

A new epoch for worker co-operatives in Ireland – an outline of the factors required for their implementation and the opportunities to address precarious employment.

Gerard Doyle
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1. Objectives of paper

- Objective 1
 - ~ What are the factors that have contributed to worker co-operatives being underutilised in Ireland?
- Objective 2
 - ~ What are the motivating factors for groups establishing worker co-operatives?
 - ~ What are the factors required to support the development of worker co-operatives in Ireland?

2. Research methodology

- Semi- structured interviews held with:
 - ~ Members of 3 worker co-operatives located in Ireland
 - ~ 2 academics
 - ~ 1 economist
 - ~ 1 Public servant
 - ~ 2 Co-operators

3. Characteristics of worker co-operatives

Definition of a worker cooperative

'a business entity owned and controlled by people who work in it'

United States Federation of Worker Co-operatives



3. Characteristics of worker co-operatives

Three shared characteristics:

- Ownership shares are purchased by member employees and membership own assets **collectively**.
- Operated by 'one member, one vote'
- Members share the profits of the co-operative based on their labour input.



3. Characteristics of worker co-operatives

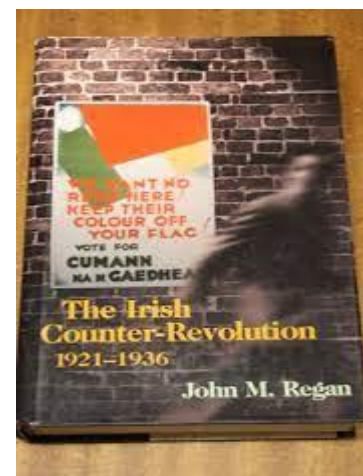
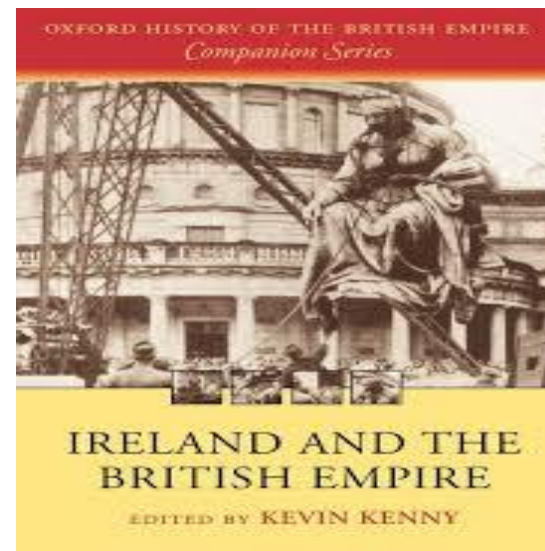
Many share additional characteristics

- In many cases objective is to provide employment for future generations- inter-generational mutuality (Corcoran & Wilson, 2010)
- Can be driven by social and economic concerns (Hough, Wilson and Corcoran, 2010)



4. Findings- factors stymied worker co-ops

- Ireland's economic development
 - ~ Colonialisation
 - ~ Economic model
 - ~ Financial institutions
 - ~ Absence solidarity economy
- Politics
 - ~ Political and trade union tradition
 - ~ Role of the state
 - ~ Policymakers



4. Findings- factors stymied worker co-ops

- Politics (cont'd)
 - ~ Legislation
 - ~ Political support
- Social and cultural
 - ~ Ideology
 - ~ Institutional legacy
 - ~ Lack of working class unity
 - ~ Radical working class leadership marginalised
 - ~ Worker co-operatives limited presence



Image idea from paradigm-shift-21st-century.nl

5. Findings –factors required to support development worker co-operatives

- Individuals
 - ~ Committed, willing to learn and resilient
- Support
 - ~ Rooted in co-operative sector – federations in Italy and Spain
 - ~ Expertise on governance
 - ~ Combination of generic and sector specific expertise
- Cultural
 - ~ Belief in economic self-sufficiency
 - ~ Collectivism



5. Findings –factors required to support development worker co-operatives

- Increased visibility
 - ~ Demonstration worker co-operatives operate across a number of sectors
- Civil society organisations
 - ~ Demand policy makers to prioritise support development of worker co-operatives
 - ~ Procure from worker co-operatives
- Political
 - ~ Programme for governments prioritise development worker co-operatives



5. Findings –factors required to support development worker co-operatives

■ State

- ~ Worker co-operatives recognised as a distinct legal entity
- ~ Give workers the right to buy if company facing closure or during succession



5. Findings –factors required to support development worker co-operatives

■ State

- ~ Recognise the right of worker co-operatives to form indivisible reserve funds through legislation
- ~ Require syllabus of relevant subjects in secondary school to include modules on co-operatives
- ~ Fund the establishment of regional co-operative development agencies



6. Sectors of the economy most suited to addressing precarious employment

- Every sector of economy ripe for worker co-operative formation
- Sectors of the economy with low capital requirement
 - ~ Care
 - ~ Cleaning
 - ~ Security
 - ~ Gig economy



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