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Census Conflict!

The 2011 Census revealed that people raised in a Protestant tradition form 48% of the population, while those raised in a Catholic tradition form 45%. Immigrants now form around 7%.

IDENTITIES

As the prospect of Northern Catholics becoming a majority in the entity built for a Protestant majority becomes clearer with every Census, more ingenious ways of disguising that fact have to be come up with by Westminster.

Why is not clear. Is it to delude the Unionists into thinking all is well with the little world carved out for them to rule in 1920 so that they don't retreat to their fundamentals? Or is it to disorientate the Fenian advance by convincing Nationalists that they have bred little Brits rather than sea-green incorruptibles?

The *Irish Times* on Wednesday 12th December had its front page feature not on the Catholic/Protestant Census Result as such, but the figures relating to some new fangled self-perceptions of "identity" asked about in the Census. Its editorial wrote:

"What helps to put paid to the traditional headcount rationale, however, is the 2011 census questions, for the first time, on identity. The census found that 40 per cent of the population described themselves uniquely as British, 25 per cent as Irish only, and 21 per cent as only Northern Irish. When we take account of those who volunteered a multiple identity, 48 per cent of the population consider themselves to be wholly or part British, and 28 per cent only said they were wholly or part Irish."

And the *Irish Times* was echoed by all sorts of Unionist media spokesmen who had suddenly discovered a debating point against the Fenians—namely that some of them weren't Fenians at all. It was even rumoured that the Loyalist phrase 'Any *Taig* will do' would have to be qualified in future so as to ascertain if they were really '*Taigs*' at all but '*Northern Irish*' and so, really British after all. In a concession to the non-Irish Fenians it was to be altered from '*Kill All Taigs—let God sort them out*' to '*Kill All Taigs—let the Census sort them out*'.

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The Prospect Of BREXIT

There are two Europes at the moment. The EU and the Eurozone. Each has a different immediate task. The Eurozone's task is to secure the Euro by consolidating itself politically. That is progressing slowly but surely. The EU's problem is what to do with the UK. That is the accepted problem but nobody wants to state it very clearly. But it is growing as an issue and now has a name—Brexit—the British exit.

Since the failure to agree the EU budget last November that issue will have to be sorted during the Irish Presidency. It has the potential to transform the term in office from being routine to being historic. That is, if the Irish can summon the will to face the Brexit issue head on.

The *Irish Times* published an Opinion Piece on 3rd December that could serve as a perfect background paper for the Irish EU Presidency. It should be in everyone's briefing papers and put on the wall of every meeting room in Dublin during the Presidency. It was called *A Country Called Europe Fills UK Sceptics With Fear* and

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Irish Budget 2013

In spite of the negative comments from Opposition politicians and the media there were many positive aspects to Budget 2013.

PROPERTY TAX

The Household Charge will be replaced in July 2013 by a more equitable property tax. There will be a tax of 0.18% tax on the market value of the house. For houses valued at over a million, the value above a million will be taxed at 0.25%. These rates

are modest by European standards, but the introduction of the tax is a good start. Wealthy non-resident property owners will begin to pay tax for the first time.

The traditional argument against such a tax was that in some cases the owners of valuable properties had little or no income. Think of the bewildered old lady in a Georgian mansion living on dog food, who is incapable of going through the stress of moving! Well, in this case she will be allowed to defer her tax liabilities until she dies. These liabilities will incur

a 4% interest charge and will crystallise on the sale of the property. Problem solved! It might be said that this is hard on the offspring whose inheritance will be diminished, but it might encourage them to take more of an interest in their ageing mother!

Needless to say the introduction of a property tax (a tax on wealth) was introduced in spite of rather than because of the so-called Left in this country. Fianna Fáil first mooted this when Lenihan was the Finance Minister. Fine Gael and Labour

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Labour Comment, edited by **Pat Maloney:**

The Dublin Guilds

Mondragon, Part 15

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Trade Union Notes

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But having tried to mystify Protestant Unionists, all the work of Westminster's sociologists was spoiled by a flag when Belfast Council voted to limit the flying of the Union Jack to official occasions—darn and blast, foiled again!

The new 'identity' questions were undoubtedly an attempted sociological mystification, on Westminster's behalf, of the anticipated bad news on the Census Front. And some of the Unionists were undoubtedly fooled. But not those who were meant to be fooled and whose gut-instinct took them out on the protests—but those in Unionism who thought they had saved the Union.

What Unionists had found was that, although the Catholics had increased, the 'Irish' had declined. They took as evidence for this the fact that only 25% described themselves as 'Irish' in identity. The fact that another 21% described themselves as 'Northern Irish' was taken to mean that they were good loyal Ulster Fenians of Norn Irr.

It seemed to go unnoticed by the

Unionists that 'Northern Irish' means 'Irish' to the average punter, Irish from the North of the island of Ireland (or, if it didn't, they still grasped at the straw).

Catholics would have looked at the categories presented to them and been torn between choosing 'Irish' or 'Northern Irish' as their identity. More straightforward nationalists would have chosen 'Irish', realising a ruse was afoot. More sophisticated nationalists, lulled into a more complex *persona* by the Good Friday Agreement, would have qualified their identity with the 'Northern' tag and fallen into the trap. And, as this was the first time this question was presented and no one had warned them of tricky sociologists hired to mess with their identity by providing a category that could be given a different interpretation by devious mischief-makers, they fell for it.

The operative word in the perceived meaning of the term 'Northern Irish' was taken by the two communities to be 'Irish'. Protestants therefore largely rejected the term, seeing it as different from 'Northern Ireland' and chose 'British' instead: 40%

chose British only as their identity. Some Catholics chose 'Northern Irish', not because they have loyalty to 'Northern Ireland' but because they saw themselves as being from 'the North of Ireland'.

It is noticeable that only a tiny minority of Protestants considered themselves 'Northern Irish'. These are most probably those who have become so disillusioned with Britain that they have abandoned all sense of 'Britishness' and become 'Ulster-Scots'. But they have been useful fodder for the Census makers to combine with the lapsed Fenians to muddy the waters. And that was the beauty of the answer category since it was open to differing interpretations and could be used to bolster the Unionist case afterwards.

It is, however, evident that the 'Irish' plus the 'Northern Irish' rather neatly equals the number of Catholics and the number of 'British' is just less than the number of Protestants. This is clear if we go to the Guardian's website: www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/interactive/2012/dec/12/northern-ireland-census-national-identities-mapped

Here there is a map showing a very close affinity between 'British' and Protestant by Council area. It cuts through all the identity camouflage and gets down to the nitty-gritty.

The 'identity' questions, which by their vague and disconcerting wording are open to positive interpretation by Unionists of the existence of the unsighted, mythical Catholic Unionist, must have been inserted purposely to muddy the waters over the rising Catholic/declining Protestant figures so as to detract from what is happening and what is of real political significance. There was a similar exercise, of course, in the aftermath of the 2001 Census as well, when attempts were made to redistribute the 'other' figure overwhelmingly to the 'Protestant' side to beef up the Unionist numbers.

That ruse could not have been used in 2011 and it is pretty sure that the Shinners will be ready for the 'Northern Irish' question in 2021. So Westminster will have to think of another one to catch everyone off guard.

The Irish Times cannot resist a sneer at "that hoary old question that once mattered more than any other to Northerners: the sectarian headcount—when is it exactly that Catholics will outbreed their Protestant counterparts to the point of voting them into a united Ireland?"

But wasn't "the sectarian headcount" the whole purpose of 'Northern Ireland'—a 'democracy' where breeding made all

the difference between the position of dominance and that of subjugation?

In the political sphere these seem to be attempts to reassure Unionists that a Catholic majority would not mean an instant United Ireland and that is what Peter Robinson is also focussing on.

In many ways this is a thought too awful to contemplate for them—and the flags dispute is the first manifestation of this. It is an omen best disguised by reverting to sociology and forgetting politics.

MINORITIES

It has been a very bad couple of weeks for Ulster Unionism in the North. First there was the loss of the City Hall Union flag—which can no longer be flown all the time as a symbol to the Fenians of how Unionists own Belfast. Then there were the street protests over the Alliance decision to make a compromise with the Shinnars and Stoops and fly the Union flag only on designated days which threw the UUP into turmoil and put the DUP into a position where they were alienating all the Catholic unionists Peter Robinson had suddenly found to defend the Union—as his own ethnic group declined. And finally there was the 2011 Census results that formally ended the ‘Protestant majority’ position and made the ‘majority’ in the territory carved out for them in 1920 into just another minority.

And we have not even mentioned the spoiling of Hilary’s party on her farewell tour (before she runs for the Presidency of the US in 2016?)

Brian Feeney, of course, is not taken in by the sociologists and sees things clearly. In response to the Census results Feeney wrote in his column in the *Irish News* (12.12.12) under the headline, *Catholic Tide Can't Be Held Back*:

"It's not so much the growth in the Catholic population revealed in yesterday's census figures that raised eyebrows. After all, it was tiny, just over one per cent, bringing it to 45 per cent. No, it was the sharp drop in the Protestant population down from 53 per cent to 48 per cent. Falling below that 50 per cent figure was a staggering psychological shock for unionists..."

"...yesterday's figures announce a huge sea change in the political landscape which has been coming for decades. The rise in Catholic numbers is not uniform across the north. It's like a tide coming in, long thin fingers rippling in between rocks in some places, bigger volumes rushing in faster to cover other parts of the beach except for little outcrops like Ballymena and Larne... west of the Bann it's 80 to 20 in favour of nationalists in many places."

The Euro Zone or Britain?

In a front page article entitled, *Just what would we do if the UK left EU?* (December 2012 *Irish Political Review*) Jack Lane rightly dismisses the argument of the celebrity economist, David McWilliams, as "*weird reasoning*". As Jack makes clear a UK exit is unlikely to pose any great problems for Ireland given that a currency difference has existed since 1979, a difference that was compounded when we adopted the euro in 1998.

In the original *Irish Independent* article (November 22) McWilliams contrives to present a UK exit as harmful to Irish economic interests on the grounds of the strong cultural links between Britain and Ireland and because Britain is our main trading partner. Both claims are misleading. As can be seen in the 2011 figures from the Irish Central Statistics Office, we export nearly three times the amount of merchandise to the Euro Zone (38 billion euro) as we do to the UK (13 billion euro) and the figures for Irish trade with the UK show higher imports (15.6 billion euro—lower than usual due depressed demand in the Republic) than exports (12.8 billion). In other words Britain gains more from Anglo-Irish trade than we do.

The present arrangement is advantageous to Ireland in that we export to the Euro Zone, the UK, the US (22 billion euro) and, to a small but increasing extent, to Asia. If the Republic withdrew from the Euro Zone, the multi-national sector would be forced to review its use of Ireland as a base for the EU market: our trade with the Euro Zone would be placed in jeopardy. Leaving the Euro Zone and implementing a currency devaluation would also immediately increase the price of imports like oil causing all sorts of knock-on effects. Favouring links with Britain before the Euro Zone, therefore, does not make economic sense. It is, however, in line with the political agenda of increasing British influence in Ireland.

Regarding cultural links there is no doubt but that many Irish people enjoy British culture in the same way they enjoy American culture but this has always posed a problem for Ireland as an independent cultural entity. The danger of being swamped by the culture of larger nearby countries is not unique to Ireland. Smaller countries cope with culturally powerful neighbours in various ways. Denmark deals with the danger of being overwhelmed by German culture by cultivating British cultural influence as a countervailing force (in addition to a vigorous anti-Germanism). Kazakhstan actively resists the encroachments of Chinese culture. Canada protects itself from US culture. The attraction of EU membership for Ireland has been that, in creating a counter to British and American influence, it opened up greater possibilities of an infinitely preferable form of cultural development, independent national development. For different reasons these possibilities have not been realized but the consistent findings of opinion survey evidence is that a majority of Irish people favour closer ties with continental Europe and like being part of the EU.

McWilliams is of the opinion that the EU's "*Northern European free trading character would be diminished on the world stage*", if Britain leaves. But that is exactly the potential gain for the EU. Britain has consistently used its influence in Brussels to advance Anglo Saxon neo-liberal policies against the continental idea of the social market. British politicians from Thatcher to Blair have been to the fore in holding back progress towards EU political union. If the UK leaves, the prospects for the EU as a viable political project will improve, and such a prospect would be in Ireland's interest as much as that of all the other member states.

As Jack Lane argues, neither Irish independence, nor breaking the link with sterling, nor the creation of the single currency were achieved for purely economic reasons. Economic factors are influential but not paramount. David McWilliams cannot make sense of current developments because, true to his background as a liberal economist, he is devoutly apolitical, and being apolitical he ends up an unwitting advocate of the political project of returning the Republic to the Anglo sphere.

Dave Alvey

So, there is now no longer a Protestant majority in 'Northern Ireland' and, presumably, there will be no more talk of "*the Majority*" again—except perhaps in relation to it being a larger minority than the other minority. But that is not really a

majority at all, is it? And it will only take another census to make it a minority smaller than the other minority, if Brian Feeney is right.

The Good Friday Agreement is now actually looking a better deal for Unionism

in a way that was never imagined by them—since it is there to protect the minority! No wonder Unionist demands for majority-rule have gone away!

The Ulster Protestants are now an ethnic minority—and we are all minorities now!

Our British readers will know that being an ethnic minority is, of course, no bad thing, if you happen to live in a state without ethnicist politics—in a state like the UK (or the Irish Republic). During the Summer Olympics London made a great thing about how it integrated all sorts of people from around the world into itself in a show that took 1936 to a whole new level. It was even said in all seriousness by Brendan Foster that Mo Farah, a Somali runner competing for Team GB, had "*taken on the Africans and beaten them!*"

Northern Ireland is different. Despite having been established by the State that most successfully integrated all and sundry with the minimum of fuss, it was assigned the polar opposite purpose of being an arena for ethnic strife and divisiveness. And it has remained true to its purpose—its assigned Imperial duty of 1920—to the bitter end.

ETHNIC VIEW

One of the problems in all this has been Ulster Unionism's insistence in being a majority. Truth be told, there were already Ulster Unionists who saw things in ethnic terms even before they got their pseudo-state and they were very useful to the Imperial scheme of 1920.

The Truth About Ulster was written by Frank Frankfort Moore in 1913-14. Moore was born in 1855, the son of a Limerick jeweller. He came from a Presbyterian background and was sent at an early age to be educated at the Belfast Academical Institute (Inst). He became a journalist with the *Belfast Newsletter* between 1876 and 1892 and rose to the position of Assistant Editor before he moved to London, where he wrote *The Truth About Ulster* during the Home Rule Crisis.

The Truth About Ulster was published when Moore saw headlines in the English press asking whether Ulster would really fight against Home Rule for Ireland. Moore, believed this to be a ridiculous question and he wrote in the first chapter, *Fighting Ulster*:

"I felt inclined to ask myself when had Ulster not been fighting? She has been fighting for precisely the same 'Cause' at intervals during the past fifty years, and for nearly three hundred years previously she had been fighting with an enemy who was the same, although wearing a different uniform. So that I fancy the

question of the hour should be, 'Will Ulster continue to fight?' rather than 'Will Ulster fight?'..." (p10).

Moore saw the struggle against Home Rule as the latest instalment in the ancient ethnic struggle of the colonist to keep the native down. The native had to be kept down because the coloniser had not succeeded in engulfing him with sufficient colonisers and exterminating him. That might seem rather harsh to the reader but it was put very explicitly like this by Moore who used the Biblical programme of extermination to explain why the pacification of Ireland did not lead to a perpetual peace for the colonists:

"...the efforts at colonisation made by the early, if not the earliest, masters of the art of pacification in Ulster were too faithfully framed on the lines of the Act of Settlement formulated by Moses in respect of Palestine, to have any greater chance of success in Ulster than it had in Asia Minor.

"And be it remembered also that the failure in both cases was due to the same cause, namely, the incompleteness of the conquests which were to result in perpetual peace. The scheme of colonisation recommended to the Israelitish brotherhood was a simple one, and I should not like to be the one to stand up and say in the presence of a congregation of Ulster Presbyterians that it did not come direct from God.

"It was neither more nor less than a policy of extermination. The instructions for carrying it out may be read in detail in a certain chapter of Exodus. The original inhabitants of the land were to 'be wiped out, men, women, and children, especially the children unborn'. Truly an effective, if somewhat drastic, scheme of 'planting' a colony.

"But in framing it, unfortunately, neither the humanity of man nor the cupidity of the children of Israel was taken into account, and the result was what God's mouthpiece prophesied it would be: the colonists were commanded to spare no one, and assured that if they did, they would find that the survivors of the massacre would become as thorns in their sides for evermore. But the colonists were weak enough to do some sparing, and of course the prophecy as to the result was realised; for those of the Philistines who were allowed to live became as thorns in their sides, even those whom the cupidity of the Israelites had saved in order that they might be turned into slaves.

"Exactly the same thing has happened in Ulster. The colonists of the Plantation instituted by James I. wanted their wood to be hewn for them and their water to be drawn for them; therefore they spared a reasonable number of the original Irish who were quarrelling among themselves, and so (according to the statesmanship of the Middle Ages and of a long time

afterwards) should have been swept out of existence altogether; and these survivors became as thorns in their flesh, especially when they were hewing wood or drawing water; and so they have remained to the present day.

"Ulster is still a colony in the midst of the hostile people who, though they have never (generally speaking) recovered more of their old position than allows of their quarrelling among themselves, are still, as hewers of wood and drawers of water, always ready to fling a faggot at the head of their task-master.

"That is, in very truth, what the constant fighting in Ulster has meant. It has been the attempt of the subject race to rebel against the ascendancy. In all the other provinces of Ireland some progress has been made by the conquered race during the past hundred years or so toward regaining the ascendancy which they once enjoyed; and the dominant ones have for long thought it prudent to suspend their domineering; but in Ulster there has never been a need for them to do so. They have always looked with indignant eyes at the attempts of the Hivites and the Hittites and the Jebusites to regain their original position, and called such attempts by the name of rebellion. They have been fighting since the days of the siege of Derry against the intermittent rebellions of the native Irish, who had become their servants; and now when it is suggested to them that these servants should become their masters, some newspaper folk inquire with a seriousness that has its comic side to anyone who knows Ulster and the history of Ulster, "Will Ulster fight?" (*The Truth About Ulster*, pp12-15).

The Covenant said opposition to Home Rule was about 'equal citizenship', but really it was about remaining an ethnic majority. The concept of being an ethnic majority is alien to Core Britain but it is a colonial concept strongly associated with the kith and kin of Greater Britain in parts of Africa—until the thorns grew up around them too.

In America and Australasia there were successful exterminations and the minority became a majority. But if exterminations are not thorough enough, or the minority do not engage with the majority to dissolve itself into a new national development, then the thorns have a nasty habit of returning and spoiling the Garden of Eden.

That is a thing modern Israel knows well through its acquaintance with its Book of Genocide and which motivates it to do some periodic pruning of the growing thorns.

The Protestant garrison of Ireland had a number of opportunities in the couple of centuries after the failed extermination of the natives to engage with them and create

something different for itself and them. But it chose to be an ethnic majority, in one way or another, if not numerically but politically, through the military power of England. It lost its opportunity around the early years of the 19th Century and the Union's emancipations and democratisations brought the absent majority back onto the stage of history.

POISON CHALICE

When one reads Moore's account of the Plantation's intentions toward the Ulster Catholics, one can permit Brian Feeney a little bit of triumphalism over the Census figures. The Plantation which tried to put an end to the wild is being overgrown again by the thorns and all that is left are parts of Antrim and Down—the migration society, outside the Plantation.

But it was the Poison Chalice of 'Northern Ireland' that really did for Ulster Protestants in 1920-21. The establishment of this pseudo-state appeared at first to be a great victory for Ulster Unionism (although the Leader of Unionism in Ireland, Edward Carson, did not want it). It seemed a great defeat also for the Ulster Catholics who found themselves trapped inside it, cut off from the national development that was proceeding in the rest of the island and from the UK State in which their leader, Joe Devlin, thrived as a substantial political force in conjunction with Liberal England.

The Northern Catholics were placed in a dire predicament within the perverse construct in which they became imprisoned. But they lived lives of hope within their culture and their ideals with the belief that their day would come, one day. They were, in many ways, suited to this position because their historical experience had stood them in good stead for it, being survivors of extermination and long endurers of worse oppression.

But, whilst the Six County Catholics lived in the belief that their day would come, it began to become the case that for the Ulster Protestant their day was done.

In 1914 the Ulster Protestant was part of the great Unionist Party, the natural party of government of the greatest Empire the world had ever seen, upon which the sun never set. He was one of the Master Race of the world and was given the honour by Joe Chamberlain, no less, of being one of the "*great governing races*". It was an honour John Redmond could only enviously aspire to.

Redmond allied with the Liberal Party to become a "*governing race*" in Ireland in the same way that the Boers had been given such a position after defeat by

England and the concentration camp.

But the Unionist Party, in alliance with the Ulster Unionists, saw off this attempt to place Imperial rule in Ireland on a new democratic footing by exchanging the minority garrison for the majority natives in a Home Rule Ireland. And then the Liberal Party was seen off in the Great War they engaged in and botched.

That Great War set off a chain of events that meant the Unionist Party had to deal with the natives differently than had been intended before the War. The War, fought on 'small nation' propaganda for the purposes of carrying the Liberal backbench, led to a further democratisation that swept away the Redmondite Imperialists in 1918. And, when the Republic was endorsed by the Irish and the natives showed their seriousness in standing up for it, a new dispensation was necessary.

That involved the cutting adrift of the old garrison. In the new Imperial scheme of things the Ulster Protestants were given the role of policing the Northern Catholics within a territory designed to enable them to become a new majority, but at the price of being cut off from the UK State. It was a cunning plan to exert continued influence on the part of the island that Britain had reluctantly let go, so that it would not go very far—and perhaps even return one day, to Mother.

But, in doing this, England turned the Ulster Protestant from a Master Race of Empire into the mere masters of the local natives. And in accepting this "*supreme sacrifice*", the horizons of the Unionists left in Ulster were narrowed and they became petty in their concerns.

SYMBOLS

One of their petty concerns has been the flying of flags—or more accurately the flying of them in the face of the Fenians—presumably, to show who still holds the whip-hand.

This has been a most un-British activity in later years. The flying of flags in England, apart from their recent appearance at Remembrance extravaganzas and sporting events, has been discreet. It would be seen as 'bad form' to fly them in the faces of the large minorities that have come to Britain and who need integrating. In the 1970s the only Englishmen who continued in such provocative behaviour were the residues of Imperial racialism in organisations like the National Front.

I don't know if flag waving was always a proclivity of the Ulster Protestant but it certainly became a prominent feature of their communal identity after they were cut off from the U.K State in 1920 and

asked to perform a new Imperial duty as a semi-detached outpost of state. It is a sign of insecurity in the sense that it seems as if it has to be done to reassure themselves that they are still 'British' and still top-dog in their little backyard of 'our wee Ulster'.

It would have been simple to demand parity with Britain with flag-flying and to have accepted what was good enough for the Queen was good enough for Protestant Ulster. But that would have been British.

Interestingly, that was the nature of the Trimble intervention in the dispute. It seems that Trimble's time in England has rubbed off on him, making him more British in instinct since he has left the province. And that is understandable as he becomes more exposed to the real politics of the State. Worryingly, for Ulster Unionism, Trimble is appearing as something of more substance and stature than what they have been reduced to since.

The point about wanting to be 'more British than the Queen' was put to a protester by a radio journalist and they replied that this wasn't the point. The point was *not to have 'them uns' tell us what to do with our flag*. And that sums up well what 'Northern Ireland' is all about and what it was set up for—an eternal communal conflict disconnected from the normal instincts and behaviour of state politics.

Of course, these things are distasteful to the more refined, particularly because the protests against the City Hall decision have a strong lumpen-proletariat character, and have been organised at 4.30 each day to disrupt the journeys home of the 'hard-working'. In 1974 Harold Wilson characterised the Ulster Workers' Strike as the work of "*spongers*". And the solid and well-organised working-class, secure in the knowledge that they were far from 'spongers', wore sponges in their lapels in response.

But the Protestant working-class was devastated by the Imperial warrior, Mrs Thatcher, in more ways than one and it is a shadow of what it once was. And the Fenians, who made provision for a future without heavy industry by tending to their education *en masse*, know it.

CATHOLIC UNIONISM?

Now, with the declining numbers of the ethnic majority, we know what 'Last Ditch' Unionism is to be—Catholic Unionism. The new majority for the Union will be constructed from the Ulster Unionist and the new species, the Northern Catholic Unionist.

That species is suddenly required in

appear in substance, in the Last Ditch for Ulster Unionism, when it never before was anything but a last-thought, scraping the barrel, debating point—‘Oh, and there are Roman Catholics who would prefer the Union to the Republic. There was that Louis fellow, what was his name, wasn’t there?’

But surely, if that species is to make an appearance, in substance that would depend on not antagonising the Catholics, wouldn’t it?

Is this a possibility for ethnicist Ulster Unionism and ‘Northern Ireland’, given its purpose and nature? We think not.

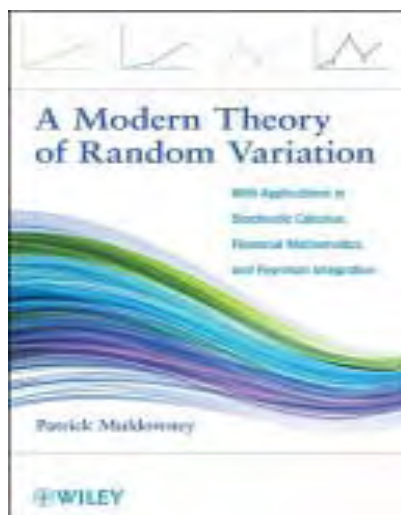
All this talk about Catholic unionists points to some important facts that are emerging in relation to ‘Northern Ireland’ that political commentators are failing to understand or, possibly, avoiding saying.

Firstly, the only real issue of state politics left is how a united Ireland is to come about, with the least bloodshed possible. There is also the growing probability that there will be a period ahead of Catholics becoming the majority in ‘Northern Ireland’, a period in which Sinn Fein consolidates its power and prepares the way for the transition to an all-Ireland state. This means an extended transitional period in which Northern Catholics become the majority and start reshaping the 6 Counties to their liking—if that isn’t occurring already. Sinn Fein will presumably have great power in such a situation, becoming the lever over both the future of the 6 Counties and that of the Irish State—something that Britain never intended in 1920. The Unionists will be in the novel position of being a minority in their ‘wee Ulster’.

What on earth will happen to Ulster Unionism in such a period? Will it die slowly in its last ditch or take a great leap of faith out of it?

Pat Walsh

New book: not to be missed!



Origins Of Capitalism

The articles by G. Francesconi and O. Yeshitela (*Irish Political Review*, Nov. 2012) both search for the fundamental source of capitalism, the first in religion and the second, in Imperialism. But there is a historical process that answers both. Clearly ongoing technological advances in the mediaeval world meant that a substantial surplus would inevitably result as people increasingly produced much more than their needs. There were two responses available: one seemingly logical response, carried out possibly by the Guilds, was to shorten the working day. The alternative response was for the surplus to be expropriated by a new ruling class—so the capitalists arrive!

A further result, as this surplus production by the workers grows, is that payment-in-kind becomes less useful. For example: daily production by a worker rises to say two shirts completed or 30 loaves of bread. Payment in kind would require increasingly complex swapping arrangements. So money wages became the norm and the labour market grew. But the really crucial result of this new money market (little noted by Marx) is that, once incomes are reckoned in purely money terms, quantity becomes the measure of everything, personal qualities disappear. The Lord of the Manor in status now becomes just a man like everyone else. He is reincarnated as the capitalist with perhaps \$50,000 income. But then the worker on \$1,000 can see that their only difference is quantity of money, which is by its nature variable: they are now on a level playing field. The spreading idea of human equality now tears down the feudal class system of Kings and Lords.

This is where Francesconi might find Christianity and Capitalism join: all humans have a soul, human beings are equal in essence, they only vary in quantity of money! In fact today we live in a rampant capitalist society, yet this has produced incredible equalities in gender, race, sex etc. that would have been mere dreams just 50 years ago. Capitalism thrived in both Catholic and Protestant countries. Francesconi tries to find a simple cause and effect between religion and capitalism, but Engels emphasized that society works dialectically, with influences moving in very complex back and forth ways, simple cause-and-effect is rare.

And simple cause and effect is also what Yeshitela looks for in stating that imperialism was the cause of capitalism. So early capitalism gave rise to the labour market that, as noted above, generated among workers a demand for human equality. This then logically led to agitation. One example was Chartist agitation in England in the early 19th century. This led to the import of cheap corn from America to quieten the workers, and the really intense ‘Age of Imperialism’ (see Eric Hobsbawm’s book) began which provided further cheap raw materials from colonies. Manufacturing was restricted to the West, India had to send its raw cotton to Manchester and buy back finished cotton sheets. But after the two wars, agitation grew further and in the 1960s Margaret Thatcher was forced to respond by allowing manufacturing to go to the Third World. This then provided the import of cheap manufactured goods boosting consumerism and again diverting the agitation.

Thus capitalists play a Mafia game (unsurprisingly) by paying off their own group, their working and middle-class, who provide them with material and armed support which oppresses and robs the workers in the rest of their empire. America sends its soldiers to grab Middle-East oil so its own workers can continue to drive their 4x4’s. If this isn’t vital to the maintenance of capitalism, why did America risk so much in Vietnam and now Iraq, etc.? Imperialist oppression is used in the Third World to extract the surplus that underpins the consumerism which buys social peace in the developed countries.

Economically, this works as follows: a worker in America might produce in one hour, goods worth \$24 of which typically \$12 is taken as profit. But a skilled Indian worker with good technology in one hour is only paid \$2 (after his boss takes \$2 profit) for goods exported to America. Thus even after capitalist profit-taking the American worker can exchange one hour of his labour for three hours of the Indian worker. So the American worker’s experience of shopping is similar to a winning gambler cashing in his chips, or a child unwrapping a fancy Christmas present. It is in the very act itself of shopping that the worker experiences his share of the ‘profit of imperialism’ getting three hours of labour value for his one hour.

In short, capitalism thrives on a docile consumerist working-class underpinned by imperialist cheap imports. It is not surprising that workers in imperial countries continue to vote for pro-capitalist parties. (It is also no wonder that religion is in many places being replaced by shopping!) This is where Yeshitela can source the relationship between imperialism and capitalism.

Two points: with the growing sense of equality caused by capitalism’s emphasis on money, workers in India, Africa and all other Third World areas will eventually do the numbers to compare themselves to the West as equally deserving. This growing awareness of their oppression will finally unite them to demand a Western level of wages. This will remove the cheap imports that underpin consumerism.

The second point is that up to now there have always been new parts of the world to colonize or to more deeply exploit. But that is now over. There are now no new colonies for global imperial capitalism to look for the cheap imports which underpin consumerism.

For the Western working-class the end of the consumerism buzz will reveal the injustice of their own system and create a real anti-capitalist movement. Certainly this is the only hope to end imperialism’s appalling oppression and consumerism’s fatal global warming.

Jim Dixon, Cork

Brexit

continued

it is by Thomas Klau, who is described as senior policy fellow and head of the Paris office of the European Council on Foreign Relations.

The article summed up the situation in the EU and the Eurozone very accurately. Klau presented a series of home truths about the UK and the EU. The gist of his argument is that more and more European leaders have had enough of the UK's antics. Now that the future of their currency is at stake the time has come to say enough is enough.

Klau explains how Cameron has made the issue very clear. He recounts:

"...a moment of beautifully unguarded prime ministerial language unfolded on the Late Show with David Letterman in the US. David Cameron, having famously failed to pass Letterman's knowledge tests on the meaning of Magna Carta and the authorship of Rule Britannia, went on to explain later in the programme that "*in Europe if you have a single currency, you are going to end up with effectively some form of single government... I don't want that for Britain... I don't want to be part of a country called Europe.*" He said this having previously made clear that the relationship between euro zone member states must surely come to resemble that between Texas and Nebraska for the euro to survive."

Cameron is quite correct. The Eurozone must integrate or disintegrate. And Britain is not ever going to be part of integration.

With the EU it is a different story. Cameron is not very concerned about this. He has a veto on any real steps towards integration so he plays mind games with his fellow leaders. Klau sums up the future for the EU in the situation of a more integrated Eurozone:

"Equally predictably, the European Union would then be reduced to some kind of glorified European free trade area encumbered with too many obsolete institutions. Whether the UK would remain in it or negotiate some other form of access to its single market would be a secondary issue."

In other words the future of the EU does not matter very much. The future of the Eurozone is the only serious game in town and the rest is much ado about nothing, just sound effects.

Klau also makes this very important point about other plans that Eurozone leaders may have:

"Surely ambitions to build a European foreign and defence policy—the one other

big constitutional issue to settle—would gravitate away from the EU towards the country called Europe. After all, wars cost money and a fiscal and budgetary union would soon seize control of military expenditure."

With Cameron prepared to use his veto to block any increase in the current relatively minuscule EU budget, how in the world can other leaders see the necessary massive expansion of the budget that would be needed for very expensive items such as armies and wars being agreed by Britain? It will never happen within the Union. It could happen within the Zone.

It is make your mind up time for Brexit. Ireland could go down in European history as the country that cut the Gordian knot and began the process to release European leaders from the incubus in their midst. Of course the current Government—and any other prospective Government here—does not have the balls to even think about this, never mind doing anything about it. But Ireland is missing an opportunity to make history for itself and Europe and put it at the real heart of the new Europe based on the Eurozone. All that is needed is simply to make it very clear during the next six months that the Irish believe that for the UK's membership of the EU it is time for some sex and travel on the UK's part.

Jack Lane

Budget

continued

deserve credit for following through on the proposal.

Fianna Fáil has been slightly disingenuous in its opposition. It opposes this property tax because it is in favour of a different property tax! The property tax that the party favours is a site valuation tax. Many economists and ecologists favour this type of tax. The argument in favour of it is that it encourages the efficient use of land. By taxing the value of the site there is an economic incentive to maximise the use of the land. The tax encourages people to live in apartments rather than the traditional suburban semi-detached house. Bungalows in rural Ireland on a few acres of land would be heavily penalised.

Also, under a site valuation tax, people would not be penalised for trying to improve their property such as building an extension or installing a top of the range bathroom or kitchen. This is not a very strong argument since there is very

little social benefit in private individuals spending money on a non-productive investment such as their house.

A stronger argument is that there is a social cost to low-density housing that is not reflected in the market price. The social cost was exposed in the recent bad Winters we had. Our low-density housing model means that the length of the road network *per capita* is very high in this country. The same applies to the water network. In normal times this makes it expensive to maintain, but in bad weather the difficulties are compounded by treacherous road conditions and burst pipes.

It is also very expensive to maintain a high-quality public transport system in a low-density city. Marc Coleman has remarked in his book (*The Best Is Yet To Come*) that the area of Berlin is about the same as Dublin, but has three times the population. This is something that *The Irish Times* and other investors may not have considered when they launched their free newspapers. While cities in Continental Europe of a similar size to Dublin can easily support half a dozen free newspapers (distributed in Metro stations), Dublin could only support one.

However, a site valuation tax takes even less account of ability to pay. In the case of the little old lady in the Georgian Mansion, she has a large imputed income equal to the rental income that she chooses to forego. Michael McGrath of Fianna Fáil argued that people in Dublin and Cork are discriminated against because of the high value of their houses. But the high value of such houses corresponds to high rental income; income, which people in rural Ireland cannot hope to obtain.

If, under Fianna Fáil's proposals, urban Ireland is to pay less of a property tax, is it fair to impose the shortfall on rural Ireland? In my view it is neither fair nor practical. Given the State's urgent need to raise revenue, the market-value-based property tax seems the most sensible option. Perhaps in time, a hybrid model could be adopted, but this is not the time.

The economist Ronan Lyons suggested in the *Sunday Business Post* (9.12.12) that a site valuation tax could be levied on residential-zoned land that has not been developed. I agree with this as a means of discouraging land hoarding. But it doesn't follow that the same rules (i.e. a site valuation tax) should apply to land which has residential property on it.

To kick start the housing market Minister Michael Noonan has exempted buyers of new or unoccupied houses from the Property Tax up until 2016. Also a

purchase of any type of home in 2013 by a first-time buyer will be exempt from property taxes up until 2016. In my view these reliefs are unnecessary.

OTHER WEALTH TAXES

Noonan also increased capital taxes by the following measures:

- Reduction in threshold (or allowance) at which Capital Acquisition tax (i.e. inheritance and gift taxes) applies by 10%
- Increase DIRT from 30% to 33%
- Capital Acquisition tax and Capital Gains Tax increased from 30% to 33%

These are welcome and there is probably more scope for increases in this area. This writer could never understand why such unearned gains were taxed at a lower rate than the income tax rates.

PRSI

There were a number of progressive changes in Pay Related Social Insurance:

- increase in the minimum level of annual contribution from self employed from 253 Euro to 500.
- Modified PRSI rate payers will be subject to PRSI on income from their trade and profession.
- Unearned income (rent, dividends, interest etc) for everyone will be subject to PRSI in 2014.

The most controversial measure, which Noonan inserted in mid-sentence, was the abolition of the PRSI Allowance for employees. He implied that this was Labour Minister Joan Burton's idea. With the exception of those with a salary under 18,304, it will cost employees 5 Euros a week, regardless of income. It is interesting to reflect that it was Labour's Ruairi Quinn who introduced this Allowance when he was the Finance Minister in the 1990s.

Noonan defended the abolition of the Allowance by claiming that PRSI was social insurance and that the low-paid benefited more than high earners from Welfare Benefits. There would be merit in what he says if PRSI was indeed Pay Related Social Insurance, but it has long ceased to be. As Michael McGrath pointed out it is, in effect, a tax.

In the past PRSI was a social insurance system of sorts. The idea was that the State should provide a safety net, which would give a very low income to the unemployed and pensioners. For this reason the PRSI contribution was capped at a certain income level. High income earners did not pay PRSI above this income level. If PRSI is considered insurance, this was

perfectly reasonable. Since neither Unemployment Benefit nor the State Pension increased with increasing contributions, high income earners were already subsidising low income earners even with the PRSI ceiling. However, a few years ago, as a result of the deterioration of the State finances, Brian Lenihan decided that PRSI was a tax. Accordingly, he abolished the PRSI ceiling and high income earners were liable for PRSI on all of their income. For Michael Noonan now to turn around and say that PRSI was, after all, social insurance, as a justification for abolishing the PRSI allowance is a little disingenuous.

PENSIONS

There is no State Pension Scheme for even workers on the average industrial wage in the private sector who want to maintain their standard of living after they retire. It is left to such people to make their own private pension arrangements to supplement the basic state pension. Such people are allowed tax relief on the contributions they make. The pensions industry defends this measure on the grounds that such pension contributions are deferred income. So although the State might lose tax revenue on the contributions they will regain the lost tax revenue when such people retire because pensions are taxable.

This argument is reasonable. However, there is a feeling that high income earners should not be allowed to avail of this relief. Lenihan capped the pension pot at retirement for tax purposes at 2.3 million Euro. Noonan decided the relief should not be allowed for pension schemes that deliver more than 60,000 Euros per annum. How it is decided when a pension fund is worth more than 60,000 per annum is unclear (many pension schemes are defined contribution rather than defined benefit). This policy will not be implemented until 2014. Whatever about the practicalities I would support this measure.

I also support Noonan's proposal to treat pensioners with a salary of over 60,000 in the same way as everyone else. The normal Universal Social Church rate of 7% will apply to these people in 2013.

The Minister also announced that the top slicing relief on non-statutory *ex gratia* lump sums greater than 200,000 will no longer be available. Up until now such payments were taxed at the average rate of tax over the previous three years rather than the marginal rate of tax of 41%. *The Irish Times* commented that Noonan's measure will result in a person receiving 199,000 ending up with an after-tax income greater than someone receiving

more than 200,000! I have a solution to this problem. Why not abolish top slicing relief altogether?

High income earners in the same job for many years benefit from tax relief on lump sum payments. This relief is called the Standard Capital Superannuation Benefit. It is calculated by the formula:

$$(\text{Average salary in last 3 years} \times \text{no. of years service}) \cdot 15 - (\text{other lump sum benefits}).$$

In my view it should be abolished. The Pensions industry can defend tax relief on private pension contributions on the grounds that it is deferred income. But it can't have it both ways and defend tax relief on pension benefits.

TAXES ON SIN

For decades now the State has somehow convinced Irish people that drinking, driving and smoking are bad things, especially if done at the same time. The will of people engaged in such activities has been broken to such an extent that the taxes imposed on them are contemptuously referred to as the "old reliables". The word "reliable" means that, no matter how unjust the tax, there will be no resistance.

Noonan imposed a 10 cent duty on a pint of beer and cider. There was also a 10 cent tax imposed on a standard measure of spirits.

Smokers, of course, did not escape. 10 cent was imposed on a pack of 20 and 50 cent on a 25g pack of roll-your-own tobacco. Many such smokers have been chased away from the pub to spend a lonely existence in front of television with a bottle of plonk. But there is no rest for the wicked! Noonan decided to impose a 1 Euro duty on a 75cl bottle of wine. The same tax will be imposed regardless of whether it is a bottle of Chateau plonk or Chateau Petrus (Michael Smurfit's favourite). But there was no public outcry at this iniquitous tax.

Motorists did not do too badly this year. There was no extra duty imposed on petrol but there was an increase in the Vehicle Retention Tax and Motor Tax rates.

WELFARE

It was remarked last year that the budget presentations are set up in a way that Fine Gael, through Michael Noonan, gives the good news (no increases in the tax rates), while Labour, through Brendan Howlin (and to some extent Joan Burton), was associated with the bad news (cuts in public expenditure).

Labour succeeded in preserving the basic welfare rates, although the duration of the Job Seekers benefit has been cut by three months to nine months. However, the general policy has been to cut all Benefits which are not directly targeted at low income groups. There is some merit in this approach, but inevitably some of the cuts will cause hardship to vulnerable groups.

Probably the most controversial measure was the cut in respite care. This is given to carers. It was cut from 1,700 to 1,375 Euro per annum (a 19% reduction). It is difficult to defend this. Such carers are saving the State money by keeping their disabled dependants out of institutions.

Another universal benefit that was cut was Child Benefit. This was cut by 10 Euro per child per month. In some ways both Fine Gael and Labour deserve the opprobrium that has been heaped on them for this cut. Many of us will remember Noonan teasing the late Brian Lenihan for cutting the benefit for the third child only ("was he bullied by a third child when he was young?"). In the 2012 Budget Howlin cut the benefit for both the third and subsequent children and now in 2013 benefit for all children will be cut in spite of Labour promises in the last election.

This is a pity. There is a social benefit in encouraging people to have children. We have the highest birth rate in the EU, just ahead of France. Our rate is comfortably above two, which should ensure that our population will increase, although it is not quite high enough to prevent the age profile from also increasing.

In my view Child Benefit should not be cut, but it should be taxed along with all welfare benefits. There is a politically correct view that it should be given to the mother and only assessed on the mother's income because a mother will spend it on her children, whereas the father will spend it on drink and cigarettes. Well the price of this feminist view is that all Child Benefit is cut because it becomes prohibitively expensive.

Some of the other measures that Howlin implemented are much easier to defend. The Medical Card for over 70s will be means-tested for high earners (i.e. about 30,000 Euros *per annum* for single and 60,000 for married couple). Such people will still be able to avail of a GP-only Medical Card. It is interesting that a similar measure introduced by the previous Government brought thousands of pensioners on to the streets. But in these more straitened times the measure is hardly noticed.

TAXING OTHER PEOPLE

Irish people don't like paying taxes, but they also don't like welfare cuts. They are not completely selfish in this. Many people oppose welfare cuts even though they themselves don't benefit from them. Opposition politicians (including the Government parties when they were in Opposition) have fostered the illusion that we can maintain generous levels of welfare provision without increasing taxes on ordinary people.

There may be scope for increasing the tax on high earners, but it is very, very limited. Thanks to Brian Lenihan's budget we have one of the most progressive income tax systems in the OECD. We are an English speaking country with a large multi-national sector. As such, high earners in this country are more mobile than most.

If we are to improve our welfare provision everyone will have to pay. The

only way this is achievable is if we replace our existing "safety net" type welfare system with a social insurance model similar to many countries in continental Europe.

CONCLUSION

The 2013 Budget was a decent attempt at closing our budget deficit in a fair way. Much of the heavy lifting was already done by Lenihan's 2011 budget, but this has been a double edged sword for the current Government. While it has had less to do, there is no longer any 'low hanging fruit'. So the Government parties—in particular Labour—may have to pay a heavy political price for the extra cuts and revenue-raising measures that were necessary. In the case of Labour this has less to do with the budget itself, than the expectations it raised in Opposition.

John Martin

Trade Unions: *time to grasp the nettle*

Is money a thing in itself with no relationship to the real economy? The boom seemed to have created a load of it, easily accessible and easily spendable.

Wage determination in 1990s Ireland was a State-funded affair. Under Social Partnership the Trade Unions agreed to restrain demands for wage increases to help restore the competitiveness of the economy. In return workers' real take home wages were to be increased gradually by way of generous tax reforms. And the Unions got to play a central role in economic and social planning. It was a strategy that worked and was seen to have helped create the growth environment of the 1990s. In the property boom years of the 2000s, the enormous business profits to be made in a low-interest environment led to a great expansion of productive activity. This, combined with a chronic labour shortage, caused wages to rise 25% in less than a decade, along with less than 10% inflation. The plentiful money (apparently) available to the State led to an erroneous view of productivity improvements. Private sector wage inflation led to public sector aggregate pay increases of 40% through the Benchmarking system.

In a capitalist economy, the cost of labour is one of the main factors of production. Trade Union muscle can cause a growth in the proportion of surplus value created by the economy that goes to workers and can also cause an increase in

the "social wage", i.e. the proportion of State revenues spent on public services that benefit the working class. The market will sustain such increases, as long as there is some reflection of it in productivity gains, but if productivity decreases relative to wage gains, labour costs can cause the economy to become uncompetitive. In a globalised economy, capital can react by simply moving elsewhere.

In the much derided era of Protectionism and 'closed' economies, the essence of the class struggle was the divide-up or distribution of the national surplus value produced. Until the 1980s the "global economy" was a marginal affair, and national economies counted for something. In Britain in the 1970s the strength of the working class was such that capitalism could no longer function unless either the working class took co-responsibility for production or its power was broken to facilitate a reassertion of capitalist power. Although offered the first option by the Bullock Report on industrial democracy, the British Trade Unions balked at the wage implications of self-regulation and co-determination and, as doing nothing was not an option, British society reverted to a re-assertion of capitalist power as advocated by Thatcher.

In Ireland the introduction of the Euro led to some widespread illusions regarding the nature of money. The explosion in global trade that followed the fall of communism, and the mushrooming of 'swaps' of financial instruments, undermined the common-or-garden understanding of

national economics and productivity, and of their relationship to earnings, property and salaries. Money was something that could be conjured in large amounts at no apparent cost. The crash reflects a re-assertion of the real economy.

The Eurozone is an incomplete currency and economic zone. The Germans are currently sorting this out. By joining the Euro, the state believed it was becoming part of what is known as an “*optimal currency area*”. National monetary authority was traded for currency stability, and macro-economic management at national level became a matter of wise fiscal policy (tax management). In the current crisis, national deficits in the real economy have re-asserted themselves, and Eurozone states must deal with this through fiscal policy. Hence the famous FG-Labour disputes over the relative proportions of revenue increases versus spending cuts. Sinn Féin seems now to have grasped this, though its economic proposals will need to develop a bit further before gaining traction.

States and political economies have faced these dilemmas before. In a comparable situation in the 1970s, the Wilson Government in the UK agreed with Trade Union and employers a programme of controlled costs and wages to restore British competitiveness following the financial crisis caused by the collapse of the Bretton Woods system. In the early 2000s, the German Social Democratic Government of Gerhard Schröder did something similar, again through social partnership. In a radio programme in mid-December, the German Ambassador to Ireland reminded Pat Kenny of this when the popular media personality sought to discredit social partnership as part of the Irish problem. The Ambassador suggested that Ireland should re-consider its abandonment of the tri-partite route of managing our way through the crisis through a social pact of Government, Employers and Unions.

Trade Unions need a purpose for themselves. Verbal radicalism and anti-capitalist rhetoric tend to grow when real power and influence decline. The least powerful Unions will tend to be the rhetorically most radical. Since the ICTU failure to convince the Fianna Fáil-Green Government to revive a social pact in 2010 (due to its insistence on ring-fencing current salary levels), speeches by Trade Union leaders have been growing ever more ‘radical’. This is a bad sign.

Despite supporting Labour participation in Government on the basis of holding the

line on social and wages policy with Fine Gael (given that the unions no longer have this function), SIPTU has expressed its great dissatisfaction with the December Budget. It is also unhappy with European Central Bank debt policy, and its proposal to the Irish Congress of Trade Unions for a series of street protests about national debt during the Irish EU Presidency when the Council of the EU will be in town, has been agreed to by ICTU. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this is an expression of powerlessness.

Would it not be better for the Trade Union movement to develop a strategy to put a nationally agreed *Pact for Recovery*

in place, and offer to play its part in a strategy in which everything—including the managing down of unsustainable salary levels (which currently is happening through market forces anyway)—must be on the table? The attraction for Government and employers would be the socially cohesive and morale effect of a shared road to recovery. Would it not be a better approach, with trade-offs for salary reductions being secured through co-determining other areas of policy (e.g. social insurance, vocational training, industrial policy, housing, pensions), rather than powerless rhetoric directed at governmental policy after the fact?

The Long Road To Gaza

The Catholic community, especially in Belfast, celebrated India gaining its independence on the 15th of August 1947. Many were in tears at the news. The 15th of August also happened to be The Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin or Our Lady’s Day which people there prefer to call this occasion. The usual bonfires in the street now serve a double purpose. Tables and chairs are taken from the houses and set up in the middle of the street. The wine flows, with bawdy songs sung, all in the old Celtic Church style of irreverence.

"When the red red biddy runs down your diddy
ye're drunk, ye're drunk... "

(to Al Jolson’s *When The Red Red Robin Comes Bob Bob Bobbing Along*)

There is match-making and lots of unofficial match-making.

(The anti-Catholic pogroms in 1969 put an end to this centuries-old tradition mostly held in the Markets and Short Strand areas)

In the countryside where I was living some of the few Catholic families got together. There was no wine or song just an emotional-choked silence at the news of India’s independence.

The Indian flag has the green, white and orange horizontally and it was said at the time to be a tribute to Ireland’s fight for freedom—“*a small country of big deeds*”.

Quite a marked contrast to the Orange banners showing Queen Victoria being attended to by a bowing Indian servant. Radical Protestant workers in the shipyard, where I was working at the time, of course welcomed Indian independence as part of

their anti-colonial outlook. Though they were a minority, they were missionary-like in their zeal to convert to a better way of thinking. They didn’t get very far and when the 1969 pogroms broke out most of them re-joined the mainstream Protestant community.

The next big issue Catholics have taken to their hearts is the Palestinian question. The Palestinian flag flies in Catholic streets on many occasions. Some of the Protestant community counter this by flying the Israeli flag. I expect these Protestants are still being the settler, British without being Irish, using the umbrella title only, while in England being British is usually a cover for being English when England will not speak its name while on its lethal overseas adventures.

Many of us, when living in England, and being members of the CPGB, supported Israel. The Soviet Union gave recognition to the state of Israel in 1948 and we felt they knew best. I know the reason for this recognition hasn’t been properly sorted out yet although the *Irish Political Review* has given some clues but it hasn’t been enlarged on so far. Among some Northern Catholics who were members of the CPGB the feeling was that 1950s London was hostile.

The people whom we could relate to were the Jewish members of the CPGB. They were next to being Irish—humorous, warm, generous and they ran a good Christmas for those of us spending our first Christmas in London away from home. This led to marriage into Jewish communist families for a few of us. At that time being a communist was more important than being a Jew or a Catholic.

But, as the CPGB began to lose its

heroic status of being associated with the country that defeated Nazism, many of the Jewish members either went towards social democracy or Zionism and in many cases both. The family I was married into left the CPGB and went back to assert their middle-class values. It seemed I had also become redundant as a son-in-law when they re-found their faith at a liberal synagogue. It looked like I would be re-interviewed by my wife's father as a prospective husband for his daughter. It was a disturbing time for me as I had already been divorced and I was only eighteen months into this, my second, marriage.

The domestic upheaval caused by the decline of the CPGB was affecting others I knew, with whole families divided by the issue of Israel and Zionism. Young Communist League branches in Jewish areas were becoming mere branches of the Zionist movement and had to be shut down. Some leading intellectuals in the party were secretly pushing Zionism in various periodicals. It wasn't the only issue that was destroying the CPGB but some of the most vital and active members were gone. The CPGB woke up to the Zionist threat too late.

On a personal level I had to fight for my marriage. It seems my wife had been put out to tender within the Jewish community. The family were re-discovering their world-wide links with relatives in half a dozen countries and they were visiting from Belgium, France, Holland, the US, Germany and Australia. Previous to that the family had been given the cold shoulder because of their communist links. With the ending of party membership went the mock proletarian mode of speech and the careless dressing..

Maybe a visit to Israel would convince the parents of my loyalty to their daughter. I was still supporting Israel, though now disturbed by discovering one of those leading communists writing under an assumed name on Zionism for the *Jewish Chronicle*. Ironically the family had begun to get the *Chronicle* delivered and I had picked up a copy when on a visit to them.

So now we could stay with my wife's relatives in half a dozen countries including Israel. Then it's off to Tel Aviv to discover it has its East End with hawkers selling balloons while another runs the three-card-trick out of a suitcase. Then the wife re-finds her snobbery:

"Basically these people are working-class and mere caricatures of Jews, much like some of the London Jewish taxi drivers with their exaggerated hand movements and crude Yiddish *spiel*. It's

much better to be quiet and blend in. On no account must you let one of these taxi-drivers know you are Jewish or he'll start his horrendous mish-mash *spiel* and end up ripping you off."

It is now obvious that middle-class Jews prefer the non-Jewish working class, when they get round to preferring them.

Ben Gurion once said that until Israel had prostitutes and crime in the streets Israel would never be a normal nation. I was beginning to learn that Israel had come about through a criminal act. Tel Aviv already had all Ben Gurion desired. We were advised not to visit the West Bank but we did, visiting Ramallah and Bethlehem. A pretty shocking experience like suddenly entering a Third World country after the glamour of Tel Aviv's Dizengoff. My wife didn't take to this scene and ended up hating the Palestinian even more because of the crude sexual gestures some of the men made towards her, and the spitting children, and can they spit!

At a Negev Desert settlement it was the Bedouin children this time we fell foul of. The place was also a tourist spot and we seemed to under constant siege by kids. I didn't know what they wanted until an Israeli demonstrated how to get rid of them. He took one of my cigarettes and threw it. The kids dived into the dust for it and were too busy fighting one another to bother us for a while. I had growing sympathy for the Palestinian and the Bedouin but I was being thwarted by an Israeli showing me how to master the natives.

In the end my wife wasn't much taken by Israel and her Australian relatives we were staying with in Tel Aviv. Their aggressive Zionist views were too much for her, and, they didn't approve of me at all. She even began to worry about what her relatives might do to the Palestinians, though she still didn't like them. I looked out of the back window of the Tel Aviv flat for the last time and noted that every clothes-line in sight had khaki shirts, underwear and trousers drying. Getting our knapsacks out of the cupboard I also noted the two Uzi sub-machine guns and the belts of ammo hanging up.

Early in the morning at Ben Gurion airport my wife pretended to be asleep rather than watch what she described as the 'caricature Jews' clean the airport with their exaggerated gestures and loud voices that pinpointed them as coming from Hackney or some other long-gone Jewish ghetto. A little snobbery does lead to some colourful descriptions at times. One of the workers came over to speak to us, as he

missed London and knew we were waiting for the London flight. My wife still pretended to be asleep as we discussed the Young Communist League when it was at its height in the 1950s. What he was doing in Israel among the *mamzarim* (bastards) he wasn't quite sure about anymore.

It now wasn't too difficult to withdraw support from Israel, though I remained friends with many of the Jewish members as by then I had known them for at least twenty years. Gradually they disappeared from their old haunts, like pub-theatres or restaurants on Finchley Road. One day I heard my name called and looked over to see two orthodox Jews.

I had run around the pubs with these two during the 1950s, been to folk recitals in the West-End, been to dances, and did what all young men do at the weekends. Now they had both taken to religion. I was assured by them that they wouldn't be calling my name out in the street ever again, after we had discussed old times. My wife would not have liked them in their present state of dress, that to her was also the caricature of a Jew.

I was again accepted by the family and that meant acceptance by the communities both in Golders Green, London, and Double Bay in Sydney, Australia. So, having again been treated well, it was now once more difficult to go against Israel though my wife didn't want to see the place ever again. Her parents never did visit that country and seemed to miss the old left-wing life by provoking me into political arguments.

Irish Political Review analysis of Israel over the years, coupled with more and more Israeli aggression against the Palestinians, has made me make a decisive break with the past. With the advent of Facebook and Twitter it is now possible to contact people in Gaza minute by minute. I have been doing this during the recent bombing of Gaza. They are mostly students at the Al-Azhar University in Gaza City who have smart phones, computers and iPads. You get their mood under heavy bombardment—and you know the Palestinian has ceased to run since the 1948 Nakba—as they report the progress of the F16 fighter-bombers overhead, the generator noise of the drones and the gun flashes of the Israeli navy off the coast of Gaza. You get district by district accounts of Israeli deliberate attacks on civilian targets. One medical student reports that a house near her has been hit, with the father of her best friend injured. It is a systematic precise bombing and rocketing of targets and I wonder if they are trying to hit the Tweeters

and the Facebookers. The students have reported electronic interference from time to time. You know from reports that these are terror raids on the civilian population. The students take immediate photos of the damage and put it on Facebook or on Twitter. It is very difficult to get away from the computer as you get reports from individuals that the noise of the F16s is almost driving them crazy, that they haven't been sleeping for 48 hours and they expect to be hit next. Later you get a message: "I am still alive but how will I sit my exams. Is the university still in one piece. I am traumatised and though the planes have gone my head is still reeling."

Two of the students have parents from Gaza living abroad. Their children were born abroad but these same children have returned to Gaza to live and study. They say they want the world to know that part of their family has returned to Gaza.

In early days when homemade rockets were being fired into Israel from Gaza I wondered if that was wise. After all it is like a small man hitting out at a large bully and being beaten-up again and again. I now know that those early rockets were in response to Israeli attacks. Now the rocket has evolved into the Iranian version. I learnt of their need to hit back for the sake of their own morale. They are going to stay where they are and will not be rushing into Egyptian territory any time soon. Now things have so advanced that Gazan rockets can change the situation by giving the Palestinian some bargaining power. The simple message is the Gazan has nothing to lose. These communicators sound proud of a rocket reaching Tel Aviv. They declare they are normally against violent reactions but, because of the Israeli *blitzkrieg*, the Israel public should have some of their own lethal medicine. They are also aware that they also have the right to defend themselves by whatever means possible.

What follows the ceasefire is post traumatic stress syndrome. These students know this is what follows such Israeli bombing raids but in knowing what is happening to them they can cope.

Russian Today Television recently reported that Gaza had won the Twitter war. I can well believe it. Though you feel guilty looking in on a tragedy they in Gaza appreciate your support and the positive articles that are being written on their behalf in the West and from around the world, those articles they can receive in a minute or less.

Wilson John Haire
28th November, 2012

Shorts

from
the Long Fellow

GREEK TAXATION

The Long Fellow cannot claim to be an expert on Greek taxation, but if an article by George Georgiopoulos in the *Irish Independent* (14.12.12) is anything to go by, that country is only beginning to get the hang of the concept of taxation.

Georgiopoulos tells us that the Greeks intend to reform their tax administration, which is "widely seen as corrupt and ineffective in combating rampant tax evasion". But even if all Greeks were tax compliant the taxation system could hardly be described as onerous.

The Greeks intend to raise tax revenue by a very modest 2.5 billion Euros in the two years 2013 and 2014. In 2013 alone Ireland intends to make a tax adjustment of 1.5 billion. (Bear in mind that Ireland's GDP is 218 billion, while Greece's is 303 billion.) The Greek Budgetary adjustment for the two year period amounts to a total of 13.5 billion. So the bulk of her adjustment is through public expenditure cuts which tend to affect the most vulnerable in society. So, whereas in Ireland more than a third of the adjustment is in the form of tax increases, in Greece this portion of the total adjustment is less than a fifth.

In Greece it appears that the various sources of income are ring fenced. So, Dividend income is only taxed at a derisory 10%. In Ireland this is integrated with other forms of income and taxed at a marginal rate of 52% (55% for the self employed).

Georgiopoulos remarks breathlessly that the Greeks are introducing a Capital Gains Tax, which could only mean that they didn't have one before! The capital gains tax rate will be 20%. In Ireland it is 33%.

Rental income in Greece will be 10% below 12,000 Euros per annum and the balance taxed at 33%. Again our rate is integrated with the rest of the income tax system.

Interest income in Greece will be taxed at 15%. Our Deposit Interest Retention tax (DIRT) will be 33%.

Greece's top rate of tax will be 42% compared to ours which is 52% (including PRSI and USC [Universal Social Charge]).

The Greek system of taxation makes ours look almost communist. What was the effect of all the demonstrations and

revolutionary rhetoric on the streets of Athens? It seems it was all sound and fury signifying nothing!

TAXES ON PENSIONS

The late Brian Lenihan's taxation reforms have had an effect. Since the 2011 Budget high earning individuals with a pension pot of 2.3 million or more have no longer been able to avail of tax relief for pension contributions (*Irish Ind.* 12.12.12).

The newspaper report tell us that CRH group Chief Executive Myles Lee received a 980,000 Euro cash payment last year instead of putting any more money into his pension. His total remuneration in 2011 was 2.8m, according to the company's annual report. The Finance Director Maeve Carton, received a 231,954 payout, with no more company cash going into her pension fund. Senior executives at paper and packaging group Smurfit Kappa have also hit the pensions cap, according to its annual report. Group Chief Operations Officer Tony Smurfit received a payment of 216,000 last year instead of the company putting more money into his retirement fund. Chief Executive Garry McGann has also built up a pension worth more than 2.3m, and received a cash payment of 325,000 last year.

These pension contributions would have been tax deductible in the past. They are now subject to the 52% rate.

THE EURO CRISIS

A few months ago this magazine suggested that the Euro crisis was over, notwithstanding the many problems which still had to be resolved. Confirmation of this was received in an article in the *Economist* (17.11.12).

The European Commission believes that this year exports of goods and services from Spain will be 22% greater, in real terms, than they were in 2009, as will exports from Portugal. Irish exports are expected to have grown by 15% over the same period. The Irish performance is impressive because Irish exports are worth about 100% of GDP, whereas in Spain the share is about 30%. Greece, unfortunately, is a special case with exports from that country being static.

Ireland had a peak Balance of Payments deficit on her current account amounting to 5.7% of GDP in 2008, but since 2010 she has been running a trading surplus. In 2008 also Greece and Portugal had enormous balance of payments deficits (18% and 12.6% respectively). Greece's deficit will still be high in 2013 at 6.3% while Portugal's has dropped to about 2%.

There has also been an improvement in the current budget deficit of these States.

The primary balance, which excludes interest, shows that Greece and Portugal will approach a zero balance in 2013. As indicated above, the Greece adjustment will largely be achieved through cuts in public expenditure rather than tax increases. Ireland has made enormous progress from a collapse in tax revenues a few years ago. Nevertheless we will still have a primary balance of minus 2% in 2013 which will be about the same as Spain's.

Ireland is one of the few countries in the Eurozone whose GDP will grow in both 2012 and 2013. This is largely because we began the adjustment process earlier than other countries. The contraction in GDP that Spain, Italy and Portugal experienced in 2012 will be repeated in 2013. Greece's situation remains dire. Her economy contracted by 6% in 2012 and will contract by a further 4% in 2013.

In December 2012 the signals from the Government suggested that we will extract some kind of a deal on the IBRC promissory notes from our Eurozone partners. But if the economic data from other Eurozone countries is examined it is difficult to see how we can claim that we are a hard case.

EMIGRATION

In recent years the likes of Fintan O'Toole and others have suggested that Ireland is a failed State; indeed that it cannot even be called a Republic. Under O'Toole's exacting criteria it is difficult to see how any State in the real world could achieve Republican status.

A favourite stick to beat the country with is our record on emigration. But by any measure our record since we achieved independence is far better than when we were a colony of Britain.

From the 1960s the trend has been for emigration to diminish. There was net immigration (i.e. more immigration than emigration) in the 1990s and 2000s.

Mark Hennessy in *The Irish Times* (12.12.12) notes that that there has been a long-term decline in the number of Irish-born people living in Britain. According to the 2011 UK Census there are now 504,900 Irish-born people living in England and Wales. It is unclear whether this includes people born in Northern Ireland. Irish people are only the fourth largest ethnic group in Britain, behind the Indians, Pakistanis and Poles. The figure of 504,900 is less than the number of foreign-born people living in the Republic of Ireland. The 2011 Irish Census shows that 544,357 foreign born people are living in the Republic of Ireland.

The following statistics come from an article written by Paul Sweeney of the ICTU for a conference in Canada in May 2004.

Net Emigration from Ireland 1850 to 2010

1850s	800,000
1860s	697,000
1870s	502,000
1880s	597,000
1890s	396,000
1900s	262,000
1910s	116,000
1920s	136,000 (see Note 1)
1930s	101,000
1940s	250,000
1950s	409,000
1960s	135,000
1970s	minus 104,000 (net immigration)
1980s	208,000
1990s	minus 37,400 (net immigration)
2000s	minus 353,200 (net immigration)

The figures are determined not only by the condition of the Irish economy but other factors such as the condition of the rest of the world. It is interesting to note that in the 1930s net emigration at 101,000 was quite low in historical terms. This was possibly because there was a world recession. In the late 1940s and 1950s Britain was in the midst of a post-war building boom.

The figures do not tell the reasons for emigration or the quality of work Irish emigrants obtained abroad. It is likely, for example, that the expectations of those Irish who emigrated in the 1980s were far greater than those who emigrated in the 1950s.

Note 1: The figures from 1850 to 1924 reflect emigration from the island of Ireland. From 1924 onwards the figures relate to the 26 Counties.

Note 2: the figures for the 2000s come from the Central Statistics Office.

Press Release: 40th Anniversary of 1st December 1972 **Sackville Place and Liberty Hall Bombings:** Oration by SIPTU General President, **Jack O' Connor**, 4th December 2012

Remembering The First Dublin Car Bombings

We gather on this cold December morning to remember those who lost their lives in the bombing of Sackville Place on the first day of December in 1972. Just minutes earlier that evening, a bomb shattered Liberty Hall just around the corner from here and outside the historic birthplace of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union.

These were the first car bombs to explode in the Republic bringing the armed conflict that erupted in the North just a few years earlier to this jurisdiction and reminding the people of Dublin that no-one on this small island was immune from the tumultuous and tragic events unfolding at that time.

George Bradshaw, aged 30, a bus driver, and a native of Fethard, Co. Tipperary and bus conductor Tommy Duffy, aged 23, were killed by the bomb that exploded here in Sackville Place. Both of them were married men. George and his wife, Kathleen, had two young children. Tommy and his wife had a daughter and Monica, who is present with other relatives of the deceased men here today, was pregnant with their second child. Many others were injured in the attacks. Some 127 people were injured, many seriously.

Liberty Hall, built in the mid 1960's on the site from where James Connolly had led the Irish Citizens Army to the GPO on Easter Monday 1916 and where the

Proclamation was printed had all of its windows blown out and suffered structural damage.

Only because the explosions took place just after 8.00 pm the hundreds of people that worked in Liberty Hall and the surrounding area narrowly escaped with their lives while the building continues to exhibit the devastating physical effects of the bombing.

Some weeks later on 20th January 1973, Tommy Douglas, aged 21, a bus conductor and a native of Stirling, Scotland died when another bomb exploded close to the CIE depot here in Sackville Place.

As I have mentioned the car bombs at Liberty Hall and Sackville Place were detonated at a politically sensitive moment in the history of those troubled times.

A controversial amendment to the Offences Against the State Act was being debated in the Dáil when the bombs exploded. A huge swathe of public opinion, including the ITGWU and the Labour Party, was against the introduction of what was perceived as draconian legislation and an attack on civil liberties.

There was also widespread opposition among other Trade Unions, hospital medical staff, staff and students of universities, mechanical workers in CIE, clergy and even some branches of Fianna Fáil, the party in Government that was introducing the legislation. Senator Fintan Ken-

nedy, the General President of the Transport Union, and Michael Mullen, its General Secretary, had spoken against the legislation which they saw as a dangerous infringement on human rights.

In its statement the ITGWU asserted that while it *“opposed political violence which is directed at civilians, we are equally opposed to the violence that is being done by the Government to democratic institutions and civilised legal procedures”*.

As a direct consequence of the bombings the legislation was passed with members of Fine Gael, the main Opposition party, abstaining that night in the Dáil vote and allowing the amendment to be passed.

Unsurprisingly, many of those who opposed the measure believed that the sinister forces behind the attacks were seeking to influence parliament, and succeeded in their objective, through these acts of terror which, and not for the last time, brought the horrific and daily scenes of destruction from the North to the citizens of Dublin.

Three minutes before the first bomb exploded, the *Belfast Newsletter* received an anonymous telephone warning that bombs planted at Liberty Hall and behind Clery's here at Sackville Place would explode at 8.05 p.m. The person who received the warning said the caller had spoken with a *“Belfast English-type accent”*.

Early investigations into the bombings centred around four cars. One car containing the owner's driving licence had been stolen four months previously in Ballymoney, Co. Antrim. The stolen licence of an Englishman, Joseph Fleming, was used to hire three other cars from different Belfast companies on 30th November by a man with an English accent. Two of the hired cars exploded at Liberty Hall and Sackville Place.

The Gardaí were very pro-active in the early days of the investigation, travelling to Belfast and London to retrieve hire agreement documents and interviewing witnesses. Although the RUC were relatively helpful the Garda reported that RUC officers would not permit them to interview some persons *“for reasons best known to themselves”*. Despite a promising start, the Garda enquiries led nowhere.

On-line sales of books,
pamphlets and magazines:

[https://
www.atholbooks-
sales.org](https://www.atholbooks-sales.org)

Notwithstanding the selfless and tireless work of Justice for the Forgotten, the group of relatives and survivors of the awful atrocities committed in this jurisdiction during the years of conflict, the identities of those responsible for the Sackville Place and Liberty Hall bombings remain unknown. Dáil motions passed in 2008 and 2011 called on the British authorities to release undisclosed documents which Justice for the Forgotten believes can help to throw light on those involved in these and other attacks, including the 1974 Dublin and Monaghan bombings which killed 33 people and an unborn child.

Today, however, is a time to remember those who lost their lives as a result of the tragic events of December 1972 and January 1973 at this place and those that they left behind.

Monica Duffy was just 22 and her husband Tom, just 23 when he lost his life. Married just over a year and eight months they had a daughter and Monica was four months pregnant with her second child. From Castlebar in county Mayo, Tom was a conductor on the 29a bus which travelled close to her home in Artane in the northside on its route from Abbey Street. That is how they met and fell in love. He was a member of the National Busworkers Union.

His colleague, George Bradshaw, was a member of the ITGWU, and his colleagues marched in sympathy from Liberty Hall just days after his death. Both workers had left the CIE canteen on Marlborough Street just moments before the explosion. George was a native of Tipperary, who lived in Sutton with his wife and two children.

Report: Margaret Urwin of Justice for the Forgotten writes on—

The Liberty Hall And Sackville Place Bombs

“...A fortnight after the bombings, two significant but ostensibly unconnected

arrests were made in Dublin hotels. British agent John Wyman was arrested at the West County Hotel in Chapelizod on 18 December.

The following day, gardaí apprehended Detective Sergeant Patrick Crinnion of the Crime and Security Branch, Garda Síochána, at the Burlington Hotel, where he was attempting to rendezvous with his handler.

Crinnion was found to have secret documents which he was about to pass on to Wyman. During the trial, Wyman's notebook was produced. There were references to “RLs”, “car bombs”, and “arrest policy”. When asked to explain these entries he replied that “RL” were rocket launchers which he said the IRA were using and “car bombs” referred to the explosions in Dublin. Of these, he added “We are as interested in finding out who did this as you are.” He would not comment on what “arrest policy” meant.

Both Crinnion and Wyman were convicted under the Official Secrets Act and sentenced to three months in jail in February 1973. As they had already served two months, they were immediately released and flown to England.

Shortly before his arrest, Crinnion confided to a fellow garda that “the Brits” had been involved in causing the explosions. He had received this information from his brother-in-law in the British Army, James Lattimore of the Royal Irish Rangers, later Major James Benedict Lattimore MBE. ...

Former Taoiseach Jack Lynch admitted he suspected British involvement...

A copycat car bomb was planted in Sackville Place on 10 January 1973, killing another bus conductor, 21-year-old Tommy Douglas, a native of Stirling, Scotland.

The investigation into this bombing was minimal and very little information is known about it.

Nobody has ever been arrested, let alone convicted, for these atrocities...”

From *An Phoblacht*, December/
Nollaig 2012

Mad consumption patterns no longer possible due to “savage austerity”

“In 2010, about 225,000 Irish visitors came to New York City, new figures show. The combined spending power of the Irish visitors in 2010 was \$441 million, with Irish visitors spending on average a little less than \$2,000 per person per trip (on average they stay 8 nights)...”

Most of these were weekend shoppers!

Read more: <http://www.irishcentral.com/news/2250000-Irish-visitors-traveled-to-New-York-in-2010-136169093.html#ixzz2ErOo1vTy>

Fact, Myth And Politics

in Ireland's property 'crisis'

Ireland is a country with a substantial Trade Union movement which remains the main bearer of its socialist politics. Yet this has failed to produce a political force determined on the introduction of a progressive and fair property tax. This is despite the fact that Ireland is alone in the OECD in not having such a tax and is to the fore as a place where property is the great repository of wealth, including very substantial untaxed "hidden wealth".

Alongside this state of affairs, we have had an extraordinary campaign to have mortgage debt simply written off so as to compensate people for "negative equity". But, as we will see, the evidence shows that—apart from landlords who have fallen victim to their own unwise speculations—only 2% of households are actually in severe mortgage "distress". And this distress, it emerges, is not primarily because of "negative equity", but a result of income loss or unemployment. And it is in the area of tackling poverty traps that it should be dealt with.

These two issues, which are inextricably linked, go to the heart of property politics in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland.

THE CLAMOUR FOR MORTGAGE WRITE-OFF

In the 1970s, with the first rush of CAP money into Ireland, many farmers over-borrowed to invest in expanding and improving their farms, and quite a few got into trouble with repayments during the subsequent recession caused by the oil crisis. There were celebrated incidents in the early 1980s where attempts by banks to repossess farms and auction them off ran into local land-war style Boycott resistance. In the event, the banks had to abandon repossession and solve the problems of the farmers concerned through a rescheduling of their loans.

In the current crisis there has been much talk of distressed mortgages arising from individuals being in severe negative equity. But unlike in Spain—where to date over a third of a million residences have been repossessed by banks—repossessions in Ireland have barely exceeded 200. And most of these cases, when examined, involve extenuating circumstances such as disputed property rights, family break-up, complicated business collapses etc.

Nevertheless, for the last few months,

commentaries and articles in the media have carried panic headlines stating that nearly a third of all mortgages are in distress and demanding Government relief through debt write-off. So what exactly is happening with "distressed mortgages", what is behind it and is it the widespread phenomenon we are led to believe it is?

MORTGAGE "DISTRESS" —SOME FACTS

Ireland famously has one of the highest rates of home ownership in Europe, something over 80%, though it *fell* to this level during the boom years when many people, particularly immigrants, rented their accommodation. Government statistics (CSO) show that there are approximately 1.6m households in Ireland. According to an investigation by the Central Bank, less than half of these—761,553 or just over 45%—have mortgages at all. The CSO also estimates that, in the boom year of 2006, half of the 120,000 new houses built were not for owner-occupiers but were bought to be rented out (buy-to-let). The total value of outstanding owner-occupier mortgages (i.e. homes) is €112bn, and of "buy-to-let" mortgages (i.e. landlord mortgages) is €23bn. ('Latest Mortgage Arrears', *The Irish Times*, 24th August 2012.). In other words, about one in five mortgages is an "investment property".

According to the same report, 27% of all mortgages are in some kind of arrears (hence the headlines), although in fact these arrears are mostly very minor. Of loans in arrears, 168,637 (22%) are owner-occupier mortgages and 38,326 (5%) are buy-to-let mortgages. But, despite the headlines, the total of all mortgages in actual distress—i.e. in arrears of three months or more, is 45,165, or just 5.9% of all mortgages, of which a fifth are *landlords* in "distress". ***The total households in distress (over three months in arrears) is thus just a little over 2% of all households.***

In addition, the number of households in mortgage arrears of over three months is actually falling (it *fell* by over 1,000 over the three months to June 2012).

What is happening to people in mortgage difficulties? At recent hearings before the Oireachtas Finance Committee, it emerged that there had been very little take up of mortgage-to-rent schemes, with only 222 such cases with the Bank of Ireland. On the other hand, 16,000 mortgages had been rescheduled by the

same bank in various ways and 86% of these were meeting their restructured repayments on time (*The Irish Times*, 2nd Nov.). The other major Irish bank, the AIB, informed the Committee that it also planned to reschedule its 10,000 "most distressed mortgages" (*The Irish Times*, 1st Nov.). In other words, the vast majority of those in mortgage arrears were reluctant to move to rent, and were being assisted to restructure their debts so that they could retain their properties and meet repayments.

BUY-TO-LET "LANDMINE"

The landlord lobby recognises the reality of things. In an article on headed *The Buy-to-let Landmine*, it stated:

"There has been a lot of anguish in the media and political circles recently over how the banks and government should deal with the growing problem of residential mortgage arrears. The clamour for some sort of debt forgiveness or broad-based restructuring programme has grown in the months since AIB executive chairman David Hodgkinson first raised the issue last spring ...

"Buy-to-let mortgages are usually loans to small-time investors to acquire residential properties to rent. ***They were extremely popular in the final, mad years of the property bubble, but have become a major headache since the crash ...*** {A}bout a quarter of all mortgages went to buy residential investment properties ...

"The number of these loans in trouble, however, is relatively much bigger. ***According to AIB about one fifth of its residential investment mortgages are in arrears compared to just one in 12 of its owner-occupier loans.*** ... BlackRock estimated AIB, Bank of Ireland, Permanent TSB and EBS together would see lifetime losses in the buy-to-let category of between 17.2 per cent in a base case and 26.2 per cent in a stress case. The Central Bank's own three-year projected losses were 9.5 per cent and 14.3 per cent, respectively.

"Both these estimates were twice as big as those for owner-occupier loans. In the worst case scenario, the losses would exceed €6 billion for the four institutions alone. Across the whole sector, that translates roughly to a €12 billion hit ..."

{No wonder the banks are seeking the state to bail out the "distressed" landlords! – PO'C}

"With potential losses on that scale, it is easy to see why Minister for Finance Michael Noonan is uncomfortable with the prospect of a 'blanket' debt forgiveness policy for homeowners. Even though the domestic banks have been overcapitalised in 2011 with almost €17 billion in fresh funds, to bring the total bill to €63 billion, there are competing demands on the banks' loss absorption capacity. Buy-to-let loans are like a landmine hidden just under the surface of the banking landscape ...

"Many of the borrowers enjoyed high incomes or bonuses during the boom—accountants, lawyers, doctors, builders, mortgage brokers but took big hits in the crash.

"A lot of residential investment property was subsidised out of normal income in the hope of future equity gains, but that surplus income is no longer available ...

"{But} ... buy-to-let borrowers are organising. Apart from the Save Our Trackers lobby group, which has pulled in legal and PR representation, financial advisers have recognised a new market and are beginning to tout fee-based services specifically tailored to the buy-to-let segment."

The buy-to-let landmine, 19th September 2012: (http://www.irishlandlord.com/index.aspx?page=news_view&id=355)

PROBLEM IS UNEMPLOYMENT, NOT NEGATIVE EQUITY

The main problem with mortgages is that, where they are viewed as an *"asset"*, negative equity means that they will never realise their purchase value if re-sold. The asset-obsessed media bombard us with demands for policy decisions to ensure property values *"get back to"* their Celtic Tiger levels. This—which would put home ownership again beyond the reach of many people—is viewed as some kind of laudable national aim. In fact this is a property investment agenda.

Where viewed as a home, lower house prices should be welcomed, as should the restructuring of mortgage debt to make it manageable. It is the only solution, as the vast majority of households which are not in a situation of excessive debt would resent subsidising people who over-extended themselves in the boom years, let alone those who bought to make a killing on the rental market.

In fact, according to Central Bank Governor Patrick Honohan, the statistics show that a considerable proportion of people in mortgage distress are not in negative equity. In addition, many owners of older mortgages have lost the ability to meet repayments due to business failure or unemployment—i.e. many of the people in arrears are actually in *"positive equity"*. He concluded that the distress arose from income loss and unemployment, not negative equity, and that that is the basis on which any relief system should be structured (speech to Institute of Chartered Accountants, *irishtimes.com* video, 16th Oct.).

HOUSING REFORM

David McWilliams has continually highlighted the plight of buy-to-rent mortgage holders (i.e. landlords) in distress (e.g.: 'The squeezed middle class', *Irish Independent*, 1st November). During the boom

years, when interest rates were low, buying property and letting it out was an extremely lucrative business, and many people of all classes—including working class people in very modest employments—invested in it as a means of supplementing income or providing a pension pot for themselves. Layers of society were feeding off the layers under them. The supplements of our 'quality broadsheets' lectured people that they were mad not to. Holding on to savings was for wimps. According to the Central Bank investigation, a quarter of buy-to-let mortgages (or 50,000) are now in arrears and commentators have called on banks to repossess them (*"50,000 buy-to-let mortgages late on payments"*—*Irish Independent*, 27th September). But as we have seen, only a fifth of these are in serious distress, i.e. over three months arrears.

The housing structure in Ireland certainly needs reform. From a long-term perspective it has always made more economic sense for families to seek to buy rather than rent a home, and electoral pressure has kept it that way. But, since the crash, with borrowing from banks far more restrictive and mortgages not as easy to get, the demand for rented accommodation has remained high and hence rents have fallen little. The reform needed is in tenancy and rental controls, not mortgage relief for landlords *"in distress"*.

END OF THE PROPERTY TAX?

The electoral factor in tax policy reflects societal norms. Since the introduction of the weak property registration tax of €100 a year ago, a full 35% of households have simply refused to pay it, scenting the possibility that such an un-Irish thing will eventually go away. This is by any standards a civil revolt. The highest rates of refusal are in Border Counties and other districts which have traditionally been less than compliant on tax matters generally. It is an anti-tax revolt.

In 2009, when introducing the Four Year Plan that subsequently became the Troika Programme, Brian Lenihan commented that the introduction of a Property Tax was a long-standing reform necessary for widening the tax base which it had been politically impossible to implement but that the crisis now provided the chance to do so.

Property is the major repository of wealth in Ireland. Of all measures in the programme agreed by the FF-Green Government with the Troika, it is the one involving the most radical social reform. If implemented in full and at a level that makes sense (in line with European norms), it would amount to a social revolution as radical in its long term effects

as the Wyndham Act of 1903 which finally abolished landlordism in agricultural land.

Fianna Fáil, which the Labour Party, by entering Government in 2011, ensured would revive, has risen in the polls to second place. It is now busy positioning itself as the party of "Middle Ireland". In the run-up to the November 2012 Budget, it launched its own populist alternative: *"A Fairer Way to Recovery"*. This proposes the abolition of Property Tax, a 3% Universal Social Charge increase on take-home pay of over €100,000, no change to Child Benefits for the better off, and relief on mortgages, including buy-to-let mortgages where the owners have suffered income loss. It also wants to achieve *"additional savings of €350m across public sector pay"* (*Irish Independent*, 22nd November 2012).

The undermining of the very notion of introducing a Property Tax has been underway for some time, instigated by the Socialist Workers' Party and assorted landlord and property interests which understand where it will lead. Sinn Féin has climbed aboard the bandwagon and, along with the extreme left (SWP, Socialist Party etc.) has denounced the Property Tax as a *"home tax"*. In scenting the possibility of victory through a large-scale revolt on the issue (and getting away with it), Fianna Fáil, in its first departure from Lenihan's Four Year Plan, has tapped into a powerful base of potential support. Its Finance spokesman, Michael McGrath, first entered the fray in September when he *"said it was clear that the new charge would be 'the unfairest tax of all' and one which would lead to grave inequalities"*. He continued:

"It's not the right time, given the very weak base of the economy and the huge number of people who have a genuine inability to pay. Half the country's mortgages are in negative equity and 425,000 people are on the live register and more than one in five mortgages are in some sort of difficulty. Does the Government not see this?" (*Irish Independent*, 16th September).

McGrath has claimed that, at its September meeting with Fianna Fáil, the Troika had stated it had no objection on principle to the tax being dropped once deficit reduction targets were met. The Department of Finance rejected this.

PROPERTY OWNING DEMOCRACY

In 1922 the German Marxist, Karl Kautsky, published an interesting booklet 'explaining' Ireland to the German labour movement. The first English translation (by Angela Clifford) of Kautsky's book—*Ireland*—was published by Athol in 1974. (The full booklet is now available again at www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1922/)

ireland/index.htm). In it Kautsky charted the course of the Irish land War and its influence on the Irish national movement. The new Irish proletariat, which he recognised as having played a central part in national liberation through its new movement, the ITGWU, and as having only recently become separated from the land, remained deeply influenced by the struggle for land ownership:

"...Up to the present it {= the Irish labour movement} has developed a socialism of a wary, backward nature. . . {W}e find that the most important motive force of this... movement is *land-hunger*. The wage worker wants to become a propertied farmer."

While we would quibble with the condescension of Kautsky's tone, and his rigid "*Marxist categories*", the substantial point he makes cannot be disputed. In Britain the key event in Thatcher's destruction of the political power of the organised labour movement was the creation of home ownership for Council tenants in the early 1980s. In Ireland this had occurred nearly a decade earlier.

For good or ill, Ireland is a property owning democracy and it is inconceivable that that might be reversed through the electoral process.

SIPTU DISAPPOINTMENT

One might expect the Labour movement to sound alarm bells on the gradual undermining of the single most substantial measure of social reform contained in the Troika programme. But its enthusiasm for tackling this prime source of wealth in Ireland has waned in recent times. SIPTU, in its 10-point programme for national recovery published at the end of November 2012, "*Towards a New Course*" (www.siptu.ie), buries its proposal for Property Tax deep in the document—at bullet point 4 of Point 5 on tax reform. SIPTU's proposal, for what it's worth, is for the Property Tax to be capped at €100 for "*properties valued at the national average*" and a "*graduated banded system thereafter*", with social welfare recipients and first-time house buyers exempted. It is also seeking a clear statement from the Coalition of "*no further increase during the life of the Government*". This, to put it bluntly, is a reactionary position.

Maybe Kautsky was right in 1922 when he observed that even the workers in Ireland were too wedded to private property to be amenable to socialism as then understood.

It increasingly seems likely that the only hope for a progressive Property Tax—and property is where wealth in Ireland resides—lies with strict adherence to the Troika Programme!

Philip O'Connor

Book reviews.

Atlas Of The Great Irish Famine (Cork University Press);
The Famine Plot by *Tim Pat Coogan* (Palgrave Macmillan)

Politics Of 'The Famine'

WASTE OF SPACE

This is a big, glossy 'coffee table' book on the Famine and one would go through some gallons of coffee to read it. I have an immediate difficulty with books that keep referring to a 'Famine' in a country full of food and I can't understand why the lead set by Cecil Woodham-Smith is not followed in describing what happened as the Gaelic Irish did—the *Great Hunger*. And they should know!

Mary McAleese prefaces it and begins with a theme that is repeated throughout the book, one which contains another concept that makes it difficult to take such books seriously. She says (second sentence):

"The deaths of over a million people and the emigration of a further million had a profound and devastating effect on Irish society."

These figures are repeated over and over again in this book—and elsewhere. If these were the actual figures I cannot imagine the 'Famine' having the effect it did have on Irish society. But nobody in this book or elsewhere makes a convincing case for these figures, nor could they as the dead of the period were never counted.

The figures are a conjecture based on the difference between the Census figures for 1841 and 1851. This might be plausible if the Irish stopped breeding at the end of 1841—and if the figures themselves were reliable. The former is obviously out of the question and the latter is never questioned.

Census figures are prone to error. The Census of 1821 missed two-thirds of the country!

They are particularly prone to error where there is a lack of trust between those counted and those doing the counting—and this was certainly the case in the Ireland of 1841. And trust is vital for an exercise like this.

The people who did the counting in Ireland before 1841 were largely tax collectors and then the police took over. Neither body automatically generates adequate trust among citizens for such an exercise and no state would dream of relying on such people today for the task.

It does not take much imagination to realise that the majority of the Irish people in 1841, who were at various levels and stages of an ongoing war with this same police force, were unlikely to be co-

operative in this exercise—and cooperation is essential for accuracy.

For example, one could hardly rely on census figures gathered today by the Israeli police in the occupied territories of Palestine, of the Turkish police figures for Kurds, of police figures for Apartheid South Africa for the black population, etc, etc.

The Census for 1921 in Ireland was not held because the farce of the then police, the RIC—aided no doubt by the Auxiliaries and Black and Tans—doing such a job was obvious. (But if it was carried out I would not be surprised if the typical historians today would take the figures seriously.)

Even closer to home, the UK Census of 1991 is not taken seriously because of the abstentions caused by Thatcher and her Poll tax.

The Census Commissioners themselves doubted the accuracy of the returns in 1841 and tried to arbitrarily correct them. When people relied on them at the time of the so-called Famine to estimate numbers for relief, they found them totally unreliable and it was reckoned that they were out by about a third. That means a population of about 12 million in 1846 and this would coincide with a figure taking account of the normal rate of growth for Ireland even when based on the obvious underestimate of 1821.

That puts a more realistic figures for those that died of possibly around 5 million, but there is no way of knowing the exact figure. Another confirmation for a figure in that region is given in the following report:

"The workhouses are full and only hold 100,000 while 4,000,000 are starving. The workhouses are mere charnel-houses. In one there is an average mortality of a death an hour, day and night" (The Times, 15 March 1847, p.4. col.3)

The paper also put it more euphemistically in its editorial of 3rd Jan 1848 when it said that 4 million people had been "*battling with death*" in 1847. But this latter reference and regular references to 4 million starving shows it was not a figure plucked out of the air.

I would suggest that the majority of that 4 million lost that 'battle' as the blight returned for two more years. Then the

Government gave up all pretence at providing relief in mid 1847 and these starving people were in no position to emigrate—as they could hardly move!

All the colourful diagrams, charts, illustrations and number crunching that adorn this book are therefore beside the point if the basis of the figures used is wrong.

In the 'Atlas' there are also all sorts of euphemism used for the Government's policy of the day. McAleese says "*it failed Ireland*": as if it could be otherwise. Pigs might also fly.

Ireland was a problem for Britain and the blight was quickly seen, which Trevelyan made abundantly clear, as a golden opportunity to solve the 'problem' of Ireland once and for all. The strategy was a complete success, as it did a better job at extermination than the Government had ever contemplated—and it had contemplated and executed many attempts over three centuries. This was 'simply the best' of them. God was obviously an Englishman. It was so successful it was a template for Trevelyan's later work in India.

Cormac O'Grada is quoted as saying it was "*a lost opportunity*" for the Government. It was the very opposite. It was seen as an opportunity of a lifetime and they took full advantage of it.

We are told that "*it was a shameful retreat by central government*"! A retreat from what? From good government?

And the cause of the 'Famine'? One chapter heading sums it up—*The Potato, the root of the Famine*.

No single diseased food source could in itself cause the 'famine' that occurred in Ireland. It did not happen in other societies where the blight occurred. No functioning society anywhere would allow this to happen. But Gaelic society was made dysfunctional by systematic and consistent English Government policy since Tudor times. It was a policy of subjugating the society by the pulverising of the forces that made it functional as a society in its own right by the use of each and every means.

Before that Gaelic society had absorbed and utilised all sorts of new elements—whether of custom, religion, food, political concepts etc. It could not, however, participate in its own destruction but that process was far advanced by the mid 19th century. That was why the 'Famine' had the effects it had. A functional society had been destroyed and the potato blight was used to further undermine it.

The extent of that further undermining

might be grasped by the following:

"According to the estimates of the historian Angus Maddison, every other country in the world (for which population data or estimates exist) experienced huge population increases in the 19th and 20th centuries. Among the 30 largest western European countries he estimated that their aggregate population more than doubled between 1841 and 1961. In the 26 counties of the Irish Republic the number of inhabitants more than halved... It is often said that too much is made of the Great Famine in discussion of this island's past. That is simply not possible. There is no single event that changed the course of Irish history more and made this island more different than it would otherwise have been than the Famine. If the number of deaths from hunger and disease did not make the Famine a unique event, the sustained exodus that it caused did. There is no inflection point that is more significant in the history of this island. Had the Famine not triggered the globally unique population decline and had Ireland followed the average demographic pattern of the rest of Western Europe since 1841, 17 million people would now be living in this State, not 4.6 million. It is almost unimaginable to think how different things would be" (Irish Times, 30 March 2012).

Maddison's figure of a 17 million population was exactly the figure that an agriculturist, Thomas Blacker, in 1834 calculated was the possible population of Ireland if it was run in a normal way—even by the standards of the time. He could not understand why it not so run. And it should not be forgotten that such a figure today would still mean the country was much less densely populated than, for example, the Netherlands, which is less than half the size of Ireland but has a population of over 16 million.

Such a phenomenon as Ireland's massive 'famine' deaths and the unique population decline that followed in an area of the UK itself cannot be explained by "*failures*", "*oversights*", "*lost opportunities*", "*mistakes*", etc., by a State that at the same time built the greatest Empire the world had ever seen. Otherwise the people responsible were some sort of schizophrenics, geniuses and idiots at the same time. This kind of exonerating displays the affliction of not seeing the wood for the trees.

Mary McAleese and these authors ask us to believe that that an Empire—that had, whenever and wherever necessary, ignored every law of 'God and man'—was suddenly rendered paralysed and helpless to do anything about relieving a starving country because its leaders were enthral-

led and fell victim to a new-fangled theory about trade, as if it had come from somewhere other than themselves to serve their interests. As if they were some sort of victims to an ideology of their own creation. Pull the other one.

A SURPRISE FROM COOGAN

Coogan's book is a welcome addition to books on the 'Famine'. It is written with passion, as any book on the subject should be written. He puts the blame fairly and squarely at the door of the British Government and describes what happened as the result of a genocidal policy by that Government.

His chapter on evictions is particularly good and illustrates the horrors in no uncertain terms. He clearly writes as he does to counter the general revisionism that now dominates Irish history-writing—which has gone too far for anybody who takes even a passing interest in what actually happened. History from this source becomes so benign that it becomes meaningless. Coogan's book is a determined counter to that tendency. He sets out to tell a story of cause and effect and does it well.

It is also interesting in that he is clearly dissatisfied with the statistics that are usually trotted out about the population and the numbers that perished. He raises doubts about accuracy of the Census figures for 1841, suggesting that the tally is uncertain because of difficulties—such as lack of roads—which would have made it "*nearly impossible for a census enumerator to give an accurate tally*". While this is true, using the word "*enumerator*" is an odd way to describe the people who actually carried out the Census: the constabulary. It is hardly credible but it appears Coogan may not realise it was *the police* who carried out the Census. Surely they could not be described as 'enumerators' in any meaningful sense! The Census was always an Intelligence-gathering exercise for them and treated as such by the population. This is surely the most important reason to regard their figures as suspect.

There is one unsatisfactory aspect that runs through the book. It is Coogan's constant reference to the people of rural Ireland as a peasantry. He takes that as being self-evident. He assumes the simple view that any tiller of the soil can be called a peasant. But it is inaccurate. A peasantry is a social class specific to certain social contexts. The peasantry is one side of a functioning society with an aristocracy on the other side. There is an organic

relationship between the two. There are a myriad common bonds and responsibilities between these classes. That includes such basic things as both co-existing in the same place, common religion, common origins, common language, common social *mores*, etc. You cannot have one without the other.

This type of society does not self-destruct. And it did not exist in 19th century Ireland. There was not a common society. Gaelic society had such bonds and very strong ones and had been a functioning society for millennia. The tillers of the soil were clansmen—not peasants or farmers. That society was systematically broken down from Tudor times onwards but not replaced by an alternative. The Palmers, Clancarrons, Lucans, Lansdownes, etc., had no organic relationship whatever with the people. The result was a barbaric relationship between different social elements that was thereby destructive in its essence. This helped to cause the catastrophe called 'The Famine'.

Slave-owners and slaves would have had closer bonds and interests than the landlords and tenants. Indeed, slave-owners would have no interest in letting their slaves die like flies. Slaves can not be described as peasants, even if they till the soil as much as any peasant.

In feudal society there is a coherent structure to land relations, one in which there are mutual rights and obligations. As the ruler in such a society, the Czar did not allow the Poles to starve because of the blight.

The concept of peasantry and its place in European history has been subject to an unremitting negative assessment by the bourgeois and socialist world views. This was inevitable, as they justified their emergence as progressive and therefore automatically described earlier social relations as backward and inadequate. But such an ideological categorisation that prevents an understanding of Irish history when applied to it.

However, Coogan's failure to understand this distinctive feature of Irish rural relations in the early nineteenth century is not unusual: he is merely reflecting a widespread view. Where he differs from so much that has been published on the subject, he is excellent.

Jack Lane

Ed. Note: Louise Roseingrave described the Famine Atlas as a "*scholarly work*" in the Irish Times of 26th October, and noted that it has been shortlisted for the Bord Gáis Energy Irish Book Awards.

Belsen And 'The Famine'

Tim Pat Coogan, in his *Famine Plot*, quotes a review of Cecil Woodham-Smith's Famine book in the *New Statesman* by A.J.P. Taylor. Taylor was the fashionable historian of the post-1945 socialist generation in England. I used to read his *New Statesman* articles but have not read any of his books. I have been intending to read his book on the Hapsburgh Empire for thirty years but never got around to it. I think I was put off him as a historian by seeing one of a series of television lectures on history that he gave. At any rate, I have no view of his quality as a historian. One seldom comes across his books these days, but in view of the way things have gone in England since the 1970s that is probably a sign that they are worth reading.

His Famine review is entitled *Genocide*. It begins:

"...When British forces entered Belsen in 1945 they found a scene of indescribable horror: the wasted bodies of 50,000 human beings who had died from starvation and disease. Kramer, "the beast of Belsen", and his assistants were hanged for this atrocious crime. Only a century before, all Ireland was a Belsen. Nearly two million Irish people died of starvation and fever within five years; another million fled, bearing disease to Liverpool and the New World.

"The story can be told in general terms, presenting the famine as a natural catastrophe like an earthquake. The population of Ireland had greatly increased in the preceding years. Most of the people depended almost exclusively on the potato. In 1845 the potato blight arrived... The potato harvest failed four years running. The Irish peasants had no reserves to fall back on. Many of their landlords were harsh; some almost as impoverished as their peasants... It happened because it had to happen.

"The is how historians usually treat the matter. We explain, and with that our duty is finished. The dead are dead... But they were once human beings, and other human beings sent them to their death... The failure of the potato crop was natural. After that men played a part. There was food available to save the Irish from starvation. It was denied to them. Nor did Ireland stand alone. Ireland was at this time part of the United Kingdom, the wealthiest country in the world. The British Government had insisted on undertaking responsibility for Ireland. When the crisis arose they ran away from it. The men in Whitehall were usually of humane disposition and the bearers of honoured names... These men, too, were in a sense victims. They were gripped by

the most horrible, and perhaps the most universal, of human maladies: the belief that principles and doctrines are more important than lives. They imagined that rules, invented by economists, were as "natural" as the potato blight...

"Russell, Wood and Trevelyan were highly conscientious men, and their consciences never reproached them. Nor are the standards of today much to rely on. The British rulers of the 1840s were no worse than those who later sent millions of men to their deaths in two world wars; no worse than those who now plan to blow all mankind to pieces for the sake of some principle or other. By they were also no better. Though they killed only two million Irish people, this was not for want of trying. Jowett once said "I have always felt a certain horror of political economists since I heard one of them say that the famine in Ireland would not kill more than a million people, and that would scarcely be enough"...

"Trevelyan and the rest were handling human beings as ciphers on a bit of paper... They invented a distinction between those who were starving because of the potato blight and those starving from normal distress. They excused the Irish for being hit by the blight once. They condemned them for persisting in planting potatoes after blight appeared—as through the Irish could do anything else. Most of all, these enlightened men feared that the whole social structure would topple down if men and women were once given food which they could not pay for...

"The Irish people were driven off their land. They were starved, degraded, treated worse than animals. They lamented, they suffered, they died. Yet they made hardly an attempt at resistance. This is perhaps the most dreadful part of the story—a people allowing themselves to be murdered. Mrs. Woodham-Smith suggests that the Irish were physically too weak to resist... Surely it was more than that. Centuries of English tyranny had destroyed Irish will...

"The English governing class ran true to form. They had killed two million Irish people. They abused the Irish for disliking this. Lord John Russell said in 1848: "We have subscribed, worked, visited, clothed, for the Irish, millions of money, years of debate, etc. etc. The only return is rebellion and calumny"..." (New Statesman, 12.11.1962).

This was too much for Leonard Woolf. In a letter published on November 30th, he took issue with Taylor's statement that the Liberals made all Ireland a Belsen, thus arguing—

"by inference and insinuation that the

British government of 1846... were no better than the Nazis, for under their administration "all Ireland was a Belsen" and owing to them "nearly two million Irish people died of starvation..." He does not mention the fact that whereas the Nazis deliberately created Belsen and deliberately gassed the millions of men, women and children, Russell and Trevelyan had no responsibility of any kind for creating the famine. They came into office on 6 July 1846 when the crop had already failed. It is difficult to understand the reason for Taylor's passion for whitewashing Hitler and the Nazis. That a serious historian who had lived through the years 1933 to 1945 should seriously write such stuff in a serious journal is horrifying and terrifying..."

This is a very technical argument. There was a change in party government in July 1846, and the new party, under Parliamentary rule, had no responsibility for what was done in Ireland by its predecessors. And the famine is narrowly defined as the potato blight, rather than the withholding of available food from millions of people who had nothing to eat.

Woolf, between the Wars, wrote a book called, as far as I remember, *What Is Civilisation?*, which I read about forty years ago. It was about Britain's reason for making war on Germany in 1914. He said that they were told in the first instance that the world was threatened by the horror of Nietzscheanism which had got hold of the German state. But war on Nietzscheanism was found to be too subtle for mass propaganda, so it was replaced by a war against the Huns who were threatening civilisation with barbarism. So what was civilisation? As I recall, he rather lost himself when trying to give it a pure definition, stripped of all accidentals. And, judging by his response to Taylor, he must have concluded *de facto* that British government of Ireland was civilised.

As to his horror that Taylor, having lived through the 1939 War, should not see the utter difference between Belsen and Ireland under British rule—I assume it was *because* Taylor had lived through the War, as a much younger man, that he saw similarities. When I went to London in the late 1950s I worked for a while as a bus conductor. Bus drivers were almost all people who had fought in the War, and their view of it was much more analytical and dispassionate than the strictly propagandist view of a later generation who had no actual experience of it. They had served here, there and everywhere through the world. They knew some of the things that Britain did in the world. And they were therefore sceptical of the Nuremberg Trials as law. And, though

Ireland was not an issue for them, they had a definite sense that the less British conduct there was probed, the better.

Fifteen years ago it was suggested that the nationalist Irish, in their customary mode of "*victimhood*" were commemorating an event that did not happen. Obviously, if it had happened, they would not be there to carry-on about it. That's the thing about genocides. Only the victims are really concerned about them—and the victims are gone.

About that time, T.P. O'Mahony suggested in the *Cork Examiner* that the Irish should make use of the Famine in the way that the Zionists made use of the Holocaust. He was jumped on by Dermot Keogh. Keogh, formerly on the staff of the *Fianna Fail* paper, the *Irish Press*, had seen a vision of Fascism at the burning of the British Embassy in Dublin in the days following the Bloody Sunday killings in Derry. He had become a powerful academic—Professor of History at Cork University—with a mission to combat "*irredentism*", which he saw as the cause of the War in the North. But, paradoxically, he was on an invited lecture tour of Israel at the moment when he condemned O'Mahony's proposal, and the Palestinians were on Intifada against the Jewish nationalist irredentism which was in military control of Palestine and was colonising it.

If the term "*genocide*" is taken in earnest, it means the destruction of a people. And destroyed peoples do not commemorate their destruction.

In actual use, the word has meant, from the time it became general currency after 1945, the destruction of part of a people. How much constitutes *genocide* then becomes a subjective matter, a matter of policy. A very small number constitutes genocide in the propaganda life of the West if the United States decides so. And attributed intention sometimes seems to count more than deeds in determining what is genocide.

Literal genocides are forgotten. A very influential Liberal politician and writer of the late 19th century, Sir Charles Dilke, boasted that the British were the greatest exterminators of peoples that the world had ever seen. And the British offspring, the United States, which is the powerhouse of Democracy in world affairs, is based on multiple literal genocide carried on over many centuries. When the Republicans won the Civil War of 1861-5 at the cost of a million white lives—an event often hailed as the foundation of Democracy in the world—they spent the next thirty years

urgently completing the genocide. It was then that Phil Sheridan, a Civil War hero, declared that the only good Indian was a dead Indian.

The North American genocide was completed in the 1890s. Fifty years later the United States at least had the decency not to sign the United Nations Genocide Convention. It did not have the British taste for convoluted hypocrisy. And, in recent years, American academic publications have been appearing which treat the extermination of the peoples which once inhabited the Continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific as genocides, even though those peoples, having been literally exterminated, are not around to make an issue of them.

Sir Charles Dilke's view was that Britain was doing humanity a service by getting rid of its waste material. That was the common view of the Darwinian generations of English Liberals up to 1914. Something broke in England Liberal political culture when the war on Germany did not prove to be the expected cake-walk. It did not mend its ways—but neither could it carry things off with the Darwinian bravura of pre-War times. It damaged itself by that War and fell back into a kind of fake Christianity in order to see it through. Leonard Woolf, indelibly marked by that experience, could not face up to the fact that British Liberalism in its prime had dealt with the Irish waste material of humanity—because that is undoubtedly how the Irish populace was seen by enlightened English minds when they availed of the potato blight to bring about the Famine.

Brendan Clifford

TO BE CONTINUED

Extracts from Dilke's book appear in:

Union Jackery:
the pre-history of Fascism in Britain:

by *Brendan Clifford*.

84pp €8, £6

(Post Free in Ireland and Britain.)



World Day for Decent Work

The issue of how to achieve national recovery has been the subject of huge debate in recent times. In comments made yesterday on World Day for Decent Work, (7 October 2012) David Begg, General Secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, outlined what he considered necessary to achieve the aim.

The issue in this country and throughout the world wasn't just about creating jobs, but also about creating 'decent jobs', according to Mr Begg whose organisation represents 833,486 workers throughout the island.

It was the fundamental task of Trade Unions in Ireland and internationally to do so.

This went to the core of what Unions did and why they were founded—to raise standards and protection for working people. He added:

"If we are serious about genuine and sustainable recovery in Ireland, we need to focus on the creation of decent jobs and decent work. You cannot build recovery on the back of badly paid, insecure and precarious work that drives people into poverty".

"The Decent Work agenda was about giving people security, the means to raise and educate a family and the capacity to develop their skills and knowledge. This aided competitiveness...".

He referred to what he called a drive across Europe to reduce standards to the lowest common denominator and strip away rights that unions and working people had won over generations: Equality, health and safety, paid overtime, holiday pay, occupational pensions, social protection and the five-day working week are all under threat.

"This is exactly the wrong way to go and will lead to more inequality, rising poverty and a loss of social cohesion."

The best protection people had was to join a Union.

It was no accident that the countries least affected by the current crisis—the Nordic states—were those which prioritised social protection and good employment, Mr Begg argued.

Ireland needed to learn from that example to ensure we did not repeat the mistakes of the past.

World Day for Decent Work, an initiative of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), to which Congress is affiliated, was an important day to mark in the Trade Union calendar.

The ITUC represented some 175 million workers in 153 countries and territories, around the world.

The definition of decent work was that it was productive and delivered a fair income to ensure a decent standard of living that provided security in the workplace and good social protection for families.

Trade Unions believed that decent work was central to the building of a fair and more equal society that puts people first.

The creation of new, decent jobs would help drive national and global recovery by getting people back to work and sparking economic growth.

Unfortunately, Europe was currently in thrall to a near religious belief that the route to economic salvation lay in removing worker protections, cutting incomes and driving standards down to the lowest common denominator.

But, as history clearly showed, the reverse was true. Only by driving standards up and ensuring people had access to decent, well paid and secure work could recovery be kick-started.

The current crisis made the achievement of a more sustainable economic order—with decent work at its core—an absolute necessity.

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) had outlined a number of steps necessary to achieve decent work.

The aim should be to end 'precarious work', defined by the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) as they include:

Ending precarious work

This was work that was highly insecure, badly paid and incapable of supporting a household or family. Precarious work had spread rapidly in recent years, particularly with the growth of contract labour. Both young and female workers feature prominently in the ranks of this new workforce.

This work, according to Prof. Guy Standing, author of *The Precariat*, included—

"many who were temps, part-timers, in call centres or in outsourced arrangements, its growth been accelerated by the neoliberalism of globalisation, which put faith in labour market flexibility, the commodification of everything and the restructuring of social protection."

Precarious work represented a huge threat to existing wages and working conditions. Those in temporary, casual and contract jobs had fewer rights and were less likely to join a union.

Social dialogue and Union rights

The full involvement of worker organisations in all decisions on the labour market and incomes was vital in ensuring that the 'market' was not left unchecked to 'wreak havoc'. Unions played a crucial role in income redistribution with numerous studies showing that where unions were weak, income inequality rises, Begg said.

Unions in Ireland currently enjoyed far less rights than many of their European counterparts.

Strong employment protection

Far from being an obstacle to a dynamic, labour market good employment protection had been shown to boost productivity and skill levels, as it encouraged workers to innovate and upskill. Many experts highlighted the fact that countries with comparatively high levels of labour market (and social) protection—the Nordic states—had emerged relatively unscathed from the current global crisis.

Better work organisation

A basic principle of decent work was the creation of workplace environments where workers were fully informed and consulted on all decisions affecting them. This helped in balancing the demands of work and home life and facilitated ongoing learning and upskilling.

Good social protection

With unemployment in Europe reaching levels last seen in the post war years—25 million and rising—a strong social protection system was vital to ensure that people maintained an adequate standard of living and had access to training opportunities.

In addition, many economists believed that social welfare spending acted as a 'stabiliser' during a recession, helping to buttress an economy as recipients spent the vast bulk of their income on local goods and services. ■

Working class must stand up against welfare threat

The Chancellor of the Exchequer should target fat cat tax dodgers—not low and middle-income families, says Brian Campfield, General Secretary, Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance

One recent, headline-grabbing story was that involving US Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney, who dismissed 47% of the electorate, due to their dependence on state support of one kind or another, as *"not worth bothering about"*.

Much closer to home, such extremism is central to Government ideology, as shown by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, who announced that a further £10bn would be taken from the welfare budget.

This is in addition to a proposed programme of cuts that the independent Institute of Fiscal Studies described as *"unprecedented"*.

What this represents is a declaration of war on the less well-off in society. Behind the propaganda, this extremism is designed to drive a wedge between those in work and those on social security benefits.

It ignores the reality of millions of low and middle-income families, including the 'working poor', who only survive because of child tax credits and housing benefit and who will now lose out.

This has to be recognised not as reform, but as an attack on both working and non-working families. At the heart of the Tory party's welfare agenda is the belief that anyone who is unemployed, or on any type of benefit, is entirely responsible for his/her own predicament and, therefore, should only be supported—if at all—in a hostile, short-term and minimalist manner.

Is this the message we want to convey to our fellow citizens—to family members, our neighbours, those workers now facing redundancy from FG Wilson?

The Westminster Coalition Government's formal strategy, as predicted by the trade unions and many eminent economists, has been a disaster.

But the Government's real mission is to transform the UK economy and society into one which serves business and private shareholder interests, particularly those of the City of London.

The 'tax-cut for millionaires' Budget of 2012 could not have made this clearer. A recent TUC report exposed how, for the vast majority of employees, take home wages, as a proportion of the economy, shrank over the last 30 years.

Furthermore, at a time when the pension provisions of society as a whole are under attack (eroded by private companies

Keaveney's Principled Stand Recalls That Of Michael Bell In 1982

As the ITGWU/SIPTU Head of Research from 1971 to 2010, future Labour TDs among my work colleagues included, successively, Michael Bell, Eamon Gilmore and Colm Keaveney.

Why mention Michael Bell at this critical juncture? Because, barely four months after being elected TD for the first time in November 1982, Bell had been prepared to take a principled stand against the disastrous economic and social policies being pursued by the Fine Gael-Labour Coalition Government of that era.

In March 1983 he resigned the Labour Party whip and voted against that year's inequitable Social Welfare Bill, while in May he was willing to propose amendments to the Finance Bill which we in the ITGWU had drafted with the objective of redistributing the tax burden from lower and middle incomes to those top income earners and possessors of wealth who were best positioned to bear it.

The 1983 Delegate Conference of the ITGWU concluded: "The basic weakness of Labour's position in Government has encouraged the more hardline elements in Fine Gael to push for even more extreme monetarist policies and has undermined any possible Labour resistance in the Dáil. Fine Gael obviously believes it has the whip-hand and that the Labour deputies must follow where they will lead, even if it means through the lobbies for the Social Welfare Bill or the Finance Bill, which together represent the most savage attack any Government has inflicted on the workers of this country for decades. Thankfully, the honour of the party has been salvaged by the courageous stand of Deputy Michael Bell in opposition to both these measures."

In due course, the principled stand Michael Bell had taken for Labour's soul saw him being elected chairman of that very same Parliamentary Labour Party whose whip he had resigned in 1983.

On his death in May of last year, Tánaiste Eamon Gilmore paid the following handsome tribute: "I first came across Michael when as a young official in the Transport Union he took me under his wing. His advice and guidance, coming from somebody who had some years experience under his belt, were invaluable to me. But Michael Bell was not just a mentor. He was also a colleague and a friend."

Colm Keaveney cannot claim Michael Bell as a mentor. But he is a worthy successor.

And if the soul of Labour is ever to be salvaged in the current crisis, it will be thanks to the principled stand first taken by Shortall, and now joined by Keaveney

Manus O'Riordan

Workers' Group Member European Economic and Social Committee, Dublin
Irish Examiner, 17.12.12

withdrawing from/diluting pension provision and Government diminishing the value of public sector pensions), the pension pots of the top FTSE 100 directors have increased by astronomical amounts.

Is it any wonder that inequality and the damage it brings has been and is increasing? In spite of this 'wages grab' and pension theft, media headlines blame the victim, using offensive terms such as 'work-shy' and 'spongers'.

It has been some time since the real villains of the piece—captains of finance, who increased their own personal wealth as they brought the world economy to the brink—were exposed for what they are.

Incredibly, their partners in economic crime—neo-liberal free market zealots—are still wheeled out as 'experts' to advise us how to escape the recession their recommendations created in the first place and then deepened.

The only sensible response from the great mass of the population is to say

enough is enough. This means, whether you live in Greece, Spain, the US, the Republic, or the UK, it is time to stand up and say 'no' to the austerity agenda.

In London, Glasgow and Belfast, Trade Unions and community activists once again took to the streets to highlight the disastrous policies of the coalition Government and call for a reversal of failed neo-liberal economics.

The economic and social measures we demand can be funded using the £120bn in taxes avoided, evaded, or uncollected across the UK. This will create decent jobs, get people back to work and deliver a fairer society.

- *Belfast Telegraph*, 1 November 2012.

Read more: <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/opinion/news-analysis/working-class-must-stand-up-against-welfare-threat-16232539.html#ixzz2B3KeCnwQ>

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Does
It
Up

Stack
?

UNEMPLOYMENT STATISTICS

It is a very good idea to ask ourselves, why am I doing this? Or why is this figure important? And of course each of our TDs should ask themselves "why am I voting for this budget?"

Two very good articles by Philip O' Connor in the *Irish Political Review*, December 2012 on unemployment and the creation of jobs include an analysis of "Irish Unemployment—what the figures say". A very interesting analysis which shows, among other things, that "austerity" programmes are not reflected in the trend of unemployment figures recently.

These articles were very interesting and thought provoking. However, because of the traditional use of the traditional "official figures for the numbers claiming unemployment benefits and assistance", we are not getting the real picture of the real economy. Unemployment figures show one negative aspect of the economy and even at that, as Philip O'Connor shows, the percentages increasingly covered up a fall in actual numbers of persons unemployed.

There are several other substantial negative aspects of the economy which are not shown or not known in numbers. There is the substantial number of those who emigrated for work—this number does not seem to be known. The nearest we can get to it is the figure of net emigration, which is emigration numbers less immigration numbers, and there is doubt as to the reliability of these figures. Then also there is the substantial number of hitherto self-employed persons who are out of work but who are not permitted to claim Unemployment Benefits. What the previously self-employed do is to emigrate or to take up a part-time job and/or their partner will go out to work full-time or part-time. We know from experience of our local economy that there is considerable movement in this aspect of the jobs economy in recent years but there seems to be no measurement of it. There should be some way of measuring this because it is so vital to our economy. I have not got recent Revenue Commissioner's figures but some years ago 85% of all employees in the PAYE/PRSI system were employed by employers who employed less than five employees each! That is significant. And it deserves to be on public record. If

something like 85% of all jobs are created by small employers who employ less than five employees each it means that Government policies should be 85% directed towards encouraging small employers of less than five employees. But small employers cannot afford to join Chambers of Commerce or SME organisations nor do their employees usually join Trade Unions and so they are unrepresented and unknown and largely ignored—to the great detriment of Ireland's economy. The Trade Unions must work towards representing employees in small firms or if they do not do so the Unions will lose their influence with Government.

In the meantime it does not stack up that we have no publicly available statistics on this major sector of the economy—*the small firms*.

AGRIBUSINESS AND FISHING

The food industry both on land and sea has always been the biggest industry and it is today the industry most capable of creating jobs. EU grants and subsidies, insofar as they tend to allow land to lie fallow and unused and insofar as they allow our territorial waters to be unfished, are not in the national interest and everything possible should be done by Government to design a system of grants and subsidies which does not reduce the value to us of our land and national seas.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Protection of the environment is necessary. It must however be reasonable in its effects. The agriculture, the fisheries and the environment should all be under one Department of Government and under one Senior Minister and the senior Minister should be compelled by law to delegate the necessary powers to Junior Ministers who would be responsible for each separate division—agriculture, food processing, fishing, aquaculture, environment, water, tourism—all of these areas of government are inter-related. The senior Minister should have his own office of senior interdisciplinary civil servants to advise him about proper proportionate control of the various Junior Ministers' sections so as to achieve maximum benefit for the nation. The planning and protection of the environment should not be, as it is at present, under the same Minister as local government. The environment and water are national issues and are closely inter-related with agriculture and fisheries and should most advantageously be under one Government Department.

Take seaside strands for example. These have to be kept clean which depends very much on adjacent water quality. Water

quality depends on control of waste disposal and on control of agricultural effluents. On the other hand at least twice a year equinoctial gales will cause thousands of tons of sea weed to be uprooted and thrown onto the strands by waves. This is a most nutritious fertiliser for farmland but under present laws it is an offence to remove it without a licence from the County Council. But it must be used while it is fresh and by the time a licence is applied for and processed and issued by unsympathetic non-involved bureaucrats—the seaweed has gone bad and putrid and it rots uselessly and becomes a public nuisance instead of an asset.

Seaweed is a crop like any other and on the coast of Brittany it is routinely harvested by twelve-metre boats which use a single hydraulic tool to cut and lift the seaweed. Each boat is operated by one person and each cargo is about 10 tons. At the quay in ports like Roscoff, the boats are unloaded by a truck with a hydraulic grab. Each truckload is about four boatloads. The seaweed is processed for food and medical products and for seafood garnishing in restaurants and for seaweed baths in spas. In Ireland, this business has been restarted after languishing for generations. It is a small business with big employment potential and needs encouragement by Government.

TURF CUTTING

A business which has suffered very much at the over-heavy hand of well-meaning environmentalists is the turf-cutting. Most of the turf cutting has been done in the Irish Midlands by Bórd na Mona. During the emergency years of the Second World War, the country's fuel for cooking and heating was mostly turf. Most of it was cut by Bórd na Mona and some by the Irish Army and some by people who owned or had rights to Turbary or who could rent Turbary at the annual auctions.

The environmentalists and the EU want to stop turf cutting altogether and just now most turf cutting is illegal except for Bórd na Mona which has been and is the greatest turf cutter of all. There has been much *angst* and regret at the cessation of turf cutting. The traditional turf cutting ritual was a cultural thing. It has gone on for thousands of years. Every member of the extended family who helped with the turf cutting got their share of the turf to take home for the winter fires. The cutting and footing of turf required some skill—it looked easy when well done, like most crafts. The only implement needed was the *slean*—usually made by a blacksmith and now sometimes seen for sale in

hardware shops. However, in recent decades a turf cutting machine was developed and manufactured in Germany and elsewhere and so "turf cutting contractors" came into the equation and money was exchanged and turf became a commercial matter even to small family Turbary owners. Money as compensation is now being paid by the Government to Turbary owners so as to stop them cutting their own turf even for their own fires. In my opinion, this is a form of bureaucratic barbarism. Let the Government pay compensation but let it be to compensate for discontinuing the machine cutting of turf. After compensation is paid, let the machines be abolished and handed over for scrapping. But hand-cutting of turf for non-commercial use should not be interfered with because it is a traditional cultural activity of great social significance. That is a simple solution to what is seen as a complicated situation in the rural economy.

FISHING INDUSTRY

There is a consensus among those who know and who, almost forty years later, are now prepared to reminisce that the Irish Fishing Industry was abandoned and "sold down the river" by Jack Lynch's negotiators in Brussels in 1972-'73 when Ireland was first being admitted into the then EEC, now the EU. Fisheries were traded away for agriculture advantages and events since then have confirmed this account of the negotiations. Irish trawlers became an endangered species and have almost vanished. The Irish Army, which controls the naval base at Haulbowline, Co. Cork, received additional funding from Brussels to provide extra naval vessels to patrol our (actually their) offshore waters to control fishing. The Courts in Irish seacoast towns were used to impose severe fines on trawler skippers and owners who offended against quota regulations. The Spaniards mostly and some French took over our territorial waters. The Irish trawlers were, sometimes literally, blasted out of the fishing grounds and gave up eventually. Very few trawlers are fishing now.

Fisheries Minister Simon Coveney, Fine Gael, was recently asked to control the offshore fisheries and his answer was an unbelievable "it is very difficult to do". It is not difficult at all but the will is not there to do it or perhaps more trade-offs are going on secretly behind scenes. There are two obvious problems. Firstly, the funding for the Naval Service has been severely choked. And the Irish Army on service abroad seems to have excellent equipment so maybe Peter is being robbed

to pay Paul—so to speak. Secondly, every vessel over 12 metres now has to have a registered MMSI number and it has to have an AIS Radar/Transmitter which continuously transmits the vessel's MMSI number, its position, name, course, speed and cargo details. The problem is that trawlers break the law routinely and they switch off their AIS or "forget to switch it on". It is basically a question of lax regulation by the authorities.

One simple thing Minister Coveney could do is to allow small trawlers of say up to 30 metres long to fish without quota restrictions. These trawlers would not damage fish stocks. He could also argue in Brussels that no vessel over 30 metres be allowed to fish inside a 50 nautical mile limit in territorial waters. These moves would give huge family employment and would give Ireland some level of food independence by reducing fish imports which are now huge. The biggest fish ports in Ireland are now said to be the airports and this must be changed.

Michael Stack ©

DAIL REPORT

SOCIAL WELFARE BILL DEBATE

Deputy Finian McGrath: I have spent a great deal of time in the past seven to ten days meeting people with disabilities and their carers to discuss their concerns regarding the budget. The legislation before us today is unjust, unfair and serves only to deepen further the divide in Irish society. The choices that could have been made to protect the vulnerable were not taken. The Bill reflects a direction by Government that will create a more unjust society and shows we are a long way from a democratic and inclusive republic.

The harrowing cuts to home care provision, particularly the respite care grant, will cause untold hardship for thousands of carers and must be reversed. The massive 20% reduction in the respite care grant must likewise be rescinded. These measures are an insult to carers throughout the country who have given up work to care for elderly parents and disabled children 24 hours a day for 365 days of the year and, in so doing, are saving the State considerable sums of money. There are close to 5,000 people who receive no other support from the State and are thus solely dependent on the respite care grant. They will be hit extremely hard by the sharp and sudden reduction in their income. An annual payment of €1,700 is not a great deal, yet it has now been reduced by €325 to €1,375.

Other cuts that will have a major impact

on the most vulnerable are the increase in prescription charges and the reduction in the household benefits package. The imposition of a carbon tax on solid fuels at a rate of 10% per tonne from May 2013 and 20% per tonne from May 2014 will cut €22 million out of the system. These changes will impact on the ability of people, particularly the elderly, to heat their homes adequately. The measures set out in this Bill will have an enormous effect on people's daily lives. It is very frustrating to hear the Government talking about its commitment to protecting the vulnerable. It is particularly irritating to hear Labour Party Members prattling on about human rights on the international stage while their party in government hammers the rights of the disabled, carers and the elderly in this country. What planet are they on?

I met a group of carers at the gates of Leinster House today, many of them exhausted. They surely have enough on their plates without having to protest in this manner.

They all asked me to fight on their behalf. I urge the Minister of State, Deputy Perry, and the Government to listen to their needs and roll back this legislation that cuts the respite care grant. Let the Government be brave, tough and strong and come up with other options to stop these cuts. It is not rocket science; many Deputies have put forward other funding proposals to resolve these matters. Let us have compassion and commonsense and above all let us listen to the carers, the disabled and our senior citizens. That is all I ask for in tonight's debate on the Social Welfare Bill. The family carers provide €4 billionsworth of care every year and they are on call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Let us give them dignity and respect, and in the coming days let us look to changing the Bill. If the Government does not do this I will vote against it. It is time to end the talk and stand with the carers, the disabled and our senior citizens.

11-12-2012

Finian McGrath also opposed the Budget:

This budget is a grave attack on children, families, the disabled and our senior citizens. It is a budget steeped in unfairness and full of broken promises, especially from the Labour Party. It is also a budget of the wrong choices for our citizens and it is steeped in inequality. Let the lesson be today that this Government has broken many promises, especially as it knows full well the economic reality for many families on the ground. It will go down in history as a budget that pushed many people over the edge, with a lack of vision, compassion and economic reality. People are hurting but the Government put the boot in even harder to families, carers, the disabled, the unemployed, small businesses and our senior citizens.

5-12-2012

DUBLIN GUILDS continued

to the request, as he happened to be an attorney by profession !

In the year 1833 this particular guild consisted of 109 members, of whom 65 had no connection with the trade. The membership included a Viscount, the Recorder of Dublin, the City Marshal, the Inspector of Prisons, a clergyman, a surgeon, two barristers, thirteen attorneys, two painters, a coal factor, a hatter, and others drawn from various occupations unconnected with the trade.

In the Report of the Commissioners upon the state of municipal corporations in Ireland, published in the years 1835-1836, we find:

"The strongest sectarian feeling pervades all the guilds, and, with the exception of three, who by a mandamus {Judicial Writ} (which was not defended) forced their way into the smiths', there are no Roman Catholics free of any of the guilds. Protestants of political principles different from those of the majority of the corporation are equally excluded. Mr. Jordan Lambert, one of the officers of the smiths', stated on oath that the guild did everything in their power to keep out Catholics and bad Protestants."

The Dublin guilds in their later period had clearly no longer any useful function in the regulation of industry in the city or in civic administration. Indeed, they were more harmful than useful. That their day had long since passed away was at length recognised by the Government when, in the year 1840, by the Municipal Corporations Act, the guilds were deprived of representation in the Municipal Council. After this they gradually disappeared.

* *The present writer wishes to acknowledge the contribution made by Joe Keenan, of Belfast, whose archival prowess led to the discovery of The Irish Monthly published by the Irish Jesuit Province. It began life in 1873 and ceased publishing in 1954. Amongst its contributors was Oscar Wilde.*

Trade Union Notes

The Executive Council of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions has endorsed a proposal to hold a series of major demonstrations on Saturday, 9 February 2013 to demand a restructuring of Ireland's debt burden as "*a prerequisite for recovery and a necessary condition for the main-*

tenance of social cohesion".

The demonstrations are to be held in Dublin, Cork, Galway, Sligo, Limerick and Waterford and are timed to coincide with EU Council of Ministers' meetings. Ireland will hold the EU Presidency for the first six months of 2013.

Speaking ahead of the Executive Council meeting, Congress General Secretary David Begg said: "*We need to send a very clear and very unambiguous message to Europe: without a serious and significant deal on our debt, there is no prospect whatsoever of a recovery in Ireland. It is as simple and clear as that.*"

MAJOR INDUSTRIAL ACTION is set to take place in the public transport system in the early days of the new year after management at Bus Eireann threatened to unilaterally press ahead with serious changes in the work conditions of staff.

The company has told staff that, having failed to reach agreement on a new cost-savings plan, it is to press ahead with a number of measures which will cut overtime rates and shift payments, increase working weeks, and cut holiday entitlements from January 13.

Unions say their members will not accept such a "*dictatorial*" stance and are to be balloted for industrial action almost immediately.

Michael Faherty, Secretary General of the National Bus and Rail Union, which represents 1,200 Bus Éireann drivers, said that action will be "*strong enough to prevent management from implementing the changes without agreement*".

"**IRISH and Greek** workers are the only employees in the world who won't get a pay rise next year, according to one of the world's largest salary advisers.

"Employees here and in Greece will get nothing while most Europeans can expect modest rises in the New Year, according to Hay Group, a global management consultancy that specialises in pay and benefits. Workers in the world's emerging markets will see wages jump.

"Greece and Ireland are unsurprisingly the hardest hit. Fast-growing economies like Turkey and Russia buck the trend."

Average pay rises across Europe are set to rise 3.3% in 2013 compared with 5.5% this year, Hay predicts.

"The smallest hikes will be in Spain (1.5%), Portugal (1.7%) and Lithuania (1.8%). British workers are set to get a 3% increase—the same as Germany and France. Other west European countries will also be subdued.

"Wages in South America will rise by

an average of 9%, while Asia will see increases of 7.5% as raging inflation forces employers to push up salaries.

"North Americans will fare the worst with a rise of 2.9%. Average salaries in the Middle East and Africa are set to rise by 5.2%.

"The biggest rises in Europe will be seen in eastern Europe where salaries in the Ukraine are set to jump 10%. Russia will see increases of 9%" (*Irish Independent*, 11.12.2012).

DONAL NEVIN, the former General Secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, died on 16 December 2012, following a long illness. He was in his 89th year.

Donal Nevin was born in Limerick, was a founder member of the ESRI when it was formed in 1960 and served with distinction in the Department of Industry and Commerce and as General Secretary of ICTU before he retired in 1989.

He then embarked on a second career as an author, writing definitively on James Connolly and James Larkin, including a biography of Larkin called 'James Larkin—Lion of the Fold'.

"His 1967 Thomas Davis lecture on the post-Treaty fortunes of the Labour Party is still a classic, while his two-volume collection of James Connolly's works will doubtless become a classic. While his energy will be missed, the recently founded Nevin Institute will give us some food for thought in the years ahead" (*Irish Independent*, 18.12.2012).

A member of the Labour Party, he was committed to social justice and was also involved in the anti-apartheid movement and the hospice movement.

YES YOU

Charged with murder when murder is your trade,

but when you are hit it's unlawful killing, uninvited guests so unfulfilling those expectations when you invade.

Take five soldiers for public relations, they who trod over a million graves, scapegoats for a reputation to save, or some sort of twisted flagellation.

Five soldiers of whom one is guilty, he'll get ten years but serve ten months to sneer,

back to the ranks and out for a balti, smash someone down the High Street when on the beer.

Put it all down to human frailty that you should die for this killer's career.

Wilson John Haire
8th November 2012

DUBLIN GUILDS contin-

laws for the government of the guild was vested in the general body. Non-guildsmen infringing the rights of the guild brethren could be committed to prison by the master and wardens. Fines were imposed upon the brethren for non-observance of the by-laws.

A three-fold division existed amongst those following any art or craft—namely, masters, journeymen, and apprentices. The serving of an apprenticeship to a trade seems to have been an essential qualification, at least until a late period, for admission to a guild. The indentures of apprenticeship were required to be enrolled in the civic archives. Seven years was the usual period of apprenticeship.

WORK TEST

It is interesting to note that in some at least of the guilds admission to the freedom of the guild was dependent upon the performance of a test piece of work, called the "masterpiece". Under the charter of the goldsmiths' guild it was provided that no one should be admitted to the freedom of the company until he should have "proved the service of an apprenticeship of seven years, and that he had wrought a piece of work of silver called his 'master piece', to be approved of by the wardens for the time being".

The Common Council of the city usually fixed the rates of wages. There is an instance on record, however, of the fixing of rates of wages by the common consent of guild and civic authorities. In the "Chain Book", one of the most ancient records of the city of Dublin, some instances are given of rates of wages in early times. Thus, sixteen pence was the rate fixed at one time for the weaving of cloth, thirty ells in length, of one colour. The wages of a fuller were fixed at twopence per day, or three shillings for fulling cloth thirty ells in length.

At a much later period—namely, in the year 1555, the Common Council ordained that "'the maister of every occupacion shall have by the daie, when he haith no meate nor drinke fyftene pens, the jorneyman *xiid.*, the prentise *xd.*; and when he haith the meate and drinke, the master shall have by the daie *vid.*, the jorneyman *iiid.*, the prentise *iiid.*, every laborer shall have by the daye, without meate and drinke, *viid. ob.*, and with meate and drinke *iiid.*"

One reason why the Common Council exercised such authority over the city

guilds, and why such harmony seems to have prevailed between the guilds and the governing body of the city was, that the guildsmen were represented upon the Common Council. Various ordinances were made from time to time by the Common Council regulating the representation of the various guilds thereon.

PROTESTANT REFORMATION

The Reformation had a disastrous effect upon the guild system in these countries. The Dublin guilds suffered in common with the others, being despoiled of that portion of their property which was devoted to religious purposes. The loss of their property would not, however, have been a very serious matter. The most grievous result of the Reformation was that it introduced religious bitterness amongst the guildsmen, and finally excluded Roman Catholic craftsmen from membership. The introduction of the principle of sectarianism as one of the guiding rules of the guilds largely contributed to the decay of the Dublin ones.

The great Civil War, which resulted in the execution of Charles I. and the ushering in of the Cromwellian regime, had a serious effect upon the Dublin guilds. We learn from the municipal records that the City Assembly in the year 1651, owing to the depopulation of the city and the destruction of houses occasioned by the recent rebellion and ten years' war, and by the late grievous and heavy visitation of the plague, whereby the number of "manufacture men" was reduced to a very few, some of the trades almost deprived of craftsmen, and several of the houses remaining in decay and in danger of ruin for want of artificers and workmen to repair them, decided to petition the right honorable the Commissioners of Parliament "to bringe into this cittie a number of manufacture men that are Englishmen and Protestants, such as are of honest life and conversacion, to come and inhabit and use their severall trades and manufactures in this cittie".

In presenting this petition the Common Council violated the most precious privilege of the guilds—namely, that duly admitted guildsmen alone should practice their craft in the city.

The religious intolerance of this period is evidenced by an ordinance made by the Common Council of Dublin in the following year, "that none shalbee admitted unto the assemblies of any of the corporacions (that is, the guilds) of this cittie unlesse hee bee a Protestant, and that noe freeman take any to bee an apprentice but such as are or wilbee and continue in the Protestant religion".

PROTESTANTS ONLY

A few years later interference with the cherished privileges of the guilds proceeded from a much higher source. Under the Act of Explanation of 1665, the Lord Lieutenant and Council were empowered to make rules for the better government of all corporate bodies in Ireland, municipal and others. Under the "New Rules" issued by the Lord Lieutenant and Council pursuant to this Act it was provided that "all merchants, strangers and aliens, as well others as Protestants, who were or should be merchants, traders, artisans, artificers, seamen, or other wise skilled and exercised in any mystery, trade, or craft, or in the art of navigation, then residing and inhabiting within the city of Dublin, or who should thereafter come into the said city with intent and resolution there to inhabit, should, on request and payment of twenty shillings by way of fine to the chief magistrate and common council, be admitted freemen of the city; and, if desired, of any guild, brotherhood, society or fellowship of any trade, craft or within the same."

By another of the "New Rules" the representation of the guilds upon the Common Council was fixed at ninety six, at which number it remained until the abolition of the guilds in 1840. The major portion of the Lower House of the Common Council consisted accordingly of guild representatives.

STUART PERIOD (1603-1714)

From the Stuart period onwards the Dublin guilds proceeded on the downward path which led to their final destruction. The guilds were all actuated by a sectarian spirit which, combined with statutory enactments and municipal ordinances, effectively excluded the Roman Catholic population of the city from any share in the direction of industry or commerce. Principle after principle of the old guild system went overboard, until finally the guilds were governed in many cases by men who had no connection with the trades connected therewith. Admission to the guild was sought as a means for obtaining admission to the Common Council of the city.

As an illustration of the disassociation of the guildsmen from the crafts which they were supposed to represent, it may be mentioned that shortly after the Union {1801} the master of the guild of bricklayers was called upon by the government to inspect and report upon some public buildings, then recently erected. That gentleman, however, was unable to accede

continued on page

DUBLIN GUILDS continued

the great Industrial Revolution, which began about the middle of the eighteenth century. All over Western Europe industry and commerce were from an early period organised and regulated on the Guild system. From the study of that system we can derive much valuable information as to the manner of life and social position of a most interesting section of the community—namely, the traders and craftsmen who dwelt in the towns. We in Ireland are far more familiar with the history of the guilds and guildsmen of Barcelona, Florence, Cologne, Bruges, and Paris, than we are with that of the guilds and guildsmen of our own towns. If the Irish guilds did not play the prominent part in the history of Irish towns that the guilds of Florence did in that famous Italian city, their economic features are at least as interesting as those of any continental guild. In this paper an attempt will be made to throw some light upon the old Dublin guilds.

The history of the Dublin guilds can be traced back to the twelfth century. Their origin synchronised with the early years of the Anglo-Norman occupation of the city. In a charter granted by Prince John, Lord of Ireland, in the year 1192, the citizens of Dublin were granted the liberty “of having all reasonable guilds, as the burgesses of Bristol had, and in the most advantageous manner”. That this liberty was availed of at an early date is evidenced by the municipal records. There exists today a valuable document setting forth the names and descriptions of the members admitted to the Guild Merchant of Dublin in the year 1226.

From this list we learn that the guild merchant of the year mentioned was open to craftsmen as well as to merchants. Amongst those admitted in the year 1226 were a goldsmith, saddler, a dyer, a tailor, a currier, a painter, a locksmith, a baker, a shoemaker, a forester, and a fisherman. Later admissions to guild membership included a lorimer {a maker of metal bits, spurs, etc.}, a cobbler, a scrivener {a clerk}, a skinner, a butcher, and a mariner.

GUILD MERCHANT

That the Guild Merchant of Dublin was open to the members of various crafts as well as to those who followed a merchant's career was in no way peculiar to this city. In the early period of the medieval guilds all those who bought or sold on the smallest scale were qualified for admission to the merchant guild. The craftsman who bought

the raw material for his labour and sold the finished product of his craft was equally eligible for membership with him who dealt in merchandise alone.

Probably a long period elapsed from the Anglo-Norman occupation of Dublin before the industry of the city had developed sufficiently to enable the members of each craft to organise themselves with advantage in their own guilds.

Owing to the inevitable *lacuna* {gap} in the civic records we are unable to learn the exact dates at which many of the craft guilds took shape. However, the records show that in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the following craftsmen were organised into guilds :- Shoemakers, butchers, tailors, goldsmiths, barber-surgeons, bakers, saddlers, gardeners, bowiers and flaichers, glovers, carpenters, masons, joiners and “heliers” (the last four trades forming a single guild), cooks, blacksmiths, weavers, and skinner.

COMMON COUNCIL

A notable feature of the Dublin guilds was their strict subordination to the Common Council of the city. While the various guilds were authorised to make by-laws for the regulation of their respective industries, the city Council exercised from time to time an over-riding authority in this matter. Disputes between the guilds as to encroachments on their respective spheres of industry were submitted to and settled by the Common Council.

The essence of the guild system was its exclusiveness. No one not a member of the guild was permitted to carry on an avocation when a guild existed in connection therewith. To carry on trade in Dublin it was necessary to be a member of the guild merchant. To practice the craft of baker, saddler, glover, weaver, or any other, it was necessary to become enrolled on the list of the guild connected with the particular trade.

On the one hand, the craftsmen insisted upon enrolment in the guild, as a condition precedent to the practice of a craft, with a view to the protection of their rights, the maintenance of a decent standard of life, and the regulation of the details of their trade; on the other hand, the Common Council, while acquiescing in the above arrangement, constantly, whenever occasion required, availed of its supreme authority to secure the interest of the general body of the people. If the bakers made faulty bread, or the shoemakers put bad leather into shoes, or if excessive prices were charged by craftsmen, the Common Council threw open the ranks of

the various trades to outsiders, in order thereby to protect the common interest. The Common Council had frequently to threaten to admit—and on more than one occasion actually admitted—country bakers to the city, there to carry on their trade freely. With a weapon such as this in the civic armoury, it was easy to keep the guildsmen within due limits and to safeguard the common interest.

RELIGION AND LABOUR

An important feature of medieval industry was that religion and labour were wedded together. Indeed, *Laborare est orare* {to work is to pray} might have served as a motto for the guilds generally. The interests both of religion and of labour were promoted by the mediaeval guilds. As in Continental towns, the guilds of Dublin were under religious patronage. The Guild Merchant was under the invocation of the Holy Trinity, and, indeed, was generally known as “The Guild of the Holy Trinity”. The shoemakers' guild was styled “The Guild of the Blessed Virgin Mary”. Other guilds were under the tutelage of various saints. On the feast day of the Patron of the Guild the members assembled together for religious worship in the guild-chapel appropriate to the guild. One of the most interesting features of guild life in Dublin was the great procession which took the form of *tableaux vivants* {a scene on stage} of a religious character. Below are given a few examples taken from the law regulating the pageant of Corpus Christi Day:

“Glovers : Adam and Eve with an angill following berryng a swerde.

“Corvisers : Cayn and Abell, with an auter and the ofference.

“Maryners, Vyntners, Shipcarpynderis, and Samountakers : Noe, with his shipp, apparalid acordyng.

“Wevers : Abraham and Ysack, with their auter and a lambe and their ofference.

“Skynners, House-Carpynders, and Tanners and Browders : for the body of the camell, and Our Lady and her chile well aperelid, with Joseph to lede the camell, and Moyses with the children of Israell, and the Portors to berr the camell... and Steynors and Peyntors to peynte the hede of the camell.”

CONSTITUTION

The constitution of each guild consisted, as a rule, of one Master, two Wardens, and the Brethren. The Guild Merchant, however, had two masters and two wardens, and included women in its membership. The officers of the guilds were elected by the brethren. The power of making by-

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The Dublin Guilds

England's Prince John granted a Charter to Dublin in 1192 giving the city of Dublin the right to have Guilds. Known as the Guild Merchant, this included not only merchants, but also craftsmen of various kinds.

Separate Craft Guilds didn't develop until the 15th century, each under the patronage of a different saint and with its own chapel. The wealthier Guilds had their own Guild Halls.

"*The Reformation had a disastrous effect upon the guild system*", states John Joseph Webb in his article below. But despite Acts of Supremacy (1537, 1560) and Penal Laws (1695 onwards) precluding Catholics from joining Guilds by insistence on the oath of Supremacy, a class of associate members, called quarter brothers, was instituted, which enabled both Catholics and Quakers to participate in Guild membership on payment of a fee.

By the 1760s, Catholic merchants and manufacturers had begun to refuse these fees, and the courts refused to uphold the demand for their payments. Seven Quarter-age Bills, all unsuccessful, were introduced in the House of Commons between 1768 and 1778. The campaign against these impositions has been seen as an important stage in the rise of a more assertive Catholic middle class.

From the beginning of the 18th century onwards the economic power of the Guilds began to decline with the movement towards decontrol and deregulation. Another factor was the growth of Journey-men's clubs, combinations of skilled workers for their own mutual benefit, which came into conflict with the Guilds and the municipal authorities. These were to be the forerunners of the modern Trade Union movement.

The Guilds were controlled entirely by the masters, who alone claimed the right to be called Guildsmen. The journeymen

were excluded from membership and forced to work under conditions that would today be considered equal to slavery or serfdom. When the journeymen combined, they met with the most determined opposition of the Guildsmen who supported every parliamentary action which made Trade Unionism illegal.

By the middle of the 18th century Guilds were more important for their political role in municipal and parliamentary politics than for their economic influence. Guild members were eligible for the municipal franchise, and the Guilds were represented on the governing body of the city or town. The political importance of Guilds led to the admission of non-tradesmen for political purposes. Guild involvement in municipal government was ended by the Municipal Corporations (Ireland) Act 1840, and many Guilds were abolished shortly afterwards because of their failure to co-operate with the Catholic Relief Acts. (The Guilds by this stage were predominately Protestant.)

PROTESTANT MAJORITY
Protestants became a majority in Dublin

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in the 1640s, when thousands of them fled there to escape the Rebellion of 1641. In the 1650s, after the Cromwellian conquest, Catholics were banned from dwelling within the city limits. Dublin (along with parts of Ulster) was the only part of Ireland in 1700 where Protestants were a majority. Catholics became the majority in the city again in the late 18th century.

JOHN JOSEPH WEBB

The present writer knows very little about the background of John J. Webb except to discover that he was born in 1886 and was a Barrister-at-Law.

In his *The Rise Of The Irish Trade Unions* (1972), Andrew Boyd (1921-2011) credits Webb with the authorship of *The Guilds Of Dublin* (1929); *Attempt to Smash the ITGWU* (1924); *Documents of the First International* (1964) and *Fifty Years of Liberty Hall* (1959).

However, the latter publication, which was edited by Cathal O Shannon, makes no mention in the acknowledgements of Mr. Webb's contribution. The pamphlet *Attempt To Smash* was William (Bill) O'Brien's defence against the encroachment of Jim Larkin's new Union, it was a seminal document, the authorship of which would have not been assigned lightly and yet John Joseph Webb doesn't get a mention in the various histories and biographies of the ITGWU nor is he listed in the *Dictionary Of Irish Biography*.

Webb also wrote a pamphlet for the Catholic Truth Society of Ireland titled *The Spoliation of Irish Towns* (1925).

THE GUILDS OF DUBLIN

John J. Webb (1917)

To students of history, and especially to those who study the social conditions of the people in past times, there are few more interesting subjects than that of the regulation of industry before the period of

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