

“Too many cooperatives and too few cooperativists”: The Consumer Cooperative movement in Catalonia 1898-1939.

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Abstract:

This article charts the evolution of the Catalan Cooperative movement from the creation of the first regional organisation, the Chamber of Catalan and Balearic Cooperatives in 1898, to the end of the Civil War in 1939. It looks at the aims of the Chamber and its successor organisation the Federation of Catalan Cooperatives, as expressed at congresses and in the movement's press and then analyses the tactics adopted to achieve these and why, in general, they did not enjoy the success that was hoped for. The founders of the Chamber were influenced by movements in other countries, specifically France, Belgium and the United Kingdom and was a member of the International Cooperative Alliance adopting the principles of these including political neutrality and the belief in acting independently of the State and political organisations. It was hoped that Catalan cooperatives would be able to catch up with and match the strength and influence of cooperatives in these countries. However, although the cooperative movement enjoyed spectacular growth during the Civil War, much of the progress that was made by cooperatives was due to circumstance and state intervention rather than due to the movement itself.

Keyword: Cooperativism, Consumer Cooperatives, Catalan working class, Catalan socialism

Introduction

The aim of this article is to follow the evolution of the Catalan cooperative movement, making clear what were its goals, examining the policies it put in place to achieve these and, finally analysing the main reasons why so many of them were, in fact, not realised. However, as Medina-Albadalejo and Pujol-Andreu (2014) have pointed out, the cooperative movement in Catalonia has a limited historiography and studies of consumer cooperativism, the central pillar of the movement, are “very scarce.” For Garau Rolandi (2020) although much research is being carried out on contemporary cooperativism, the historiography of the movement in Spain is “fragmented” while according to Gabriel (1998) cooperativism is “the poor relative of social history”. What does exist is often based at the local level (Duch i Plana 1993; Casanovas i Prat 1998; Dalmau and Miró 2010), written by cooperativists themselves as a means to inform about the movement (Ventosa i Roig, 1980; Plana i Gabernet, 1998) and/or are rather general in nature focusing on cooperatives rather than specifically the cooperative movement (Pérez Barò, 1989; Medina-Albadalejo, 2017; Reventós, 1960). The cooperative movement here is defined as those cooperatives that joined together to form two regional organisations: the Chamber of Catalan and Balearic Islands Cooperatives (the Chamber), from 1899 to 1918, and the Federation of Catalan Cooperatives (the Federation) from 1918 to 1939, with the intention of working together to further the economic, social and ideological progress of cooperativism. This movement grew from 37 cooperatives, representing 6,943 cooperative members, to 559 cooperatives, representing some 388,000 members at the end of 1938. At first sight, this growth seems impressive but these figures are misleading since they were affected by the impact of the Spanish Civil War, 1936-39, (the Civil War). In reality, individual members of the affiliated cooperatives only numbered 26,821 in 1927 and, by the end of 1934, this had risen to 38,608, an almost tenfold increase during the Civil War.

These two organisations, the Chamber and the Federation, also became members of the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) formed in 1895 and they therefore accepted and adhered to certain of its principles that related to their own aims and objectives (Garner, 2013). These were debated and adopted at regional level in their congresses and not only stressed the central role of consumer cooperation and the economic policies to be adopted, but also political aspects of cooperativism, significantly democratic control by members and political neutrality.¹ The former meant that those who were more immersed in the ideology of cooperativism and who often gained positions of importance in these organisations, could not enforce their ideas on the affiliated cooperatives as these had to accept the democratic will of their members. The latter, political neutrality, was a source of much confusion given that the Chamber and the Federation both defined themselves broadly as Socialist, in a general rather than in a party political way although many of those in the Chamber were members of the Republican Radical party and the Federation’s leading figures were members of Catalan socialist or Leftist Catalanist parties. As shall be seen, the movement’s progress, or lack of progress, was directly related to both factors. Cooperativist idealists wanted to go further and faster than the majority of cooperative members and eventually political and state intervention was needed to overcome their resistance. Thus, rather than cooperativism advancing as an autonomous movement, it would do so in the context of war and under the aegis of political masters.

In Catalonia, the majority of consumer cooperatives could be found in the working-class districts of Barcelona as well as in the growing towns of the capital’s industrial belt although there were significant movements in other Catalan provinces such as Girona, Tarragona and Vich. The dominant ideology among the Catalan working class, especially in Barcelona, from 1870 to the end of the Civil War was anarchism with anarchists being the driving force behind the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT), the largest union in the region from 1910 to 1939 (Termes, 2011). Although cooperatives were clearly not anarchist in their ideology - indeed, anarchists were exceedingly critical of the movement - libertarian ideas would also have an impact on the outlook of many cooperative members through rational schools, an extensive press including radio, neighbourhood commissions (especially during the Second Republic) and in particular ‘atheneums’ which acted like neighbourhood centres exercising a “local community function” and supplying members with “cultural modernisation and social transformation resources,” also providing educational, theatrical and sporting activities (Arnabat Matta and Ferré-Trill 2017). Ealham (2005, 63 and 103) claims that for the workers “the neighbourhood atheneums were a complete social environment” in which “the cooperatives helped to maintain a proud and independent neighbourhood spirit and the culture of searching for practical and collective solutions

for the collective problems of daily life.” Anarchism was an influence on, but not a dominant ideal of, the Catalan cooperative movement and must be taken into account, together with the socialists or Leftist Catalanist parties, in any attempt to assess its progress.

The socio-political and economic realities that facilitated the rise of anarchism also evidently, had an impact on the rest of the working-class. So while the leaders of the Chamber and the Federation hoped to create a large, unified movement, many cooperative members appeared happy to support a form of micro-cooperativism operating on a local or neighbourhood level with a “strong individualistic character” (Medina Abadalejo and Pujol-Andreu 2014). ‘Individualistic’ in the sense that each cooperative strongly believed in its autonomy and defended its independence. It also means allocating any profits to mutual, social or cultural activities of its members and locality rather than investing in the Chamber’s or the Federation’s grand schemes. Membership of both organisations was voluntary, the president and his administrative staff were elected by the cooperatives and responsible to them (although more directly in the case of the Federation as shall be seen). However, these officials in general were more convinced cooperativists and sought to promote the policies they felt would lead to the achievement of the cooperative movement’s overall aims. Individual cooperatives did not oppose this but put limits on policy direction relevant to their economic realities and the opinions of their members, many of whom were not as steeped in cooperativist ideology as those elected to positions in the Chamber and the Federation.

In Catalonia, the model for the cooperative movement’s ideology was provided by the Rochdale Pioneers’ Equitable Society, founded in Rochdale, England in 1844, which had seven principles that would soon be adopted by cooperative movements in other countries as well as by the ICA (Garner 2007). This model was adapted by the French cooperatist, Charles Gide, (1847-1932), who created the doctrine of ‘consumers’ cooperation’. Focusing on the individual as a consumer rather than as a producer, for Gide the cooperative movement should have consumer cooperatives at its centre and as its leading force (Monzón Campos 2003). According to Gide’s cooperatist ideology, consumer cooperatives would unite to form local, regional and then national unions and use profits not solely (or at all in some cases) for the benefit of individual members but to invest in the creation of other types of cooperatives (e.g. credit, production, health, educational etc.) therefore gradually taking over production and distribution and replacing capitalist competition in all areas of the economy with cooperation. Gide’s cooperativism aimed at the ‘complete transformation of society’ and the creation of a Cooperative Republic. In general, Gide’s ideas maintained their hold on the Catalan movement throughout the period under study in this article, although from the 1920s they were adapted to fit in with the cooperative policies of the Union Socialista de Catalunya (USC) formed in 1923 (Garner 2004). The USC accepted the basic concepts of Gide’s cooperativism but included them in an overall policy known as ‘the multiple base’ which gave equal standing to political parties, unions and cooperatives - Gide’s ‘cooperative republic’ was to be part of the USC’s socialist republic.

Initially, much optimism accompanied the creation the Chamber, which, it was felt, would create the necessary impulse for the cooperative movement in Catalonia to advance in line with other countries: they were simply following a tried and tested formula that had worked elsewhere in Europe, especially in the United Kingdom. Yet, as shall be seen, this was not successful and when the movement finally began to experience significant growth, this was due mostly to external factors associated with the political and economic challenges brought about by the Civil War.

In order to give a historical context to the evolution of the Catalan consumer cooperativism, the main text of the article will begin with a brief history of its early years. Thereafter, it is divided into four sections that broadly follow the movement’s chronological development:

- the Chamber, 1899 to 1918: idealism, haste and collapse
- the Federation, from 1918 to the inauguration of Second Republic in 1931: attempts to restore trust in the cooperative movement after the Chamber’s collapse
- the Second Republic, 1931 to 1936 and the Spanish Cooperatives Law, 1931, and the Catalan Basic Law, 1934
- the Civil War years, 1936 to 1939: State control of the cooperative movement?

Finally, the Conclusion will sum up the argument put forward in this article which is why the Catalan Cooperative Movement did not progress during this period in line with the cooperative movements elsewhere in Europe. Secondly, it will also summarise the causes for the Catalan cooperative movement's prodigious growth during the Civil War and why this advance would not be sustained in the years that followed.

This article uses, as its sources newspapers, reports of the movement's congresses and assemblies as well as contemporary articles in alternative working-class institutions' publications (mainly those of the CNT and the USC). From these sources, it will be possible to consider the Chamber and the Federation's policies and its practices and examine their outcomes as well as take into account the opinions of individual members of these two organisations concerning their relative lack of success.

A Brief history of the early development of Cooperativism in Catalonia, 1865 to 1899

The first cooperatives in Catalonia were production cooperatives founded by workers in the second half of the nineteenth century in order to produce a product and sell it. They were normally closely linked to trade unions and were inspired by the ideas of the French cooperators of the period. However, it was to be consumer cooperation which would dominate the movement in Catalonia from 1865 until Franco's regime which began in the mid-1930s. The man responsible for bringing information about the consumer cooperatives of the Rochdale Pioneers Equitable Society from England to Catalonia was Fernando Garrido, who promoted cooperation in his books *Historia de las asociaciones obreras* (1864) and *La Historia de las clases trabajadoras* (1870). A Cooperative Congress held in Barcelona in December, 1865, promoted cooperativism as the 'sole means of social transformation (Olaya Morales 1994, 210-212). The first consumer cooperative in Catalonia was created in Gerona (La Econòmica Palafrugellenca) in 1865 and until 1870 consumer cooperativism was the predominant working-class movement in the region. Set up by workers fed up with paying the exorbitant prices of private businesses, the first consumer cooperatives were nothing more than a local store, which often opened for a few hours when the working day had finished. The name of the cooperative usually had a social meaning, for example La Lealtad (Loyalty), La Fraternidad (Brotherhood), etc. or it referred to the neighbourhood in which it was located such as La Andresense (San Andres), El Progreso Sansense (Sans), or the town, such as La Obrera Tarraconense (Tarragona), La Econòmica Ripollense (Ripoll), etc. The names in themselves suggest the localised and distinctive nature given by members to their cooperative. Most of the cooperatives were located in the working-class neighborhoods of Barcelona - Sant Martí, Gracia, Sans, San Andreu etc. – or in the cities of the industrial cordon surrounding the capital such as Sabadell or Mataró although there were also important cooperatives in Girona, Tarragona and Osona.

The heyday of Catalan working-class cooperative dominance was short-lived. At the Workers' Congress held in Barcelona in June, 1870, the Federación Regional Española (Regional Federation of the First International) was officially constituted. The Congress saw the eclipse of cooperativism by anarchism (at first, collectivist, and then, syndicalist) as the predominant ideology of the organised Catalan working class. The anarchist hold on the working class grew from this moment onwards and they convinced their followers that cooperation was "a desertion of the ranks of the revolutionary workers" (Reventós, 95). By the beginning of the twentieth century social democratic parties across Europe had become the predominant supporters of consumer cooperativism (Birchall 1997, 76; Arias Gonzalez 2007). However, the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) had limited influence in Catalonia partly due to the strength of anarchism and partly due to the nature of Spanish socialism which was Madrid-based, centralist, rejected Catalan and had little interest in Catalanist politics. Despite this lack of political support in the last decade of the nineteenth century, cooperatives continued to exist, but were largely isolated from the main strands of the organised working-class movement. In general, there is little information about the period between the early 1870s and the 1890s and beyond the limited sphere of activity of their own cooperative, members looked no further and there was no national, regional or even local framework to link them together.

The lack of industrial take-off and the concomitant limited economic growth combined with a lack of political support and limited legal clarity on the position of cooperatives all created obstacles to the growth of the movement. For a long time, the Ley de Asociación (Association Law) of 1887 and some articles of the Commercial Code were "the only substantive provisions regulating the life of Spanish cooperatives".

Nonetheless, the law was very confused as to whether or not cooperatives should enjoy certain tax exemptions because their purpose was not lucrative and in general, cooperatives paid more tax than in other countries (Guinnane and Martinez Rodriguez 2009). The need for legal clarity was the main theme at the first Catalan and Balearic Regional Cooperative Congress held in Barcelona in 1899. The Congress also saw the creation of the Regional Chamber of Catalan and Balearic cooperatives which would advocate a change to the law and coordinate, unite and help advance the cooperative movement in Catalonia.

The Chamber, 1899-1918: Idealism, haste and collapse

The Chamber set itself two principle tasks: propaganda in favour of cooperativism which included the publication of a monthly journal *Revista de la Cooperación Catalana (RCC)* and expanding cooperation “as much as possible” (*RCC*, May 1899).ⁱⁱ Forty cooperatives were founding members of the Chamber, the majority of these being consumer cooperatives with less than 100 members. In his closing address to the first Catalan and Balearic Regional Cooperative Congress, Salas Anton, president of the Chamber during its 19 years in existence, argued that “the aim of Catalan cooperation was the social transformation of society” (Salas Anton. 1902. “¿La Obra de la Cámara Regional debe ser de cooperación o cooperativismo?” *RCC*, May). How this was to be achieved was clarified at the Second Cooperative Congress in 1902. Consumer cooperatives were, Salas Anton continued, to be “the primary element of social reconstruction.” They would be the shops that would supply as many goods as possible, merging together to form a regional “mother cooperative” (cooperative union) that would monopolise wholesale trade. A large percentage of the profits of the mother cooperative would be used to create production cooperatives that would produce the products that the consumer cooperative would distribute - next, a cooperative bank would be created. The mother cooperative would also promote the creation of agrarian cooperatives so that their produce would go as directly as possible from producer to consumer. In short, the goal was to replace capitalist society little by little. The influence of Gide was more than evident but references to the British cooperative movement were also a constant in the pages of the *RCC*.

The first step to achieving this ambitious goal and what would become the Chamber’s principle preoccupation: “a constant aspiration” throughout its 19 years, was the creation of a cooperative wholesale society that would be able to buy in bulk the products sold by member cooperatives thus reducing prices as well as demonstrating the benefits of acting cooperatively (*RCC*, February 1901). The inspiration was the English Cooperative Wholesale Society (CWS) which had played an essential role in the growth of the movement in that country and Chamber members believed that they should follow the path already taken by the English cooperativists. They felt that the creation of a wholesale company would provide the economic logic for a merger of all cooperatives into one big union, therefore making cooperatives more economically competitive. This would represent the first step in the creation of the Cooperative Republic advocated by Gide. Initially, hope was high among the Chamber members that the Catalan cooperative movement could, and would, follow the success of movements in other western European countries.

At the First Congress in 1899, it was agreed that the cooperatives were not yet economically prepared to create a wholesale society immediately. Instead, an Office of Commercial Relations (Oficina de Relaciones Comerciales, ORC) was created to organise the purchase of goods in bulk as a first step in this direction (*RCC*, January 1900 and February 1901). However, the ORC was soon having problems: from the comments in the press it is obvious that member cooperatives had not been ordering sufficient products through the ORC, nor had they provided the economic support it needed to operate, often paying late for produce or not at all. This was a critical problem as the ORC needed money to buy in bulk prior to distribution. The ORC issued an ultimatum ordering them to pay what had been agreed in status and meetings. As a result, a number of cooperatives left the ORC, including the most important and largest in Barcelona. The annual report presented by the general committee at a general meeting in February, 1901, was a catalogue of failures (*RCC*, February 1901). The Chamber would try on numerous occasions to relaunch their wholesale project but always with the same results: The ORC was replaced by Catalan and Balearic Central Cooperative which was soon in trouble, again, it seems, through lack of support and it quickly collapsed; this was eventually replaced by Spanish Union Workers’ Consumer Cooperative Wholesale and Retail Society in 1908 which collapsed at the end of 1909 or in early 1910 (*RCC*, Jun 1902, February, 1903 and CC, 15 December, 1907). In each case the Chamber blamed the

lack of support from the cooperatives, while these complained of lack of commercial knowledge and experience of the administrators the Chamber put in charge of the organisation (*RCC*, June 1902).

Following the previous failures, the next attempt to organise bulk purchasing of products by cooperatives evolved more by chance than design and had the advantage of not forcing cooperatives to take financial risks. The Chamber, acting like a mediator, simply organised the purchase of certain key products for the cooperatives but without a charge. After the first year, 54 cooperatives were buying products in this way and in October, 1912, a permanent Cooperative Market was created where delegates from the member cooperatives would come to inspect the products and make their orders (*Cooperatismo*, 15 October, 1916). The Chamber created an Economic Section to manage this 'common purchases' scheme and in May 1915 this created a wholesale warehouse after eight cooperatives had agreed to buy their goods in this way (Salas Antón. 1915 "El Cooperatismo y la Actual Psicología Barcelonesa." *Cooperatismo*, 15 July). Within a year, 19 cooperatives were members of the Economic Section which almost doubled its trade the following year when, on average, 60 different cooperatives made their orders via the Section (*Cooperatismo*, 1 October, 1916). The success of the Economic Section was aided by the economic situation: the Catalan economy was transformed by the First World War because, although Spain opted for neutrality in the global conflict, it benefited greatly from the increased demand for its products by the belligerent countries and by the countries that previously obtained their products from them.

However, the success of the Economic Section soon led the Chamber to try to increase the pace of the wholesale development. New Section regulations were approved in May 1917 ruling that all cooperatives in the Chamber would be participants in the Section. However, by December, 1917, the Chamber was complaining about: "the unspeakable conduct observed by some Cooperatives towards the Regional Chamber, refusing to satisfy in due time the invoices of the same, some of them having received in bad form the dependants that presented them with said invoices" ("Càmbra Regional.", *Cooperatismo*, 1 December 1917). Once again the Chamber's projects had demanded financial commitments from the member cooperatives, which they were unable or unwilling to fulfil. The Section's economic situation became so dire that in mid-1918 it collapsed, a victim of its "disastrous administration" taking the Chamber with it (Reventós, 193). It is unfortunately difficult to establish the exact details of the crisis as the relevant copies of *Cooperatismo* are not in the archives and, in general, the cooperative press avoided delving deeply into internal disputes.

The leaders of the Chamber were quick to blame the cooperatives and their members for the failures: "our cooperatives are either crawling in a materialism devoid of all ideals or an idealism that's not based on solid concrete." (Salas Antón. 1917. "Hay que reaccionar con rapidez y energia." *Cooperatismo*, 15 November). There were Salas Antón had complained (1903 "Escollos que hay que evitar." *RCC*, November) "too many cooperatives and too few cooperativists". The criticism, while not totally unfounded, missed the point. The central problem was one of leadership. The projects launched by the Chamber were often ill-conceived, over-ambitious, and were more influenced by the desires of the Chamber's ideologues than by the contemporary reality of the cooperative movement they represented. The chamber's leaders were "armchair socialists" and "benefactors" belonging to the "bourgeoisie" (Arias Gonzalez 2007; Medina-Albadalejo and Pujol-Andreu 2014; Joan Coloma. 1922. "El epílogo de un fracaso y La cooperación Catalana," *Acción Cooperatista (AC)*, 10 December). The cooperatives had to put economic safety first. Many enjoyed a fragile existence and preferred to use profits to create cafes, social centres or social benefits for their members. Simply put, the project demanded too much sacrifice from them with evident risks and, particularly following the earlier failures, no guarantee of success.

The collapse of the Chamber was the result of financial incompetence and was undoubtedly its principal failure. However, progress in the other main areas the Chamber had targeted was equally as disappointing. There were no mergers of cooperatives and therefore no progress in the creation of the "mother Cooperative" although different cooperatives had begun to work together to produce bread and pork products (a basic part of the diet) on a local level (*CC*, 15 March and 1 April 1910). There were still numerous laws that presented obstacles for the movement's growth, limiting them to selling only to members unless they wanted to be treated like private businesses for tax purposes, permitting intrusive inspections while, in general, laws relating to cooperatives remained confusing, generalised and open to wide interpretation (Salas Antón. 1903. "Palo de Ciego contra la Cooperación de Producción and Reformas Cooperativas I." *RCC*, August and December). These

factors were exploited by professional guilds that had influence in local politics and they were often used against the cooperatives (“Los presupuestos Municipales y las Cooperativas.” *CC*, 1 January 1910).

The Federation, from 1918 to the Second Republic’s inauguration in 1931: attempts to restore trust in the cooperative movement after the Chamber’s collapse

A few months after the collapse of the Chamber, a regional assembly of cooperatives in Barcelona approved the statutes of the new regional Federation of Catalan Cooperatives (the Federation) (*Cooperatismo*, 1 September 1919). The Federation also published its own newspaper, *Acción Cooperatista (AC)*. The Federation’s progress was severely restricted by the fallout of the Chamber’s collapse both with regard to financial issues as well as to morale. In general, the cooperative movement did not make much progress but perhaps the fact that it survived was success in itself. Yet in the 1920s, the Federation introduced significant changes to the movement specifically in terms of member cooperatives’ representation within the organisation and the clarity of its overall ideological position – both in terms of its social class and its socialist political position.

At the fourth Regional Congress of Catalan Cooperatives held in Barcelona in March, 1920, representatives of 107 cooperatives defined the objectives and organisation of the new Federation. It retained the Chamber’s consumer-based ideology and its basic tenets but these were now more clearly defined and more directly related to the nature of the cooperatives in that region. The Federation would propagate the advantages of Cooperation “among the working class,” acting as a link between the region’s cooperatives and representing them in relation to public authorities (IV Congreso Regional de Cooperativas de Cataluña, 1920). The Chamber’s vague socialism was now more clearly orthodox and working-class. The Federation was more responsive to members with its central committee being made up of five members – one elected by each of the four Catalan provinces and a President then elected by these four delegates. All the delegates had to be members of affiliated Cooperatives - the cooperatives wanted more control over policy than they had enjoyed during the years of the Chamber.

Replacing wholesale purchasing as the movement’s central policy was the project to create a cooperative Credit Bank. A paper on this subject was presented to the Congress claiming that the attempts to create a wholesale society failed due to the fact the Catalan cooperative movement as a whole lacked a solid financial base. The paper argued that a credit bank, with the most solvent (both morally and economically) member cooperatives being the major shareholders, could help create the stability necessary to relaunch the wholesale purchasing project. The bank would provide low interest loans to encourage expansion by the cooperatives thus helping wholesale purchases and it would also help consumer cooperatives to create production cooperatives. In short, the cooperative credit bank was now seen as the cornerstone of the future progress of the movement.

This new strategy, however, did not last long. The Federation had created its own Economic Section in 1919 which was now more directly under the control of the cooperatives. However, despite the change of name, the new Section inherited the Chamber’s debts. The socio-economic situation in Catalonia did not help: the wartime economic boom petered out and social unrest grew, culminating in a general strike in Barcelona and a subsequent form of gangland war as paid gunmen of the employers Federation and the CNT left hundreds dead. Given past experiences and the present reality, the cooperatives’ caution to become involved in the Section was more than understandable (*Cooperatismo*, 1 May 1919). By early 1921 the situation was desperate and the Section drew up new regulations that required member cooperatives to contribute more financial support, but all to no avail and the Section was liquidated in early 1922 after the Federation had reached an agreement with both creditors and litigators after the latter had threatened to take the Section to court (*AC*, 1 March 1921, 25 June and 20 July 1922). The collapse of the Section and the financial agreements needed to keep the Federation out of legal difficulties threatened its very existence and put an abrupt end to the project to create a credit bank.

The rest of the decade was one of gradual and careful rebuilding by the Federation. The individual cooperatives’ confidence in the regional project had been severely tested by the Chamber’s mismanagement and its consequences. It is impossible to gauge the full impact of the Chamber’s errors on the cooperative movement, but it is clear that it made individual cooperatives more hesitant to get involved in regional organisations and tended to reinforce their individualistic nature. At a time when cooperative movements in other European countries had grown and evolved, the Chamber had sent the movement in Catalonia in the opposite direction.

The collapse of the Economic section and that of the projected credit bank severely restricted policy in relation to wholesale purchasing. A natural process towards making common purchases emerged at town, neighbourhood, and eventually province level. However, the next step proved elusive. In January, 1929, a commission was created at a Provincial Federation Assembly to investigate how to move forward. This commission concluded that it was not the right time to start wholesale purchasing due to the amount of capital needed for such a project: "We have to be more modest because our past mistakes have left a background of pessimism." Instead a Purchasing Group was set up that would "communicate on a daily basis the state of the markets, prices, opportunities, and how much information they think is useful." ("Informe sobre relaciones económicas." AC, 10 May 1929).

Yet the movement's relative weakness in the 1920s did not prevent cooperativists from seeking ways to improve and strengthen the unity of the movement i.e., the merger of two of the largest cooperatives in the Gracia district of Barcelona in January, 1927, to create the Barcelona Cooperative Union (UCB). Inspired by the creation of UCB, the Federation members in Barcelona launched a campaign for a study to be carried out and then put forward to its members the need for a merger of all consumer cooperatives in the capital. The Federation's permanent secretary, Duran i Guardia, argued that the fusion of the cooperatives in Barcelona into one large union "would solve all the other internal problems that currently concern the members of the Barcelona cooperatives" (Duran i Guardia. 1927 "A nuevos tiempos, nuevos métodos." AC, 14 October). The main conclusion that was drawn from the campaign was that a merger would not be an easy task. Although the federated cooperatives shared certain common principles, each of them had their own statutes and regulations, particularly in relation to commitments to their members. In order to form a single union, extensive negotiation of statutes would be required and it would also need the will of the cooperatives to do so, which in most cases was clearly lacking. As would be seen during the 1930s, it would require legal and state intervention to achieve this. However, such a change was premature: first, the cooperatives had to work more closely together in order for the benefits of joint action to become evident. The 1920s saw only gradual progress in this direction.ⁱⁱⁱ

In 1920, the Federation created its first second-degree cooperative, the Union of Cooperatives for the manufacture of pasta for soups. A second-degree cooperative is one where the members are the cooperatives that link up to form it rather than individuals being members; workers in the pasta cooperative, therefore, were the cooperative's employees rather than its members and by 1927 36 cooperatives were members (AC, 15 November, 1920). However, despite enthusiasm among Federation members for creating further second-grade cooperatives, no more were created until the Second Republic. One negative aspect of this new cooperative was the issue of labour relations. At the end of 1928 a strike broke out at the factory after the pasta cooperative's management board decided to cut the working week and reduce salaries due to a fall in demand. It then decided to replace the striking workforce. There is little information about this strike in the cooperative press, but what is known is that after a month production at the factory was resumed (AC, 25 May and 29 June 1928). It appears that the strike was initially resolved in favour of the cooperative, i.e., the employers - however, once the CNT regained its legality in 1930, the cooperative's Board was forced to reconsider its position (AC, 7 August, 23 October and 6 November 1931; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 27 January 1933).

The strike drew the attention of leading members of the CNT, who were at the time engaged in a process of revising their tactics following Primo de Rivera's military coup in September, 1923, which was supported by the Catalan bourgeoisie on the understanding that the new dictator would crush the union. The CNT was banned in 1924 and it did not regain legality until after the fall of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship in 1930. Angel Pestaña and Joan Peiró had both been CNT national secretaries, both on the moderate side of the union. Pestaña (1928, "De cooperativismo", "El asunto de Actualidad" and "En torno a lo mismo", *El Diluvio*, 4 May, 6 and 8 June) condemned the actions of the Union's management as "deplorable," and claimed the conditions of the workers were worse than in the majority of private companies Peiró (1928, "Un pleito que queda en pie." AC, 29 June) also criticised the dictatorial behaviour of the management whose treatment of its workers differed little from that of the "most despotic bourgeois" as well as the way that the cooperative movement had without question blindly defended them. The strike was a propaganda disaster for the cooperative movement, showing a clear division between employers and employees that cooperativism was supposed to overcome. Finally, important CNT militants had shown an interest in the potential of cooperatives only to see their worst prejudices reaffirmed.

Towards the end of 1929, the Catalan Leftist newspaper *L'Opinió* published an article by Joan Palafox (1929. "Fracàs del cooperativisme." *L'Opinió*, 21 September). who claimed cooperativism in Catalonia had failed. A further article by Joan Casajoana (1929. "Dels nostres amics cooperatistes." *L'Opinió*, 15 June) argued that it was not cooperativism that was at fault, but rather that Cooperation in Catalonia had taken the wrong path. Catalan consumer cooperatives had "stayed stuck in 19th century ideas" ignoring "modern advances" and they had "wanted to turn the cooperatives into some sort of fraternity, completely different from the aims of cooperativist ideology". "Particularism and personalism" had got in the way of the collective ideal. B. Farre (1931. "La Cooperació tal com és?" *Justicia Social*. 10 October), a member of the Federation administration, agreed arguing that this had resulted in the majority of individuals that joined the cooperatives doing so for individual, not ideological, reasons, attracted by the social and mutualist projects of individual cooperatives. Cooperative members seemed to be more interested in their own individual cultural groupings and this inward-looking and individualistic approach was why, according to Ventosa I Roig (1929. "La Cooperación en Barcelona." *AC*. 4 April). President of the Federation, the majority of the working class remained outside the movement and, in most cases, not even aware it existed. By the end of the 1920s, therefore, the Catalan cooperative movement was in profound crisis. Growth during the decade had been derisory, the projects associated with wholesale purchasing, the creation of a credit bank, cooperative education, and the creation of cooperative unions in the main cities had all failed. Lluís Ardiaca (1931. "La Veritable Cooperació." *Justicia Social*. 26 September), a member of the Federation's administrative staff, concluded that what was needed was a "radical renovation." To "amend and correct" this situation, Duran I Guardia (1930. "¿Fracaso del Cooperativismo?" *AC*. 27 September) argued "a handful of men of goodwill are working." But rather than from within the cooperative movement itself, this renovation would come from political parties in which these cooperativists were also active. Apart from being cooperativists, Ardiaca, Farre and Duran i Guardia were members of the Unió Socialista de Catalunya (USC) while Ventosa I Roig was a leading figure in the Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya formed in 1931 by different factions from the Catalanist Left.

The Chamber had defined itself as 'socialist' although the definition was vague but now, with the Federation, the movement was more clearly defined along class lines and, although still following the basic outline of Gide's cooperativism, it moved closer to the position of Belgian cooperativism with a much closer relation to socialist parties but with a distinct Catalanist leaning. The Unió Socialista de Catalunya was created in 1923 by a mixture of cooperativists, militants from the Catalan Federation of the PSOE that opposed the party's centralist policy and Catalan republicans looking for a means to attract the Catalan working class to Catalan nationalism, which, up until then, was mostly associated with the Lliga Regionalista, a clearly right-wing party (Alcaraz i Gonzalez 1987, 10). The USC supported the 'multiple base' policy by which workers' emancipation would be achieved due to a joint, but autonomous, ruling by the different workers' organisations: party, unions and cooperatives (Guerra Sesma 2008, 408-434). The USC was a relatively weak party claiming to have a membership of 600 at its height although 100 to 125 may have been more accurate, mostly from the upper levels of the working class (Martín, 1974). The USC recommended that all party members became active cooperative members in their neighbourhoods in order to ensure that these did not deviate from the "pure cooperative doctrine" which was itself "a naturally socialist action" (1933. "El II Congrés General de la Unió Socialista de Catalunya: Tesis aprovades." *Justícia Social*, 22 April). The USC was dissolved in 1926 as a result of its opposition to the Primo de Rivera Dictatorship but reorganised in 1930 following the latter's demise. It was to be its coalition with the Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC) that gave it an influence disproportionate to its strength.

The ERC was created in 1931 when different factions from the Catalanist Left came together to form one party. A significant member was Joan Ventosa I Roig who was the President of the Federation from 1922 to 1934 (as well as President of the newly formed Spanish Cooperative Federation from 1929 to 1934). The ERC was a populist leftist party and welcomed members from all classes therefore including guild members and representatives of small industries that were opposed to the cooperative movement. So, ERC support for cooperativism came from a small section within the party and was not a formal position as was the case with the USC (Plana i Gabernet, 283-291). It is not surprising, therefore, that the influence the USC had over the Federation was greater than that of the ERC - for example, in 1933 the Federation's central council had eight members, four of whom were USC militants (Garner 2004). During the Primo De Rivera dictatorship (1923 to

1930) the political influence in Catalonia of the USC and the different factions that made up the ERC was negligible. However, these two organisations formed a coalition for the municipal elections in April, 1931, and this coalition would continue throughout the Republic until, in, July, 1936, the USC became one of the founder members of the Partido Socialista Unificado de Cataluña (PSUC).

After the collapse of the Primo dictatorship in 1930 and the so-called Dictablanda of General Berenguer (January, 1930, to February, 1931), a new government under Admiral Aznar (February to April, 1931), organised municipal elections of April of that year. An editorial in *Acción Cooperativa* (“Las cooperativas y la política municipal.” 27 February, 1931) about the forthcoming elections, claimed bitterly that “the cooperatives find themselves in a position of inferiority in relation to organised commerce; their voice has not reached the opinion of those who exercise power.” But that was all about to change: the scale of the government’s defeat in these elections would lead to the collapse of the monarchy and the inauguration of the Second Republic, bringing about political change that would fundamentally alter the prospects of the Catalan cooperative movement, creating a new regional government, the Generalitat, led by the ERC/USC coalition.

The Second Republic 1931 to 1936, the Spanish Cooperatives Law, 1931 (the National Law), and the Catalan Basic Cooperative Law, 1934 (the Catalan Law)

The transformation of the political landscape in Catalonia ushered in by the inauguration of the Second Republic in April, 1931, finally created the environment for cooperativism to make progress with the passing of the National Ley de Cooperatives (National Law) in 1931 and the Ley de Bases de la Cooperación (Catalan Law) in 1934. Both laws were intended to clarify cooperatives’ legal position and to help them to develop. The political parties of the “handful of men” of which Duran I Guardia had spoken, were now in government removing many of the legal obstacles that had limited the movement’s progress. However, in the five years prior to the outbreak of the Civil War in 1936, despite progress in some areas, at organisational level and in the expansion of other forms of cooperation, the Federation’s consumer cooperatives were unable to take full advantage of the legislation due to their own internal shortcomings.

For Garau Rolandi (2015, 481), the cooperative movement finally “matured” during the Second Republic. Tellingly, the author’s focus is on production cooperatives and there is little doubt that this form of cooperation was able to take full advantage of the help that the National and Catalan cooperative laws provided and by 1935, 65 new cooperatives had been formed (“Ensucrant el cami.” *AC*, 10 January, 1931). The Catalan Federation was also able to make progress in this area with the creation of second degree cooperatives for the production of soap, chocolate and carbonated water.

Year	Cooperatives	Individual Members
1931	166	27,718
1932	185	30,978
1934	189	38,542
1935	206	60,030
1936	241	84,300

As Table 1 shows, membership of the Federation grew as did the number of individual members. The figures for 1936 include the five months of the Civil War and therefore its impact must be taken into account. Initially, growth was limited but it appears to increase after 1934, although much of this could be due to the rise in the number of production cooperatives. The Federation’s 1936 annual report gives the figure for individual members of consumer cooperatives as 51,353. However, figures were amalgamated and, together with the increased numbers of production cooperatives, the Federation included seven electricity cooperatives, six health cooperatives, five housing cooperatives, one credit cooperative and one school cooperative. By 1936, as well as the Local Federacion of Barcelona, there were district federations in Gerona; Tarragona; Levante; Vic; Manresa; Bajo Llobregat; Igualada and Valles (Federaci3n de Cooperatives de Catalunya. Memoria 1936-1937 1937).

However, given the support of the two new laws and the fact that the Catalan government was favourable to the cooperative movement, the growth of consumer cooperatives was far less than expected. In fact, by 1936, the Vice-President of the Federation Joan Rovira (1936. "Balances." AC. 11 April), and Juame Joan, who worked in the Federation's main office (1936. "Mutualisme no és cooperatisme." AC, 26 April), bemoaned its evident "stagnation." According to Joan many cooperatives were proud of their collectivist policy, directing all their profits to mutual funds, based on a natural increase in membership and a determined consumption. When these calculations proved erroneous they were forced to raise prices, often higher than private businesses, to cover expenses. This made them uncompetitive and also limited the funds they could dedicate to the growth of the movement. An example of this is that the lack of support from the cooperatives appears to have been the main cause for the disappearance, in 1932, of the Purchasing Group created in 1929 (AC, 22 April, 1932). Although there was much truth in the criticism, it is important to remember that in other countries where cooperativism was successful, governments were more active in providing social security.

Spurred on by the new Catalan Law and the creation of a national wholesale society in 1935, a draft statute for the Central Wholesale Cooperative of Catalonia (CCC) was drawn up: the CCC was to incorporate the Federation of Cooperatives, the provincial and local federations that had economic sections, and the cooperatives where there were no provincial federations (AC, 7 June, 1935). The economic sections were in charge of informing the CCC about the purchase orders coming from their respective regions. However, as had happened with the purchasing group, many cooperatives had promised to support the project in meetings and assemblies but did not back it up with action and the CCC languished well into the years of the Civil War (AC, 21 August, 1936). With the obstacles presented by the State removed during the Second Republic, the different outlooks between cooperativist idealists and cooperative members became evident and there was no one to blame for the failure of the cooperative movement other than the cooperatives themselves.

That many cooperative members and leaders had a different view from the Federation's leaders became clear in the debate that ensued concerning the two new cooperative laws. The National Law of September, 1931, defined a cooperative as a voluntary association of people who, in order to improve human relationships, decided to put collective interests above all ideas of personal benefit and to suppress the pursuit of profit. A draft law exempting cooperatives from contributions, which was attached to the National Law, took a year-and-a-half to pass because the structure for administering it was insufficient ("Sobre el momento actual." AC, 21 August, 1931). In addition, this new law did not create a specific body to deal with cooperatives; the Sub-Commission of the Ministry of Labour was charged with this responsibility but soon proved to be totally incapable of fulfilling the task assigned to it. The cooperatives had to make several changes to their statutes to conform to the new legislation, which they then submitted to the Ministry of Labour in Madrid, a process that took a very long time. This delay was so severe that the Federation protested on several occasions to the Sub-Committee about the difficulties it was creating for cooperatives, which were forced to wait months or even more than a year for their legal recognition. The constant delays in the legal process associated with the 1931 National Law, coupled with the knowledge that the Generalitat would be given responsibility for cooperatives in Catalonia, meant that it was the Catalan Law rather than the National, that would have an impact on the movement.

The Catalan Law, drawn up by the cooperativist Ventosa i Roig, Minister of Agriculture and Economy in the Generalitat from 1933 to 1934 was approved in February, 1934. The new Law, adopted many of the basic elements of the 1931 National Law being based on three fundamental principles: the open door policy; political and religious independence; and economic democracy ("La presentació del Projecte de Llei de Bases de la Cooperació, al Parlament de Catalunya." AC, 22 December, 1933). To avoid the problems that had caused so many delays for the National Law, a Supreme Council for Cooperation was formed which had two main objectives: to ensure that the legislation was complied with and to exercise a kind of guardianship guaranteeing that cooperatives did not deviate from their objectives. As with the National Law, the Catalan Law divided cooperatives into 'popular' and 'mercantile' and only the former were entitled to the financial benefits and tax exemptions provided by the law.

The Catalan Law was debated at the Second Congress of the Federation of Cooperatives of Catalonia (the Second Congress), held on 30 June and 1 July and 25 and 26 August, 1934, at which the stark contrast between the desires of a few cooperativist faithful in the Federation and the overall position of the cooperatives was made apparent. Divisions regarding some of the stipulations were immediately evident, so much so that the

Second Congress had to be suspended as it proved impossible to reach an agreement on the election of members to the new Supreme Council (“Deduccions del Congrés.” AC, 13 July 1934). Many cooperatives complained that the legislation gave too much power to the Supreme Council, allowing it to intervene in cooperatives’ affairs, a fear encouraged by its first circular which stated: “This organisation has the function of guiding and controlling the activities of cooperatives ... in our land”. Finally, the Second Congress agreed that “the position of members of any federative body is incompatible with that of members of the Supreme Council of Cooperation or any official body” to try to ensure the independence of the Federation from the new state-lead body (1934 “Continuación del II Congreso” AC, 7 September).

Reading between the lines of some of the articles published immediately after the initial part of the Second Congress at the end of June, and the amendments made when it resumed at the end of August, there were two other aspects of the Catalan Law that caused conflict in addition to the issue of the Supreme Council. The Catalan Law stated that in order to be considered as a cooperative, and therefore qualify for tax exemptions, a cooperative would have to have a minimum of 400 members and should describe themselves as ‘popular’ rather than ‘workers’ cooperatives. In a regional assembly of Barcelona cooperatives, the majority saw the proposed 400-member minimum as an attempt to force cooperatives into a merger which they had so far resisted. The assembly also opposed the term ‘popular’ as it did not convey the concept of “the working class spirit” that cooperativism “should represent” (AC, 25 May, 1934). The opposition from Barcelona cooperatives was important since they represented more than half of all the Federation members. The Second Congress, reconvened on 25 and 26 August, accepted that “the cooperative movement ... is the direct and natural fruit of the working class” and agreed to address the Catalan Parliament asking that “popular consumer cooperatives be allowed to prohibit the entry as members of those persons who, in a camp or other economic activity, carry out a function of expropriating the most valuable or who belong to the professional armed forces” (AC, 7 September 1934).

On 6 October, 1934, the President of the Generalitat, Lluís Companys, declared that Catalonia was an independent state within the Spanish Federal Republic. The rebellion against Madrid lasted only seven hours before it was quashed by the army, a statute granting Catalonia autonomy was suspended and thousands of Catalans were imprisoned. As late as February, 1936, an editorial in *Acción Cooperatista* complained that since October the cooperative members had “had their hands tied in any attempt to advance the movement” (“Cap un període de realitzacions.” AC, 28 February, 1936). But the victory of the Popular Front in the October elections cleared the way once again for the movement to be able to progress. Yet it was the Civil War that would significantly change the fate of cooperation in Catalonia, resulting in an “abnormal development” by the movement (Pérez Barò 1970, 35).

The Civil War years (1936-1939): State control of the Cooperative Movement?

In Barcelona, mutinous soldiers from the military uprising on 19 July, 1936 against the Republic were confronted, not only by the Republic's assault guards, but also by the armed workers of the CNT. The defeat of the uprising in Catalonia sparked a spontaneous revolution throughout the region: the workers took control of their factories and seized the land they were working on and power was in the hands of the working class and its organisations. However, the CNT, and its ideological ally, the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI), were aware of the need to defeat the common enemy once the rebellion had become a civil war in the rest of Spain. They decided, therefore, to share power with the other left-wing groups in the region with the PSUC (which included the USC), the ERC and the Marxist Unification Workers' Party (POUM). However, the CNT itself remained highly influential in Catalonia until May, 1937.

The Generalitat initially published a decree stating that it would “intervene in the functioning of all production and consumer Cooperatives” which would remain “under the immediate control” of the Supreme Council for Cooperation” (“Decret important.” AC, 7 August 1936). However, with the dominance of the CNT in the region, the Supreme Council effectively disappeared. The CNT was initially the principal power within the Catalan Economic Council which was created in August to “order and give structure to economic activity in Catalonia” (Castells Duran 1996, 41). The Council was made up of the unions and political organisations opposed to Franco and almost immediately produced a plan for the region’s “socialist transformation” which contained 11 resolutions on how this new economy should function. The seventh proposed the “intensification

of the cooperative regime in the distribution of products and, in particular, the cooperative exploitation of large distribution companies" (Pérez Barò 1974, 59-61; "La Nova ordenació de l'Economia." AC, 28 August, 1936). The Federation then requested that it be represented on the Catalan Economic Council but this request was rejected, a clear indication that the cooperative movement was not considered politically relevant to the new situation. Cooperative policy, therefore, would not be in the cooperative movement's hands.

Castells Duran (1996, 17-35) has shown that whereas the CNT and its allies imposed the collectivisation of the economy initially until their influence declined after May 1937 and then the PSUC which became the major political force in the region imposing a more statist and centralised approach - a reflection of its socialist and communist leadership. The initial policy of 'collectivisation-socialisation' of industry put the cooperative movement at risk. As if to stress the point, the Decree of Collectivisations and Workers' Control of 24 October, 1936, which gave a legal framework to the spontaneous collectivisations of industry that had been occurring since the outbreak of the war, did not even mention cooperatives. The economy was divided into two types of enterprises; collectivised and private.

During the first months of the Civil War, the cooperative movement was emasculated by the CNT's influence in the Catalan government and needed to adopt a defensive strategy to try to demonstrate its revolutionary nature to the new dominant political powers (Rovira. 1936. "D'ara en endavant." 7 August). The first step was a decision by the Barcelona consumer cooperatives to join together to form the Union of Cooperators of Barcelona (UCB). The UCB was the result of the merger of 52 cooperatives and had 62 branches (some cooperatives had more than one). At its inception in September, 1936, the UCB had some 9,000 members, a figure that increased to 21,000 within a year and would reach 98,000 by September, 1938. After years - indeed decades - of delay, the merger of the Barcelona cooperatives had been agreed and carried out in less than a month. The speed with which the decision was taken was a mixture of pressure from outside and, desperation from within, the cooperative movement. The movement needed to make itself relevant and united in the face of the new political and economic reality. The merger was achieved, not for ideological reasons, but by the necessity of survival.

There is no specific research into the UCB's history, yet it seems highly unlikely that the decision to unite cooperatives in Barcelona was universally greeted with enthusiasm, given the failure to advance in this area for decades. What limited evidence that exists makes this clear. In a meeting in September 1936 an alternative was proposed in which the UCB would be limited to the cooperatives' purchasing sections. The proposal was defeated by 31 votes to 7. Later the same month, the UCB included 52 cooperatives but by 1938 this number had decreased to 45. The position of the Els Teixidors a Mà in Gràcia is indicative - reading through the editions of its newspaper, *La Llançadora*, it becomes clear that the cooperative was not convinced by the UCB's aims right from the start. An editorial in October, 1936, explains that it needed to do all it could "to save the maximum autonomy to which we aspire". Finally, in July, 1937, an assembly voted unanimously against joining the UCB due to the "scarcely democratic" nature of its constitution. Later in 1938, the cooperative joined the UCB but only after it had retained certain products the cooperative claimed were theirs. This episode demonstrates that cooperative individualism had not completely disappeared. (*La Llançador*, October 1936; July 1937 January and March 1938).

The situation began to improve for the cooperative movement following the 1937 May Days, when militants of the CNT and the POUM fought against the Generalitat on the streets of Barcelona. Following the May Days, the influence of the CNT was severely reduced and the PSUC eclipsed the CNT as the main power in Catalonia. With PSUC at the helm, the Catalan government began a process of 'nationalisation' of the economy, a change that would immediately benefit the cooperative movement in relation to the previous months. However, the 'statisation' of the Catalan economy introduced by the PSUC dominated regional government (aided by the increasing influence of the national government from late 1937) also represented a danger to the movement: whereas collectivisation had threatened its very existence, statisation threatened its independence.

On 16 July, 1937, the Generalitat decreed the restoration and reorganisation of the Supreme Council. Its powers increased from what they had been prior to the Civil War and it was now responsible for "resolving the difficulties and correcting the abuses that occur in the distribution of basic necessities," giving it a major role in the running of the cooperatives (*Almanac de la Cooperació* 1938, 159-163). It was no longer simply consultative. In May, 1937, a Catalan Committee for Inter-Cooperative Relations was set up to coordinate

commercial relations between agricultural unions and consumer co-operatives. It operated under the control of the Generalitat's Department of Agriculture and was made up of representatives of the agricultural and consumer cooperative federations. However, again it was the state and not the Federation that was in control.

While welcoming the political changes, the Federation still hoped to maintain a level of independence. A resolution on "Cooperation and the new economy" was approved by the Federation's fifth Congress in July, 1937, and began by stating that: "Cooperation is irreplaceable as a system for structuring the new economy of Catalonia in a rational and fair manner". However, while it accepted the nationalisation or municipalisation of large industries and public services, it made it clear that "the only guarantee that this ... will be advantageous to the people of Catalonia" would be by "the direct intervention of consumers organised in a cooperative manner". A mixed administration was advocated in which "the municipalities would exert control over these companies" but they would be "administered autonomously by the consumers" ("Les tasques del V Congrés de la Federació de Cooperatives de Catalunya." AC, 23 July, 1937). The Federation's acceptance of an increased role for the state was evident at an individual level as leading members took up important roles within the Catalan government, although this was more related to their political affiliations (mainly PSUC) than their positions within the cooperative movement. An editorial in *Acción Cooperatista* lamented that it was the government, not the cooperatives or the Federation, that gave direction to the movement, but added that "... it is childish to call for the principle of freedom at a time when necessity makes it questionable" ("Un decret governatiu, uns principis universals i una opinió particular" AC, 28 January, 1938). At the First Extraordinary Congress of the Federation, held in November 1938, it was agreed "to put the Catalan Cooperative movement at the disposition of the Republican government" ("Primer Congrés Extraordinari de la Federació de Cooperatives de Catalunya." AC, 23 December, 1938).

The sixth Catalan Consumer Cooperative Congress held in July, 1938, represented a rapidly expanding movement as families joined cooperatives as a means to guarantee the supply of basic goods. Yet this growth was causing problems. The new members were "not yet educated" in cooperative ways and needed to have "our principles" explained to them ("Les tasques del VIè Congrés de la Federació de Cooperatives de Catalunya." AC, 5 August, 1938). To this end, a School of Orientation and Co-operative Education was created, which organised a cycle of Sunday conferences from 13 November, 1938. The spectacular growth of members, combined with the deplorable economic situation resulting from the war, had also left the Federation's financial situation "somewhat laughable" ("Les Finances de la Federació." AC, 1 April, 1938). Economic difficulties and the desire to maintain some level of independence were undoubtedly the key factors in the decision by the Federation to create its own Credit Bank. The first Extraordinary Congress of the Federation held in Barcelona in December, 1938, agreed the statutes of Finances Coop (the credit bank), the only point of contention being that all cooperative members were required to join the new organisation – a final demonstration of division and doubt concerning the cooperative project. Felip Barjau, the Federation's President, predicted that the Finances Coop would link the CCC, Productos Coop and the consumer cooperatives together ("Primer Congrés Extraordinari de la Federació de Cooperatives de Catalunya." AC, 23 December, 1938). The Finances Coop would supply the finance to help the cooperatives buy large-scale purchases, the CCC would have a large quantity of products in a central warehouse and distribution being carried out by a 'transport cooperative' ("Finances Coop." AC, 23 December, 1938). The Federation was planning a cooperative future. But, as with the Chamber before them, it was based on wishful thinking although this time it was due to causes unrelated to the cooperatives. *Acción Cooperatista* published the Acts of the Congress on 23 December, 1938 - this was its last issue. The following month Barcelona surrendered to Franco's regime which immediately began to dismantle the existing cooperative movement, reorganising it according to the religious-corporatist dictates of the new Francoist economy.

Conclusion

The creation of an organised cooperative movement (initially in the form of the Chamber) was seen by its founders as the first step towards Catalan cooperatives becoming equally successful as the cooperative movement elsewhere in Europe - yet this did not occur. Growth and progress over the next 30 years was limited by a number of issues before the conditions of the Civil War finally enabled cooperation in the region to

flourish. This late success resulted more from factors external to the movement than those within it and indeed, during the Civil War, progress that was made was state-imposed rather than simply state-sponsored. Initially, the movement faced opposition and indifference from the State, best exemplified by the delays in passing legislation to clarify cooperatives' legal standing. The weakness of political allies, in particular socialist parties, the PSOE and, until 1931, the USC, meant that the movement was unable to influence a change to this situation. The Chamber's leaders felt that the creation of some form of wholesale society would reduce costs and show the benefits to cooperatives of working together, overcoming legal obstacles and setting the movement along an unstoppable path of expansion. But the Chamber's leaders' desire to run before the movement could walk led to a series of calamitous errors that led cooperatives to be hesitant in becoming involved in regional projects, preferring to limit themselves to smaller-scale local initiatives. This simply re-enforced an already palpable disposition towards autonomy, individualism and to reaching agreements based on mutual benefit. In fact, the real cause of cooperativism's lack of progress in Catalonia, was the cooperatives themselves, through their members. Many members seemed to be influenced by the same federalist, decentralised and bottom-up organisational structure advocated by anarchists. The fierce working-class identity almost mirrored that of the CNT, while a deep suspicion of centralised hierarchy was the basis of libertarian thinking.

Local and traditionalist anarchists, Catalanists or non-political members supported their cooperatives, but not necessarily cooperativism: those who wanted a new fairer society felt unions and political parties were more likely to bring this about, with cooperatives providing consumer goods at a reasonable price, as well as mutual services. In Catalonia, cooperativism as an independent and autonomous means of social transformation failed to convince, although cooperation was embraced by socialists, some Catalanists - and even some anarchists - as an integral part of an overall project to emancipate the working class. Cooperative rank and file members were supportive of many of the policies put forward by the cooperativist ideologues in the Chamber and the Federation if they felt these would benefit cooperatives. However, after the passing of the Catalan Cooperative Law in 1934, the ensuing debate caused these rank and file members to become increasingly suspicious of attempts to limit, or even to destroy, the autonomy of their cooperatives. In short, they were not cooperativist.

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ⁱ The principles, which have since been updated to clarify this position and include autonomy and independence, are available on the ICA website: <https://www.ica.coop/en/cooperatives/cooperative-identity>

ⁱⁱ *La Revista de la Cooperación Catalana (RCC)* was replaced by *El Cooperador Cooperativista* (1905-1911) which in turn changed its name to *El Cooperatista* (1911-1915) and then to *Cooperativismo* (1915-1920), all three being fortnightly. *Cooperativismo* was replaced by *Acción Cooperatista* in 1920, which became a weekly in 1925 and continued publication until December 1938.

ⁱⁱⁱ In 1919, four cooperatives created a Coal section of which ten later expanded to include 13 more cooperatives from different parts of Barcelona. Meanwhile, in Sans (Barcelona) two of the cooperatives joined forces to make carbon products. And in 1927, five of the largest cooperatives in Barcelona joined forces to purchase cattle, organise their slaughter and distribution, creating the Workers Cooperative Slaughterhouse. Meanwhile, in the town of Mataró, just up the coast from Barcelona, the Union of Mataró Cooperatives was created in 1928 with 440 members.

^{iv} The figures are taken from the AC or the Federation's annual reports. It has proved impossible to locate reliable figures for 1933.