, the IAOS

* I wish to acknowledge the comments and criticisms of the late András Vári and of Nancy Berlage on earlier drafts of this essay. András was particular helpful, and it was he who encouraged the writing of this article for an edited collection which, due to his untimely death, sadly did not materialize. The draft benefited greatly from his attentive comments and suggestions and also from Nancy's editorial touch. In addition, I would like to acknowledge generous comments and support from Chris Colvin, Vincent Comerford, Sean Lucey, Paul Sharp, Niall Whelehan and participants at the Rural History 2010 Conference at the University of Sussex. I thank the Leverhulme Trust for funding this research under the project 'A messy divorce? Irish debt and default, 1891–1938'.

[1] Horace Punkett, *Ireland in the new century* (popular edition with epilogue, 1905), p. 186.

encouraged the imitation of continental forms of agricultural cooperative enterprise where individual producers cooperated to reduce costs of production and realize economies of scale.

This article posits the argument that the immediate response to structural changes in the agrarian economy was the formation of the Land League, which was intrinsically cooperative. A later response to these structural changes was the formation of cooperative enterprises by the IAOS. Cooperative enterprises associated with the IAOS were imitations of successful cooperative initiatives in Scandinavia and Continental Europe. However, indigenous manifestations of cooperation in Ireland in the guise of the Land League (1879–1882)[2] emerged contemporaneously to cooperative ventures in Scandinavia (e.g., 1880 in Sweden and 1882 in Denmark), and thus preceded attempts to imitate Scandinavian and continental European forms of cooperation in Ireland in the 1890s.

The central question that this article explores is how these different institutional forms of cooperation functioned in Ireland and, in particular, whether they competed with or complemented each other. Potentially there was a capacity for complementarity between both forms of cooperation. On the one hand, land reform, as agitated for by the Land League, could have created greater property rights and given landholders an incentive to participate in cooperative enterprises. Cooperative enterprises could have made small landholdings economically viable by reducing transaction costs and giving individuals access to economies of scale and scope. On the other hand, the pre-existence of alternative institutional forms of cooperation could have undermined the adoption of novel cooperative institutions that espoused alternative functions. For example, it may have created path-dependencies whereby tenant farmers focused on forms of cooperation that lobbied for government intervention and were blinded to other strategies such as developing alternative cooperative functions that emphasized productivity increases.

In a recent study of the determinants of cooperation in Ireland, O'Rourke argued that agrarian outrages in the early 1880s, associated with the Land League and corresponding Land War, were not conducive to the spread of dairy cooperation outside of Ulster in the north of the island. He concluded that the 'suspicion between Catholics and Protestants, and tenants and landlords, spilled over into Nationalist suspicion of the cooperative movement and hindered its spread, despite the efforts of the IAOS to remain apolitical'.[3] Conversely, Horace Plunkett (1854–1932), agricultural reformer and unionist member of parliament (1892–1900) and a divisive political figure,[4] argued, in *Ireland in the new century,* that 'the process of [cooperative] organization was also, to some extent, facilitated by the insight the people have been given by the Land League into the power of combination, and by the education they had received in the conduct of meetings'.[5] In this article, these contrasting views are compared. It is concluded that the Land League and subsequent land war did not hinder the adoption of cooperative enterprises; in fact the Land League can be seen to be complementary to cooperative organization. However, it is also argued that the IAOS was ideologically motivated

[2] R. V. Comerford, 'Land League', in S. J. Connolly (ed.), *The Oxford companion to Irish History* (2007), pp. 00–00.

[3] Kevin H. O'Rourke, 'Culture, conflict and cooperation: Irish dairying before the Great War', in *Economic J.*, 117 (2007), p. 1375.

[4] *ODNB*, 'Plunkett, Sir Horace Curzon (1854–1932)'.

[5] Although, he believed people had been too dependent on a central authority: Plunkett, *Ireland in the new century,* pp. 186–7.

and that the cooperatives it introduced offered no institutional advantages compared to those that already existed as private enterprises.

The article proceeds as follows. Sections I and II outline the broad trends in the Irish agricultural sector from 1850 to 1877. Section III introduces the Land War and Land League and presents the argument that the Land League was a cooperative institution. Section IV discusses agricultural cooperation in Ireland. Section V returns to the question of whether the Land League and the IAOS were competitors or complements.

I

The Great Irish Famine of the 1840s was the pivotal moment in Irish economic and social history.[6] It heralded changes in socio-economic relationships and the structure of the Irish economy. Arguably, some of these changes were visible in the pre-Famine period,[7] but they became more pronounced post-Famine. The Famine resulted in an immediate decrease in the population of Ireland, the emergence of path-dependent emigration patterns and shifts from tillage to pasture. During the 1870s, agricultural conditions in Ireland were gradually improving and landlord-tenant relations were in all likelihood not as strained as traditionally portrayed. Then, a severe recession upset a delicate equilibrium and instigated structural change. Essentially the forms of cooperation under review here can be seen as responses to that structural change.

The following section gives a brief outline of developments in Irish agriculture in the period from 1850 to 1877. During these years, and for the majority of the period covered in this article, Irish land was held by a small number of landlords (there were 32,614 owners of more than one acre in 1875–6) who in turn rented or leased their land to tenant farmers (there were 533,151 occupied landholdings in 1876).[8] Land transfers began *en masse* in 1903 and by 1914 62.6 per cent of farmers were owner-occupiers.[9]

[6] Kevin O'Rourke, 'Did the Great Irish Famine matter?', in *JEcH 51* (1991), pp. 1–22.

[7] Raymond D. Crotty, *Irish agricultural production: its volume and structure* (1966).

[8] *Return of owners of land of one acre and upwards in counties, cities and towns in Ireland* [C. 1492], H.C. 1876, lxxx, 61 and *Agricultural Statistics of Ireland* [C. 1749], H.C. 1877, lxxxv, 529. The existing historiography is somewhat divided on the issue regarding landlord-tenant relations and their implications for the agricultural sector. The traditional view presented a 'heroes and villains' scenario, with tenants portrayed as the protagonists fighting rapacious landlords, e.g. Charles Stewart Parnell, 'The Irish Land Question' in *North American Rev.* 130 (1880), pp. 388–406. (It has been suggested that this article may have been written by Parnell's sister: Paul Bew, *Land and the national question in Ireland, 1858–82* (1978), p. 82.) Subsequently, a series of revisionist interpretations of landlord-tenant relations argued that the relationship between landlords and tenants was not as malevolent as popularly supposed: Crotty, *Irish Agricultural production*; James S. Donnelly Jr, *The land and the people of nineteenth-century Cork: The rural economy and the land question* (1975); Barbara Lewis Solow, *The land question and the Irish economy, 1870–1903* (1971); and W. E. Vaughan, *Landlords and tenants in mid-Victorian Ireland* (1994). This view has in turn has been followed by a counter-revision: Theodore Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800: conflict and conformity* (sec. edn, 1999), Michael Turner, *After the Famine: Irish agriculture, 1850–1914* (1996). More recently, however, a consensus has emerged which discards the notion of predatory landlords: Donnacha Seán Lucey, *Land, popular politics and agrarian violence in Ireland: the case of Kerry, 1872–86* (2011), p. 2.

[9] *Agricultural Statistics of Ireland; with Detailed Report for 1914*, H.C. 1916 [Cd. 8266]

The main demand of the Land League was primarily a reduction in rent and increases in security of tenure (a reduction in evictions), with the transfer of landownership from landlords to tenants a longer-term goal. Thus, it is important to analyse a number of critical issues: tenant security, rent, farm income and its distribution and the overall relationship between farm income and rent. However, landlord-tenant relations do not exist in a vacuum and so it is also important to explore broader issues in the agricultural structure such as the concentration of landownership, distribution of land, land usage and price movements.

A key issue is the security of tenant farmers in the post-Famine period against arbitrary evictions. Arguably, tenant farmers were relatively secure on their land provided they honoured contractual agreements – namely, they paid their rents. During the period 1850–76 evictions and eviction rates per farm were relatively low. There was a trend of decreasing eviction rates from peaks during the Famine period. Evictions and the eviction rate rose during the agricultural depression of 1859–64, but did not reach the heights of those recorded during the Famine. In the period 1860–77 the mean annual eviction rate was 15 per 10,000 occupied landholdings,[10] suggesting that evictions were not widespread. Admittedly, these figures may not give us an exact indication of the number of threats of eviction nor do they take the issue of re-admissions into account.[11]

Given that rent reduction was a central demand of the Land League, it would be informative to have an understanding of rent trends relative to farm income and costs. Unfortunately there is no national aggregate (or disaggregate) rental index for Ireland in the nineteenth century; however, available evidence from estate records suggests that rent levels were low.[12] While there are no indicators of agricultural income either, the information contained in agricultural price levels acts as a proxy indicating the return to agricultural enterprise. The period 1850 to 1877 was a period of rising prices, albeit one interrupted by severe downturn in the period 1859–64.[13] Prices for both tillage products and pastoral goods rose considerably in the period, although the relative price of tillage to pastoral goods continually shifted in favour of pastoral products.[14] Importantly, it appears as though prices rose faster than rents.[15] However, it is unclear what the net income of tenant farmers was in this period. Coincidently, there appears to be a negative correlation between changes in price levels and changes in eviction rates: when prices went up, evictions went down, and vice versa.[16]

[10] The highest number of annual evictions taking place in 1864 with 36 evictions per 10,000 occupied landholdings, the lowest number of annual evictions took place in 1869 with seven evictions per 10,000 occupied landholdings. See *Agricultural Statistics of Ireland* and *Return, by provinces and counties (compiled from returns made to the Inspector General, Royal Irish Constabulary), of cases of evictions which have come to the knowledge of the constabulary in each of the years from 1849 to 1880, inclusive,* H.C. 1881 (185), lxxvii, 725.

[11] The interpretation of the eviction figures has been nuanced by consideration of the issue of re-admissions. See Donnelly, *Cork*, and Vaughan, *Landlords and tenants*.

[12] Solow, *Land question*; Donnelly, *Cork*; and Vaughan, *Landlords and tenants*.

[13] James Donnelly, 'The Irish agricultural depression of 1859–64', *Irish Economic and Social Hist.* 3 (1976), pp. 33–54.

[14] Liam Kennedy and Peter M. Solar, *Irish agriculture: a price history* (2007).

[15] Cormac Ó Gráda, *A new economic history of Ireland* (1994), p. 256.

[16] Eviction Statistics; Kennedy and Solar, *Irish agriculture*.

TABLE 1. Livestock per landholding over one acre in Ireland (32 counties), 1871

	Total	*Mean*	*Standard deviation*
Horses	538,095	1.11	0.58
Cattle	3,976,372	7.77	2.66
Milch cows	1,545,662	2.84	1.40
Sheep	4,233,435	8.28	6.13
Pigs	1,621,423	3.20	1.58
Poultry	11,717,183	22.99	5.20

Source: 1871 Census of Ireland.

It is useful to gain an appreciation of how landownership was distributed in post-Famine Ireland as it gives an indication of the incidence of landlord-tenant interaction. Landownership was concentrated among a small proportion of the population; in 1875–6 the percentage ratio of landowners to landholdings[17] was 6.1 per cent.[18] There was, however, regional variance and in the west the percentage ratio was lower, 2.4 per cent; thus there was a lower proportion of landowners to tenants and this may have had implications for social and economic interactions between landowner and tenant. The overwhelming majority of farmers were tenants and thus paid rent. Urban dwellers were also tenants and rent payers.[19]

In terms of land distribution, the majority of the agricultural community had holdings of under 15 acres (*c.*6 hectares).[20] The land itself was heavily grazed, with all areas of the island participating in a pastoral economy,[21] although some areas with greater intensity than others. A notable feature of the Irish agrarian economy was its early specialization in pastoral products, which can be seen in the livestock figures in Table 1. The agricultural sector of the economy was export orientated and the main export markets were the expanding British cities.

Contemporaries perceived that the north of Ireland – the province of Ulster – was the most progressive agricultural area. They explained this in terms of customary rights, which conceded security to the tenant.[22] A desire to emulate Ulster's success inspired modest land

[17] There are two historical series that represent farms in Ireland – 'landholdings' and 'occupied landholdings'. The landholdings series begins earlier and shows a larger number of landholdings compared to the occupied landholdings series. However, in 1914 it was discovered that the landholdings series was flawed and overestimated the number of farms. In particular, the number of small farms was overestimated and the number of large farms underestimated. The terms 'landholding', 'occupied landholding', and 'farm' have been used interchangeably in this article: any statistical reference using these terms refers to the occupied landholdings series.

[18] *Return of Owners* (1876), 61 and *Agricultural Statistics of Ireland* [C. 1749], H.C. 1877, lxxxv, 529.

[19] The census definition of 'urban' was any town with a population over 1500 at a census date, the remainder of the population being considered rural.

[20] The proportion of farms, of over one acre and under 15 acres, in 1861 and 1871 was 46% and 44%, respectively. *The agricultural statistics of Ireland ... 1861* [3156], H.C. 1863, lxix, 547; *The agricultural statistics of Ireland ... 1871* [C. 762], H.C. 1873, lxix, 375.

[21] In 1871 the percentage ratio of pasture to tillage was 184% across all counties, with a standard deviation of 81%: *The agricultural statistics of Ireland ... 1871* [C. 762], H.C. 1873, lxix, 375.

[22] The north was also the most heavily urbanized and industrialized region of the island – although this was modest by British and European standards – and thus had a greater demand for agricultural output.

reforms that were implemented throughout the island following the 1870 Land Act, which attempted to extend throughout the island the rights associated with the 'Ulster Custom' and provide compensation for improvements and damage.[23] However, recent scholarship has challenged the view of Ulster as unique and instead highlights the complexity of the northern agricultural sector.[24] In addition, scholars have pointed to similar customs found in other parts of the island, which did not resolve landlord-tenant problems.[25] Moreover, contemporary prosperity in the north seems to be related to a flax boom in the 1860s caused by the 'cotton famine' induced by the American Civil War (1861–5).[26] Prices for flax rose in this period, and tonnage output also increased. Importantly, flax was predominantly an Ulster crop; for example, in 1864, 84 per cent of the total flax acreage on the island was found in Ulster.[27]

II

The crisis that affected Ireland in the late 1870s was both ecological and economic in origin. Untimely and poor weather in 1877 and 1878 led to a series of bad harvests.[28] This, combined with the 'grain invasion'[29] – i.e., the opening of New World granaries – led to a decrease in both pastoral (–18.2 per cent) and tillage (–12.5 per cent) prices in the years 1876–79.[30] The impact of both events meant that Irish agricultural producers experienced a reduction in farm income.

The nominal value of agricultural output fell from £48.3 million, approximately valued at €4.2 billion in current monetary value (hereafter current value is given in parentheses) in 1876 to £37.2 million (€3.5 billion) in 1879.[31] There are different interpretations of the magnitude of the impact of events when nominal values are converted to real values. According to Cullen the output of the main agricultural crops, measured in fixed prices, fell from £35 million (€3 billion), in 1876 to £22.7 million (€2.1 billion) in 1879, a 35 per cent decrease.[32] In contrast,

[23] Fair rent (a rent lower than the open market rate); fixity of tenure (a tenant could not be arbitrarily evicted if rents paid – i.e. perpetual lease); free sale (a tenant could sell his interest when a tenancy changed hands). Kennedy and Solar note that: 'These extra-legal rights varied from estate to estate, but often carried the presumption that a sitting tenant could expect renewal of a lease, once it had expired; that rents would be "fair", meaning essentially lower than the competitive or rack-rent; and that on vacating a holding he or she had the right to sell the value of the unexpired lease to the incoming tenant. The last could be valuable, amounting on some farms to ten times or more the annual rent paid to the landlord, suggesting that *actual* rents were well below the *competitive* rent level'. L. Kennedy and P. Solar, 'The rural economy', in Liam Kennedy and Philip Ollerenshaw (eds), *Ulster since 1600: politics, economy and society* (2011), p. 174.

[24] Frank Thompson, *The end of Liberal Ulster: land agitation and land reform, 1868–1886* (2001).

[25] Paul Bew and Frank Wright, 'The agrarian opposition in Ulster politics, 1848–87', in Samuel Clark and James S. Donnelly Jr (eds), *Irish Peasants: Violence and political unrest, 1780–1914* (1983), p. 193; Cormac Ó Gráda, 'Irish agriculture after the Land War' in Stanley Engerman and Jacob Metzer (eds.), *Land rights, ethno-nationality and sovereignty in history* (2004), p. 134.

[26] Philip Ollerenshaw, 'Industry, 1820–1914', in Liam Kennedy and Philip Ollerenshaw (eds), *An economic history of Ulster, 1820–1939* (1985), pp. 76–8.

[27] *Agricultural Statistics of Ireland ... 1864* [3456], H.C. 1865, lv, 125.

[28] Solow, *Land question,* p. 121.

[29] Kevin O'Rourke, 'The European grain invasion, 1870–1913' in *JEcH* 57 (1997), pp. 775–801.

[30] Kennedy and Solar, *Irish agriculture*

[31] Turner, *After the Famine,* p. 108.

[32] L. M. Cullen, *An economic history of Ireland since 1660* (1972), p. 148.

Turner's real volume of agricultural output index shows a decline of 23 per cent over the same period.[33] Despite their divergence, both indices show a changing agricultural structure and a fall in prices; of particular note is the steep decline in pastoral prices, as pastoral goods comprised 75 per cent and 78 per cent of total agricultural output value in 1876 and 1879 respectively in Turner's output estimations.[34] Within the pastoral sector, the largest components were livestock and dairy; beef prices fell by 8 per cent, but more importantly, live cattle prices fell in the region of 14 to 18 per cent and dairy prices fell by approximately 20 per cent.[35]

The economic problems facing Irish agriculture in the late 1870s were common across Europe. There was an increase in grain exports from new world granaries, which affected agricultural producers in Europe. A number of European countries responded by placing tariffs on grain imports, notably France and Germany.[36] Other countries continued free trade policies. Of these, the two most important from a comparative perspective were the UK (Great Britain and Ireland, 1800–1921) and Denmark.[37]

The UK had implemented a free trade policy in agricultural produce following the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. The nation had specialized in industrial production in the nineteenth century and was increasingly reliant on foreign imports for its food supplies. The immediate beneficiaries of a free trade policy in the UK were the inhabitants of urban centres who required cheap supplies of food. Ireland, as a constituent member of the UK, also followed this free trade policy. Some voiced objections to free trade in Ireland and called for tariffs,[38] but such requests went unheeded as they went against the economic interests of the UK as a whole.

Denmark also continued a free trade policy in the wake of the grain invasion and implemented productive policies in its agricultural sector.[39] Denmark had previously been a grain exporter to the UK but shifted into other areas of agricultural production. The Danes adopted new technologies, such as the centrifugal separator, and developed new methodologies, including cooperation, in agricultural production.[40] The Danes specialized in cooperative creameries through which they exported high-quality standardized butter and also promoted cooperative pig curing stations and exported bacon of a high quality. Danish cooperative marketing and organization also developed in the 1880s as a response to international competition.[41]

[33] Turner, *After the Famine*, p. 119.

[34] Ibid., p. 108.

[35] Kennedy and Solar, *Irish agriculture*.

[36] Cullen, *Economic history of Ireland*, p. 148.

[37] For wider discussion see Niek Koning, *The failure of agrarian capitalism. Agrarian problems in the UK, Germany, the Netherlands and the USA, 1846–1919* (1994).

[38] For example, there were numerous references to protection of both industry and agriculture in the *Report from the Select Committee on Industries (Ireland); together with the proceedings of the committee, minutes of evidence, and appendix*, H.C. 1884–85, (288), ix, 1.

[39] Although protectionist trade policies were implemented in Denmark prior to this period in relation to cheese, which Henriksen *et al.* argue provided the platform for the Danish shift to dairy farming: 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', *EcHR* 65 (2012), pp. 770–88.

[40] I. Henriksen, M. Lampe and P. Sharp, 'The role of technology and institutions for growth: Danish Creameries in the late nineteenth century.' *European Rev. Economic Hist.* 15 (2011), pp. 475–93.

[41] C. R. Fay, *Cooperation at home and abroad* (third edn, 1925), and Johnston Birchall, *The international cooperative movement* (1997).

The significance of both British and Danish actions was that Irish agricultural producers did not have the luxury of agricultural protection, while at the same time they were faced with a more productive competitor in their traditional export markets. It must be stressed that Irish agriculture did receive some non-tariff protection in the form of infectious disease control, something that hindered the importation of livestock from countries outside the UK.[42] Thus, Irish livestock exports to Britain remained relatively constant over the period and had a dominant share of British livestock imports.[43]

The impact of and response to the crisis in the late 1870s was not immediate. There was an increase in the number of people receiving indoor (183,979 to 368,096) and outdoor (66,116 to 181,778) poor relief from 1876 to 1880.[44] Their numbers peaked at 363,844 indoor and 226,005 outdoor in 1881.[45] There was an increase in private charity to alleviate distress. Emigration, which had been low in the mid-1870s, increased dramatically.[46] Emigration continued to remain relatively high until the early-1890s. Evictions also increased in the period 1877 to 1882. The eviction rate rose from 9 per 10,000 farms in 1877 to 18 per 10,000 farms in 1878. This rate steadily increased and peaked at 99 per 10,000 farms in 1882. The increase in the eviction rate was partly due to changes in economic conditions that made it difficult for tenants to meet their obligations; it also reflected the response of landlords to the tenant agitation, which we discuss below.

Conditions in the west of the island were even worse as the population there relied on potatoes, which were adversely affected by weather conditions.[47] The adverse situation was compounded by the fact that the proportion of cultivatable land was lower in the west than elsewhere on the island.[48] Perhaps more important was the loss of income experienced by farming households caused by a decline in the demand for seasonal labour in Britain. Inhabitants from the west of Ireland had migrated on an annual basis to Britain to work as agricultural and factory labourers.[49] There were a greater proportion of marginal farms in the west than in other areas of the island; 82 per cent of farms were under 30 acres (12 ha.). Therefore, any income loss would have had a detrimental effect on the people. Conditions in Mayo led many landlords to offer sizeable rent abatements; however, given the small portion

[42] Contagious Disease (Animals) Act, 1869 (32 & 33 Vict.), c. 70.

[43] R. Perren, 'The North American beef and cattle trade with Great Britain, 1870–1914', *EcHR* 24 (1971), pp. 430–44

[44] Poor relief can be viewed as proto-social welfare. Indoor relief meant that people received aid at institutions, outdoor relief was aid given outside the institution. Indoor relief required the recipient to enter an institution whereas outdoor relief had no such stipulations.

[45] 'Aggregate number relieved, continuously or successively, during the year', *Thom's Directory,* 1888, p. 662.

[46] Increasing from 9.7 emigrants per 1000 population in 1876 to 17.6 emigrants per 1000 population in 1880.

[47] For example, in 1871 the mean percentage of cultivable land under potato was 19% at a national level, but the mean percentage of cultivatable land under potato crop was 27% in Connaught and 33% in Mayo: *Agricultural Statistics of Ireland ... 1871*.

[48] The mean proportion of cultivatable land was 83% across the island, with a standard deviation of 10%. In Connaught the figures were 73% and 11% respectively.

[49] Annual returns of the number of seasonal migrants began post-hoc in 1880 and therefore do not give us a good indication of the relative decline in the number of seasonal migrants. However, the information from the annual returns shows us that almost all of the seasonal migrants came from the west of the island, indicating that a decline in seasonal migration would have the most adverse effect there: Cormac Ó Gráda, 'Seasonal migration and post-Famine adjustment in the west of Ireland', in *Studia Hibernica*, 13 (1973), pp. 48–76.

that rents contributed to total expenditure, these were deemed insufficient in the eyes of the agricultural community.[50]

The response to events in Ireland came in the form of social agitation which resulted in a 'Land War' (discussed below). Subsequent legislation was part of a deliberate government policy to pacify social agitation.

III

The Land War was a period of tenant-landlord conflict in Ireland.[51] It typically refers to the years 1879 to 1882, though it may be said that this was one of a number of distinct phases in a larger land war that included the years 1886–91, 1906–1909, and some intermittent outbreaks of agrarian unrest until 1923.[52] The focus here is on the formal organizational structure of the first and 'main'[53] phase (1879–81) of the Land War, the Land League, and the *modus operandi* adopted in the first and second phase (1879–81 and 1886–91). These periods involved the active cooperation of individual economic agents. The second phase, known as the Plan of Campaign (1886–91),[54] is particularly worthy of note as it coincided with initial efforts to establish continental-style cooperatives in Ireland. Still, the Plan of Campaign was implemented on specific estates in the south and west of the island; therefore, it did not have the same scope as the agitation of 1879–82.

Politically, the period from 1878 is also known as the 'New Departure',[55] when there was an alignment of constitutional nationalism and Fenianism, republican separatism that advocated the use of physical force. Land reform became associated with the national question. These years saw the Land League play a significant role in Irish political history and witnessed the growth in support for the Irish Home Rule party, subsequently named the Irish Parliamentary Party. Charles Stewart Parnell (1846–91), a leading nationalist politician, leader of the Land League and himself a landlord, capitalized on agrarian discontent as well as electoral reforms that increased the franchise. Thus, in much of the existing historiography, land and nationalist politics are intrinsically linked.

(a) Land League

The incidence of crises in the late 1870s differed across the island. The protests spread as other sectors of the economy were adversely affected by bad weather conditions. Economic interests coincided and colluded to make the Land League economically and politically effective.[56] The economic conditions were worse in the western districts.

The first Land League meeting took place in 1879 in County Mayo (in the west of Ireland).

[50] Donald E. Jordan, *Land and popular politics in Ireland: county Mayo from the Plantation to the Land War* (1994), p. 208.

[51] The usage of the term 'war' is hyperbolic as there was no war *per se*, but it has become a convention to describe the conflict between landlords and tenants as a 'land war'.

[52] Comerford, 'Land War'.

[53] The first phase of the land war, from 1879 to 1881, is described as the 'main' phase in Comerford, 'Land League'.

[54] James Loughlin, 'Plan of Campaign', in Connolly (ed.), *Oxford Companion*.

[55] James Loughlin, 'New Departure', in Connolly (ed.), *Oxford Companion*.

[56] Cullen, *Economic History of Ireland*, p. 149.

Fenian activists and local politicians became heavily involved in the agitation: they in turn influenced its direction. The Fenian activists were interested in land agitation as a platform for a nationalist movement.[57] Within five months of the first meeting, a National Land League was established. It remained in existence until it was declared illegal in 1881. A Ladies Land League was established after the Land League was declared illegal, but its activities wound up in 1882.[58]

The Land League was a combination of tenant farmers and urban interest groups. In addition, a range of political figures, from Fenians to constitutionalists, together with the clergy, were broadly sympathetic towards the Land League. The participants had a common goal – to reduce rents.[59] They viewed rents as a cost in agricultural production and believed that rent reductions would reduce their costs, increase the net income of tenant farmers and thus insulate them from falling agricultural prices. Urban interest groups were supportive of this movement as income increases would have enabled tenant farmers to repay debts and maintain consumption patterns. The urban argument was supported by Parnell, who argued that reducing rents and transferring landownership to tenants would increase 'the buying power of the agricultural classes, who form nearly two thirds of the population'.[60] Landlords, as a group, would have been adversely affected if these policies had implemented.

The burden of rent relative to agricultural income or agricultural costs is unclear due to the paucity of evidence. A potential indicator of the rent burden comes late in the period, *c.*1893, from household budgets in the congested districts, relatively poorer areas in the west of Ireland. The burden of higher levels of rent, assuming other items of the household budget remained constant, at 25, 50 and 100 per cent increases over the 1893 level, have been estimated in Table 2 to give an indication of what higher rent levels in previous periods would have been relative to household costs. This crude exercise illustrates that rent relative to household costs varied depending on various factors. The highest proportion of rent to total costs occurred in what was labelled a household in 'ordinary circumstances,' which derived its income solely from agriculture. Still, these proportions varied across households. On the other side, the costs of obtaining rent reductions involved the possibility of eviction, loss of income and possibly payment to the Land League; however, the more people that participated in the action, the lower the costs to the individual. Reduction or elimination of rent would increase the income of tenant farmers, but whether the size of the increase, vis-à-vis the cost of obtaining it, warranted the actions involved in obtaining rent reductions, discussed below, is debatable.

The Land League operated as a decentralized federated body. Michael Davitt (1846–1906), a founding member of the Land League in Mayo and a key figure in Irish nationalist politics, estimated that there were around 2000 branches throughout the island but that only 1000 were in 'continuous active existence'.[61] Davitt also claimed that the Land League had 'half a million members in Ireland, branches in every town and village, and financial resources that reached a sum of £250,000 before the organisation was three years old'.[62] By way of comparison, this

[57] Jordan, *Land and popular politics*, pp. 211–12.

[58] Caitriona Clear, 'Ladies' Land League', in Connolly (ed.), *Oxford Companion*.

[59] It is unclear what the proportion of rents to total costs were. Stylized household budgets from the 1890s suggest that the proportion of rent to household cost varied depending on the location.

[60] Parnell, 'The Irish Land Question', p. 395.

[61] Michael Davitt, *The speech delivered by Michael Davitt in defence of the Land League* (London, 1890, carefully revised edn), pp. 289–90.

[62] Ibid., p. 291.

TABLE 2. Rent as a percentage of estimated expenditure in Congested District Board households, *c.*1893

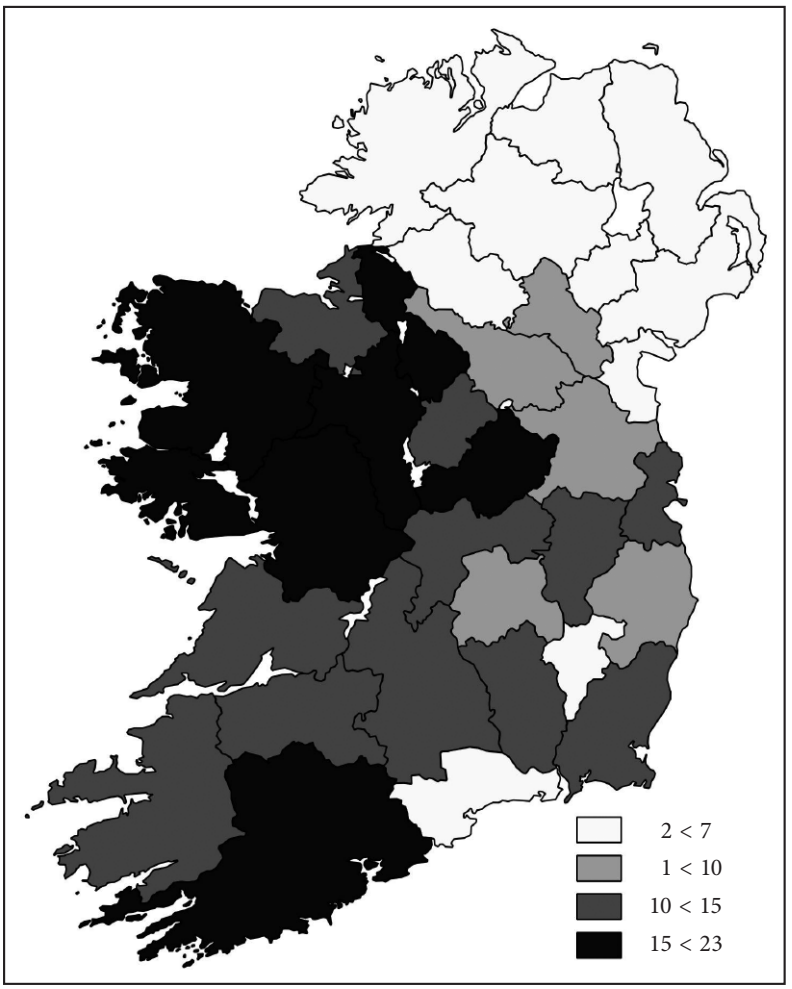
Type of household	*c.1893 rent* I	*1893 rent plus 25%* II	*1893 rent plus 50%* III	*1893 rent plus 100%* IV
1. Good circumstances being derived from agriculture and fishing	10.78	13.12	15.35	19.46
2. Very poor circumstances agriculture and fishing	13.70	16.56	19.23	24.10
3. Family in ordinary circumstances from agriculture, fishing and home industries	6.57	8.08	9.54	12.33
4. Family in ordinary circumstances – agriculture, migratory labour, and home industries	3.45	4.27	5.08	6.66
5. Ordinary circumstances – agriculture and earnings as migratory labourers	13.06	15.35	17.38	21.36
6. poor circumstances – agriculture and earnings as migratory labourers	5.74	6.69	7.53	9.33
7. Ordinary circumstances – agriculture and home industries	6.70	8.24	9.73	12.57
8. Ordinary circumstances – agriculture and home industries	7.46	9.16	10.79	13.89
9. Ordinary circumstances – agriculture and home industries	7.98	9.79	11.52	14.79
10. Ordinary circumstances – agriculture and home industries	8.77	10.73	12.60	16.13
11. Receipts and expenditure of a family in ordinary circumstances, the receipts being derived altogether from agriculture	24.03	28.34	32.18	38.75
12. Poorest possible circumstances – agriculture and labour in the locality	8.73	10.68	12.55	16.06

Note: the Congested Districts Boards inspectors estimated household budgets in the baseline reports, and the household budgets in the appendix in the first report are also estimates.
Source: Appendix in *First annual report of the Congested Districts Board for Ireland*, pp. 32–37. [C. 6908], H.C. 1893–94, lxxi, 525.

constituted more than the total number of cooperatives, the total number of members, and the amount of subscriptions and donations,[63] recorded by the central cooperative agency, the IAOS, in the years 1894 to 1914. Like the IAOS, the League was not financially self-sustaining.[64] Although required to make subscriptions to the League, many members did not pay them,

[63] Individual cooperatives were required to pay subscriptions to the IAOS, but these were not forthcoming. However, individual members did contribute to their local cooperative when purchasing shares.

[64] R. V. Comerford, 'The land war and the politics of distress, 1877–82', in W. E. Vaughan (ed.) *A new history of Ireland,* VI*: Ireland under the Union,* ii*, 1870–1921* (1996), p. 36.



MAP 1. Land League meetings per 10,000 occupied farms, 1880

Source: *Land League meetings and Agrarian Crime (Ireland)*, H.C. (5), 1881.

and much of the League's funds were raised instead in the United States by Charles Stewart Parnell.[65] The IAOS also attempted to harness funds through this route but R. A. Anderson's sojourn in the United States only reaped £1,500.[66]

The Land League was not solely a farmers' movement; rather its membership covered a broad spectrum of rural society. In the initial Land War, large and small farmers were equally active, with large farmers over-represented relative to their share of the tenant population; shopkeepers, traders and artisans in towns were also over-represented.[67] What made the League effective was the common goal of all its participants, despite their economic differences.

While a picture of the regional distribution of Land League branches would enhance our understanding, there is no complete published list of them. Nevertheless, the number of Land

[65] Ibid., pp. 36–43.

[66] R. A. Anderson, *With Plunkett in Ireland: the co-op organisers story* (1983), p. 145.

[67] Samuel Clark, *Social origins of the Irish land war* (1979), p. 260.

League meetings provides an indication of Land League activity. Meetings were 'one of the League's principal methods of operation'; moreover, meetings often reflected the establishment of new branches.[68] Therefore the incidence of Land League meetings in 1880, shown in Map 1 relative to occupied landholdings, seems to be an adequate indicator of Land League activity.[69] As can be seen in Map 1 there were distinct regional patterns in Land League activity, with less activity present in the industrial north east and the more agricultural counties in outer Ulster (discussed below).[70]

The *modus operandi* of the Land League was to use combined rent strikes and social ostracism, commonly known as 'boycotts' after a *cause célèbre* involving Captain Boycott, to attain its goal of rent reduction.[71] Enforcement of Land League objectives was achieved through informal methods such as violence, intimidation and boycotting. Michael Davitt stated in his speech in defence of the Land League that contrary to the views of *The Times*,[72] the Land League did not advocate crime. Davitt claimed: 'Nearly all our witnesses have testified – those at least who gave evidence as to speeches – that it invariably happened that the chairman or some speaker at every Land League meeting denounced outrage more or less, and warned the people against committing crime'.[73] However, in the years 1879 and 1880, there was a strong positive correlation between Land League meetings and agrarian crime at the county level (0.75 and 0.73). Agrarian crime was broadly defined and there were a few incidents of murder or manslaughter, although these were a tiny proportion of the total figures.[74] The majority of recorded incidents were reports of threatening letters.[75]

The Land League did not rely solely on negative sanctions to entice member support. There were a number of positive benefits; for example, the Land League provided legal support in the event of eviction and non-monetary support such as clothing, food and seed to members.[76] Given the fact that members did not actively contribute subscriptions and the Land League was financed by donations from abroad, this can be seen as a net gain to members.

The Land League was successful in that it represented the convergence of numerous interest groups in rural society. It was also helped by the fact that Land League agitation coincided with an electoral cycle – a national parliamentary election was held in 1880. The subsequent government response was to introduce a rent control act which reduced rents on average by

[68] Comerford, 'The land war and the politics of distress', p. 44.

[69] *Return showing for each month of the years 1879 and 1880, the number of Land League meetings held and agrarian crimes reported to the Inspector General of the Royal Irish Constabulary in each county throughout Ireland*, H.C. 1881, (5), lxxvii, 793.

[70] The intervals in the maps displayed in the article used nested means to define intervals. For a discussion of the methodology, see Ian N. Gregory and Paul S. Ell, *Historical GIS* (2007), pp. 94–100.

[71] These methods were also used in other Land War phases.

[72] *The Times* of London had given antipathetic coverage to the activities of the Land League.

[73] Davitt, *Speech*, p. 243.

[74] Murder and manslaughter comprised 0.60, 0.50, and 0.79% of agrarian outrages in 1880, 1881 and 1882 respectively: *Return, by provinces, of agrarian offences throughout Ireland reported to the Inspector General of the Royal Irish Constabulary between 1 January 1880 and 31 December 1880*, H.C., 1881 (13); *Return of the number of agrarian offences in each county in Ireland reported to the constabulary office in each month of the year 1881*, H.C. 1882, (8); *Return by provinces, of agrarian offences throughout Ireland reported to the Inspector General of the Royal Irish Constabulary between 1 January 1882 and 31 December 1882*, H.C. 1883, (12).

[75] Threatening letters comprised 52, 49, and 58 per cent of agrarian outrages in 1880, 1881 and 1882 respectively: Ibid.

[76] Clark, *Social origins,* pp. 316–17.

20 per cent, and another act paid off arrears accumulated by tenants in rent strikes.[77] The 1881 Land Act granted the three Fs, fixity of tenure (security from eviction provided rents were paid); free sale (the right to sell interest in a holding); and fair rent. To achieve these, the government established a Land Commission to mediate in landlord-tenant contractual disputes. The act aimed to grant the tenants a 'fair rent', but the policy seems to have been to reduce rents regardless of their level. Subsequent legislation was specifically designed to encourage the greater transfer of ownership from landlords to their tenants. By 1903 the Land Commission had been transformed into an institution that primarily supervised the sale of land.[78]

The *modus operandi* used by the Land League in various phases of the Land War was similar to the cooperative methodology used in Denmark in that economic agents cooperated with one another to attain economic goals and reduce costs and thereby increase income; although the Land League's strategies also included boycotting and elements of traditional agrarian violence. In Denmark cooperative production developed on a large scale. This involved the combination of numerous economic agents to reduce transaction costs in agricultural production. The Irish response also encompassed combination and cooperation of numerous economic agents, but with the intention of reducing rents and enabling tenants to acquire their own landholding. The attraction of the Land League to many in Irish society was that it promised a reduction in rents and aimed to achieve owner occupancy of farms. The supporters of the Land League, it seems, believed that the payment of rent was the root cause of their problems.

Why was the Land League fixated on costs and not on ways of improving productivity? In other words, why was the focus on the distribution of output rather than on increasing output? Land reform in the guise of landownership transfer from landlords to tenants occurred at different times in some continental countries when compared to Ireland; for example, land reform took place much earlier in Denmark.[79] The lack of land reform may explain why cooperation took the forms it did in Ireland. If land reform had taken place earlier in Ireland, this would mean that tenants, as owner-occupiers, would have had no landlords to blame for their plight. Instead they would have had to focus their efforts on dealing with their immediate circumstances as rent would no longer have been a social grievance. Land reform would also have created property rights and given owner-occupiers a vested interest in partaking in productive reforms that would maximize returns from their property.

(b) Agrarian agitation in Ulster

As was shown in Map 1, Ulster appears not to have seen much Land League activity in 1880. O'Rourke used agrarian unrest to argue that Ulster did not have the same Land War experience and that this was an explanatory factor in the success of cooperative dairying in Ulster vis-à-vis the rest of the island. On casual inspection it would seem to reflect Irish religious and political divisions, as the north had a greater proportion of Protestants and was

[77] Land Law (Ireland) Act, 1881 (44 & 45 Vict.), c. 49.

[78] For a discussion see: Nathan Foley-Fisher and Eoin McLaughlin, 'Irish Land Bonds', European Association of Banking and Financial History, discussion paper 14-01 (2014).

[79] O'Rourke, 'Culture, conflict, and cooperation: Irish dairying before the Great War', p. 1376.

Unionist[80] in political outlook. This is supported by some sample correlations that show that Land League meetings were positively correlated with the proportion of Roman Catholics in a county and strongly negatively correlated with the proportion of Protestant confessional groups.[81] Was there no 'land war' and no cooperation, as defined above, in Ulster? This narrative is too simplistic as it does not take into account Land League support in Ulster, the pre-existence of functionally equivalent institutions, or the fact that Ulster tenants were the first to reap the benefits of agrarian agitation.

As Kirkpatrick illustrates, a common but incorrect assumption is that land agitation was foreign to Ulster. The economic challenges of the 1870s also had an effect there.[82] Eviction data shows that there was a sharp rise in the eviction rate from 3 to 25 per 10,000 holdings from 1877 to 1880. This led to a demand for rent reductions; although a number of landlords, including Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery (a key figure in the constructive unionism discussed below), granted abatements before petitions were made.[83] The north also had its own tradition of tenant associations that agitated for greater tenant rights, and these became the primary instigators for these demands.[84] Although it appears that the Land League had little presence in Ulster, functionally equivalent tenant rights associations 'continued to swell in numbers'.[85] These associations were supportive of Land League goal of rent reductions but they did not share the Land League's associated political affiliation to Fenianism and Home Rule. Still, efforts were made to establish Land League branches in the north; they were established in Tyrone and in southern Ulster, but were confined to counties with higher Catholic populations.[86]

In the north the Protestant Orange Order initially acted in opposition to the Land League and held counter-demonstrations.[87] Orangemen also gave direct assistance to Captain Boycott.[88] With the Orange presence, the Ulster land agitation could easily have descended into a sectarian dispute; instead, broader political aims took hold and created a platform for ecumenical cooperation.[89] Ulster, unlike the rest of the island, was not dominated by the Home Rule party but by the Conservative and Liberal parties, which competed for the upper-hand. Of the two, the Liberals adopted the cause of land reform. The Conservative party was dominant in the towns and boroughs, winning eight and ten seats out of a total of 11 in the 1874 and 1880 general elections. Still, elements in the north cooperated to achieve goals of land reform and

[80] They favoured the continuation of the union between Great Britain and Ireland established in 1800. Irish nationalists opposed this union and wished to attain greater autonomy for Ireland within the union (Home Rule) or outright political independence (Fenians).

[81] Correlation coefficients between Land League meetings per 10,000 head of population and religious confessions in 1880–81 are as follows: Roman Catholics, 0.57; Anglicans, –0.53; Presbyterians, –0.50; Methodists, –0.33; others –0.52.

[82] R. W. Kirkpatrick, 'Origins and development of the land war in mid-Ulster', in F. S. L. Lyons and R. A. J. Hawkins (eds), *Ireland under the Union* (1980), p. 201.

[83] Ibid., p. 216.

[84] Liam Kennedy, 'The rural economy, 1820–1914', in Kennedy and Ollerenshaw (eds), *Economic history of Ulster* p. 41.

[85] Brian M. Walker, 'The Land Question and elections in Ulster, 1868–86' in Clark and Donnelley (eds), *Irish peasants*, p. 242.

[86] Kennedy, 'Rural economy', p. 42; Thompson, *End of Liberal Ulster*, pp. 201–07.

[87] Ibid., p. 225; The Orange Order was predominantly active in the traditional nine counties of Ulster. See data collected by Eric Kaufmann: www.sneps.net/research-interests/orangeism.

[88] Bew and Wright, 'Agrarian opposition', p. 212.

[89] Ibid., p. 213.

rent reduction, which is reflected in the voting patterns of Catholic and Presbyterian voters in the rural (county) constituencies.[90] In addition, there was a significant increase in voter cooperation to support the pro-land reform Liberal candidates. The Liberal share of rural seats in Ulster increased from 17 to 44 per cent between the 1874 and 1880 general elections.[91] The association of the Liberal party with land reform transcended the sectarian arena and enabled pro-land reform Orangemen to align in common interest with Nationalist Land Leaguers. However, the political landscape post-1885 was a different prospect (discussed below) with a stronger division between Nationalist and Unionist political parties evident; especially in Ulster which became a Unionist stronghold.

Tenant farmers in Ulster supported agitation, and Orange tenants, too, supported reform. Thus, despite the perception that Ulster was more progressive and economically viable, Ulster also engaged in land agitation. Yet, Ulster tenant farmers appear to have been free-riding on the lobbying activities of the Land League, for when land settlements were proposed to appease agitation throughout the whole of the island, Ulster farmers were the first to take advantage of their generous terms.[92]

Despite common goals, why was the Land League as an institutional form not as prominent in Ulster? Bew argues that the most attractive feature of the Land League's approach was the 'low risk of martyrdom' and the risk was lower in the south than in the north as the implementation of boycott policies depended on the lack of local support for the landlord. Bew also suggests that landlords in the north were in a stronger position and thus rendered the boycott and similar threats less effective.[93] In addition, Bew finds that the cornerstone of Land League rent reduction was that rents were based on land valuations (and agricultural prices), dating from the 1840s and '50s. These valuations were made at a later date in Ulster and captured inflated flax values. Thus, while reductions of such a magnitude would have been significant in the south, they represented modest demands for Ulster farmers.[94] Furthermore, Bew notes that 'in certain periods of the Land League's activity, supporters of quite divergent strategies and ultimate objectives could coexist and cooperate with each other. Differences between Irish revolutionaries and reformers were often obscured'.[95]

IV

Slight economic recovery in the 1880s brought a respite to Irish farmers, but further ecological and economic shocks (droughts and recession in Britain) combined with continued price depression affected agricultural incomes. This in turn led to a renewal of the land agitation, conventionally known as the Plan of Campaign (1886–91), whereby tenants refused to pay rents until abatements were granted and instead deposited their rents into trust accounts.[96] This activity was primarily concentrated in the west and south of the island. The continued

[90] Walker, 'Land Question and elections', p. 246.

[91] B. M. Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1801–1922* (1978).

[92] Thompson, *End of Liberal Ulster*, p. 251.

[93] This is reflected in the incidence of landlords to farm figures discussed in section 2.1: Bew and Wright, 'Agrarian Opposition', p. 211.

[94] Ibid.

[95] Ibid., p. 212.

[96] Loughlin, 'Plan of Campaign'.

fall in agricultural prices was a significant structural change and led protagonists to look further afield for methods other than rent reduction alone to cope with a dynamic economic environment. From the late 1880s this resulted in attempts to establish agricultural enterprises based on continental cooperative methodologies.

In this discussion it is important to emphasize the fact that two distinct agricultural innovations were being adopted in Ireland. One was technological: the centrifugal separator enabled the production of standardized fresh butter. The other was methodological: the adoption of cooperative methods to overcome information costs, reduce transaction costs and realize economies of scale. While the extant literature on cooperation in Ireland has primarily focused on cooperative creameries, this section highlights how different forms of cooperative enterprise were imitated and how their take-up rates varied.

The post-1885 political landscape in Ireland was essentially divided between the Irish Parliamentary Party and the Conservative Unionist party. The main divisive issue between the two parties was Home Rule, a measure of devolution for Ireland within the United Kingdom.[97] During the period 1886–1914, three home rule bills were introduced in the UK parliament; only the third reached the statute book, but its implementation was postponed due to the outbreak of the First World War.[98]

The Land League and Land War were generally associated with the Irish Parliamentary, or Home Rule, Party. Cooperative enterprises, as represented by the IAOS, were ostensibly apolitical and areligious; in actuality, the IAOS was associated with unionist politics. The IAOS was particularly associated with the policy of 'constructive unionism', the view that economic and social grievances led to support for nationalism and that redressing these grievances would led to a more stable political environment. This policy was sometimes called 'killing Home Rule with kindness', primarily due to the association of Horace Plunkett, a one-time Unionist Member of Parliament, with both the cooperative movement and the Department of Agriculture. However, a superficial distinction of nationalist versus unionist is difficult to uphold when faced with local realities. Plunkett suggested that 75 per cent of cooperative members were in fact nationalists.[99] Kennedy also highlighted the paradox of Irish cooperation, stating that 'members of the nationalist party, with few exceptions, showed persistent hostility toward the cooperative movement, even though most farmer-cooperators were also nationalists'.[100] Thus, although the elites of the cooperative movements may have had divergent political views to those associated with the Land League, the rank-and-file do not appear to have shared these differences. Therefore, the question is whether the link between political unionism and the IAOS and the corresponding link between nationalist politics and anti-cooperative business interests hindered the spread of cooperation in Ireland.

[97] These divisions were also complicated by attitudes towards education and religion.

[98] James Loughlin, 'Home rule', in Connolly, *Oxford Companion*.

[99] Andrew Gailey, *Ireland and the death of kindness: the experience of constructive unionism, 1890–1905* (1987), p. 57.

[100] Liam Kennedy, 'Farmers, traders and agricultural politics in pre-independence Ireland', in Clark and Donnelly (eds), *Irish peasants,* p. 368.

(a) IAOS and agricultural cooperation in Ireland

In the late nineteenth century attempts were made by a small group of idealists to introduce agricultural cooperation into Ireland. Initially attempts were made to establish consumer cooperatives along British lines, but it was discovered that these would not take root in an agrarian society.[101] Plunkett stated that the role of the IAOS was to 'persuade' people to adopt cooperation.[102] (His involvement, an Anglo-Irish landlord and prominent Unionist political figure, has parallels with some continental cooperative experiences, such as Bohemia and Eastern Europe, whereby landlords and political figures were involved in establishing cooperative enterprises.) The IAOS aimed to introduce cooperative creameries on the Danish model, cooperative agricultural banks along German lines and cooperative agricultural stores of the sort found in France. However, as Plunkett himself acknowledged, the IAOS gave greater prioritization to the creameries.

The first successful attempts at were a conscious effort to imitate the Danish cooperative creamery system. However, given the agitation between landlords and tenants in Ireland, Plunkett's efforts were seen by some as promoting a landlord and Unionist agenda. Plunkett recounted the response of a solicitor in the town of Rathkeale, County Limerick, to an effort to establish a cooperative creamery in the area. The solicitor informed Plunkett that Rathkeale was '"a Nationalist town – Nationalist to the backbone – and every pound of butter made in this creamery must be made on Nationalist principles"'.[103]

Plunkett outlined the motivation for the prioritization of creameries:

> New machinery, costly but highly efficient, had enabled the factory product, notably that of Denmark and Sweden, to compete successfully with the home-made article, both in quality and cost of production … To add to the interest of the situation, capitalists had seized the material advantages which the abundant supply of Irish milk afforded, and the green pastures of the "Golden Vein" [sic] were studded with snow white creameries which proclaimed the transfer of this great Irish industry from the tiller of the soil to the man of commerce.[104]

This rationale supposes that cooperative creameries were encouraged not because Ireland had failed to adopt new technology, but because it was believed that private creameries were realizing 'profits altogether out of proportion to [their] share of the capital'.[105]

Horace Plunkett and R. A. Anderson, another key figure in the Irish cooperative movement and Secretary of the IAOS, encouraged dairy farmers to establish cooperative creameries. Their initial focus was primarily on an area in the south west of Ireland known as the Golden Vale, encompassing parts of Counties Cork, Limerick and Tipperary, where there was an established tradition of dairy farming.[106] Horace Plunkett claimed to have held over 50 meetings before the first cooperative creamery was established in Drumcollogher, Co. Limerick, in 1889.[107]

[101] Ibid.

[102] *Report from the Select Committee on Money Lending; together with the proceedings of the committee, minutes of evidence, appendix and index*, H.C. 1898 (260), x, 101, para. 1973, pp 101–2.

[103] Plunkett, *Ireland in the new century*, p. 191.

[104] Ibid., pp. 187–8.

[105] Ibid., p. 188.

[106] James S. Donnelly Jr, 'Cork Market: its role in the nineteenth-century Irish butter trade' in *Studia Hibernica* 11 (1971), pp. 130–63.

[107] Plunkett, *Ireland in the new century*, p. 190.

Coincidentally, these meetings were held in an area of the island where the second phase of the Land War was concentrated.

Initially Plunkett had solicited help from the Cooperative Union, the federated body that represented British consumer cooperatives, for his 'missionary work'.[108] Having realized that consumer cooperatives looking to minimize the price paid by consumers had an antinomic relationship to producer cooperatives, which tried to maximize the price received by producers, Plunkett and his associates decided to establish their own central cooperative organization, the IAOS, in 1894. It is worth stressing that the apex institution representing Irish cooperatives at a national level was not established on a federated basis, as in other countries. In cooperative literature, discussion of the development of central institutions emphasizes individual cooperatives combining on a 'higher level.'[109] In Ireland the order was reversed with a central organization creating local cooperatives, representing a top-down rather than bottom-up approach. The role of the IAOS was outlined by Horace Plunkett as follows: 'In the first instance it was to consist of philanthropic persons, but its constitution provided for the inclusion in its membership of the societies which had already been created and those which it would itself create as time went on'.[110]

The IAOS acted as an apex institution to a loose federation of cooperatives. In the Irish case, the central institution, the IAOS, propagated the idea of cooperation by organising local meetings and enticing people to join.[111] It was a top-down social movement with the IAOS attempting to promote the formation of creameries. In fact, it was not until 1912 that local initiative formed a cooperative enterprise.[112] This experience is in contrast to the Land League, above, where local branches formed first and then affiliated with the central institution. Paul-Dubois, a contemporary French observer writing in 1904, noted the role of the IAOS in its attempts to 'ameliorate the condition of the agricultural population'. He noted how:

> [the IAOS] of itself has created nothing; it merely organises, advises and controls. It sends out organisers, who undertake campaigns in one district after another, and endeavour to establish cooperative associations by explaining their aims, advantages and methods to the peasants.

The subsequent role of the IAOS as the 'parent Society' was to monitor and supervise its creations and also to audit their accounts. In addition, it offered training and instruction to members on best practice in business, accounting lessons and legal training in cooperative law. As Paul-Dubois said, 'it [the IAOS] undertakes their economic education'.[113]

How did these efforts compare to contemporary Danish activities? In 1892, a British Board of Agriculture report remarked that 'almost all Danish agriculturists, whether the landed proprietor with his 300 cows, or the crofter – Huusmand – with his one or two, with like zeal and with equal profit, comparatively speaking, take part in the manufacture of butter'.[114] The board attributed this growth to a 'remarkable extension of the co-operative system'.[115] This

[108] Ibid., p. 185.

[109] Johnston Birchall, *The international cooperative movement* (1997), p. 35.

[110] Plunkett, *Ireland in the new century*, p. 192.

[111] Ibid., p. 194.

[112] IAOS *annual report, 1912*, p. 3.

[113] L. Paul-Dubois, *Contemporary Ireland* (1909) (a translation of *L'Irlande contemporaine*, 1907), pp. 446–7.

[114] Board of Agriculture, *Reports on dairy farming in Denmark, Sweden and Germany* [C. 7019], 1893–94, p. 6 and p. 9.

[115] Ibid., p. 9.

sentiment cannot be applied to Ireland, where there was neither an equivalent distribution of dairy farming nor adoption of cooperation.

Why did the Irish not adopt cooperative methods as enthusiastically as the Danes? O'Rourke has explored this question by analysing a 1906 agricultural return which distinguished between 'proprietary and joint-stock companies' and 'cooperative' creameries. His econometric analysis led him to the conclusion that nationalist politics and conflict undermined the 'propensity to cooperate' outside Ulster.[116] O'Rourke does not explicitly state that Ulster played any special role; rather it was the distribution of agrarian outrages associated with the Land War which were detrimental to the propensity to cooperate and he finds that these 'outrages' were higher outside of Ulster. If these findings are representative, they would suggest that the Land League might have undermined cooperative efforts in Ireland.

Given O'Rourke's conclusions, it is important to assess his findings critically. O'Rourke focused on the 'propensity to cooperate' in the Irish dairy industry, and he analysed the proportion of cooperative creameries to all creameries at a county level in 1906. Map 2 displays the number of creameries per occupied landholding in 1906. The first thing to note is the absence of creameries in nine of the counties running in a band from east to west, which separates the creameries in the south and the north. In 1906, 44 per cent of the creameries were cooperatives. The proportion of cooperative creameries was highest in the north, standing at 85 per cent. However, there was a greater concentration of creameries in the south west and Munster but, of them, only 23 per cent were cooperatives. The county with the highest number of cooperative creameries was Co. Tipperary, in Munster, which had 44 cooperative creameries; however, Tipperary also had a large 'private' creamery sector, and the proportion of cooperatives was low, at only 35 per cent. Four counties were wholly cooperative, Armagh (10 cooperatives), Donegal (15), Monaghan (27) and Wicklow (1), and three of the four were in Ulster. The numbers indicate that they had significantly lower numbers of both creameries and cooperative creameries than the norm. These statistical inconsistencies are highlighted in Table 3.[117] Curiously, the early IAOS cooperative movement had greater support amongst Catholics in Ulster which also seems at odds with the statistical correlates.[118]

Overall it appears as though Munster and Ulster had a similar number of cooperatives, but that Munster had a long-established tradition of dairy production, with networks of farmers, butter merchants and a butter market in Cork.[119] Private creameries using centrifugal separators had been established in Munster before the development of cooperatives.[120] In addition, local farmers had established their own joint-stock companies which 'though not strictly co-operative, are mostly owned and worked by the milk suppliers'.[121] Furthermore, creameries were established by both the Wholesale Cooperative Society and the Scottish

[116] O'Rourke, 'Culture, conflict and cooperation', pp. 1357–79.

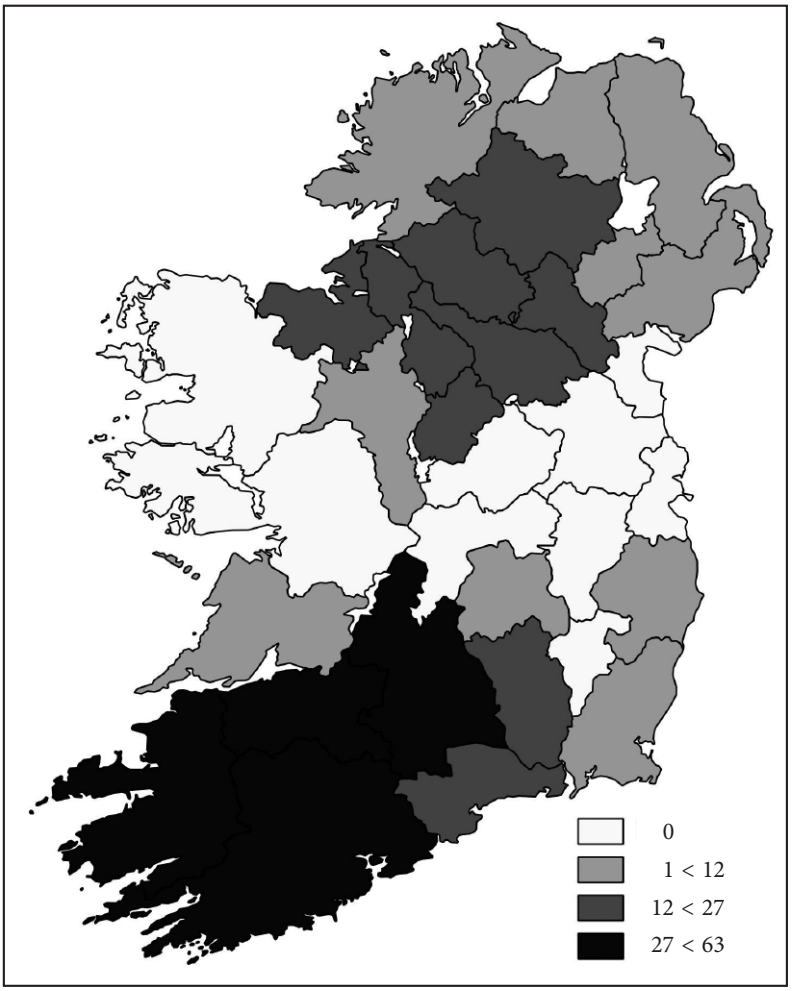
[117] Also see the discussion in Cormac Ó Gráda, 'Irish agriculture after the Land War'.

[118] F. W. Boal and B. S. McAodha, 'The milk industry in Northern Ireland', *Economic Geography* 37 (1961), p. 172.

[119] Cormac Ó Gráda, 'The beginnings of the Irish creamery System, 1880–1914', *EcHR* 30 (1977), p. 285.

[120] Proinnsias Breathnach, 'The diffusion of the cooperative creamery system in Ireland, 1889–1920: a spatial analysis' (NUI Maynooth, PhD thesis, 2006), p. 356.

[121] Ibid.



MAP 2. Proprietary, Joint-Stock and Cooperative creameries per 10,000 farms, 1906

Source: *Agricultural statistics of Ireland, with a detailed report for the year 1906,* H. C. [Cd. 3791], 1908, pp. 128–9.

TABLE 3. Creameries in 1906

	Ireland	*Munster*	*Ulster*	*Connaught*	*Leinster*
Creameries	780	477	190	61	52
Cooperatives	345	112	162	45	26
Private	435	365	28	16	26
% Cooperative	44	23	85	74	50

Source: *Agricultural statistics of Ireland, with a detailed report for the year 1906,* H.C. [Cd. 3791], 1908, pp. 128–9.

Wholesale Society.[122] Thus, without the efforts of Horace Plunkett or the IAOS to stimulate cooperative enterprises it is unclear whether cooperative forms of agricultural enterprises would have developed. Moreover, a number of high profile court cases illustrated an inability of Irish cooperative creameries to enforce binding contracts on their members, contracts which were of immense importance to Danish creameries.[123] These cases suggest therefore that institutionally, cooperative creameries were not superior institutions in the case of Ireland.[124] Thus, after inspection, it appears as though there were not terribly different rates of cooperation between the nationalist south and unionist north. This suggests that analysis of other cooperative enterprises might give greater insight into the development of cooperation in Ireland rather than the obfuscating 'propensity to cooperate' encapsulated in the cooperative share of creameries.

(b) Raiffeisenism in Ireland

The IAOS advocated the application of cooperative methods in a number of different situations. Initially they emphasized cooperative creameries but subsequently they promoted other cooperative enterprises, in particular cooperative banks.[125] Plunkett claimed that he and the other cooperative propagators had been aware of the advantages of cooperative banks 'but only in the last few years have we fully realised that they are even more required and more likely to do more good in Ireland than in any other country'.[126] Figure 1 shows the number of cooperative institutions registered with the IAOS and Map 3 displays their location in 1908, a peak year for the registration of cooperative banks. There were regional variations in the form of cooperative established. In terms of the distribution of cooperative enterprises, Map 4 displays the number of cooperative societies registered with the IAOS by county in 1911 per occupied landholding. There was also regional variance in the rate of cooperation throughout the countryside, but when all forms of cooperation are considered it can be seen that each county had some form of cooperative activity.[127]

In 1903, H. de F. Montgomery, a unionist Ulster landlord involved in the 'constructive Unionist' policy referred to above, went on a 'research trip' to Germany on behalf of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (DATI).[128] In a subsequent article on cooperation in Germany he noted how the German system of Raiffeisenism offered 'the best

[122] Frank Porter, *Porter's guide to the manufacturers and shippers of Ireland* (Belfast, n.d.)

[123] I. M. Henriksen, M. Hviid, and P. Sharp, 'Law and peace: Contracts and the success of the Danish Dairy Cooperatives', *JEcH* 72 (2012), pp. 197–224.

[124] I. M. Henriksen, E. McLaughlin and P. Sharp, 'Contracts and cooperation: the relative failure of the Irish dairy industry in the late nineteenth century reconsidered' (European Historical Economics Society Working Paper, 71, 2015).

[125] This section draws on E. McLaughlin, 'Microfinance institutions in nineteenth-century Ireland' (PhD thesis, National University of Ireland, 2009) and Christopher L. Colvin and Eoin McLaughlin, 'Raiffeisenism abroad: why did German cooperative banking fail in Ireland but prosper in the Netherlands?', *EcHR* 67 (2014), pp. 492–516.

[126] Plunkett, *Ireland in the new century*, p. 195.

[127] The mean share of creameries of all cooperatives registered with the IAOS in 1911 was 31 per cent; however, there was high variance between counties and the standard deviation was 28 per cent.

[128] He spent a lot of time studying Haas cooperatives rather than Raiffeisen cooperatives, something which Henry Wolff criticized him for doing: *Departmental committee on Agricultural credit in Ireland: Evidence, Appendices, and Index*, q. 7153, p. 206. [Cd. 7376], H.C. 1914, xiii, 431.

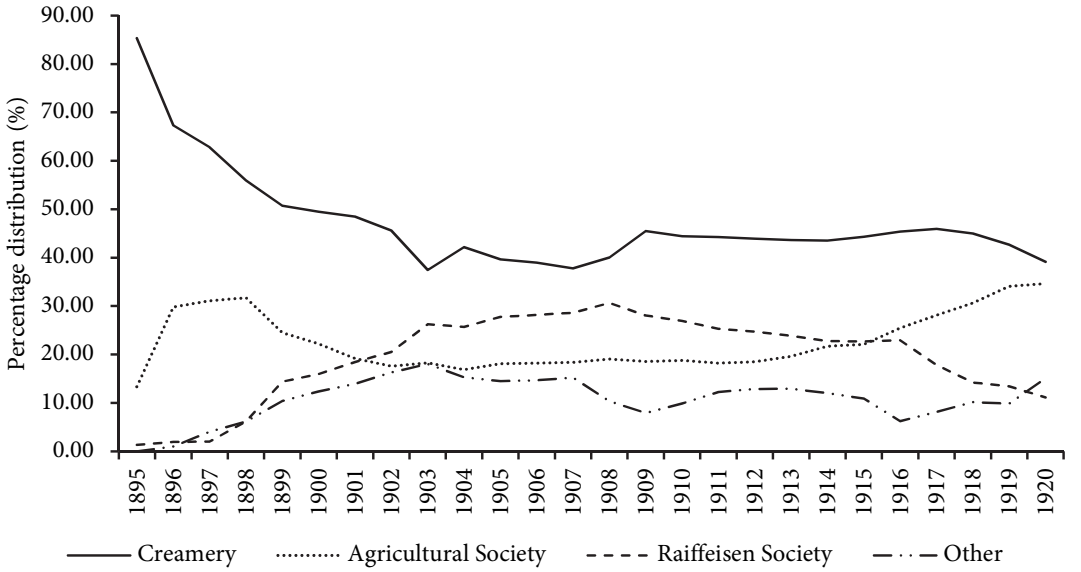


FIGURE 1. Total number and percentage distribution of cooperative societies registered with the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society, 1895–1922

Source: Irish Agricultural Organisation Society annual reports

model for the organisation of agricultural cooperative societies' but that the prioritization of dairying in Ireland had meant that cooperative banks were not integrated with other cooperative businesses in Ireland.[129]

As was seen in Figure 1, significant emphasis was placed on establishing Raiffeisen cooperative banks as part of the cooperative programme in the late 1890s and early 1900s. The initial focus was on poor rural areas in the west of Ireland. The Raiffeisen cooperatives received government support, most noticeably in the form of concessional loans. However, despite this support, Raiffeisen societies had an ephemeral existence in Ireland. Even at their peak in 1908, shown in Map 5, there were a significant number of societies that were inactive and were later struck from the IAOS's register. This led Rev. Cornelius Lucey (1902–82), a notable clerical figure who became Bishop of Cork and held a chair of philosophy and political theory at Maynooth from 1929 to 1950[130] to argue in 1943 that:

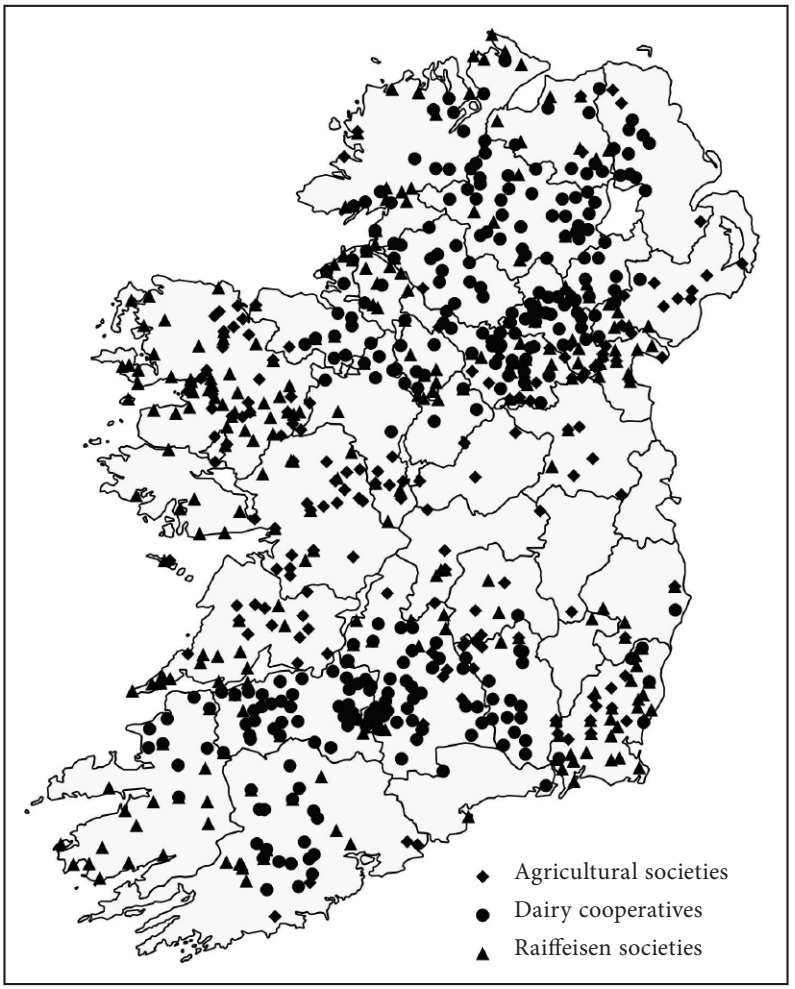
> So far no serious effort has been made to introduce Schulze-Delitzsch or Raiffeisen cooperatives either here or in Great Britain … There is every reason why we in Ireland should think seriously of inaugurating a cooperative credit movement on Raiffeisen or similar lines.[131]

There were in fact a number of Raiffeisen societies still in existence at that date, but their

[129] H. de F. Montgomery, 'Agricultural cooperation in Germany', in *Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland J.* 4 (1903), p. 247.

[130] Diarmaid Ferriter, 'Lucey, Cornelius' in James McGuire, James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (2009).

[131] C. Lucey, 'Cooperative credit societies', in *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record* 62 (1943), pp 78–9 and 79–80.



MAP 3. Cooperatives registered with the IAOS in 1908

Source: Irish Agricultural Organisation Society annual report for 1908.

activities were very limited in scale. Can competition from the Land League explain their failure?

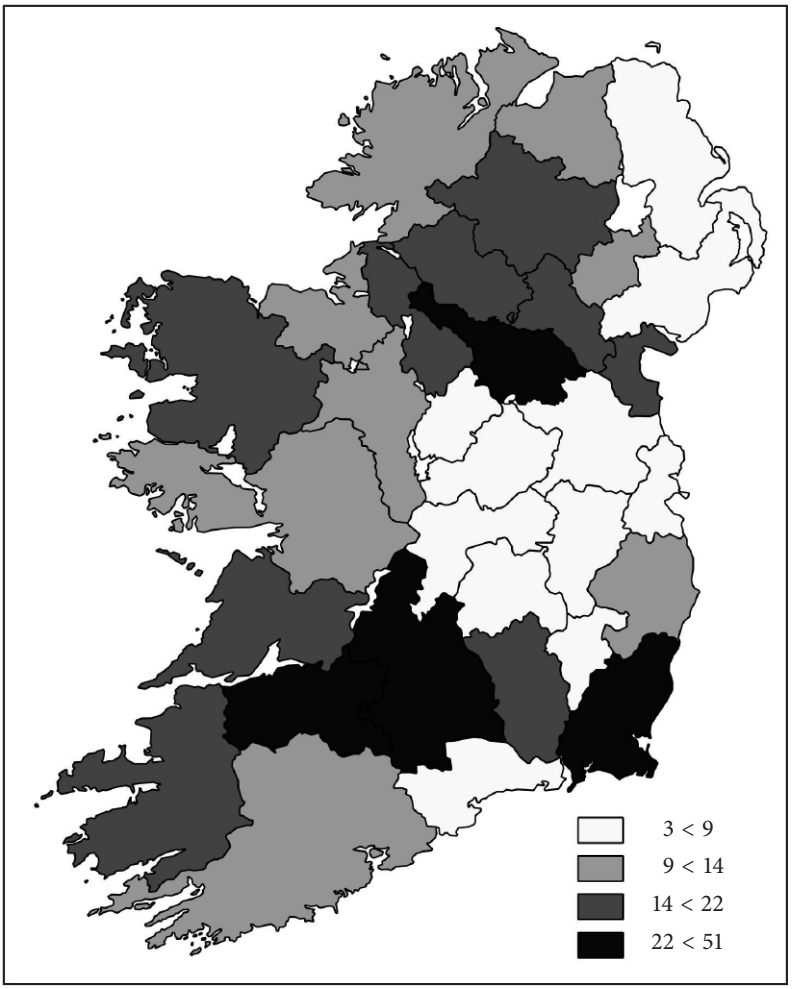
In an early study of cooperative banks in Ireland, Guinnane cited three key reasons for the failure of Raiffeisen cooperative banks in Ireland: competition for savings, an absence of strong auditing federations, and norms of rural behaviour that undermined information advantages.[132] Guinnane concluded that 'if Raiffeisen had been an Irishman, or if the Post Office Savings Banks [POSB] had not been established until the twentieth century, the situation in Ireland might have been different'.[133]

Guinnane's account of the function of the POSB is somewhat mistaken as he states that 'deposits and withdrawals could be made in any amount'.[134] Actually, there were strict annual

[132] Timothy W. Guinnane, 'A failed institutional transplant: Raiffeisen's credit cooperatives in Ireland, 1894–1914' in *Explorations in Economic Hist.* 31 (1994), p. 39.

[133] Ibid., p. 59.

[134] Ibid., p. 52.



MAP 4. Cooperatives registered with the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society per 10,000 occupied holdings, 1911

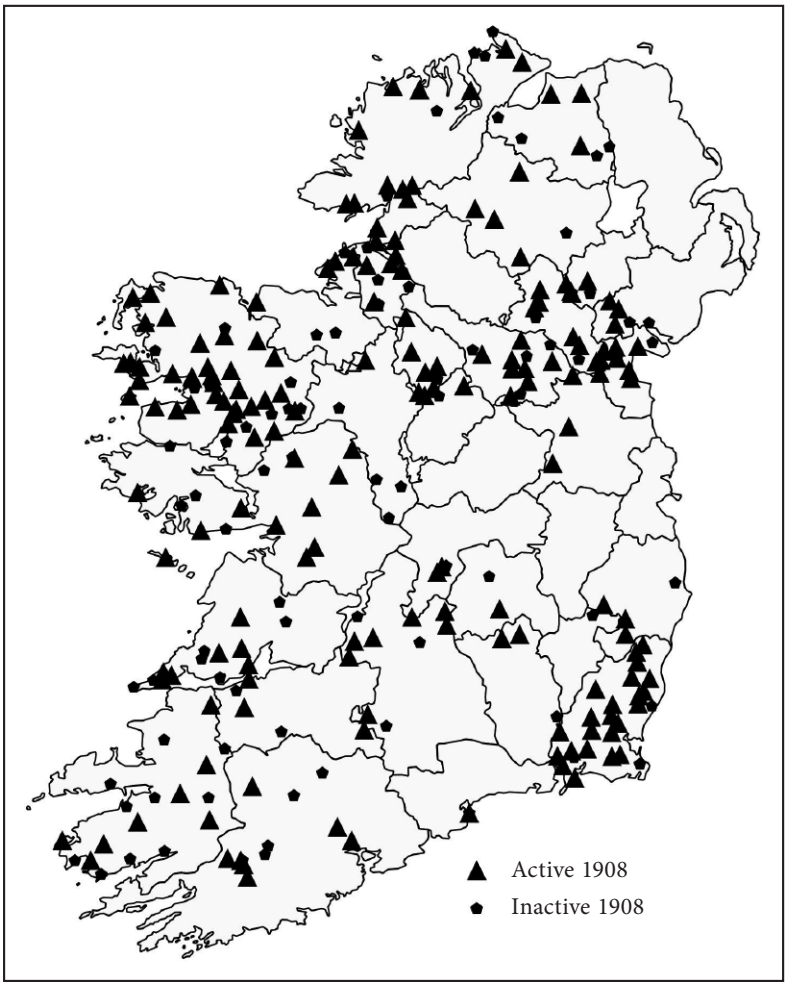
Source: Irish Agricultural Organisation Society annual report for 1911.

limits imposed: £30 per annum between 1863 and 1892, rising to £50 per annum from 1893, and £200 in total.[135] It was not until 1915, as a means to obtain cheaper war finance, that savings limits were eliminated. Joint Stock Banks (JSBs), deposit mobilizing branch banks, were the major incumbents in Irish rural markets and they had no limitations on deposits and withdrawals, accepting deposits from £1 and up.[136] More importantly, the POSB did not issue loans whereas JSBs did. Effectively, Irish JSBs were the functional equivalent of Raiffeisen cooperative banks;[137] whilst German JSBs did not begin branch banking until the early 1900s. Furthermore, an important consideration is also the timing of POSB growth when it

[135] C. Eason, 'The trustee savings banks of Great Britain and Ireland, from 1817 to 1928', in *Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, 104 (1929), p. 4.

[136] *Report from the Select Committee on money lending* (P.P. 1898, X), q. 2024, p. 105; Society of St Vincent De Paul, *Bulletin of the Society*, XII (1867), p. 369. By 1914, the director of the Bank of Ireland, The O'Conor Don, reported that his bank accepted as little as £1 on deposit (D.C. minutes of evidence [P.P. 1914], Q.631).

[137] This is a central argument of Colvin and McLaughlin, 'Raiffeisenism abroad' where more detail may be found.



MAP 5. Raiffeisen societies registered with the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society in 1908

Source: Irish Agricultural Organisation Society annual report for 1911.

superseded TSBs, incumbent savings banks in Ireland that were primarily located in urban areas, as the largest savings bank on the island. This shift occurred during the land war period and was an intentional shift of savings to the more 'private' (i.e. no landlord trustees) POSB which had the added attraction of complete government security.[138]

Guinnane also argued that the Irish Raiffeisen example lacked institutional equivalents to German cooperative apex institutions, audit unions and central clearinghouses (centrals); of these two he deemed that the lack of audit unions was the more detrimental as they provided external management and support.[139] Yet, the Irish case is an example of the political economy of cooperation. The IAOS had threatened to establish its own central clearinghouse in 1902.[140]

[138] Frauds in TSBs in Ireland during the Famine painfully highlighted their lack of government security. See Eoin McLaughlin, ''Profligacy in the encouragement of thrift': Savings banks in Ireland, 1817–1914', *Business Hist.* 56 (2014), pp. 569–91.

[139] This point is elaborated in T. W. Guinnane, 'A "friend and advisor": External auditing and confidence in Germany's credit cooperatives, 1889–1914', *Business Hist. Rev.* 77 (2003), pp. 235–64.

[140] IAOS, *Annual report 1902*, pp 14–15.

It did so in order to force the existing JSBs, which served the function of cooperatives' centrals in the Irish case, to lend to the wider cooperative movement at concessional rates of interest. A favourable agreement was reached in return for cooperative banks channelling all their deposits through JSBs.[141]

Guinnane asserted that one of the reasons why Raiffeisen cooperatives failed in Ireland was because 'norms of Irish society' made it difficult to work a cooperative system.[142] Using a statement from the 1926 banking commission, he suggests that 'rural Irish people did not give "full recognition of the justice of the debt so incurred", and thus resisted efforts to force repayment of loans'.[143] Guinnane's interpretation has implications for the wider history of Irish banking. If Irish people resisted efforts to get them to repay loans, then how could a bank branch network operate in rural Ireland? The truth, it seems, is that people did repay loans, so much so that the only thing in arrears in rural Ireland was rent.[144]

Data suggest that direct competition from other financial institutions was not a critical factor in Raiffeisen survival. This is evident from the fact that Raiffeisen societies were located in remote areas. A highly significant factor was the low level of integration with other cooperative enterprises. Deposit mobilization was also positively related to survival. IAOS annual reports suggest that societies that inadvertently imitated German conditions (cooperative integration and deposit mobilization) survived past the 1920s.[145] From an economic perspective these aspects of Raiffeisen societies increased information on both a potential borrower's income and farming activities. Raiffeisen societies were deliberately discouraged from mobilizing savings and as part of bank agreements they were required to place deposits in JBSs.[146] This practice effectively made Raiffeisen societies redundant as savings institutions. This is a reflection of the top-down structure of the IAOS and the fact that Raiffeisen societies were not instigated by local initiatives. Also, this reflects the failure of the IAOS to give any consideration to the functioning of rural financial markets where branch-banking JSBs were a dominant incumbent and functional substitute for cooperative banks.[147]

In terms of integration, as was shown in Map 3, there was a distribution of cooperative societies throughout the island with different areas having specialization in different cooperative enterprises. Raiffeisen societies were not integrated with the dairy cooperatives. This partially reflected institutional factors. Raiffeisen societies were unlimited liability whereas other cooperative forms were limited liability, and partly functional; other cooperative enterprises were able to provide credit to members.[148] As the IAOS was responsible for establishing cooperatives the lack of cooperative integration can be attributed to IAOS policy. Furthermore, Map 3

[141] IAOS, *Annual report 1904*, p. 27; *Third report of the Royal Commission appointed to inquire into and report upon the operation of the Acts dealing with Congestion in Ireland* (P.P. 1907, XXXV), p. 55.

[142] Guinnane, 'Failed institutional transplant', p. 39.

[143] Ibid., p. 57.

[144] B.P.P. (1898), *Report from the select committee on money lending*, H.C. 10(260), 101, q. 2372, p. 120.

[145] IAOS, *Annual report 1920*.

[146] *Third Report of the Royal Commission appointed to inquire into and report upon the operation of the Acts dealing with Congestion in Ireland*; Evidence and Documents, q. 14138, p. 55 [Cd. 3414], H.C. 1907, xxxv, 337.

[147] The ignorance of the IAOS in relation to JSBs is highlighted in the evidence of IAOS delegates to the Select Committee on Money lending: BPP, *Report from the Select Committee on Money Lending*, H.C. 1898 (260), x, 101, q. 2016, p. 105.

[148] IAOS *Annual Report 1920*, p. 10.

suggests that O'Rourke's findings of correlation between land war outrages and cooperative creameries may not translate automatically to imply a similar relationship between land war outrages and the cooperative movement as a whole.

The IAOS later argued that unlimited liability, a cornerstone of Raiffeisenism, was unsuitable to conditions in rural Ireland.[149] Support for this view can be seen from the variation in land holdings; there was a greater proportion of small, and by definition, poorer farmers relative to larger, and wealthier, farmers. Unlimited liability, which implied that all members were equally liable for debts, deterred wealthier members from joining. Another factor, somewhat related to the previous, was the shortage of skilled management. This problem was compounded by the fact that there were no institutional equivalents of federated institutions such as Audit Unions to provide substitutable managerial experience. These difficulties were not experienced, however, by Dutch counterparts that were able to utilize confessional divisions to overcome socio-economic encumbrances (such as those experienced in Ireland) and successfully introduce German-style Raiffeisen cooperative banks.[150]

The difficulty of attracting managerial talent was not experienced by Land League branches that operated in similar areas of the Irish countryside, either; for example, a Land League branch in Tralee, Co. Kerry had a school teacher as its president.[151] Furthermore, Clark suggests that a broad section of social interests were involved in the Land League and that the League derived leadership from existing farmers' clubs that were involved in 'disputes between landlords and large farmers'.[152] Again, these were features absent in credit cooperatives in Ireland as they were unable to attract such broad support. So why, given that both were voluntary associations,[153] was it that one form of cooperation was able to attract skilled management while the other was not? Kennedy argued that there was a conflict with the Catholic Church's economic interests as the cooperative movement threatened rural traders on whom the church was financially reliant.[154] This influenced priests and teachers who were reliant on clerical patronage, in turn, clerics were unwilling to act against their economic interests and patronage ties by supporting cooperative ventures that threatened the livelihoods of patrons.

Perhaps another key element is the lack of a common mutual goal. In the Land League all participants stood to benefit from participation through the form of reduced rents and possible land transfers at concessional rates; some more than others. Hence, this could help explain why those with management and organizational skills would have joined the Land League – namely large farmers and urban interest groups. In cooperative ventures such as Raiffeisen cooperative societies it is not obvious that the interest of all in rural society would have been

[149] IAOS *Annual Report 1931*, pp. 18–19.

[150] Colvin and McLaughlin, 'Raiffeisenism abroad', pp. 507–12.

[151] William L. Feingold, 'Land League Power: The Tralee Poor-law election of 1881', in Clark and James (eds), *Irish peasants*, p. 293.

[152] Clark, *Social origins*, e.g. Tables 16 and 17, p. 268 and p. 258.

[153] Membership of the Land League can be loosely defined as a voluntary. As the eighth rule of the Land League stated: 'that no person shall be admitted to membership who does not give his adhesion to the principles of the League' which could be interpreted as saying membership was open to all who adhered to the principles of the League. See Appendix F in Davitt, *Speech*, pp. 399–400.

[154] Liam Kennedy, 'The early response of the Irish Catholic clergy to the cooperative movement', in *Irish Historical Stud.* 21 (1977–8), pp. 55–74.

homogenous. Larger farmers, a minority group, would have been burdened with the risk of failure if they were members of an unlimited liability cooperative bank. The interests of rural townsmen would have been directly impinged upon and thus could have affected those they patronized, such as clergy. This may explain the lack of skilled management. As Ireland did not develop audit unions or teaching mechanisms, it would have been difficult to find management substitutes.

Also, given the ephemeral nature of both the Land League and Raiffeisen cooperatives, perhaps members viewed each as a temporary expedient to attain instantaneous rewards rather than as permanent institutions. The Land League aimed to deliver reduced rents; when legislation was introduced that delivered this result, participants abandoned land agitation. In the case of Raiffeisen cooperatives they were used as a means to funnel cheap credit from government agencies and JSBs to members. When the sources of cheap credit were curtailed, active membership ceased.

In sum, the story of Raiffeisen societies in Ireland does not suggest that the Land League undermined cooperative banks. However, it highlights flaws in the top-down policies of the IAOS and friction within rural society. This, in turn with the evidence presented regarding cooperative creameries, does not suggest that the cooperative movement was undermined by the Land League but rather the IAOS attempted to imitate institutions that had no conferred institutional advantages compared to indigenous institutions (private creameries and JSBs). In this light, the fact that continental European cooperation struggled to gain a foothold in Ireland is not one of politics but one of economics.

V

This article has explored different forms of cooperation in late nineteenth-century Ireland. It argues that the Irish response to adverse exogenous shocks in the late 1870s was to adopt cooperative institutions. This reaction paralleled contemporaneous developments in Scandinavia. However, the cooperative action in Ireland was aimed at reducing one of the costs of farming – rent – whereas the Scandinavian and continental European forms of cooperation succeeded in reducing the information and transaction costs associated with agricultural production.

The 'Land War' inspired a social and economic mobilization similar to that required for a cooperative movement, but it was directed towards land reform, or rather rent reductions and land purchase. Horace Plunkett, the founder of the cooperative movement in Ireland, understood the relation between the Land League and cooperation in Ireland. He also believed that increased international competition necessitated the introduction of other forms of cooperation.[155] Plunkett and others had hoped to build cooperative structures on the Land League tradition, but their efforts were stifled. Plunkett was initially hampered by his political affiliation, Unionism, as the Land League movement became associated with nationalist politics. In retrospect, were these different cooperative institutions competitors or complementors?

Land agitation in Ireland provided a template and infrastructure for cooperation. The agitators in the 1870s and '80s would have had experience with a cooperative environment.

[155] Trevor West, *Horace Plunkett; cooperation and politics* (1986), p. 21.

This experience could have been transferable to other cooperative ventures, provided that the goals of the venture were mutually acceptable. In the case of the Land War all social groups, excluding landlords, shared the goal of rent reduction. By contrast, cooperation in agricultural ventures such as agricultural stores and Raiffeisen cooperatives impinged on the interests of urban interest groups and patronage ties in rural society. This can explain how Land League branches had greater access to large farmers and urban interest groups. Thus, they were able to utilize their management skills, whereas cooperatives, such as Raiffeisen and agricultural stores, found it difficult to access skilled management. Effectively, interest groups prominent in the Land League were either apathetic or overtly hostile towards IAOS ventures. The Land League coalition of the late 1870s collapsed once its primary goals had been obtained. However, other factions wanted greater reforms, such as land redistribution, but such movements failed to galvanize interest groups as effectively as the common goal to reduce rents and achieve ownership transfers.

Of the cooperative enterprises introduced by the IAOS, dairy cooperatives were the most successful (relatively speaking) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, cooperative methods did not completely dominate dairy production until later in the twentieth century, after the state became involved. State policy aimed to deliberately 'make the manufacturing of butter entirely co-operative and place the ownership of the premises and direction of the industry in the hands of the farmers who supplied the raw material'.[156] This led to the cooperative rationalization of the dairy industry under the auspices of the Dairy Disposal Company. In a recent study of creameries in Ireland, O'Rourke argues that areas of the country with a greater proportion of owner-occupiers of land in 1906 were the ones with the highest number of creameries;[157] coincidentally, the majority of those outside the dairy heartlands in the south west were cooperative. This is, in effect, a legacy of the Land League and 'Land War', as the Land War provided the impetus for landownership transfers – especially in free-rider areas in the north.

The pertinent question then, is why Irish cooperation took a reactive stance in 1879? Perhaps tradition played a role as violence was a common response used to support traditional rights and address social grievances.[158] Also, a key part of this story is the fact that land reform took place much later in Ireland. Therefore farmers were fixated on the issue of rents, feeling aggrieved at having to pay rents during severe economic downturns, rather than concerned by aspects of agricultural production. The IAOS believed that its role was to imitate continental cooperative practices but these were ideologically motivated and misguided. This implied cooperatives competed with established incumbents but without the perceived institutional advantages of the new entrants. The experience of the IAOS cooperatives illustrates the limitations of misguided cooperation but it does not suggest competition between the IAOS or the Land League. Rather, the evidence from the Land League illustrates that Irish society was willing to cooperate if an adequate incentive structure was in place. Perhaps an IAOS policy of implementing reforms in agricultural education and practice or focused reforms to

[156] John O'Donovan, *The economic history of livestock in Ireland* (1940), p. 339.

[157] Kevin H. O'Rourke, 'Property rights, politics and innovation: creamery diffusion in pre-1914 Ireland', in *European Rev. Economic Hist.* 11 (2007), pp. 395–417.

[158] Clark, *Social origins*, p. 69.

the dominant livestock sector, such as improvements in breeding stock, may have been more fruitful endeavours; in fact, key figures in the IAOS such as Plunkett were involved in the foundation of the DATI.

Another important question is how important was path-dependence? There was a tradition of violent reactions to threats to traditional privileges, such as landlord-granted rent reductions and tolerance of arrears. This may have influenced the pattern of reaction to the crisis in the late 1870s where such privileges were seen as rights by tenants.[159] Possibly a more important factor was the tradition of state involvement in the Irish economy. As a result many looked to the state to provide solutions rather than taking proactive steps themselves. The state had previously intervened in the area of Irish land legislation and had passed an act in 1870 which aimed to formalize informal customary rights, thus creating expectations of state intervention. The Land League was effectively a cooperative lobby group that aimed to force the government to intervene in landlord-tenant relations on the behalf of tenants. The complaint of the cooperation propagators was that Irish society was more reliant on state aid than on self-help. George Russell, a key figure in the Irish cooperative movement, wrote that: 'If self-help had been fostered as industriously as state aid we might have arrived at something'.[160] Ironically, the cooperatives that imitated Continental forms of cooperation were also reliant on state aid. When the IAOS was established, despite overtures of cooperation and self-help, it was heavily reliant on financial subsidies from the state.[161]

Finally, how does the Irish experience fit into the wider European experience? The common theme throughout Europe is that of institutional importation. Cooperative methodologies and ideals diffused beyond borders, with different areas developing cooperative methodologies at different stages, often at the behest of local elites. The Irish story is strikingly similar to events in Catalunya, as outlined by Jordi Planas. The catalyst for cooperative ventures in Catalunya was an exogenous shock in the form of the phylloxera plague that devastated the grape stock in the late nineteenth century. Changes in the economic structure influenced further cooperative ventures. Social divisions were also present with landowners and larger farmers more supportive of cooperative ventures that reflected their economic interests, as was the case in Ireland.[162] The Netherlands successfully adopted Raiffeisen cooperative banks, which were integrated with other forms of cooperative enterprises.[163] Also Estonia established cooperative banks that were integrated with other cooperative ventures, namely cooperative creameries.[164] The Irish model of dairy cooperation was based on the Danish model where cooperative banks were not prevalent,[165] but Irish cooperative creameries were unable to enforce binding contracts along Danish lines.

[159] Ibid., p. 179.

[160] A. E. (pseud. George W. Russell), *Co-operation and nationality guide for rural reference from this to the next generation* (1912), p. 29.

[161] Kennedy, 'Farmers, traders and agricultural politics in pre-independence Ireland', p. 350.

[162] Jordi Planas, 'Rural cooperatives and empowerment of peasantry in agrarian collective action at the beginning of the twentieth century', paper read at Rural History 2010 Conference.

[163] Christopher L. Colvin, 'Religion, competition and liability: Dutch cooperative banking in crisis, 1919–1927' (PhD Dissertation, LSE, 2011).

[164] Johan Eellend, 'The Butter Republic': Cooperatives and corporative structures in Estonia, 1890–1934', paper read at Rural History 2010 Conference.

[165] Timothy W. Guinnane and Ingrid Henriksen, 'Why were credit cooperatives unimportant in Denmark?', in *Scandinavian Economic Hist. Rev.* 46 (1998), pp. 32–54.

Political affiliations and social relations that were important factors in cooperative ventures in other countries were present in Ireland; however, these facets of the cooperation were initially more evident in the Land League than in the IAOS cooperatives. For example, in Bohemia and Eastern Europe, local political elites were present in traditional forms of cooperative ventures.[166] In Ireland local political elites were more pronounced in the Land League than in IAOS cooperatives. It was not until the 1900s that the cooperatives began to take on political affiliations. For example, nationalist diary cooperatives were a response to private creameries that 'symbolis[ed] colonial trading links as well as English (Protestant) ownership of the means of production' in County Tipperary;[167] whereas the Land League adopted political affiliation from the outset. This culminated in reprisal attacks on cooperative creameries by British auxiliary forces during the Irish War of Independence (1919–21).[168] Overall though, Irish developments in cooperation may be seen to parallel events further afield.

[166] Catherine Albrecht, 'Rural banks and credit cooperatives in Bohemia, 1860–1914'; András Vári, 'Co-ops, peasants, and networks in segmented rural societies of Austria, Hungary, and Transylvania from the 1880s to 1918', both papers read at Rural History 2010 Conference.

[167] W. Jenkins, 'Capitalists and co-operators: agricultural transformation, contested space, and identity politics in South Tipperary, Ireland, 1890–1914', in *J. Historical Geography*, 30 (2004), p. 103.

[168] Patrick Bolger, *The Irish co-operative movement: its history and development* (1977), p. 212.