

War, Agriculture, and Food

Rural Europe from the 1930s to the 1950s

**Edited by Paul Brassley, Yves Segers,
and Leen Van Molle**

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Peter Moser and Tony Varley

INTRODUCTION

Besides having small territories and democratically organized states that survived the turmoil of the inter-war period, Ireland and Switzerland are also distinctive for having remained neutral in the Second World War and for having escaped the devastations the conflict brought to others. As much as the economic effects of the war were keenly felt, state–farmer relations in both countries present a striking contrast before, during, and for quite some time after the war years. In highly industrialized Switzerland we can observe the state authorities continuing to pursue an inclusive corporatist strategy based on a well-developed institutionalized framework of working relations between the administration, the farming organizations under the leadership of the Swiss Farmers' Union (SFU, established in 1897), and the educational and scientific community. Under these arrangements farming organizations were being encouraged and guided by the 1930s to interpret their role as one of executing state policy nearly as much as representing their members.

On the other hand, the young Irish state, presiding over an economy built upon export agriculture that had become even more agricultural with partition,¹ was strongly opposed to accepting the Irish Farmers' Federation (IFF), an aspiring umbrella organization founded in 1936, as a representative of the farmers and as a means of executing state policy. While in Northern Ireland 'a monopolistic consultative relationship' obtained between the Ulster Farmers' Union with close ties to the ruling Unionist Party and the Ministry of Agriculture,² the Irish Free State opted for a de facto strategy of exclusion, which contributed significantly to the radicalization and politicization of prominent farmer activists like Elizabeth F. Bobbett, the IFF's general secretary, who were perceived as opponents rather than allies of the state by the Fianna Fáil administration. But the struggle for Irish agricultural corporatism did not cease with the rejection of the IFF. Other civil society actors also became convinced that Irish agriculture would never prosper in the longer run unless corporatist state–farmer relations were instituted. The Catholic corporatist demand for closer relations between

the state and civil society groups ultimately led in 1939 to the state conceding a Commission on Vocational Organisation. This commission, whose purpose was to examine and report on 'the practicability of developing functional or vocational organisation in the circumstances of this country', published its final report and recommendations in 1944.³

While the Swiss and Irish governments had chosen very different strategies to reach their agricultural goals, the goals themselves did not differ significantly in the 1930s. Both executives aspired to create a better and more efficient agriculture capable of supporting the industrializing process and feeding the national population. In both countries agricultural modernization in the 1930s and 1940s primarily meant producing more food for their citizens more efficiently than before. Our task then is not only to ascertain and describe the more or less obvious differences and similarities between the two countries, but also to consider the reasons behind the observable patterns.

It has been argued that states with corporatist state–farmer relations were better placed historically to successfully modernize their agricultural sectors.⁴ This well-substantiated conclusion begs two questions: firstly, how exactly did corporatism function as a necessary condition of agricultural modernization? And, secondly, what effects did corporatism have for farmers and agriculture? Taking these questions as our point of departure, two more specific questions will serve to structure our discussion here. The first asks: why was it that corporatist state–farmer relations had become so well established in inter-war Switzerland while quite the opposite was true in Ireland? The second question asks: what implications did this diverging pattern have for attempts to promote agricultural modernization and for farmers and their respective agricultural sectors? The answers to these two questions will then provide baselines against which we can consider how the Second World War impacted on corporatist state–farmer relations in Switzerland and Ireland both during the conflict and in the decades immediately following it.

CORPORATISM, MODERNIZATION, AND SUBORDINATION

Corporatism, which can be viewed from the perspectives of state elites and organized civil society interests, is sometimes associated with fascist and authoritarian regimes. And in Ireland, too, we find the espousal of authoritarian corporatist ideas in the 1930s, with the fascist-sympathizing General Eoin O'Duffy even founding a short-lived National Corporate Party in 1935.⁵ But in the inter-war period, and indeed for much of the twentieth century, corporatism was a significant principle of governance in liberal capitalist societies like Switzerland and the United States.⁶ In his classic account of the phenomenon, Philippe Schmitter suggests that central to the

ideal-typical corporatist system of interest representation is the way certain organized interests are selectively 'recognized or licensed (if not created) by the state and granted a deliberate representational monopoly within their respective categories in exchange for observing certain controls on their selection of leaders and articulation of demands and supports'.⁷ Such a conception of corporatism implies a tight structure of control that states can impose on civil society groups very much with their own interests and purposes in mind. Two crucial dimensions underpin this structure of control: *who* the state authorities accept to be legitimate representatives of economic interests and *how* they choose to use these interests to advance their own economic policies.⁸

Why should civil society groups be keen to participate in such corporatist arrangements if they are to be treated as a means to the state's ends? One possibility suggests that civil society interests have much to gain from participation—both in representational and material terms.⁹ A contrasting possibility points to how one-sided corporatist relationships can become and to how much incorporation exposes civil society interests, especially working-class ones, to the risk of becoming active accomplices in their own ongoing subordination.¹⁰

Modernization, no less than corporatism, can be viewed from the perspectives of state elites and civil society interests. Ambitious state elites, we suggest, tend to take agricultural modernization to be at once transformative of the *status quo* and historically progressive.¹¹ For twentieth-century modernizing state elites the movement towards more market-oriented and larger-scale farming, as perceived preconditions of constantly increasing output and enhancing labour productivity, came above all else to signify what was transformative and historically progressive. Other, less-flagged modernizing changes have seen the partial replacement of biotic by mineral resources in agriculture since the 1950s, as had happened in manufacturing since the thermo-industrial revolution,¹² and the displacement of large farms by family farms and of paid labour by family labour.¹³ These examples of displacement illustrate how modernizing change, in a way that parallels corporatism itself, can produce 'winners' and 'losers' among the farming community.

Viewed from a critical political economy perspective, agricultural modernization can be seen as subordinating farmers as a group. An early expression of this subordination thesis is found in the remark of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1848 that in the emerging industrial era the countryside would find itself being progressively subjected 'to the rule of the towns'.¹⁴ Similarly Eric Hobsbawm observes of the 1848–1875 period that 'what a growing part of agriculture all over the world had in common was subjection to the industrial world economy'.¹⁵ The subordination Hobsbawm points to here had economic and political dimensions. On the economic front farmers as 'price-takers' had little option but to conform to their assigned role as cheap food providers. And as their numbers grew thinner

and the representatives of organized farming interests became more and more co-opted by the state, the political influence of farmers contracted.

CORPORATISM IN SWITZERLAND AND ITS RELATIVE ABSENCE IN IRELAND BEFORE WORLD WAR II

To understand the corporatist character of state–farmers relations in inter-war Switzerland we must first look at developments in the period before, during, and after World War I. The emerging pattern since the 1880s assumed a path dependency that saw formalized working relations evolving between a state, diversely constituted on the federal and cantonal levels, and an agricultural sector represented by a large and diverse set of farming, educational, and scientific organizations. What was also present was the practice of the state empowering civil society actors to act as intermediaries in industry and commerce before agriculture got its turn—a feature significantly absent in the predominantly agricultural inter-war Ireland.¹⁶

The era of liberalism from the 1830s to the 1870s proved decisive to the agricultural sector's standing in Switzerland's emerging industrial society. Producers were freed from many restrictions on selling their surplus products.¹⁷ The replacement of tithes with taxes put a constant pressure on farmers to increase production for the market; the farmers began to create their own societies at the local, cantonal, and national levels. In 1863, the Swiss Agricultural Association (*Schweizerischer Landwirtschaftlicher Verein*) emerged as an umbrella body for the newly emerging agricultural associations as well as for some older improving societies surviving from the eighteenth century.¹⁸ Alongside the wave of new farmers' organizations at the local and regional levels emerging in the 1880s and 1890s, a department of agriculture was established at the Swiss Technical University in Zurich (ETH) in 1871. It provided for the training of agronomists who mostly became teachers in the agricultural colleges running winter classes for young farmers.¹⁹ This educational campaign gathered further momentum when the federal state established an agricultural section within the Department of Trade and Commerce in 1882. Two years later the federal state began to support farming self-help initiatives financially. Yet, in spite of the state's positive disposition, the consensus among the organizing farmers and agronomists was that the agricultural societies should continue to focus on 'the barn, the field, the garden and the orchard, not the town hall', as Friedrich Gottlieb Stebler, a trained farmer who became an internationally known agronomist, put it.²⁰ Of course, emphasizing the production agriculture's importance did not mean ignoring the state's centrality and the issue of political representation. From the 1880s we find the emerging farming societies participating in state-aided improvement schemes whenever the chance arose.²¹

A new era in state–farmers relations commenced in the early 1890s when peasant leagues (*Bauernbünde*) emerged in a few cantons. These criticized the liberal administration and existing agricultural societies alike—advocating another way out of the crisis to that of the educated ‘establishment’. The peasant leagues emphasized debt relief and reducing state expenditure. They provoked the agricultural societies, dominated by liberal forces, into establishing a new umbrella body capable of embracing all existing agricultural associations and representing the entire farming population. The federal state supported the formation of the SFU in 1897 and mandated it to maintain a *Bauernsekretariat* in order to collect, analyze, and disseminate agricultural statistical data of use to the state as well. The energetic young agronomist Ernst Laur, the SFU’s first director, immediately set about turning the *Bauernsekretariat* into the union’s scientific wing.²² Statistical data concerning prices, costs, and margins, derived from the systematic book-keeping efforts of hundreds of small and medium-sized farms, gave the union a potent resource in negotiating with commercial interests and soon with the state itself.

Not only did the SFU fight vigorously for what were often contradictory farming interests, but it greatly assisted the federal state in pursuing its own agricultural policy, especially when it came to negotiating new tariff agreements for industrial and agricultural products with neighbouring states. In addition, the statistical data relating to prices, costs, and margins facilitated the newly established milk producers’ associations to challenge what had become the unquestioned mechanism for fixing the milk price in the nineteenth century: the producers’ domestic price for liquid milk was simply derived from the price of cheese on the international market. A ‘fair price’ for liquid milk, it was now forcefully argued by the organized milk producers, must cover both the production costs of rational production units *and* reflect the high quality and nutritional value of liquid milk delivered to the consumer’s door. Beginning in 1908 the milk producers waged a series of ‘milk wars’ against the combined forces of cheese manufacturers and exporters, milk powder exporters, chocolate producers, and, increasingly, the consumers’ movement as well. The real significance of these ‘milk wars’ lies in the new method of fixing agricultural prices that the producers were ultimately able to win. Furthermore, all the relevant interests—the producers, manufacturers, exporters, milk vendors, and consumers—would henceforth regularly sit around the negotiating table, deciding prices and margins together.²³

The new milk price-fixing arrangement had yet to be fully tested when the First World War broke out. As it happened wartime emergency conditions strengthened the still young arrangements by almost immediately leading to the formation of a state-recognized coalition of exporters, traders, manufactures, producers, and consumers whose aim was to safeguard the domestic food supply and to provide for a minimal level of exports.²⁴

But even with far-reaching state intervention in the form of compulsory tillage, price ceilings, delivery obligations, and many new initiatives by workers, industrialists, and farm-women to increase food production, it became increasingly difficult to ensure adequate food supplies for consumers at affordable prices. This shortage of food, due to bad harvests and serious interruptions of the international food trade from 1916 onwards, and its high cost—even the experience of hunger in some cases—became important contributory causes of the general strike in the autumn of 1918 which instigated the most serious socio-political crisis to beset the modern Swiss state since its foundation in 1848.

‘Never again a 1918!’ became the rallying cry of those advocating the ‘new food and agricultural policy’, which pursued a reorientation of agricultural production towards the needs of consumers at home and away from satisfying export market demand. It was the agronomists, uniformly trained at the ETH in Zurich, who gave vital leadership by ensuring that elements of the different experimental initiatives inspired by the wartime food crisis found their way into the new food and agricultural policy. Even when food shortage gave way again to food abundance in the early 1920s, the consensus was not to return to the Danish, Dutch, or Irish model of having a primarily export agriculture. A tacit understanding now prevailed within the state and across civil society that the agricultural sector’s basic function was to feed the national population, three-quarters of which had little or no chance (since the urbanization of the nineteenth century) to make a direct contribution to food provision.

Most elements of the evolving policy were systematically brought together in the so-called ‘neo-agrarian policy’ launched in 1938. Towards the close of that year the exact character of the ‘new’ policy was made clear when Friedrich T. Wahlen, one of the most influential agronomists and then a high official in the agricultural section of the department and simultaneously the director of a research station, addressed the cantonal ministers for agriculture. The federal state, Wahlen declared, was now in need of the active support of all farmers to safeguard the Swiss population’s food security. To achieve this end, he continued, the state was willing to guarantee the farmers ‘a right to work’ and a ‘fair wage’—provided they produced what the administration decided was required by the consumers.²⁵ Agriculture was no longer simply a private business; it was now to be properly regarded as a ‘public service’ whose delivery would depend on the actions of a relatively large number of predominantly small and medium-sized family farms.²⁶

When war broke out in September 1939 the difference between Switzerland and Ireland could hardly have been more pronounced where state-farmer relations were concerned. While the Swiss state was now *de facto* ‘employing’ the farming population in order to produce the country’s food requirements, the IFF, the body that aspired to play the same role as the SFU, saw itself not only systematically excluded from all decision-making

processes concerning state agricultural policy, but, in a metaphorical sense, to even be 'at war' with the state.²⁷ How had such a situation come about?

In searching for relevant answers it would be hard to over-emphasize the underlying structural importance of Ireland's de-industrialized economy. In marked contrast to early industrialized Switzerland with a growing population (4,266,000 in 1941 of which 20.3 per cent was agricultural),²⁸ Ireland's lack of industrialization and its smaller and falling population (2,955,000 in 1946 of which 45.7 per cent were agricultural)²⁹ proved to be a fundamental and persisting obstacle to the creation of corporatist state-farmer relations. Looking at the Swiss, British, and Northern Irish cases illustrates how much more likely it was for the political elite of an industrial society to establish working relations with organized farmers than was so in a largely agrarian society.³⁰

Alongside this underlying constraint there existed a number of specific Irish obstacles, such as the tendency for Irish farmers to form agrarian parties in the inter-war period. The polarization of Irish politics around the fracture in the nationalist movement, and the continuing threat up to the mid-1930s of civil war resuming at any time, present a strong contrast to Switzerland's relative stable democracy.³¹ Soon after Southern Ireland reached political independence in the form of the Dominion status within the British Empire granted by the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, Irish farmers and nationalists who had been close political allies for half a century suddenly became rivals. The Irish Farmers' Union (IFU), established in 1911–1912 as a would-be national alliance of county-based branches modelled on the British National Farmers' Union, decided in 1922 to form its own Farmers' Party. This politicization of a trade union was a response to the social, economic, and political turbulence of the immediate post-war years that left the IFU's leadership fearful of the threats posed by radicalized 'red flag' labourers, the post-war economic slump, and the country's slide into civil war.³²

Before long the sundering of the nationalist movement produced the emerging party system's fundamental polarization, one that neither the Farmers' Party of the 1920s nor any of the subsequent farmers' parties were able to transcend to any significant degree. For their part the pro- and anti-Treaty nationalist parties, Cumann na nGaedheal (League of the Gael) and (from 1926) Fianna Fáil (Soldiers of Destiny), who themselves relied heavily on farmers' votes,³³ perceived organized farmers primarily as an electoral threat. They claimed to be the true and legitimate representatives of farming interests in the political sphere 'and made ritualistic reference to traditional rural virtues'.³⁴

By the early 1930s, when the United Farmers' Protection Association (UFPA) appeared, the Farmers' Party, which had actively supported the pro-Treaty government between 1927 and 1932, was a spent force. The UFPA, like the emerging anti-treaty Fianna Fáil party, was in favour of a tillage-friendly agricultural policy. The main aim of the UFPA, however,

was to deal with the 'frozen debts' farmers had accumulated during the years of monetary inflation. But soon high rates and low livestock prices became as important as the debt question to the union-like UFPA.³⁵ In contrast, the National Farmers' and Ratepayers' League (NFRL) formed in 1932 in response to a ruinous 'economic war' and to fears that a tillage-oriented agricultural policy would undermine the export-oriented cattle economy.³⁶ It aligned itself with other anti-Fianna Fáil farmers' organizations such as the National Agricultural Association in Dublin and the New Land League in Cork, before following in the IFU's footsteps by becoming an agrarian party, the National Centre Party. Shortly after contesting the 1933 election quite promisingly it coalesced with Cumann na nGaedheal and the 'shirted' National Guard to form the new pro-Treaty Fine Gael (Tribe of the Gael) party.³⁷

At first relations between the UFPA and these new groups were less than friendly, since some of their members were active in the anti-annuities campaign that was supported and partly organized by the Blueshirts or Army Comrades Association that became the National Guard in 1933. But the differences between them faded when they all experienced the same rejection at the hands of an unsympathetic administration. A push for unity among farmers organizations began and an umbrella-type nationwide organization—the IFF—materialized in September 1936.³⁸ The IFF, which registered as a trade union in April 1937 under the leadership of Elizabeth Bobbett who farmed herself in County Wicklow, set out to do three things: transcend civil war and other divisions that were causing farmer disunity, represent the farming interest at the national level, and negotiate with the state on behalf of Irish farmers.³⁹

While the organizational strength and electoral appeal of all these organizations were strongest in the larger farm counties of the east and south, they were rather weak or non-existent in the western smallholder counties of Connacht and Ulster. It was here, where the cattle crisis of the 1930s hit the small farmers hardest, that Clann na Talmhan (Family of the Land) mobilized an indigenous farmers' movement in 1938–1939.⁴⁰ Clann na Talmhan advocated a somewhat different agricultural policy to that of the IFF, focusing on the demand for de-rating that would favour smallholders. In spite of a number of unity meetings in 1938–1939, the IFF and Clann na Talmhan failed to agree on a common policy, not to speak of a unified organization. The economic, social, political, and cultural differences between the western smallholders and the 'Lords of the Pale', as Martin Finnerty (one of the western activists) described the representatives of the larger eastern farmers, gulfed too wide to bridge at this point.

This failure highlights a second fundamental difference between Ireland and Switzerland: the land question. The lack of a Swiss landlord class, or even the existence of a substantial number of large farms,⁴¹ helped make the formation of an umbrella-type farmers union at the end of the nineteenth century possible. Compared with Ireland the distribution of agricultural

land was relatively equal in Switzerland. In spite of an ambitious land reform that transferred the ownership of the landlords' tenanted land to the tenants, numerous large farms and even 'ranches' managed to survive—or were newly created—in post-independence Ireland.

A third specific reason for the absence of any significant corporatist-like state–farmer relations in inter-war Ireland was the position the Irish state adopted towards the organized farmers. While the British state primarily viewed Irish farmers as close allies of the nationalists at the end of the nineteenth century, the Fianna Fáil party, continuously in power between 1932 and 1948, saw them as political rivals as well as opponents of the newly adopted industrial and agricultural policies heavily centred on self-sufficiency and tillage. Unlike the pro-Treaty Cumann na nGaedheal governments of the 1920s, which tended to see the organized farmers both as rivals and potential allies, Fianna Fáil in power only perceived them as competitors and as representatives of the big farmer class hostile to the new agricultural policy.⁴² It had no intention therefore of entering into corporatist-style negotiations with the IFF.⁴³ James Ryan, the Minister for Agriculture, accused the IFF of being anti-nationalist and bluntly told them that they were free to seek a mandate at the next general election if they felt discontented.⁴⁴ But fearing that contesting elections would provoke a debilitating split within the farmers, the IFF refused to contest the 1938 election that saw Fianna Fáil being returned to power with an even larger majority. In January 1939, the IFF called on James Ryan to resign; and in April they staged a one-day commodity strike and protest march in Dublin—led by Elizabeth Bobbett riding on a white horse.⁴⁵

That relations between the IFF and the state deteriorated in this environment is hardly surprising. But the extent to which this happened is noteworthy. The police were instructed to closely observe and report on the activities of IFF activists like Bobbett. Indeed, the reports of the Guards sent to observe farmers' meetings in the 1930s and 1940s yield considerable insight into the IFF's activities—and into the financial and personal situations of some of its more prominent members. 'It is doubtful if Miss Bobbett will make a genuine effort to pay her land annuities', noted one policeman observing IFF activities in County Wicklow in 1937.⁴⁶

CORPORATISM, MODERNIZATION, AND FARMER SUBORDINATION

By 1939 corporatism and agricultural modernization were intimately connected in Switzerland. Typically modernizing moves were jointly initiated by educational institutions, the state, and the farmers' organizations. Critical to the underlying corporatist structure of Swiss state–farmer relations was the practice, evident from the 1880s on, of an increasing number of farmers' sons attending the winter courses of the newly established

agricultural colleges. A good number of these graduates went on to the ETH in Zurich and usually returned as professors to their colleges, which only employed academically trained teachers. Here they often acted additionally as advisors to the farmers or worked for agricultural associations in the summer months when their teaching obligations were modest. Other agronomists became full-time state officials or, more often, representatives of farmers' organizations after in many cases serving a period in the SFU's *Bauernsekretariat*. Frequently, representatives from farmers' organizations went into politics, becoming members of the federal parliament or ministers at the cantonal level. The regular movement of agronomists between farmers' associations, educational and scientific institutions, and the administration was a characteristic element in Switzerland, but one notably absent in Ireland. Joseph Käppeli, a farmer's son who graduated from an agricultural college and studied at the ETH in Zurich, personifies this mobility of agronomists. Käppeli's career took him from being general secretary of a national breeders' association and teacher and later head of an agricultural college to becoming the director of a research institution before ultimately being appointed general secretary of the agricultural section of the Department of Trade and Commerce. In his new capacity Käppeli continued to attend numerous meetings of the executives of the crucial farmers' organizations.

It was this close interaction of the state, educational and scientific institutions, and civil society actors—so notably absent in inter-war Ireland—that provided both the foundation of Swiss agricultural corporatism and the seedbed for successful agricultural modernization. Another, albeit unintended, result of this close alliance of the state and the farming community in Switzerland was the fact that here, unlike in neighbouring Germany, France, Austria, and Italy, the farmers did not turn to the fascist right but remained, as in Sweden, Britain, and Ireland, defenders of democratic policies.⁴⁷ By and large the leaders of the Swiss organized farmers were more likely, in the prevailing corporatist environment, to subjectively view their situation and that of their constituencies as one of empowerment rather than subordination.

Neither the post-war depression nor corporatism's weakness prevented attempts to modernize inter-war Irish agriculture, but as a rule these efforts were made from the top down. For instance, Patrick Hogan, Minister for Agriculture from 1922 to 1932, introduced an ambitious reform programme geared to improving the market position of Irish export agriculture. When the relatively weak co-operative movement got into severe difficulties, the state intervened directly in the 'keystone' dairying industry through the Dairy Disposal Company of 1927.⁴⁸ And the early Fianna Fáil government soon took steps in pursuit of agricultural modernization tied to a vision of import-substituting industrialization and national self-sufficiency in food production. In striking contrast to Switzerland with its well-established corporatist state-farmer relations, organized Irish farmers

tended subjectively to perceive their constituencies as becoming more subordinate as agriculture lurched from crisis to crisis in the inter-war period. In these circumstances the view of the IFF leadership from 1936–1937 on was that achieving partnership with the state was a necessary condition of organized farmers (and farmers in general) being able to cast off the subordination they were experiencing.

WARTIME AND POST-WAR CORPORATISM

What impact did the Second World War have on corporatist-style state–farmer relations in Switzerland and Ireland? Although the Swiss state’s so-called ‘neo-agrarian’ policy of 1938 predated the outbreak of war, its timing was influenced by the gathering war clouds. Besides synthesizing already strong corporatist tendencies, the new measure went considerably further in the structure of control that the state was now imposing on agriculture and organized farming interests. An even closer relationship with organized interests was envisaged to support a more ambitious jointly pursued modernizing campaign to safeguard food supplies in wartime. Corporatism, in short, added to both the federal state’s autonomy and capacity to actively promote agricultural modernization—during and after the war. In 1943 the government could tell the SFU that it would be ‘an illusion’ to believe that individual farmers would return to ‘full freedom of production’ after the war.⁴⁹ Farmers, in rhetoric as well as in practice, now became a kind of class of property owners employed by the state to use their production capacities to satisfy the demands society imposed on them. In return they were paid an income comparable to that of skilled workers in rural areas. This principle was written into the constitution in 1947 and the new agricultural law in 1951, each of which spoke of preserving a ‘healthy peasantry’ and creating ‘an efficient agricultural sector’.⁵⁰

This socialization of agriculture had fundamental implications for the role of farmers’ organizations. Besides continuing to represent the farmers and act as brokers between the state and the farmers, they now increasingly were being seen as the tied agents of the state. Ernst Feisst, an agronomist and senior state official, wrote in 1940 that farmers’ organizations should now cease to represent sectional interests or adopt an oppositional stance vis-à-vis the state. Their ‘real purpose’ was to act as the state’s agents and to help instruct the farming population as to the state’s requirements.⁵¹ Tempted by the quid pro quo on offer the leaders of the organized farmers soon demonstrated their willingness to accept their new role and were not inclined to subjectively view their situation, and that of their constituencies, as one of subordination.

In Ireland the IFF saw the outbreak of war as the longed-for opportunity to create an inclusive form of corporatism—and indeed there were some early promising signs. On 5 September 1939 Minister Ryan received an

IFF delegation which offered the government their organizations' full cooperation in return for adequate representation on any board to be set up to manage agriculture in the wartime crisis. But the Minister made no such concession, and when the disillusioned IFF leadership met the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Eamon de Valera a week later, he informed them that they could not go on strike like any other trade union given the wartime emergency.⁵² However, when the Leinster Milk Producers' Association withheld milk deliveries from the city of Dublin in November 1939, the IFF quickly jumped on the bandwagon and fully supported the two-week strike.

The government dealt quite differently with the striking farmers. While it was prepared to negotiate with representatives of the Leinster Milk Producers' Association—and simultaneously even promised the non-striking sugar beet growers a price increase for the following year—it steadfastly refused to talk to the IFF. Ryan's blunt message to them was that the government had nothing to negotiate with farmers—except those organized in commodity groups. Use was made of the recently enacted Offences against the State Act of 1939 to prohibit newspapers publicizing the strike, with the consequence that the public was neither informed about the strike nor the precise demands of the strikers for several days.⁵³

The IFF's total failure in this commodity strike weakened the organization. While some activists drifted away, others, led by a still-defiant Elizabeth Bobbett, launched a short-lived but intense protest campaign of boycotting ploughing matches, the symbol of the government's campaign for greater food production in wartime.⁵⁴

In view of the increasing wartime difficulties, the IFF finally offered unconditional support to the government in 1941. But even this move did not lead to a change of mind in the cabinet—neither IFF nor Clann na Talmhan representatives were invited to take part in the wartime administration of agriculture. It was therefore not surprising that in 1943 many of the leading IFF activists decided to take up Minister Ryan's challenge that the farmers should test their support by competing with Fianna Fáil at the polls. Positive signs that the ballot box might empower farmers were emerging from the west, where Clann na Talmhan, under the charismatic leadership of Michael Donnellan, was making impressive strides.⁵⁵ In the run-up to the general election, some prominent IFF-linked easterners merged with the westerners under the name of Clann na Talmhan—the National Agricultural Party. In the election the farmers performed fairly well but, although they had the balance of power in the Dáil (lower house of parliament), they chose not to use it to prevent Fianna Fáil forming a government, partly out of a desire to avoid prolonging political instability and partly because they also opposed Fine Gael's agricultural policy.⁵⁶

As the farmers turned (again) to politics, other interests intent on installing corporatist-style relations between the state and the agricultural sector took up the baton. Ironically much of this effort flowed from the Fianna Fáil government's decision to institute the Commission on Vocational

Organisation in 1939. 'The question that this commission is mainly interested in', its chairman, Bishop Michael Browne of Galway, announced in 1940, 'is that many people think that agriculture in this land of ours is backward because the Irish farmers happen not to be organised; they are not vocal and have not sufficient organisation to be able to deal with their own problems and to master them'.⁵⁷ One of the difficulties he identified as hindering the 'vocational organisation of farmers in Ireland' was the practice of previous farmer organizations pursuing 'political objectives which easily aroused enthusiasm [but] lessened interest in organisation for purely social and economic purposes'.⁵⁸

The evidence of the senior department of agriculture officials led the commission to note that the department was not opposed in principle to formalized state-farmer relations.⁵⁹ A statutory basis was even in place to allow for consultation. Under the 1931 Agriculture Act the minister was empowered 'to establish by order consultative councils consisting of persons with special knowledge and experience, nominated by him, to advise and assist him on specialised matters'.⁶⁰ Indeed, a number of consultative councils—dealing with dairy produce, livestock, eggs, wheat, and tobacco—were in existence by 1940. And there was also a thirty-one-member Agricultural Production Consultative Council that had been formed to 'advise the Minister' during the wartime emergency. Its membership was drawn from representatives of the County Committees of Agriculture and sectoral agricultural organizations as well as private individuals.⁶¹

Reflecting disapprovingly on the consultative councils already in being, the Commission commented:

in practice they are defective in a number of respects. Members are directly nominated by the Minister and are not elected by vocational organisations. They have no standing body or permanent secretary, and for the most part they meet only infrequently and at irregular intervals, when convened by the Department. When they do meet, the agenda is prepared by the Department, and the Minister, who normally presides, makes up his mind as to the feeling of the council on the proposals before it. Members only express their view on the questions submitted, and have not power to take decisions.⁶²

The commission also criticized how the infrequency of meetings meant that 'no continuous examination of particular problems is possible'. Another noteworthy deficiency was that the Minister did:

not regard it as possible to take councils fully into his confidence on proposals for legislation on the ground that it is the practice in this country not to divulge the texts of Bills before they have been circulated to members of the Oireachtas [parliament] and consultation on contemplated legislation can, therefore, be only of a general character.⁶³

The commission's majority report called for a new vocational model of organizing farmers built locally on the *Muintir na Tíre* (the People of the Countryside) parish councils and based nationally on a National Agricultural Council.⁶⁴ It was further proposed that 'Agriculture' supply eight of the twenty-four members of the governing body of a new National Vocational Assembly.⁶⁵ But the critical tone of the commission's report did not commend it to the ruling *Fianna Fáil* party when it was published in 1944, and its proposals fared no better than the IFF's earlier case for corporatism.⁶⁶

The *Committee of Inquiry on Post-Emergency Agricultural Policy*, convened during the war, also touched on the issue of state-farmer relationships. Ireland had only relatively few farming organizations and institutions concerned with 'economic welfare and technical advance', the committee's majority report observed, and 'those that have been formed exert little influence in framing policy'.⁶⁷ The committee's majority report proposed 'a small full-time body' to be called the Agricultural Inquiry and Advisory Council that would have a chairman and two permanent members and that would, as the business required and 'subject to Ministerial sanction', have power to co-opt persons possessing 'technical or special knowledge'.⁶⁸ While accepting that 'the direction and control of agricultural policy must remain the responsibility of the Minister for Agriculture', the first of the committee's minority reports urged that 'close contact should exist between those engaged in farming and those administering agricultural policy'.⁶⁹ A Consultative Council for Agriculture was proposed that would be 'elected on vocational lines' and represent 'all branches of the industry'. Meeting twice yearly this council would 'place before the Minister the views and recommendations of those engaged in the industry'.⁷⁰ A second minority report, penned by Henry Kennedy, the secretary of co-operative movement's Irish Agricultural Organisation Society, recommended a separate Agricultural Development Council 'with adequate funds under its own control' and which, along with mobilizing the participation of farming interests (especially the co-operative societies), would organize a series of research committees and routinely advise the Minister regarding agricultural development issues.⁷¹

Although these proposals were broadly consistent with the IFF's position on state-farmer relations, actual relations between the IFF and the government—irrespective of whether *Fianna Fáil* or the Inter-Party coalition held office—did not improve significantly. It was only in the 1960s that the new Taoiseach Seán Lemass granted the farmers formal negotiating rights with the state.⁷² By this time, however, the IFF had ceased to exist, having dissolved itself in 1954–1955, and supported the newly established National Farmers' Association (NFA). Elizabeth Bobbett became an ordinary member of her local *Barndarrig* NFA Branch in Wicklow, thus continuing an activist engagement which had started almost twenty-five years earlier as secretary of her local UFPA Branch.

CONCLUSIONS

In spite of the virtually common desire of the Swiss and Irish governments to have agricultural sectors that could produce greater quantities of food more efficiently, substantially different strategies were chosen to achieve these goals before, during, and after the Second World War. While the Swiss authorities built systematically on long-established corporatist relations with a variety (but not all) actors and institutions in the agricultural, educational, and scientific spheres, Irish governments intentionally limited their formalized contacts to representatives of specialized commodity-producing organizations. The inclusion of representatives of general farmers' organizations (such as the IFU, IFF, and the NFA) was resolutely rejected. Some of the reasons for this rejection are rooted in 'specific' Irish circumstances, especially the tendency of Irish farmers to form agrarian parties whose ability to endure and be effective was limited by the factionalization of the post-civil war nationalist movement and the differentiation of farmers into often opposed 'big' and 'small' farming classes. While these 'peculiarities' clearly counted for much, the comparison with Switzerland, a highly industrialized but similarly small and democratic state, reveals another major factor whose considerable explanatory power needs to be underlined.

Ever since the second half of the nineteenth century we find a great variety of actors and institutions springing up within the Swiss farming community, the educational and scientific sectors, and the state (including political parties) that both co-operated and competed in pursuing their aspirations for agricultural modernization. It made sense in this situation for the state to engage and work closely with all sorts of organizations—except those, such as the peasant leagues, who fundamentally opposed the 'liberal' modernizing strategy. There was, on the other hand, in spite of the 'relative political maturity' of inter-war rural Ireland,⁷³ a notable lack of educational and improving farming groups. Even if the increasing pastoral character of Irish agriculture indicates that Irish farmers were not oblivious to considerations of land use, the pre-independence obsession with landlord-tenant relations strengthened the tendency to view the whole issue of land predominantly in terms of ownership and possession. 'Against the drama of evictions and agrarian crime', Vaughan observes insightfully, 'the minutiae of agricultural improvement and rural organization seemed dull'.⁷⁴ While the cooperative movement of the 1890s somewhat counterbalanced this tendency, its influence was largely confined to areas where dairying was strong. It was not until Macra na Feirme (Young Farmers' Clubs) was founded by farmers and agronomists in 1944 that rural Ireland had an organization exclusively dedicated to the cause of agricultural improvement.⁷⁵ This new improving ethos also affected the NFA, whose leadership had close ties with Macra. Stronger from the outset than the IFF, the NFA systematically pursued a

modernizing agenda as a means of increasing farmers' income in line with the wage advances of other sections of the Irish workforce. Its unrelenting 'modernist' approach made it, as the future would show, not an easy but a challenging partner for the urban-minded Seán Lemass, the government leader mainly identified with accelerating Irish industrialization in the 1960s. It is not surprising, therefore, that it was Lemass's Department of Industry and Commerce (and not the Department of Agriculture) which provided the NFA with financial aid to allow them to undertake educational trips abroad in the 1950s,⁷⁶ trips that confirmed the belief that it was the norm for leading farmers' organizations to have formalized working relations with their respective administrations. The historic concession of a 'formal negotiating stance with the Government' in 1964 brought the long wait of organized Irish farmers to be admitted as policy partners with the state to an end.⁷⁷ They had finally arrived where they had wanted to be since the state began to promote industrialization in the 1930s.

The challenge in comparing state-farmer relations in Ireland and Switzerland has been to go beyond a simple detecting of differences and similarities to find explanations that potentially can yield new insights about both cases. What the contrasting experience of state-farmer relations in Ireland and Switzerland suggests above all is that the development of a variety of civil society actors and institutions dedicated to agricultural modernization is virtually a precondition for the establishment of a 'proper' corporatist system in Schmitter's sense. It is not, therefore, surprising that the World War II emergency did not fundamentally change the Irish government's attitude towards the IFF-organized farmers. Incidentally, the same can be said about Switzerland, where the pre-existing state-farmer relations were simply strengthened in line with a path dependency that persisted and developed further after the war had ended. It was, in other words, the First rather than the Second World War that induced the most significant change in formalized working relationships between the Swiss state and the farmers.

NOTES

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2. A. Greer, *Rural Politics in Northern Ireland: Policy Networks and Agricultural Development since Partition*. Aldershot: Avebury, 1996, pp. 3, 123–124.
3. Commission on Vocational Organisation, *Report 1943*. Dublin: Stationery Office, 1944, p. 1.
4. N. Vivier and S. Petmezaz, 'The State and Rural Societies', in N. Vivier (ed), *The State and Rural Societies: Policy and Education in Europe 1750–2000*, Turnhout: Brepols, 2009.

5. F. McGarry, *Eoin O'Duffy: A Self-Made Hero*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 280.
6. W. Schivelbusch, *Entfernte Verwandtschaft: Faschismus, Nationalsozialismus, New Deal 1933–1939*. Munich: Hanser Verlag, 2005.
7. P. C. Schmitter, 'Still the Century of Corporatism?', *Review of Politics*, 36, 1974, pp. 93–94.
8. M. J. Smith, *Pressure, Power and Policy: State Autonomy and Policy Networks in Britain and the United States*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993, pp. 69–71.
9. G. Wilson, 'Farmers' Organizations in Advanced Societies', in H. Newby (ed), *International Perspectives in Rural Sociology*, Chichester: John Wiley, 1978.
10. L. Panitch, 'Recent Theorizations of Corporatism: Reflections on a Growth Industry', *British Journal of Sociology*, 31, 1980, pp. 181–184.
11. See D. C. Tipps, 'Modernization Theory and the Comparative Study of Societies: A Critical Perspective', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 2, 1973, p. 202.
12. R. Siefert, F. Krausmann, H. Schandl, and V. Winiwarter, *Das Ende der Fläche: Zum gesellschaftlichen Stoffwechsel der Industrialisierung (Umwelthistorische Forschungen, Bd. 2)*. Cologne: Böhlau, 2006.
13. See N. Koning, *The Failure of Agrarian Capitalism: Agrarian Politics in the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands and the USA 1846–1919*. London: Routledge, 1994.
14. K. Marx and F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1848] 1992, p. 7.
15. E. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital 1848–1875*. London: Abacus, [1975] 1997, p. 206.
16. P. Moser, *Säen, züchten, ernten: Agrarpolitik, Pflanzenzucht und Saatgutwesen in der Schweiz 1860–2002*. Baden: hier + jetzt, Verlag für Kultur und Geschichte, 2003; M. Daly, *The First Department: A History of the Department of Agriculture*. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 2002, p. 547.
17. C. Pfister, 'Deregulierung. Vom Paternalismus zur Marktwirtschaft 1798–1856', in *Berner Zeitschrift für Geschichte*, 60/3, 1998, pp. 160–175.
18. H. Brugger, *Schweizerischer Landwirtschaftlicher Verein 1863–1963*. Zurich: Eigenverlag, 1963.
19. M. Stuber, P. Moser, G. Gerber, and C. Pfister (eds), *Kartoffeln, Klee und kluge Köpfe: Die Oekonomische und Gemeinnützige Gesellschaft des Kantons Bern OGG (1959–2009)*. Bern: Haupt Verlag, 2010.
20. *Schweizerische Landwirtschaftliche Zeitschrift*, 1881, p. 466.
21. Stuber et al, *Kartoffeln, Klee und kluge Köpfe*, p. 31.
22. W. Baumann, *Bauernstand und Bürgerblock. Ernst Laur und der Schweizerische Bauernverband 1897–1918*. Zurich: Orell Füssli, 1993.
23. P. Moser and B. Brodbeck, *Milch für alle: Bilder, Dokumente und Analysen zur Milchwirtschaft und Milchpolitik in der Schweiz im 20. Jahrhundert*. Baden: hier + jetzt, Verlag für Kultur und Geschichte, 2007.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
25. Moser, *Säen, züchten, ernten*, p. 138.
26. P. Moser, 'Neue Perspektiven und Institutionen zur Analyse eines alten Gegenstands: Die Landwirtschaft in der wirtschaftshistorischen Geschichtsschreibung', *Traverse: Zeitschrift für Geschichte*, 1, 2010, p. 66.
27. Commission on Vocational Organisation. Minutes of Evidence, National Library of Ireland [NLI], MS 929, 24 October 1940, pp. 2650–2651.

28. Swiss Farmers' Secretariat, *Swiss Agriculture*. Brugg: Swiss Farmers' Secretariat, 1962, p. 22.
29. J. Meenan, *The Irish Economy since 1922*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1970, pp. 41, 112.
30. Daly, *First Department*, pp. 547–548.
31. D. Rueschemeyer, E. Huber Stephens, and J. D. Stephens, *Capitalist Development and Democracy*. Oxford: Polity Press, 1992, p. 85.
32. T. Varley, 'On the Road to Extinction: Agrarian Parties in Twentieth-Century Ireland', *Irish Political Studies*, 25, 2010, pp. 583–585.
33. J. L. McCracken, *Representative Government in Ireland: A Study of Dáil Éireann 1919–48*. London: Oxford University Press, 1958, pp. 115–116.
34. J. J. Lee, *Ireland 1912–1985: Politics and Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 72.
35. *Wicklow People*, 4 March 1933.
36. The 'economic war' dispute followed the decision of the incoming Fianna Fáil government in 1932 to withhold payment to Britain of the annuities or interest payments on the loans advanced to finance peasant proprietorship since the 1880s.
37. McGarry, *Eoin O'Duffy*, pp. 218–222.
38. *Irish Press*, 3 October 1936.
39. *Wicklow People*, 17 October 1936.
40. T. Varley, 'Farmers against Nationalists: The Rise and Fall of Clann na Talmhan in Galway', in G. Moran and R. Gillespie (eds), *Galway: History & Society*, Dublin: Geography Publications, 1996.
41. Rueschemeyer et al, *Capitalist Development and Democracy*, p. 85.
42. Varley, 'On the Road to Extinction', p. 593.
43. *Wicklow People*, 20 November 1937.
44. *Wicklow People*, 15 January 1938.
45. *Irish Independent*, 21 April 1939.
46. National Archives of Ireland [NAI], D/Jus, 8/662.
47. W. Baumann and P. Moser, *Bauern im Industriestaat: Agrarpolitische Konzeptionen und bäuerliche Bewegungen in der Schweiz 1918–1968*. Zurich: Orell Füssli, 1999, p. 238.
48. Daly, *First Department*, pp. 129–131.
49. Baumann and Moser, *Bauern im Industriestaat*, p. 338.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 341.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 335.
52. NAI, Irish Farmers' Federation: Official statement (stopped by the censor on 25 November 1939), D/Jus, Farmers Strike November 1939.
53. *Ibid.*
54. NAI, D/Jus, 72/61; *Farmers' Gazette*, 10 February 1940.
55. Varley, 'Farmers against Nationalists', pp. 596–600.
56. Bobbett's own case again illustrates the failure of the turn to electoral politics. After standing for Clann na Talmhan in County Dublin in 1943 without success, she lost again when she contested a Wicklow by-election as an independent in 1953. As the only woman councillor on Wicklow County Council in the 1950–1955 period, Bobbett found herself in an isolated position. And successive Taoisigh declined to nominate her to the senate; indeed, despite her wide knowledge of matters agricultural, she was never even appointed to a government committee.
57. Commission on Vocational Organisation. Minutes of Evidence, NLI, MS 929, 10 October 1940, p. 2507.
58. *Commission on Vocational Organisation Report 1943*, p. 127.
59. *Ibid.*, pp. 140, 294.

60. Ibid., p. 140.
61. Ibid., pp. 140–141. The County Committees of Agriculture, a product of the 1899 Local Government Act, gave local councillors a measure of decentralized control over agricultural schemes and administration. Interestingly, though not admitted to membership itself, the IFF claimed credit for the Agricultural Production Consultative Council's creation (*Wicklow People*, 8 February 1941).
62. Ibid., p. 294.
63. Ibid., p. 141.
64. Ibid., pp. 344–7. Muintir na Tíre (People of the Land), a Catholic rural renewal movement appearing in the 1930s, aspired to cover the countryside with vocational parish councils. That its spatial coverage was only patchy was something that Minister Ryan seized on in his critique of the commission's plans for building local corporatist organization among farmers. See D. O'Leary, *Vocationalism and Social Catholicism in Twentieth-Century Ireland: The Search for a Christian Social Order*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2000, pp. 111–112.
65. Ibid., p. 445.
66. D. O'Leary, *Vocationalism and Social Catholicism in Twentieth-Century Ireland*, pp. 130–148.
67. Committee of Inquiry on Post-Emergency Agricultural Policy, *Reports on Agricultural Policy*. Dublin: Stationery Office, 1945, p. 12.
68. Ibid., p. 91.
69. Ibid., p. 157.
70. Ibid., p. 157.
71. Ibid., pp. 216–217.
72. G. Murphy, *In Search of the Promised Land: The Politics of Post-War Ireland*. Cork: Mercier Press, 2009, pp. 231–235.
73. Lee, *Ireland 1912–1985*, p. 72.
74. W. E. Vaughan, *Landlords and Tenants in Ireland 1848–1904*. Dublin: The Economic and Social History Society of Ireland, 1984, p. 40.
75. J. Miley, *A Voice for the Country: Fifty Years of Macra na Feirme*. Dublin: Macra na Feirme, 1994.
76. Murphy, *In Search of the Promised Land*, p. 214.
77. Ibid., p. 233.