From the History of Cooperative Thinking - Professor Ion Răducanu. Cooperative Movement on the Road to Self - Determination

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Abstract

Inter-bellum cooperative thinkers have evaluated and re-evaluated the cooperative phenomenon in our country in concordance with the historical stages the national economy evolved through until the Second World War. On such principle basis, they sought to formulate adequate measures of revival and lead the cooperative movement on the trajectory of social progress.

Key words: cooperatives, economy, solution, profit, current

The rich economic literature of the inter-war period, and also the preoccupation of some economists of European fame for the cooperative problem have generated a series of ideas and actions meant to promote and develop this economic-social movement.

Meanwhile, it is worth to emphasize the policy of the main parties of the time (National Peasant Party and the National Liberal Party), which reflected the organization and function of the cooperative companies, as they represented a potential electoral segment in the quest to achieve and exercise power. Concrete proof of these preoccupations are the numerous laws regarding the organization and the operation of the cooperation, along with its subordination to the state, both as institutional system and economic - social action and purpose.

Within the confrontations that take place during this period regarding the nature and perspective of the cooperation in our country the ideas of Ion Răducanu begin to affirm, as he was during the inter-war period, upon the opinion of Dimitrie Gusti, one of the most authorized specialists of the cooperative doctrine in Romania. In his youth works, as "Două chestiuni privitoare la mișcarea noastră cooperatistă" ("Two issues regarding our cooperative movement") in 1907, "Prezentul și viitorul cooperației sătești" ("Present and future of rural cooperatives", 1914) and "Fapte și idei în cooperație românească" ("Facts and ideas in Romanian cooperation", 1916), he emphasized and sustained a series of valences of cooperation regarding the development of initiative spirit and defense of cooperator's interests and the fight against excesses of exploitation.

Prominent economic personality, illustrious teacher at the Academy of Commercial and Industrial Sciences, Ion Răducanu is one of the first Romanian economists which commits with his full being to the active life of the cooperative movement. After his studies abroad, but also driven by an inner impulse, he enters in
1907 in the Central of People's Banks, following with special interest the cultural action and moral education of the cooperative members. He established, on this line, the first cooperative class at Dumbrăveni, in Botoșani and he is preoccupied with the organization and direction of the first federations. He is one of the initiators and organizers of cooperative statistic on scientific bases, publishing yearbooks, which were issued regularly before the First World War. By such works, it was attempted to bring more light upon the structure and activity that developed in our country during that period. After 1909, through studies and articles published in newspapers, he continued to propagate the idea of federalizing the cooperatives and especially of their autonomy. Meanwhile, he contributes, together with Nicolae Iorga, to the organization and development of cooperative lectures at the free University of Vâlenii de Munte.

Under the new social economic conditions, determined by the foundation of Great Romania, after 1918 he joins the current which was preparing the independence of the cooperative movement that was rallying around the review "Viața Cooperativă" ("Cooperative Life") and the Central Office of the Federations. In the federations assembly, that was held at Roman in autumn 1918, he is elected leader of the cultural section of this office and, in this position, he participates at the assemblies of the federations, organized by this autonomous organization in Bucharest, in 1918 and 1919.

In the first days of 1919, following the application of the Decree - Law promulgated on January the 3rd, of the same year, from his initiative and with the help of the Central Office of the Federations, he inaugurates the Central School of Cooperative Studies in Bucharest, in the presence of minister I. G. Duca, school that transforms, in December 1919, in the Academy of Cooperative Sciences.

In May 1919 he is elected by the Congress of delegates of popular banks as member in the Council of its Central. In this position, together with A. Galan and priest Grigoraș he further upholds the idea of autonomy of the cooperative movement through the organization of free federations. In the days following the Congress of Federations, he publishes the article “Starea de spirit în cooperație”, in the review "Indepeniența economică”, revealing the dominant ideas that stirred the Romanian cooperative movement. There are few fundamental questions included in the articles, by which he pursues to establish the place, role and value of this economic and social institution in the life of the community.

"The unanimous desire is that a unitary driving and mobilization would lead, that is the solidarity of forces within the movement. Before the socialist movement had proven the unity of action in the reunified Romania, the cooperative movement tried to gather together all the units, all powers conscientious in joint cooperation, from all over the country. So we can remember: The Central Committee of Romanian Cooperation made of cooperators from the Old Kingdom, Ardeal and Bucovina, following which we had a unitary representation activity towards similar foreign organization and the propaganda of cooperative culture.

At the Congress of the International Cooperative Alliance, in Hamburg, Romanian cooperators presented themselves in a unitary group, even if political degrees were separating us; also at the elaboration of the "Calendar of Village
Companionships”, the said Commitee of the Central gave its oblation of work, bringing data and facts on the Romanian cooperation from everywhere. So the trend of joint and unification of cooperative work to us is older than it might be believed... However, a great deal of labor is to be done in this direction ”.

In the article ”Starea de spirit în cooperaţie” Ion Răducanu makes a synthesis of the currents existing in the cooperative movement, both from the principle and organizational viewpoint. ”A trend with general character - the author outlined - is that the cooperative movement to be lead on the real cooperative regime: self-determination and, thus, removal of the state tutelage.” To the question, in fact asked by many economists of the tine, what should be the role of the state in cooperation? Ion Răducanu writes: ”in the debates within the council of federations, two currents manifested: 1) An extremist current, that demands the removal of the state, at once and fully, from the role of collaborator in the central organization of the cooperation; 2) The second current - we could name it reformist - thinks that the Decree - Law that gives birth to more centrals, as mixed institutions, was a kind step, necessary, on the road to emancipate the cooperation from the state tutelage. This current, far from seeing the new central organization a perfect and permanent arrangement, thinks that it is proper for the transition from state centrals to fully free centrals.

Both currents pursued the liberation of the cooperation from the state. The solution proposed by most cooperative doctrinars envisioned the organization of a central institution made only of cooperative forces and led by cooperators, elected by the organizations component of the central. But, the methods and ways to achieve these desiderates are different in the conception of various authors.

"At the beginning - Ion Răducanu outlined - some of the actual extremists did not see the federations with favorable eyes, - they were then extremists... bureaucrats - and only later they have seen the importance of the educational problem for the technical and soul preparation of the leading personnel. When the reformatory current attempts a constructive work, fighting for the strengthening of the federations and propagation of cooperatives’ ideas, - the extremist current is satisfied with a negative opera in the struggle between facts and words - of course, the blagomania will not prevail.”

Professor Ion Răducanu distinguishes two different currents also in the trends of the cooperative movement: the materialist current and, on the other hand, the social-idealist current. ”In the mad pursuit for dividend, - let's not hide behind the finger: the danger of the Trojan horse, the American profit spirit, in popular banks is not a fiction! - it is long forgotten the ideal of cooperation: removal of profit under any form!” The materialism from cooperation has generated a weak preoccupation from the banks, cooperatives, federations, for cultural activity and education. The reaction towards such state of facts of cooperators is synthesized by the social-idealist current, which leads, from a principle point of view, the reformatory trends in cooperative organization. ”The fight between the social - idealist current and the materialist one is the conflict between the real cooperation and the fake one. The social-idealist current wants to end the run after dividend, it strives to give soul to the cooperative body and, by a more and livelier action - through propaganda and school, he is to achieve significant roots.
first cooperative classes, and the federations - schools of cooperative education, propaganda books, calendars and cooperator's libraries, the central school of cooperative studies, the print office of Romanian cooperation, as well as the "Fotin Enescu" Cultural Fund – are the fruits of the social-idealistic current, which knew how to realize them by fighting with the bureaucracy of some and the negative attitude of others."

Professor Ion Răducanu, of which Ion N. Angelescu wrote in his admirable book "Cooperația și socialismul în Europa" ("Cooperation and Socialism in Europe") that he is the enthusiast promoter of cooperative ideas, fervently pursued to remove bureaucracy and negative attitude in the development of cooperatives in Great Romania. This is what he wrote in the article "Starea de spirit în cooperație" ("State of Mind in Cooperation", published in "Independența economică" ("Economic Independence", in May 1919: "Cooperative life can not be lead by bureaucracy, or by the clean negative attitude of extremists, but by a single force, the cooperative spirit. Let us not wait the true reform in cooperation from others, but let’s seed it, by ourselves, fulfilling the inner organization of the institution. Only by this shall we pave the road to victory. Cooperation is the democracy realized in the social and economic field. But any democracy without education and discipline leads to anarchy. That’s why, by education and learning, we hope to strengthen the Romanian cooperative movement”.

The same ideas, this time, in a more concrete manner, can be found in his report on cooperation, which he presented and sustained in the Congress of the peasant’s party. The principles exposed in this report are based on his older ideas, but they are formulated also in the light of the new experiences achieved during the three years in the Central of popular banks, in its new post-war form, by the state organization having a mixed council made of named members and elected members.

There are, upon time newspapers, the general lines of his report:

"A cooperative reform must start from some fundamental considerations: 1) An establishment of the legal and statutory regime and also of cooperative policy, on sound and wide bases, to allow unhindered development, pursuing an economic-social regime based on the principle of interest in labor. 2) A cooperative organization, that is to take into account the consolidation and blossoming of small and medium households, created through the agrarian reform, that are to give the small exploitation all the advantages of big exploitations. 3) To introduce cooperative learning in the education of all stages and organize, on sound bases, the special cooperative education. To hold periodic courses in various centres: to offer a greater development to the Academy of Cooperative Studies. 4) To establish the social product on the basis of cooperative principle. The capital of cooperative should not be limited (as it is today: 200,000 lei for one year). 5) To tend to the concentration of cooperative forces. Institutions with commercial cooperative character are to enjoy full autonomy. A credit central is to be established for cooperation 6) Cooperative enterprises to be always preferred by the State to the capitalist enterprises. Associate labor in labor cooperatives to be recognized as equal to the capital. 7) In cooperative legislation, it is to be taken into account the spirit that dominated the cooperative organization for each region. 8) The peasant party does not want to discredit..."
the cooperation, but wishes to distinguish the form from the foundation of cooperation, to not transform some consumption cooperatives in tools of specula and exploitation”.

Ideas exposed by Professor Ion Răducanu in his scientific papers\(^1\), as well as in the lectures presented at the Academy of Cooperative Studies, were materialized all over his activity of organizer and promoter of cooperative movement, that recorded him between the marking personalities of the period between the two world wars.

The vast literature on cooperation\(^2\) has reflected in a pregnant manner the dispute between various parties, faction of parties and cooperative organization, titled as independent, dispute ran to conquer the cooperative movement.

**Bibliography**


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\(^1\) See Ion Răducanu, Regimul legal al cooperației, in Problema cooperației române, Independența economică Publishing House, Bucharest, 1940, p. 208-222

\(^2\) Among the most important studies we outline: Cooperația și clasa muncitoare în anul 1920, Istoria științifică al cooperatistă (1931), Tratat general de cooperație (1935), Cooperația și economia agricolă (1935), Științele cooperației române (1938), Socialismul și cooperația (1945-1946), etc. by Gr. Mladenat; Dinamica economiei cooperatistă (1941) by V. Jinga; Cooperația în Ardeal (1933) by Gh. Dragoș; Reforma cooperatistă by V. Madgearu; Problema cooperatistă române (1940) by I. Mihalache, M. Gormsen and I. Răducanu; Capitalismul român și cooperația by Gh. Pascu; Cooperația română (1925) by Ștefan Zeletin; Cooperația: fapte, idee, doctrină (1927) by H. Ghiulea; Cooperativele agricole (1924) by Cerchez Grigori; Problemele cooperatistă române (1925); Monografia cooperatistă de credit din România (1935) by A. G. Galan etc.