

The Liberal Theory of Industrialism and the Development of Industrial Relations in Ireland

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The Liberal Theory of Industrialism and Industrial Relations

THE CENTRAL CONCERNS of liberal theory with respect to industrial relations can be divided into one set of propositions concerning the effects on unions and employers of the 'take-off' into industrialisation and three further sets of propositions concerning the effects, following take-off, of long-term development towards an increasingly industrialised society. The major arguments regarding take-off and secular change can be stated as follows.

1 Worker and union militancy and radicalism peak early in the course of industrialisation and represent a protest against social dislocation occasioned by the rigours of industrial organisation and urban life. The faster the pace of industrialisation, the more severe the disjuncture with traditional patterns of life and the greater the degree of militancy with which workers respond (Kerr *et al.*, 1973: 218–9; Lipset, 1969: ch. 6). Industrial technology and its supposed 'imperatives' are attributed major, indeed almost exclusive, importance in influencing trends in behaviour and organisation. Other concomitants of industrialisation, such as the development of markets, growing regional and international economic interdependence, and the effects of business cycles, have virtually no place in liberal theory. The impact of take-off is, however, believed to be compounded by the social and political circumstances in which it is achieved. Of particular importance in this respect is the *sequencing* of 'national, political and industrial "revolutions"' in a country relative to the

rise of the labour movement' (Dunlop, 1958: 313 and ch. 8; cf. Kahn-Freund, 1972: 39–40; Commons, 1932: 683; Sturmthal, 1951; Kendall, 1975; Lorwin, 1954). Relatedly, it is noted that the social divisions of rural society may 'carry over' into industrial society through pre-capitalist traditions of militancy which continue to influence newly recruited industrial workers and their unions.¹

The three remaining sets of propositions of the liberal theory are addressed to long-run change in industrial relations.

2 Sustained employer resistance to union recognition and collective bargaining results in union demands becoming utopian and eventually revolutionary. The prospect of a spiral of politicisation, in which employer resistance and union militancy reinforce each other, leads in most national cases to a revision of employer strategy. A class compromise of a kind is achieved which allows a 'containment spiral' to take effect. The waning of employer resistance reduces significantly the *intensity* of industrial conflict. What Kerr calls the 'glacial impact' of institutionalised compromise gradually transforms industrial relations. Gradually the exercise of industrial authority comes to be shared between managers and managed. A 'constitutional approach' to the governance of work replaces confrontation. Following an early decline in the intensity of industrial conflict comes a long-run decline in the *level* of industrial conflict (Ross and Hartman, 1960). The progressive development of a 'constitutional approach' to the governance of the workplace—the elaboration of a 'web of rules', or the emergence of 'industrial citizenship', as the process is sometimes described—is the guarantor of long-run social integration and economic stability (Kerr, 1955; Slichter, Healy and Livernash, 1960; Flanders, 1970). Pluralist industrial relations strategy involves a rejection of 'monism' or 'unitarism'. Efforts at total control of employees' attitudes to employment are viewed as superfluous and damaging (Kerr, 1955: 16–7; Fox, 1966).

3 Geographical and social mobility increase in response to economic development, the spread of educational opportunity and the gradual growth of occupations requiring higher levels of skill (Kerr *et al.*, 1973: chs. 1 and 8). Class structures decompose and give way to social structures in which people's identities in the labour market are formed no longer on the basis of class allegiance but on the basis of occupation or 'status position'. Occupational identities and interests cannot be accommodated in large 'inclusive', multi-occupational unions. In consequence, general and industrial unions experience long-run decline at the expense of more

¹ For a somewhat different version of this approach see Gallie's discussion and critique of the 'Mann-Giddens' thesis (Gallie, 1983: ch. 11).

'exclusive' types of trade unions, such as craft and occupational unions (Kerr *et al.*, 1973: 274). Trade unions lose the capacity to act in concert in pursuit of the common interests of all workers.

4 Changes in social stratification and the institutionalisation of industrial conflict result in the scaling-down of trade union objectives. The very idea of labour organisations as 'component parts of class movements urging programmes of total reform' ceases to have meaning (Kerr *et al.*, 1973: 274). Politics and industrial relations become distinct spheres of activity, responding, as it were, to their own cycles. Cleavages in industry and politics arise around different issues. Political parties originating on the left open-out to embrace issues not traditionally polarised in terms of a left-right split and, as a result, the interests of unions and 'progressive (socialist, labour) parties' diverge (Dahrendorf, 1959: 267-318). The state continues to be powerful and active, but operates as an honest broker, overseeing the 'rules of the game', and protecting civil liberties in a society dominated by interest organisations.²

These propositions have had a major impact on sociological thought regarding the development of relations between employers and employees in western industrial nations. For adherents of the liberal canon, they are no less applicable to Third-World, Asian and east European nations (Kerr *et al.*, 1973). It will be argued in this paper that the development of Irish industrial relations confounds liberal theory in a number of major respects. The shortcomings of the liberal position will be examined by reviewing the Irish experience against each of the four sets of propositions in turn. In addition to testing the liberal propositions in the Irish case, the paper is concerned to advance alternative, and more empirically grounded, explanations of the forces that have shaped industrial relations in Ireland.

Working-class Militancy in Sociological Context: 1900-1922

In the period from about 1907 to 1920 unionisation first became a mass economic and social force in Ireland. Prior to the early twentieth century, only skilled craftsmen working in the towns and cities of the eastern,

² Clearly the liberal representation of the maturation of labour movements over the course of industrialisation carries strong undertones of the 'end of labour history'. Regulated or institutionalised industrial relations is presented as the really momentous social invention of industrialism. 'Constitutional' decision-making in industry, involving professional managers and workers organised independently in unions, halts the political and social momentum of industrial conflict. The study no less than the practice of industrial relations becomes properly concerned with the complex 'web of rules' through which the pragmatic day-to-day compromises between managers and workers receive expression (Dunlop, 1958).

southern, and western seaboard had attained significant levels of sustained union organisation. The majority of these craftsmen were members of Irish branches of several of the formidable British 'new model' unions (Clarkson, 1926; Keogh, 1982: ch. 2). It was a British trade union activist, James Larkin, who set off the avalanche of unionisation which began in 1907. The Irish Transport Union (later, the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union) was founded by Larkin in 1909, following a dispute with his own union, the British National Union of Dock Labourers. The ITGWU was to be at the centre of the remarkable transformation of Irish industrial relations in the years to 1920. The sequence of events during this period need only be considered here in outline.

The membership of unions affiliated to the Irish Trade Union Congress rose from about 30,000 in 1894 to 250,000 in 1920. The Irish Transport alone reached a membership level of over 100,000 by 1920 (Greaves, 1982). In very rough terms total trade union membership in that year represented about 25 per cent of wage earners. From the incomplete statistical data available on strike trends, it is clear that a major strike wave occurred during the period, with particularly high levels of strike participation registered during the years 1917 to 1920 (Fitzpatrick, 1980). From the many descriptive studies of strikes during the period, it is clear that industrial conflict was of unique intensity compared to subsequent strike waves (O'Connor, 1988; Greaves, 1982; Lysaght, 1982).

The period as a whole can be divided into two sub-periods, each characterised by a distinct cycle of unionisation and militancy. In the first period, covering the years from 1907 to the great Dublin lock-out of 1913–14, the self-styled syndicalist ITGWU concentrated on gaining membership and recognition in the towns and cities of the 'maritime economy' that had been the bulwarks of craft unionism. The urban membership drive of the nascent general union was centred on relatively mature working-class occupational communities of dockers, transport workers, millers and engineering workers. This drive for membership and also recognition met with concerted employer resistance, and resulted in a series of major lock-outs, culminating in the great Dublin lock-out of 1913–14, which all but destroyed the ITGWU. In the years 1914 to 1917 the union was virtually dormant. The years to 1920 witnessed the second cycle of unionisation and militancy, this time focused on rural areas, and in particular on agricultural labourers. The rank-and-file militancy of this second cycle showed signs of social radicalism. Land seizures and factory occupations became common. These initiatives were encouraged by the widespread collapse of civil order during the Anglo-Irish War. From 1919, attempts by employers to cut wages also spurred workers into militant action. The rhetoric and sometimes the tactics of trade union militancy were influenced by the

Bolshevik revolution (Mitchell, 1974: 141–2; Lysaght, 1982; Fitzpatrick, 1977 ch. 7).³

As outlined above, liberal theory attributes major importance to the traumas associated with the take-off into industrialisation in explaining the tendency for ‘worker protest to peak early in the course of industrialisation and decline in intensity thereafter’ (Kerr *et al.*, 1973: ch. 6). However, the intense strike wave and worker militancy in Ireland between 1907 and 1920 cannot meaningfully be regarded as a response to economic and social dislocations resulting from industrialisation. In many of the towns and rural areas in which working-class militancy was particularly intense, take-off into industrialisation in any real sense had yet to be attained—or reattained. In other areas with a more developed industrial base, militancy arose in a context of industrial stagnation or decline.

Table 1. Percentage of total workforce in agricultural employment in Ireland and other European countries, 1891–1971.

	Ireland	Great Britain	France	Italy	Sweden
1891	44.2 ^a	10.4	40.3	59.4 (1901)	53.9
1901	44.6 ^a	7.7	41.8	59.4	49.8
1911	43.0 ^a	8.1	42.7 (1906)	55.5	45.6
1926	51.3	6.0 (1931)	38.3	47.3 (1931)	35.4 (1930)
1951	39.6	5.0	27.2 (1954)	40.0	20.3
1961	35.2	3.6	20.3 (1962)	28.2	13.8
1971	25.4	2.5	12.2 (1975)	16.3	8.1

^a Irish data for 1891–1911 relate to all Ireland.

Sources: Data for European countries derived from Flora *et al.* (1983). Data for Ireland for 1891 derived from Coyne, ed. (1902: 65) and for 1901 and 1911 from the Census of Population for Ireland 1911, *General Report*, occupational tables.

The standard indicators of levels of industrialisation presented for Ireland and other European countries in Tables 1 and 2 indicate that in the 1890s and early 1900s overall levels of industrial employment and non-agricultural employment in Ireland were on a par with continental European countries, though well behind Great Britain, the world’s ‘first industrial nation’. The regional penetration of industrialisation in early twentieth century Ireland was nonetheless very uneven. The heaviest concentration of industrial employment was found in the North East, centred on Belfast. Generally, levels of industrial employment were lower in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries than they had been in

³ The most detailed accounts of union militancy during the period can be found in O’Connor (1988) and Lysaght (1982).

Table 2. Percentage of total workforce in industrial employment in Ireland and other European countries, 1891–1971.^a

	Ireland	Great Britain	France	Italy	Sweden
1891	27.2	44.5	28.1	23.7	14.4
1901	32.6	45.6	30.0	23.7	19.7
1911	33.8	44.6	29.5	26.8	24.7
1926	14.5	46.1	33.0	29.4	30.9
1951	24.4	49.2	35.7	30.4	40.6
1961	25.5	47.4	38.5	39.4	45.1
1971	31.5	42.2	34.7	42.2	40.3

^a Time points as in Table 1.

Sources: As in Table 1.

the early nineteenth century (Booth, 1902; Cullen, 1972). The available evidence suggests that the pace of output growth in Ireland over the period since the middle of the nineteenth century was slower than in any other European country (Kennedy *et al.*, 1988: ch. 1). Thus, in many parts of Ireland the nineteenth century and early 1900s witnessed 'deindustrialisation'. The 1890s saw the beginnings of an economic revival on this shrinking industrial base (Cullen, 1972). The circumstances of the Great War rendered uneven the fortunes of different sectors of Irish industry between 1914 and 1920. Sectors that could take advantage of war contracts prospered, as did parts of the food industry, but sectors that had relied heavily on imported raw materials or on export-markets were adversely affected (Riordan, 1920).

The relevant point here is that, even in the absence of reliable indicators of aggregate industrial output, liberalism's social dislocation theory is clearly redundant in explaining the intense worker militancy of early twentieth century Ireland. No severe disjuncture in living or working conditions was experienced by Irish industrial or agricultural workers such as might explain the extreme intensity of the industrial and class conflict of the period. An alternative explanation for the 'peaking of worker protest' and the course of union militancy in Ireland between 1907 and 1920 can be found in the interaction of three sets of factors: first, the two cycles of economic activity in industrial and agricultural Ireland; second, the progress of the Anglo-Irish War and the associated near-collapse of civil order in rural areas; and third, the response of employers and farmers to attempts by the unskilled to unionise.

The early success of Larkin and his Irish Transport Union in organising urban workers occurred against the background of industrial revival (Cullen, 1972). While the numbers employed in manufacturing generally continued to fall between 1891 and 1911, employment rose in occupations

in transport and communications which represented the early focus of unionisation. The rate of growth in occupations in the Census classification of 'general labourers' was only about one third of that achieved over the period 1841-81 (Booth, 1902; Census of Population, 1891; 1909; 1911). This might suggest that a combination of economic revival and slow-down in the growth of the labour supply at the base of the occupational structure contributed to the first cycle of unionisation and militancy in urban areas.

The second cycle of unionisation and militancy from about 1917 to 1920 occurred against an economic background of war-time food shortages, spiralling inflation and sharply falling real wage levels. In such conditions workers developed an intense conviction that employers and shop keepers were profiteering by creating artificial shortages and by hoarding goods (Fitzpatrick, 1977; O'Connor, 1988). Workers in urban-based industries faced highly uneven economic conditions, but the net employment situation in the towns appears to have been poor throughout the War. The position of agricultural labourers was more conducive to unionisation and militancy. Rural workers faced similar problems of inflation and relative deprivation to those faced by workers in the towns. However, soaring agricultural prices during the Great War led to a boom in farming. Rural labour markets were thus generally tighter than those in the towns, especially following the imposition of compulsory tillage, backed by legal minimum wages, between 1917 and 1919. The growth of agricultural trade unionism was dramatic. By the end of 1919 agricultural labourers had become the single biggest membership category of the Irish Transport, accounting for just under 30 per cent of the total union membership (Greaves, 1982: 259). More generally, the Irish Transport enjoyed spectacular membership growth and quickly became by far the largest trade union in Ireland, although its progress was very uneven geographically (Kenny, 1985; Fitzpatrick, 1977: 247).

'Modern' or revisionist explanations of the spectacular, but geographically uneven, rise in the unionisation of agricultural labourers usually stress the importance of the rise in tillage acreage. Because tillage is more labour intensive than pastoral farming, an increase in tillage acreage is understood to have increased the demand for labour. This in turn is taken to have enhanced the bargaining power and confidence of agricultural workers and increased their propensity to unionise and press claims on farmers. (Fitzpatrick, 1977: ch. 7; Kenny, 1985: ch. 3). The revisionist position among historians and historical geographers tends, at the same time, to down-play the role of resurgent nationalism in legitimising the strongly republican ITGWU and enhancing its attractions to wage earners (see esp. O'Connor, 1988). The participation of the

union's acting general secretary, James Connolly, in the 1916 Rising and his subsequent execution, gave the union a symbolically powerful place in the pantheon of Irish revolutionary martyrdom. During the Anglo-Irish War union officials were actively engaged in the independence movement. The union participated in a series of major political strikes and in the campaign against conscription (Mitchell, 1974). The potency of nationalism among rank-and-file trade unionists was apparent in a wave of breakaway activity by the Irish branches of British trade unions during and after the Anglo-Irish War.

The results obtained by modelling the county-level branch penetration of the ITGWU in 1920 throw interesting light on the mediate and proximate factors contributing to the dramatic growth of the union in the second cycle of unionisation and militancy during the First World War and Anglo-Irish War. Data on the incidence of branches by county are available for 1920. (Unfortunately, no data are available on the membership of branches, so the incidence of branches represents but a rough indicator of relative union strength in different counties.) Also available by county are data on tillage acreage in 1918, on changes in tillage acreage from pre-war levels in 1911, on approximate numbers of agricultural labourers employed on large commercial farms, on inter-county variations in contemporary nationalist political organisation, and on the incidence of rural militancy and conflict prior to the advent of unionisation ('outrages' during the Land War of 1879-82).

The results of regressions of 1920 ITGWU branch numbers by county on these and other control variables are reported in Table 3. Comparable data are not available for the six counties subsequently to be partitioned into Northern Ireland. In the Ulster counties with significant protestant and unionist populations, however, the ITGWU made little headway. This was due, no doubt, almost entirely to the union's nationalist pedigree.

The most dramatic result to emerge from the regression analysis is that branch incidence is very strongly associated with variations between counties in the size of the agricultural labouring class employed on large commercial farms. This variable is highly significant statistically ($p > 99$ per cent) and accounts for the greater part of the inter-county variance in branch incidence, as revealed in model 3.1. Variations in the size of the labouring populations working on large farms proves to be a much better predictor of ITGWU branch incidence than either the sizes of county populations or agricultural populations. The permanent agricultural workers on the large commercial farms of the east, the midlands and the Golden Vale constituted an agricultural proletariat. The scale of the farms on which they worked was such that they were less tied to farm owners by

Table 3. Influences on ITGWU branch penetration in 1920 (BRANCH), standardised OLS coefficients.^a

Independent variables ^(a)	Model			
	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.4
AGPROL	0.90**	0.95**	0.86**	0.88**
TILLAGE		-0.32		
TILLRATE		-0.24		
SINN FEIN			0.06	
OUTRAGES			0.22*	
ACTIVISM				0.26**
TOWN BRANCHES				0.12
R ²	0.81	0.85	0.88	0.87
F	124.30**	41.38**	66.12**	63.84**
DW	1.56†	1.99†	2.70‡	2.59‡
F.Ch.				15.18**

Statistical significance at the 1% and 5% levels is indicated by ** and *; † indicates the absence of first-order serial correlation at the 1% level; ‡ indicates an inconclusive Durbin Watson test. (The DW value of 2.59 in equation 3.4 is just at the boundary for an inconclusive test: 4 - 2.59 = 1.41; the upper limit of the inconclusive zone, with N = 26 and three variables, is also 1.41.)

^a All results relate to the 26 counties of what was to become the Irish Free State. BRANCH = numbers of ITGWU branches by county in 1920; AGPROL = numbers of permanent agricultural labourers employed on holdings of 100 or more acres (1912); TILLAGE = tillage acreage by county in 1918; TILLRATE = the percentage rate of change in tillage acreage between 1911 and 1918, by county; SINN FEIN = members of Sinn Fein per thousand of the population by county in 1919. (The variable has been scored on a scale with a minimum value of 1 [0-100 members] and maximum value of 7 [600-1,000 members]); OUTRAGES = agrarian outrages per 10,000 of the population by county during 1880-82. (The variable has been scored on a scale with a minimum value of 1 [up to 10 outrages] and a maximum value of 5 [40 or more outrages]); ACTIVISM = an index combining unweighted scores on the scales of SINN FEIN and OUTRAGES; TOWN BRANCHES = number of branches based in urban areas in 1917, by county. Information on sources is available from the author.

bonds of paternalism and deference than farm workers on smaller farms. Whereas many of those working on smaller farms in the west and north west might still have harboured hopes of benefitting from land redistribution under the Land Acts of 1881-1909, labourers employed on large commercial farms were probably more resigned to remaining wage workers permanently. In areas where labourers still harboured hopes of becoming farmers, the ITGWU faced competition from local Land and Labour Associations. These organisations combined trade union functions with a programme of lobbying for the establishment of small holdings

through land redistribution. Where the class basis of agriculture was more propitious for simple trade unionism, many of these associations were absorbed by the ITGWU (see Greaves, 1982; Fitzpatrick, 1977: ch. 7).

A further interesting result to emerge is that the impact of proximate economic factors, like the level of tillage acreage in counties, or differences in the scale of the shift into tillage farming, appears a good deal more indirect or remote than suggested in the historical literature. Model 3.2 includes tillage acreage in 1918 and the rate of increase in tillage acreage over 1911 levels. The rationale for including the former variable is straightforward: the scale of tillage farming represents a rough indicator of county-level differences in the gross demand for agricultural labour. Including the rate of change in tillage acreage as a variable tests the hypothesis that the propensity of agricultural workers to unionise may have been affected by *changes in the demand for labour*, in addition to the current level of demand. Both aspects of the new pattern of agriculture from 1917 have been linked with the explosion of ITGWU branch activity in rural Ireland (see Kenny, 1982: ch. 3). In model 3.2 the coefficients on both variables are incorrectly signed and statistically insignificant. Logging tillage acreage to allow for the possibility of a non-linear relationship with the number of branches produced no better results. Tests for interaction effects, making the impact of tillage acreage and changes in tillage acreage depend on variations in the size of the agricultural proletariat, also produced negative results.⁴

Further interesting results emerge when levels of Sinn Fein membership and Land War outrages are entered in model 3.3. The coefficient on the outrages variable is significant and positively signed. This suggests that traditions of rural militancy influenced the early growth of trade unionism. The coefficient for the variable measuring levels of Sinn Fein membership by county is also positively signed but insignificant. The correlation between county-level Sinn Fein membership and Land War outrages is strong ($r = 0.7$). Given such a high level of inter-correlation between independent variables, and the small number of cases available to estimate the model, simultaneously entering the two variables results in multicollinearity. The options available are to derive principal components

⁴ The only specification of a tillage acreage variable that produced statistically notable results was where tillage acreage was expressed as a ratio of numbers working in agriculture (including farmers and 'relatives assisting'). Such a variable might be regarded as a very rough indicator of county-level differences in the balance of demand and supply of agricultural labour. When this variable was entered it produced a statistically significant coefficient. The coefficient was negatively signed, however, contrary to theoretical expectation, and would suggest that where the balance of demand over supply favoured workers, there was a lower propensity to organise. The result is thus probably a statistical accident and can be ignored.

scores for these variables, or to combine the variables into an index to measure variations in underlying levels of social and political activism—past and current—in different counties. The former strategy is, however, also compromised by the small N, so in model 3.4 an 'index of activism' is entered. The coefficient is correctly signed and significant; an F test confirms that the addition of the index significantly improves the explanatory power of the model.

The results overall can be interpreted as suggesting that traditions of social and political activism at county level positively influenced the spread of unionisation to rural areas between 1917 and 1920. The dominant factor appears to have been a tradition of rural militancy prior to the advent of unionisation. The stronger were pre-existing traditions of rural activism, the greater appears to have been the predisposition of workers to organise in unions. Contemporary Sinn Fein strength seems to have exerted a similar influence. The greater the strength Sinn Fein had attained at county level, the more prone workers were to organise collectively, or possibly, as well, the more receptive they tended to be to the blandishments of the 'republican' Irish Transport. The union's activities, of course, inevitably conflicted with Sinn Fein's ideology of class harmony. Model 3.4 introduces as a variable the number of urban branches of the union in existence in 1917. This was included to control for any positive effect that pre-existing ITGWU branch activity in county towns up to 1917 might have had on the general growth of branches (see Kenny, 1982: ch. 3). The results provide no evidence of any such effect.

Given the shortcomings of the available data, the results of the modelling exercise must obviously be regarded as tentative. Nonetheless, by integrating them with the historical record, a number of conclusions can be drawn regarding the roots of unionisation and working-class militancy in Ireland in the early decades of the century. The pace, character or process of industrialisation is not directly relevant to an understanding of the scale and intensity of worker militancy during the period 1907–20. The most militant sections of the urban working class were those working and living in relatively mature communities in the main cities and towns of the maritime economy. The most highly organised and militant agricultural workers were labourers on larger commercial farms who had probably become reconciled to their status as an agricultural proletariat. The growth of trade unionism in town and country thus reflected the mediate influence of dispositions formed by stable social arrangements, rather than putative processes of social dislocation or 'anomie'. The demands of Irish workers during this period give no hint of any atavistic rejection of industrial or commercial economic relations. What is striking, rather, is the precocious nature of much of the militancy of the period, considering that the great

majority of the workers involved had little tradition of trade unionism (cp, for example, O'Connor, 1988 and Cronin, 1979: ch. 5).

On the other hand, liberal theory's emphasis on the role of employer resistance in spurring working-class militancy is broadly consistent with the record in Ireland. After the first intense set-piece confrontations with new unionism in the towns, employers appeared to accept, however grudgingly, that union recognition and collective bargaining could not be fought off indefinitely. Employer resistance to the rudiments of collective bargaining was also intense in rural Ireland from 1918 to 1920. This probably contributed to the volatility, violence and intermittent radicalism of rank-and-file militancy in the countryside. Here the onset of the post-war slump in agricultural prices from late 1920 defused rural class struggle by undermining working-class power and confidence. So a spiral of politicisation failed to take hold in Irish industrial relations, in part because working-class insurgency in the face of intense employer militancy was not sustained for sufficiently long to have critically transformed the socio-political values of workers.

In sum, then, cyclical recovery in the urban economy, followed by the abnormal economic and social conditions of wartime in urban and rural economies alike, gave rise to economic conditions conducive to unionisation and militancy. The proximate economic influences on the surge of unionisation between 1917 and 1920 appear to have been those that affected more or less all agricultural labourers: in particular, the prosperity of employers, a general tightening of labour markets, inflation and stagnant or falling real wages. Legal provision for guaranteed minimum wages was also important in that it provided the ITGWU with a prop in its dealings with farmers and cast the union in the role of custodian of public policy (Greaves, 1982: ch. 10). Variations between counties in unionisation appear from the data available not to have been affected in any direct or simple way either by the scale of tillage farming or the growth in tillage acreage.

In addition, the subsidiary liberal idea of 'sequence' effects is useful in a number of respects in appreciating the distinctiveness of Irish industrial relations. The geographical pattern of unionisation appears to have been influenced by nineteenth century traditions of rural agitation and by contemporary nationalist political mobilisation. More generally, the sequencing of industrialisation and unionisation in Ireland was unusual owing to the influence of British institutions and ideas. At independence, trade unionism in Ireland was organised along similar lines to British trade unionism, in spite of the dramatic difference between the two countries in levels of industrial and economic development. Strong craft and occupational unions coexisted with industrial and general unions in a fragmented

trade union system. The occurrence of the national revolution was to fragment Irish trade unionism further by causing a wave of breakaway activity in the Irish branches of virtually all of these types of British unions.

The simultaneity of national revolution and mass unionisation contributed both to the emergence and containment of social radicalism in the period 1918–20, and at the same time to the marginalisation of the Labour Party in the formative period of Irish politics. The land seizures and factory occupations were spurred by the political upheaval of the Anglo-Irish War and Civil War and the virtual collapse of civil order over much of the country. Radicalism was also contained by the balance of class forces in the national revolution. The revolutionary political elite sought to contain class conflict during the struggle for independence, initially to promote united insurgency, and later to placate farming and business interests and maintain the status quo (Strauss, 1951: 265; Laffan, 1985: 205). In this they were aided by the successors of Larkin and Connolly and the leaders of the Irish Labour Party and Trades Union Congress. In general, labour leaders during period 1917–20 drew back from rank-and-file militancy, using their energies instead to build and consolidate trade union organisation.

In deference to the strength of the nationalist movement, and constrained by the weakness of party organisation at constituency level, the Labour Party failed to contest the first election held under universal adult suffrage in 1918. This election ultimately led to the establishment of the independent Irish State. The civil war, which began shortly after the truce in 1922 and continued into 1923, set the mould of party politics in Ireland. By mobilising support around the national question, the parties drew electoral support from across the class structure.

The critical formative influences on Irish industrial relations are thus to be found in the interaction of mediate influences that imply social dispositions formed in a context of stability rather than dislocation, influences arising from cyclical and wartime economic conditions, and the kind of sequence effects viewed by liberal theory as little more than subsidiary influences on the impact of industrialisation.

Trends in 'Exclusive' and 'Inclusive' Trade Unionism

Liberal theory predicts a secular rise in the membership shares of craft and occupational unions at the expense of general and industrial unions. This trend gradually attenuates unions' inclination or capacity to act in concert to achieve common objectives. In short, liberal theory argues from trends

in organisation to trends in union strategy, predicting a secure future for trade unions, but the end of *trade union movements*.

The level of trade union 'density' attained by Irish unions increased from less than 20 per cent in the 1920s to a peak of over 60 per cent in 1980 (Roche and Larragy, 1989: 22). Short- and medium-term fluctuations around this rising secular trend can be attributed to business cycle and institutional influences on unionisation (Roche and Larragy, 1990). The membership of Irish unions also became occupationally and industrially more diverse over this period. Of particular sociological interest, however, are trends in the distribution of this growing level of union membership across unions along the continuum from 'inclusive' to 'exclusive' unionism. General unions are the most inclusive of all unions in aspiring to organise the 'entire working class' or workforce, whereas pure craft and professional unions are the most exclusive in restricting membership to trained members of the craft or profession. Often craft and professional unions impose barriers to entry in order to restrict labour supply. They also try to 'police' the work of members to preserve the 'integrity' of the craft or profession against encroachment by other occupations. Between these extremes of union character fall unions of more or less inclusive membership and ambition. Industrial unions and unions organising workers engaged in broadly similar or 'allied occupations'—possibly in different industries—are closest to general unions. Unions of single occupations are closest to pure craft and professional unions, differing perhaps only in their inability to exercise closure over entry to the occupation, or to control the boundaries of the jobs done by their members.

Table 4 presents the distribution of union membership across unions grouped into these three broad types at ten-year intervals since 1930. Data for 1985 are also presented, as this is the most recent year for which

Table 4. Percentage distribution of union membership by organisational type.^a

	General unions	(Quasi-) industrial and allied occupational unions	(Ex-) craft and occupational unions
1930	38.4	30.8	30.8
1940	46.0	27.1	26.9
1950	54.8	20.9	24.2
1960	56.8	19.5	23.7
1970	52.3	19.6	27.7
1980	49.5	20.7	29.8
1985	45.2	22.5	32.3

^a The membership of a small number of unions of indeterminable status has been omitted. Rows may not sum to one-hundred due to rounding.

Source: Dues Data Series on Ireland, available from the author.

Table 5. Percentage distribution of union membership by organisational type (excluding general unions).^a

		(Quasi- industrial	Allied- occupations	Occupational	(Ex-)craft
Blue-collar unions	1930	36.0 (6)	9.1 (7)	1.3 (2)	53.2 (50)
	1940	28.2 (7)	14.3 (7)	0.9 (4)	56.6 (50)
	1950	25.2 (5)	13.6 (7)	0.0	61.2 (44)
	1960	22.4 (4)	16.4 (8)	0.0	61.2 (42)
	1970	14.9 (4)	20.9 (8)	2.4 (2)	61.8 (26)
	1980	9.3 (3)	17.9 (7)	2.6 (1)	70.2 (22)
	1985	7.8 (3)	19.2 (7)	2.9 (1)	70.0 (16)
White-collar unions	1930	31.8 (6)	22.9 (8)	45.2 (16)	
	1940	40.8 (5)	19.4 (11)	39.8 (25)	
	1950	33.9 (5)	20.8 (10)	45.2 (34)	
	1960	30.5 (5)	21.0 (11)	48.4 (40)	
	1970	22.0 (7)	24.3 (13)	53.7 (43)	
	1980	13.6 (5)	34.1 (12)	52.1 (38)	
	1985	12.2 (5)	34.9 (13)	52.9 (33)	

^a Percentages express the shares held by different types of unions of total blue-collar and white-collar union memberships for the years shown (the membership of general unions being excluded from these totals). Rows may not sum to one-hundred due to rounding. Membership of a small number of unions of indeterminable status has been excluded. Figures in parentheses show numbers of unions in each category.

Source: As for Table 4.

reliable data can be obtained.⁵ The terms 'quasi-industrial' unions and 'ex-craft' unions are used in the tables to indicate that not all industrial unions aspire to complete organisation of their industrial domain, and that many craft unions, though originating in organisations restricted solely to apprenticed tradesmen, have 'opened' and admitted semi-skilled workers over time. This point is elaborated later. The table indicates that the share of total union membership organised by general unions remains by far the largest of any union type. General unions, quasi-industrial unions, and unions organising allied occupations combined, still in 1985 organised 68 per cent of all Irish trade union members—more than double the combined share of craft and occupational unions.

If the level of membership accounted for by inclusive unions is inconsistent with liberal theory, the *trend* in membership shares might still be interpreted as providing it with some support. The period covered by

⁵ In interpreting relative shares for that year it has to be borne in mind that 1985 was the trough of a deep labour market recession. This would have affected the membership share of the more 'exposed' general unions more than other union types, and would, thus, have led to a short-run cyclical drag on the relative performance of open unions.

the data appears to break down into two distinct sub-periods. During the first, from the 1930s to about 1960, the trend favours general unions. The share of the intermediate union types declines sharply, as does that of craft and occupational unions. From then on, however, the share of intermediate types fluctuates around a fairly level trend; the share of general unions declines and that of occupational and craft unions (in fact, of occupational unions alone) rises. On closer inspection, however, the support provided by these data is far from compelling.

First of all, the unions classified by type in Table 4 have themselves undergone significant change. General unions have in practice become progressively more general or inclusive over time. Their ambition to organise workers of all industries and occupations is closer to their actual achievement in recent years than in the past. The 45 per cent of trade union membership accounted for by general unions in 1985 is much more heterogeneous in occupational and industrial terms than the 57 per cent organised in 1960. It follows that the inclusive unions have been capable of accommodating an increasingly diverse membership, whereas the prediction of Kerr and his associates was that occupational identities would become increasingly unmanageable in unions of this type. A similar trend holds at the other end of the organisational spectrum, at least for craft unions. A major trend among craft unions for many years has been to engage in mergers, where necessary, with contiguous craft unions. As a result, many craft unions are now in reality conglomerate organisations of craftsmen and unskilled workers in related job territories. Thus, the rising share held by craft and occupational unions since the 1960s masks the growth of occupational diversity within at least some unions of this type. A final problem concerns the allocation of unions to the typology. Any typology of union type or character inevitably gives rise to difficult cases, and in the typology of Tables 4 and 5 the difficult cases arise in the occupational unions category. Several unions defined as occupational unions in the breakdowns of Tables 4 and 5 might arguably be better defined as industrial unions. The Irish Bank Officials' Association is a case in point. The IBOA organises the great majority of officials in Irish banks, from entry grade up to, and including, management levels. Thus, it might be regarded as an industrial union of all bankers. However, the IBOA does not attempt to organise manual and craft workers in the industry, and has long adopted an exclusive strategy which has involved remaining outside the ICTU and avoiding alliances with blue-collar unions. So it seems more valid to define the union as an exclusive occupational union. At the same time, the vertical integration of different levels of the same occupation in IBOA, and in other similar unions, means that unions in the occupational category range from small civil service grade associations,

representing only workers at the same level in the public service, to much wider ranging occupational unions taking in all grades from the bottom to the top of a particular profession. In other words, the changing distribution of membership shares across inclusive and exclusive unions masks growing internal occupational and industrial diversity across nearly the whole range of union types—a trend inconsistent with liberal theory's predictions.

A second reason for caution in interpreting organisational trends as favouring these predictions is that there seems nothing inexorable about the overall trend towards occupational unions since the 1960s. Of particular relevance in this respect has been the upsurge of merger activity involving occupational unions in recent years. A notable example is the declared intention of three separate unions of teachers and a union of lecturers to consider merger into one industrial union for education; an interim federal organisation of teaching unions has already been formed. Again, a significant number of civil service grade unions and staff associations are merging into increasingly conglomerate unions in the public sector. These currently comprise such a significant share of the 'closed' unions category that the outcome of their merger activities may decisively affect the future overall trend. Finally, the merger in 1990 of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union and the Federated Workers' Union of Ireland into the self-styled 'super union', SIPTU, has resulted in new recruitment and organisation campaigns which could lead to a revival in the membership share of general unions.

One last reason for scepticism regarding the long-run sociological significance of the overall organisational trend since the 1960s emerges if we consider white-collar and blue-collar unions separately (omitting general unions from the analysis). This is done in Table 5. The table indicates that within the blue-collar group the most salient trend is the decline of quasi-industrial unionism. This has not occurred through organisational disintegration, resulting from the conflicting pressures exerted by a diverse membership, but typically because the unions affected suffered from the long-run decay of their industrial domains. An example is the Irish Shoe and Leather Workers' Union, which transferred to the ITGWU when the Irish leather industry collapsed in the wake of increased international competition. More important is the trend among white-collar unions, where occupational unionism appears to have reached a plateau and the major development is the sharp growth of conglomerate unions of allied occupations. Given that the white-collar workforce is destined for future relative growth, and that recent merger activity appears to reinforce the trend apparent in the table, the prototypical union form may well be the large conglomerate and not Kerr's narrow craft, occupational and professional union. It is also significant in this respect that so diverse have

some major white-collar unions of this type become, for example, The Manufacturing, Science and Finance Union, that they are increasingly described as general unions or 'white-collar general unions'.

Several further features of the trend in union organisation in Ireland bear comment in regard to the question of fragmentation. The first is the long-run decline which has occurred in the number of unions relative to the number of union members. In 1930 in the region of 100 unions and associations organised about 104,000 workers. In 1985 83 unions and associations organised 500,000 workers. Also relevant is the level of organisational concentration. The share of membership held by the top five unions in 1980 was 56 per cent—the same level of concentration as in 1930, though a drop from the high point of 63 per cent reached in the 1960s. In terms of the predictions of liberal theory, organisational concentration might be expected to have undergone secular decline as an outcome of growth in occupational and grade-based unionism. The 'monopoly' of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions as the peak federation of Irish unions is likewise relevant in considering trends in organisational cohesion. ICTU-affiliated unions have organised in the region of 90 per cent of trade union members since the federation was re-established in 1959, following a 1945 split which led to the establishment of two rival federations. Attempts by white-collar unions to establish a separate white-collar federation have had little effect on ICTU's monopoly: the vehicle of white-collar exclusivism, the Irish Conference of Professional and Service Associations, has remained ineffectual.

One secular trend that has gone contrary to any tendency towards fragmentation is the declining share of union membership organised by unions with headquarters in the United Kingdom—'British unions' in the parlance of the Irish trade union world. The British-Irish divide has long been a source of deep conflict in collective bargaining and policy-making within the ICTU. Most British unions are philosophically opposed to centralised, national wage bargaining and particularly to tripartite agreements involving government. The preference of most British unions for 'free collective bargaining' contrasts with the more pragmatic approach of Irish unions. The share of British union membership in total membership, and commensurately the influence of British unions on the policies of the Irish labour movement, have declined steadily over time. In 1930 about 30 per cent of Irish trade union members were represented in British unions, compared with 14 per cent in the mid-1980s. The declining membership share of British unions can be accounted for in part by the prolonged influence of nationalism. Nationalist sentiment appears to have both encouraged secession by the Irish branches of British unions and retarded their membership growth (Roche, forthcoming).

What, then, may be emphasised is the degree to which the Irish case deviates from the liberal pluralist prediction of an increasingly sectionalist trade unionism, fragmented by occupational interests, and progressively less capable of conceiving of itself as a 'movement' transcending the immediate priorities of its many component groups. Though already fragmented by the circumstances of their early development, Irish unions have had sufficient capacity for concerted action to enter centralised wage agreements in nineteen of the twenty-nine 'wage rounds' which have occurred since 1946. Four such agreements have formally involved government in tripartite deals. The objectives of the ICTU in centralised tripartite bargaining have included 'wage solidarity', tax reform, employment creation and the preservation and extension of social policy. The degree to which these objectives have been attained is a subject of continuing trade union and academic debate. And it cannot be denied that the fragility of cohesion in the trade union movement and the limited authority of the ICTU have been evident in such centralised bargaining (Roche, 1987a; Hardiman, 1988). Yet the evolution of trade union organisation in the course of industrialisation has not rendered it impossible, or progressively more difficult, for unions in Ireland to act in a concerted manner, or to pursue policies which are in significant respects class-oriented. The ideal of trade unions as components of a social movement has not altogether disappeared; it remains a compelling ideal, albeit one that meets with variable support from different types of trade unions and different trade union leaders. Though the alliances of unions involved in centralised bargaining have always been contingent and thus insecure, they have nonetheless pursued social democratic objectives that challenge market outcomes in the common interest of working people. Acting concertedly to influence macro-economic and social policy, unions in Ireland have retained a pivotal influence over the granting or withholding of consent by employees to government policy. Some sixty years after the Irish state first began actively to promote industrialisation, unions still debate the mission of their organisations. Though no longer engaging in militant class insurgency, they are still capable of creating alliances which transcend narrow occupational interests. The future of such alliances is open and not predetermined by an inexorable 'logic of industrialism'.

That no clear trends towards 'exclusive' trade unionism or progressive fragmentation can be identified in the Irish case points to a number of weaknesses in liberal theory's grasp of the effects on union organisation and strategy of industrialisation and economic development. The departure of craft unions from exclusive organisational strategies and the growing prominence of unions of allied occupations can be attributed in part to the effects on union policies of technological and industrial

change. Changing technology in many instances blurred established lines of demarcation between crafts and other occupations, making it more difficult for exclusive unions to control job boundaries and thus to restrict these jobs to their members. If the work traditionally done by union members can be allocated to semi-skilled workers, or to the members of other craft or occupational unions, a union may be forced to respond by trying to organise the potential substitute workers. This can then result in the merger of craft unions into a craft conglomerate; in the admission of semi-skilled workers; or in the addition of allied non-craft occupations to a core craft membership.

Another force linked with economic development but going counter to fragmentation is the state's policy of encouraging trade union 'rationalisation'. The impetus behind this policy is the belief that union multiplicity encourages inter-union conflict and compromises economic growth. A series of legislative initiatives by successive Irish governments have addressed this issue. It has been made progressively more difficult for groups of workers to establish new unions. As well as encouraging newly unionising occupational groups to opt for representation in existing unions, this policy has also made it harder for disaffected groups to secede from unions in order to set up more exclusive organisations. State policy favouring large inclusive unions also gave unions like the Irish Transport an advantage in organising the new workforces of incoming multi-national companies. The process of change within unions themselves is further inimical to fragmentation and exclusivism. Much of liberal writing on change in trade unions has focused on how processes of 'union maturation' transform unions from militant organisations to 'sleepy bureaucracies' (Lester, 1958). Other effects of 'maturation' should also be recognised. As unions become more concerned to represent members 'professionally', introducing to this end an increasing range of services and 'selective incentives', the size-threshold for financial viability probably rises. Craft and occupational unions tend to be small unions, and such unions are particularly vulnerable to financial pressure arising from membership setbacks, inflation and relative improvements in the services and benefits offered by larger unions. Unlike larger organisations, they may be unable to scale-down administrative overheads to weather financial difficulties. Financial vulnerability to merger with predatory inclusive organisations has long been a weakness of exclusive unions, and such vulnerability has probably increased with the general 'professionalisation' of union activities.

The overall conclusion must therefore be that the prediction of an inexorable drift towards exclusive unionism lacks validity in the Irish case. Irish trade unions remain capable of operating in concert as a 'movement'.

The impact of industrial and technological development on trade union structure and strategy has been more complex than grasped by liberal theory. The future, with respect both to trade union structure and strategy, is open rather than predetermined.

The Development of Pluralist Industrial Relations Practices

The *conduct* of industrial relations in Ireland has evolved more or less along 'liberal pluralist' lines, but the *outcome* of liberal pluralist practices has not been as predicted. Little development in industrial relations institutions or practices occurred in the new Irish State until after the Second World War. During the period of intense industrial and social conflict from 1907 to 1920 Irish employers were already retreating from dogmatic opposition to the unionisation of the unskilled, and were pragmatically accommodating to collective bargaining (O'Connor, 1988). Through its membership of the International Labour Organisation, independent Ireland was bound by resolutions concerning the right to freedom of association and the promotion of collective bargaining. The Irish constitution of 1937 granted citizens the right to 'form' associations and unions.

The establishment of the Labour Court in 1946 was a watershed in Irish industrial relations. The Court was established to provide a facility for conciliation or adjudication in industrial disputes. It was philosophically disposed towards encouraging the spread of collective bargaining, and intervened early in disputes over union recognition in a number of industries. While the Labour Court was beginning to foster a pluralist model of 'good industrial relations' in the private sector, collective bargaining was also gaining acceptance in the public services. As a result of developments from the late 1940s, civil service unions and associations gained recognition as representative organisations in conciliation and arbitration schemes.⁶ As unionisation increased, a system of collective bargaining emerged which was dominated by multi-employer and multi-union bargaining units. Wage bargaining came to be heavily influenced by a series of recurring economy-wide 'wage rounds'. In establishing an economy-wide 'orbit of coercive comparison' for wage rises, the industrial bargaining structure virtually 'took wages out of competition' across the entire economy.

Certain elements of pluralist industrial relations were thus in place

⁶ They were not, however, to enjoy the same strike immunities as private sector workers until the 1980s.

Table 6. The growth of professional personnel management.**A.** Estimated national totals of personnel managers in firms with different levels of employment (1964 and 1973)

	Employing less than 100	Employing 100-499	Employing over 500	All Firms
1964	21 ^a	16 ^a	53	90
1973	93 ^a	135 ^a	155	383

B. Estimated number of firms with a designated personnel office, 1981-82, in different sectors

Manufacturing/industrial (including construction)	550
Financial	70
Other services/distribution etc.	150
Total	770

^a Estimates are likely to be imprecise due to survey sampling errors. Very small firms (less than 20 employees in 1964 and less than 25 employees in 1975) were excluded from the surveys.

Sources: Data for 1964 and 1973 are derived from results reported in Gorman *et al.* (1975: 36-9). Data for 1981-2 are derived from Institute of Public Administration (1982).

early in state's history, while other elements evolved slowly but progressively. From the 1960s state development agencies successfully followed a policy of encouraging foreign companies to adapt to local practices. Many incoming international firms concluded 'pre-production' agreements with unions covering recognition and procedural arrangements for the conduct of industrial relations.⁷ The 'constitutional' approach to the governance of the workplace entered a new phase during the 1960s and 1970s with the professionalisation of personnel and industrial relations management. Up to then, apart from in large enterprises, industrial relations activity was mostly conducted at industry level. It was at that level that wage bargaining was concentrated and there was little more to industrial relations. From the 1960s, workplace bargaining and associated policies and procedures began to be elaborated, and enterprise-level industrial relations assumed growing importance.

Table 6 indicates the increase in the number of professional personnel managers and departments. In a survey of 141 manufacturing companies in 1984 Murray (1984: 21) found that 74 per cent of companies had a personnel function. Compared with the situation in the mid-1960s, when only 4 per cent of companies had a personnel executive reporting to the company's chief executive, in 1984 the head of personnel was directly accountable to the top manager in 84 per cent of companies with a

⁷ A review of industrial relations in multi-nationals in the early 1980s, concluded that they were not 'materially different from home-based companies' (Kelly and Brannick, 1985).

personnel function; and 24 per cent of personnel directors had a seat on company boards. Further, almost 90 per cent of companies claimed to have a written personnel policy. So-called 'comprehensive agreements', covering pay, conditions and procedures, became more common and fixed-term agreements became standard (McCarthy *et al.*, 1975). Management education in personnel and industrial relations also expanded in universities, third-level colleges and professional institutes like the Irish Management Institute and the Institute of Personnel Management. The canons of 'good industrial relations' taught in higher education and professional bodies were stridently pluralist in character.

Studies conducted during the 1970s and 1980s indicated that techniques of 'rational' personnel and industrial administration—such as selection, training, employee appraisal, disputes and grievance procedures—were by then extensively used (Gunnigle and Shivanath, 1988; Keating, 1987; Murray, 1984; Wallace, 1981; Gorman *et al.*, 1975). During the 1960s, in contrast, they were seldom used even in large companies (Tomlin, 1966: ch. 15). Productivity bargaining, some of it certainly spurious, also became common during the 1960s and 1970s (McCarthy, 1982; O'Brien, 1981). The growth of professionalisation and rationalisation was encouraged by the main employers' industrial relations body, the Federated Union of Employers (later the Federation of Irish Employers). The Federation followed a policy of broadly supporting collective bargaining in companies where some degree of unionisation had occurred. During the 1960s and 1970s, FUE increased its level of penetration of Irish business and developed an extensive set of services for member firms (Commission of Inquiry on Industrial Relations, 1981: ch. 4; O'Brien, 1987).

The evidence that a process of extensive and intensive professionalisation and rationalisation in the management of Irish industrial relations gathered pace during the 1960s and 1970s is thus compelling. The changes which occurred at the level of the firm endorsed the basic principles of liberal pluralism. Collective bargaining remained the cornerstone of professional industrial relations and personnel management. The new techniques and practices were implemented with a view to rationalising collective bargaining, and often to extending its scope. By the end of the 1970s pluralism's 'constitutional approach to the governance of work' reigned almost supreme in Irish industrial relations.

The question that then arises is what effect these changes had on industrial relations and on the policies of trade unions. There is no simple answer to this question. But what can be suggested is that a number of trends and developments indicate that the consequences of professionalisation, in all its forms, have been a good deal more complex than is presumed in the liberal pluralist model. The liberal pluralist claim that the *intensity*

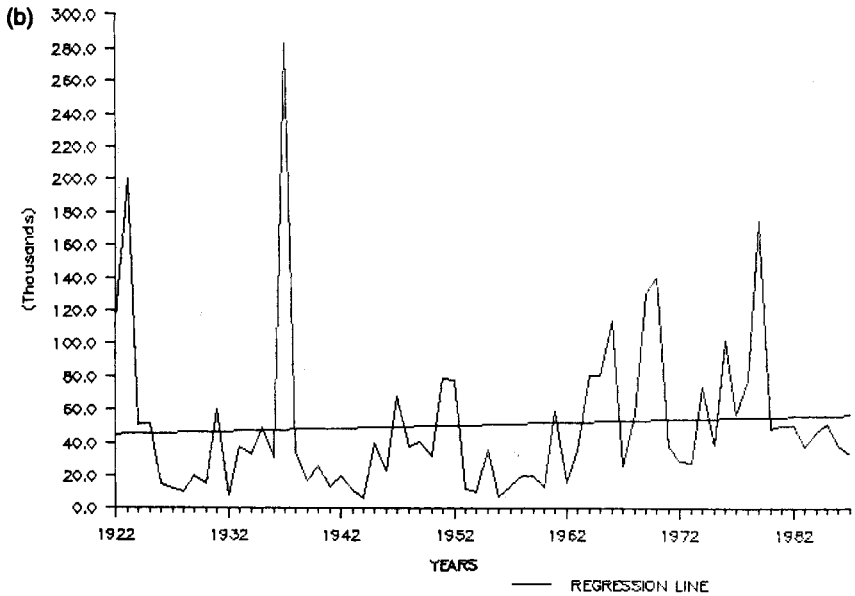
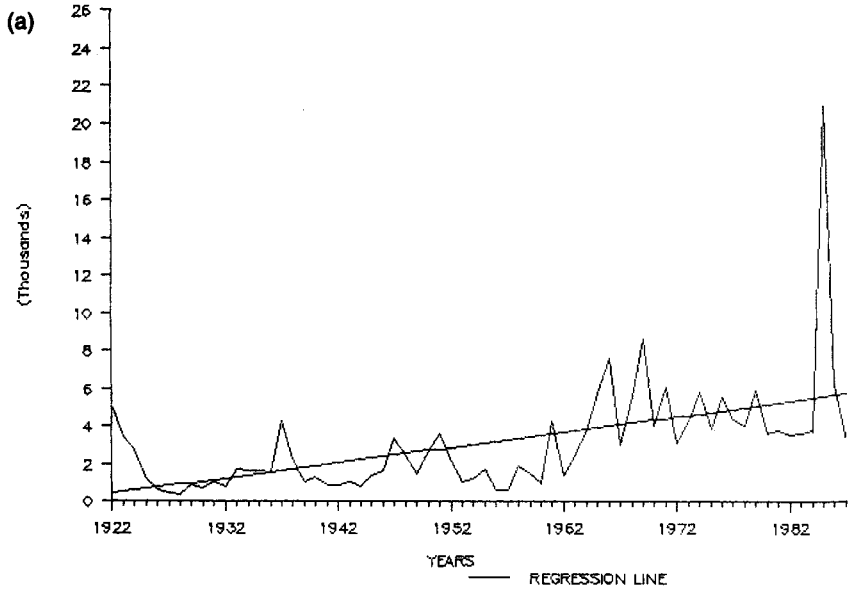


Figure 1. (a) Workers involved in industrial disputes and (b) working days lost, annually per hundred thousand civilian employees at work.

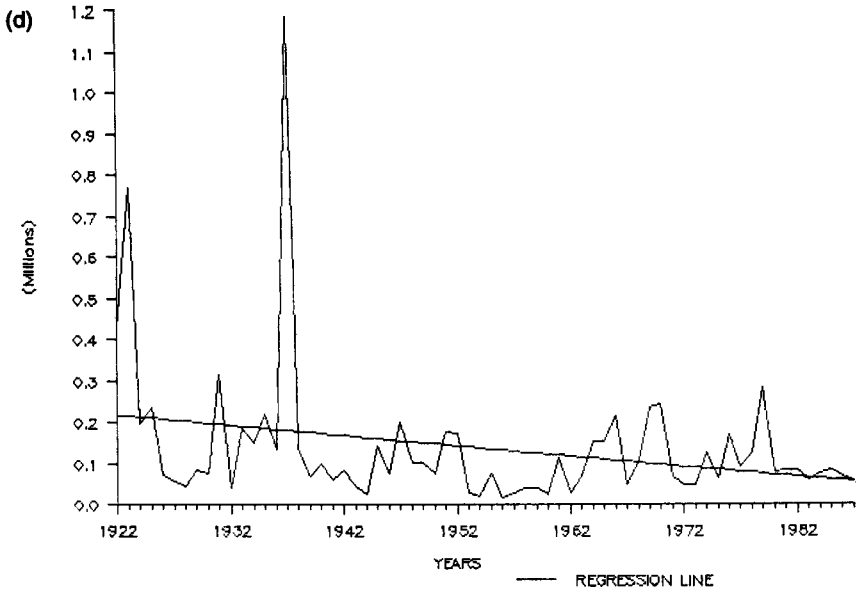
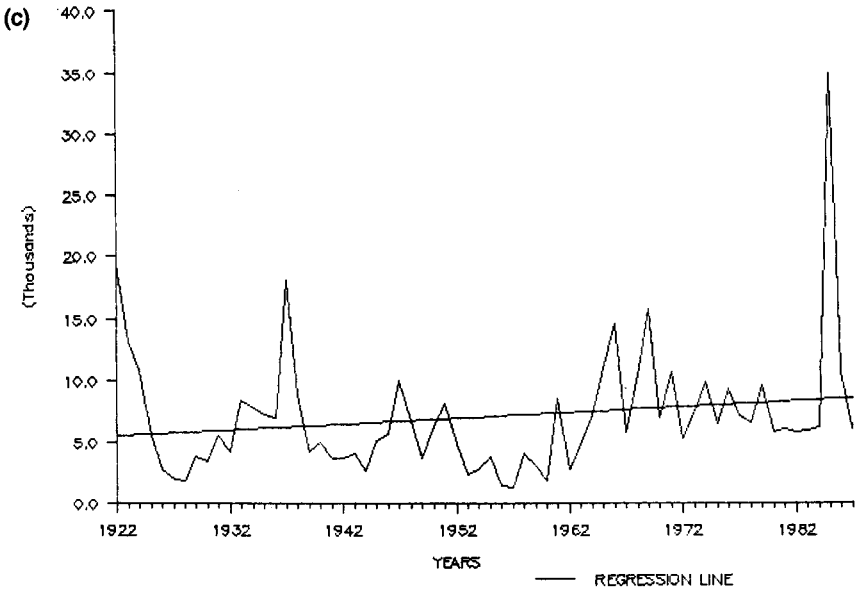


Figure 1. (c) Workers involved in strikes and (d) working days lost, annually per hundred thousand trade union members.

of industrial conflict peaks early in the course of industrialisation and declines thereafter can be accepted as a reasonable portrayal of the course of such conflict in Ireland. Employers' gradual and pragmatic acceptance of trade unionism, and unions' withdrawal from militant class insurgency, during the period from 1907 to the early 1920s defused the intensity of conflict in Irish industrial relations. But of particular interest here is whether the establishment and development of pluralist and professionalised industrial relations practices led to a long-run decline in industrial conflict. One obviously critical indicator of any such trend is the record of strike activity.

Panels (a) to (d) of Figure 1 present data on the trend in industrial conflict since the establishment of the Irish State, in terms of the numbers of workers involved in industrial disputes and the numbers of working days lost. Panels (a) and (b) show levels of conflict per 100,000 civilian employees, while panels (c) and (d) show the same data per 100,000 trade union members. Clearly, the level of industrial action fluctuates in a broadly cyclical manner. To bring out the underlying long-run trends, each panel fits an autoregressive linear trend-line to data for the period as a whole. This provides a way of identifying any long-run decline in the propensity of employees or union members to engage in industrial action across the troughs and peaks of the business cycle.⁸ As pluralist practices relate in particular to the conduct of industrial relations with unionised workers, trends in the union-weighted series could be viewed as a conceptually preferable indicator of long-run change in the impact of management practice and institutional developments on worker behaviour.⁹ Panels (a) and (c) indicate that the numbers of workers and trade unionists participating in strikes have shown no long-run decline, and the volume of working days lost per 100,000 employees, as shown in panel (b), has also failed to decline. Only in panel (d), which relates the trend in working days lost to number of trade union members, do we find any indication of long-run decline in industrial conflict. However, this arises largely because in the 1920s and 1930s unions had so few members to engage in industrial conflict, relative to the later years of the period covered. Overall, then,

⁸ While such measures of trend, like any others, are open to criticism, they are useful nonetheless in bringing out underlying secular patterns. All autoregression trends are clearly affected by 'outliers'. These affect, in particular, trends in working days lost. Their 'typicality' raises conceptual problems which will not be considered here. What is of particular interest in the present context is the lack of evidence of a declining trend during the period of most pronounced development of workplace pluralist practices and institutions (covering the mid-1940s to the early 1980s); and this result is not seriously affected by outliers.

⁹ For a rejection of the view that union-weighted series are the relevant indicators of trends in industrial conflict, see Hibbs (1976: 1034-7).

Figure 1 would suggest that there has been no secular decline in the propensity of employees or trade union members to engage in industrial conflict.

What also clearly emerges is that levels of industrial conflict failed to respond to any significant degree to the professionalisation of industrial relations at workplace level. The rise in strike participation and working days lost during the 1960s and 1970s occurred in spite of the rising incidence of procedures for conflict avoidance and the growing resort to the conciliation and investigation services of the Labour Court. In addition, a diverse repertoire of other sanctions apart from strikes became evident in industrial relations during this period—for example, go-slows, overtime bans, bans on flexible working, refusal to work co-operatively and so on. It is difficult to identify trends in their occurrence with certainty but in many large organisations, like ESB, such sanctions both became more common and were deployed with greater sophistication. Murray's 1984 survey of manufacturing found that the incidence of non-strike forms of industrial action was triple the incidence of strikes (Murray, 1984: 8); and an exploratory study, based on the reportage of such tactics in a specialist industrial relations news periodical during the 1980s, also concluded that there appeared to have been an increase in the level of sophistication with which non-strike sanctions were deployed (Moore, 1988).

The growing formalisation of wage bargaining structures also had economic effects that were unanticipated in liberal theory. Research on wage rounds during the 1960s suggested that the system of wage fixing had become almost entirely unresponsive to market signals and conditions. Prevailing micro-economic and macro-economic conditions seemed to have little effect on wage determination in comparison with the 'micro-political' dynamic enjoined by inter-union relations and the determined use of collective organisation (McCarthy *et al.*, 1975). Wage pressure on direct labour costs began to rise from the 1960s, and so too, it appears, did pressure for concessions on a range of fringe benefits and conditions of employment. The scope of collective bargaining began to widen to encompass allowances of various kinds (Hardiman, 1988: 155–8). To the traditional union policy of claiming wage-round increases and the maintenance of relativities were added an opportunistic seizing of bargaining opportunities wherever they arose and an entrepreneurial flair for creating such opportunities where none had existed before. Orbits of coercive comparison also began to widen as blue-collar groups for the first time pursued parity of pay and conditions with white-collar workers (Roche, 1981). In this context, disillusionment set in among employers with some of the most 'progressive' techniques of the period, and with productivity bargaining in particular.

Some of the consequences of pluralist industrial relations practices have been as expected and intended. Pluralist systems of industrial authority have afforded employees greater job protection, reduced their vulnerability to arbitrary or capricious management decisions, and provided them with a means of voicing grievances. Professionalisation along pluralist lines has also given companies greater predictability in respect of wage costs, and greater stability in the intensity with which work is performed. By routinising and even ritualising industrial conflict through procedures, the parties to industrial relations have defused its intensity and volatility. Pluralist practices have also made it possible to build up a body of precedents regarding equity in wage determination. However, other consequences of pluralist professionalisation seem at variance with the expectations of liberal theory. Worker grievances and industrial conflict have proved to be 'durable'. Attempts to democratise and constrain the exercise of managerial authority have expanded the bargaining agenda of unions and have probably encouraged worker 'entrepreneurship'. The development of wage-bargaining structures has resulted in the suppression of market signals. In short, while some, though not all, of the anticipated effects of pluralism have been achieved, other effects, scarcely considered by liberal theory, have probably had no less an impact on industrial relations. And these unintended consequences, as well as the unrealised effects of pluralism, point to weaknesses in liberal theory. In this theory, the various forms of joint regulation are viewed primarily as providing a series of channels for 'draining away' conflict and worker dissent. This view neglects entirely the complex ways in which institutions can interact with day-to-day industrial relations to heighten awareness of bargaining opportunity and, as it were, 'create their own supply' of grievances and demands. The idea that professional management and its institutional supports can contain or reduce worker militancy or 'pushfulness' ignores a number of problems. The establishment of procedures for conflict avoidance appears often to result in a tactical use of such procedures during the course of disputes. Far from commanding normative commitment, the various stages and levels associated with procedure agreements are often viewed in an instrumental way. Procedure is frequently exploited tactically as a resource for furthering a dispute; and procedural rules can be ignored by either side as the occasion demands (see Murray *et al.*, 1984; Wallace and O'Shea, 1987). The adoption by managers of a more professional and strategic approach to containing industrial action may evoke a similar response on the part of unions and their members. This can result in a widening of the repertoire of methods of industrial action. The more sophisticated employees become in responding to management professionalism, the more they may resort to methods that are

acknowledged by managers to be very difficult to counter: for example, a tacit refusal to work flexibly, or a withdrawal of goodwill. By establishing committees, tribunals, representatives and channels for processing claims, pluralist forms of industrial relations can foster worker opportunism and 'entrepreneurship'. By encouraging orderly and stable union organisation at the level of the enterprise and the workplace, professional managers may strengthen their 'adversaries' and their capacity to pursue claims effectively. In elaborating a web of rules in the workplace, pluralist forms of industrial relations may institutionalise job boundaries and demarcations. Career-ladders and rights of access to jobs and promotional opportunities are usually highly regulated by collective agreements, as are wage relativities between different grades. In these ways pluralist practices further compound the bureaucratic organisation of work.

If pluralist practices can in this way *build up codified work rules* which intensify bureaucracy, they may also *erode social norms* which facilitate organisational integration and the control of work by managers. It is now widely recognised that productivity bargaining serves often to heighten bargaining awareness and to encourage an instrumental attitude to work. By focusing attention on the wage-effort bargain, productivity bargaining may encourage employees, in effect, to 'ration' work effort and sell it at the margin. In the same way, where a strong predisposition develops among employees to trade work-effort marginally, aspects of effort which may in the past have been offered 'free'—conceded, that is, as 'non-contractual elements of contract'—for example, enthusiasm, co-operation, flexibility, a willingness to adjust to change etc., are subsumed to the logic of exchange (Roche, 1987b). The result may be a further need for rules and standards to *substitute for* the social norms eroded through the routine conduct of collective bargaining.

The evolution of Irish industrial relations since about 1960 illustrates many of the lacunae and unintended effects of pluralism. When faced with an increasingly confident and strongly organised workforce, companies resorted to a model of 'good industrial relations' which built upon the foundations of long-established traditions and practices. This model seems not to have reduced worker pressure on wages, contained industrial conflict or increased the leeway available to companies to organise work and direct work effort without provoking strong and well-organised employee resistance. What emerges in the Irish case, therefore, is hardly an instance of industrial relations conflict becoming little more than a 'frictional' force in an otherwise smooth progression towards advanced industrial society. During the 1960s and 1970s, on the contrary, industrial relations conflict and union wage pressure appeared to government and employers to be intractable to existing industrial relations practices and

prescriptions. The wage-price spiral came to be seen by the same parties as a chronic threat to competitiveness, and the trend in industrial conflict as a serious discouragement to foreign investment—the cornerstone of the State's strategy of industrialisation and economic development. In spite of the growing sophistication of industrial relations, the model of 'good industrial relations' enshrining pluralist practices was brought increasingly into question and a growing sense of industrial relations 'crisis' arose.

The major exponents of the 'crisis' argument were employers and governments, but trade unions too sometimes questioned the viability of current practices (McCarthy, 1973). The immediate result of growing disillusionment in the 1970s was a progressive politicisation of wage bargaining—a trend at variance with one of the central predictions of liberal theory. On the side of employers, one of the longer-term consequences has been a new popularity of versions of 'monistic' or 'unitarist' industrial relations in which the role of trade unions is restricted. This is one of the most salient developments in Irish industrial relations during the late 1980s and 1990s. In common with their counterparts in other countries, Irish employers have shown growing interest in 'human resource management' techniques, and other departures from established pluralist practice can also be identified. Thus, in many sectors of Irish business, employers have sought to promote 'flexibility' by dismantling standardised conditions of employment and job security; and flexibility has also been pursued by hiving-off of parts of production, maintenance or amenities to sub-contractors, by making greater use of part-time workers, and by increased resort to 'untypical' forms of employment contract. Moreover, in some companies and sectors, the challenge to pluralism has been less sophisticated, involving growing resistance to union recognition, or the reassertion of traditional doctrines of managerial prerogative (Roche, 1991; McGovern, 1988).

In sum, the creation of a system of industrial citizenship based on the 'joint regulation' of working conditions has proved not to be a panacea for the economic and social conflicts released by industrialisation and economic development. In the 1990s the very survival of major features of pluralist industrial relations at company and workplace levels is coming into question. 'Unitarism' in various guises is back on the employers' agenda. The Federation of Irish Employers appears no longer to be disposed to encourage new companies to concede union recognition rather than explore other industrial relations strategies. Unions have also complained that the IDA has tacitly retreated from its traditional policy of encouraging incoming multinationals to adapt to local industrial relations practices (McGovern, 1988: 89–90). Unions are obviously very aware of recent revisions in the ideological and strategic positions of employers

and the state. Thus far, they have not regarded the reappearance of unitarism as the most serious threat with which they are faced. But there is growing concern and debate within the union movement about the likely future impact on unionisation of the waning support for industrial relations on the pluralist model.

The Politics of Industrial Relations in Ireland

Liberal theory predicted the progressive depoliticisation of industrial relations. At face value, party politics in Ireland seems consistent with the liberal prediction. The political ideologies of the major parties with respect to industrial relations have not been distinctive, and thus the governments they have formed have not followed markedly different industrial relations strategies. Both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have sought—and, to a greater or lesser degree, managed to sustain—working-class support for their policies. The main parties' 'catch-all' approach to political mobilisation has meant that conflicts arising from the sphere of industrial relations have not been politicised in a visibly class-partisan way. In contrast with the United Kingdom, industrial relations has never figured as a key issue in Irish elections. The policy of the Labour Party on industrial relations issues has traditionally been distinct from those of the two major parties in placing emphasis on the extension of industrial and economic democracy. But Labour policy on these issues has had little direct effect on Irish industrial relations owing to the electoral weakness of the Labour Party and, consequently, the Party's minority status in inter-party and coalition governments since 1945.

While the similarity of approach of the major parties is the most salient feature of party politics in industrial relations, important differences of emphasis and 'political style' can nonetheless be identified. Fianna Fáil governments have favoured active involvement in industrial relations and collective bargaining rather less equivocally than inter-party governments or Fine Gael-Labour coalitions. The political ideology of Fianna Fáil, which views the party as a 'national' party or party of 'national consensus', places few ideological constraints on intervention in industrial relations, if this is seen to be warranted by circumstances. Indeed, the promotion of 'social partnership' between the state and the peak federations of unions and employers has come to be regarded as the direct expression in economic policy of the Party's emphasis on fostering 'national consensus'.

Fine Gael ideology is permeated by political and economic liberalism of a character which reflects the party's original support-base among larger farmers, the propertied middle class and the professions. From the 1950s

the Party moved towards a more social-democratic politics, which found its clearest expression under Garret Fitzgerald's leadership, and this facilitated the adoption of a more *dirigiste* approach to economic policy-making. The liberalism still inherent in Fine Gael's political ideology, even under Fitzgerald, resulted in a higher level of equivocation on union involvement in public policy-making than was characteristic of Fianna Fáil. Nonetheless, Fine Gael's liberalism stopped short of distaste for active state involvement in pay bargaining, and well short of that expressed in the 'free market' policies of the Thatcher Conservative Governments in the United Kingdom. In any case, the Party's stance was tempered in government during the 1970s and early 1980s through its being in coalition with Labour.

The absence of clear class-based party politics in Irish industrial relations cannot, however, be understood in terms of forces unleashed by industrialisation. The character of Irish party politics must be traced to the circumstances in which the Irish party system emerged. In this sense, much of the politics of industrial relations in Ireland has to be understood in terms of the 'pre-history' of modern industrial relations, considered earlier in the paper. Nor should the broadly similar positions of the main political parties on industrial relations be viewed as unchangeable. In the mid-1980s a new party, the Progressive Democrats, emerged on the liberal-right of Irish politics. In spite of its origins as a breakaway from Fianna Fáil, the PD Party espoused a neo-liberal ideology which declared itself hostile to restrictive and monopolistic institutions and practices. The Party polled impressively in the 1987 election. For a time, the PDs seemed set to coalesce in future elections, and possibly governments, with Fine Gael— itself experiencing realignment following the retirement of Fitzgerald. This raised the prospect of a more ideologically divided party-politics of industrial relations. It was a prospect that did not go unnoticed by trade union leaders when they entered talks on a national wage agreement with a Fianna Fáil government after the 1987 election. The fortunes of the PDs declined sharply in the general election of 1989, and the organisation opted to participate in coalition with Fianna Fáil. However, the realignment in party politics threatened by the appearance of the PDs indicates that political circumstances are still capable of recasting the politics of industrial relations in Ireland in a more class-partisan mould.

If considerable electoral and ideological scope has long existed for the adoption by government of an active, interventionist approach to industrial relations, up to the 1960s only the exceptional circumstances of war-time were seen to warrant a departure from a non-interventionist approach. For much of the state's history, a preference prevailed for keeping politics out of industrial relations (Roche, 1987a). However, in the 1960s, in response

to growing trade union organisation and power, a rising level of industrial conflict and forceful trade union wage pressure, Irish governments began to adopt a more interventionist stance. In the following decade, pay determination became increasingly politicised, as unfettered collective bargaining fell from favour and governments sought to promote concertation with union and employer federations.

The limited success of national bargaining during the 1970s has been examined in a number of studies of the period (O'Brien, 1981; Roche, 1987a; Hardiman, 1988 and this volume). In attempting to explain the weakness of centralised wage bargaining in Ireland, Hardiman concludes (1988: 151) that the involvement of unions in concertation during the 1970s tended to 'take a pluralist, pressure-group form rather than one characteristic of (neo-corporatist) political exchange'. While the limited success of concertation during the 1970s cannot be denied, what bears emphasis in the present context is the degree to which pluralist interest representation was modified at the political level during the decade, as successive governments sought to avoid the damaging effects attributed to 'free', or politically unfettered, collective bargaining. The politicisation of industrial relations between 1970 and 1981, though heavily compromised by practices and structures built up for long before, represented a significant departure from the politics of industrial relations as projected by liberal theories of industrialism.

In liberal theory, industrial relations are supposed to become 'insulated from the political process'. In neo-corporatist concertation, this obviously is not the case; indeed, the objectives of the 'social partners', and of unions in particular, come to be shaped in important respects by the opportunities opened up by access to public policy. Specifically, wage pressure in the labour market is traded off, in the main, against economic and social policy measures which benefit employees in general, irrespective of their occupational situation or status. In consequence, politicised wage bargaining tends to stand opposed to pressures towards sectionalism in the trade union movement (cf. Goldthorpe, 1984: 326; Regini, 1984: 124-5).

Nor has the experiment in tripartism of the 1970s and early 1980s proved to be an aberration—in the face of international economic upheaval—from a secular trend towards depoliticisation. Between 1987 and 1990, unions, employer associations and government again entered a central, tripartite agreement, the Programme for National Recovery (PNR), after five years of decentralised bargaining. Considerable controversy remains regarding the achievements of the PNR—as distinct from the benign effects on the Irish economy of the international economic recovery with which the agreement coincided in the late 1980s. The parties to the PNR were critical of its limited achievements; the unions, in

particular, felt that little progress had been made in tackling unemployment. Yet in a manner unprecedented in the history of tripartism in Ireland, all parties to the agreement pointed to areas or issues with respect to which they considered themselves 'winners'. The success attributed to the PNR was a major factor in the background to the negotiation of the Programme for Economic and Social Progress (PESP) in early 1991. A second cycle of politicised wage bargaining has thus lasted over four years and is scheduled to last at least for six. This raises the question of the factors responsible for the emergence of a more stable tripartism, and the related question of whether secular trends in Irish industrial relations may lead to the *institutionalisation* of political exchange as a more or less permanent feature (see further Hardiman, this volume).

The economic and political conjuncture in which the PNR was negotiated and implemented was very different to that obtaining during the informal and formal experiments in tripartism of the 1970s and early 1980s. In 1987 the Irish economy was almost universally seen to have reached its nadir. The public finances had run virtually out of control; the level of unemployment was unprecedented in the state's history; emigration had risen sharply, and union membership had declined dramatically over the preceding seven years. In such a context, market forces began to impinge decisively on free-for-all bargaining, progressively widening pay differentials hitherto fixed by institutional forces. More generally, as discussed earlier, the pluralist model of industrial relations was coming under threat from employers. In addition, the realignment of Irish politics attending the emergence of the PDs held out the prospect of growing support for neo-liberal policies and politics. Faced by these circumstances, Irish trade unions thought it advisable to take stock and opt for politics—as much as anything else to find shelter from the storm. In the event a slow economic recovery set in during the life of the PNR and the party political base for neo-liberal policies seemed to disappear in the General Election of 1989.

Against the background of such extreme contingencies, 'political exchange' proved to be more stable than before and unions and employer associations more inclined, or better able, to 'deliver' the consent of their respective constituencies. The terms of the PESP provide for slightly higher pay rises than those of the PNR, but allow more scope for local bargaining in the private sector and relax restrictions on 'special' relativity claims in the public services. The viability of PESP commitments by the government on pay and social policies was seen to depend at the time of negotiation on optimistic assumptions regarding economic growth. By mid-1991 these assumptions were confounded by the worsening international economic situation. The Minister for Finance responded in the Autumn

of 1991 by calling for the renegotiation of the PESP. A torrent of protest came from the unions, especially those in the public services. The future of PESP and of the rehabilitated version of politicised wage bargaining hangs in the balance.

It may be that the economic and political contingencies of the late 1980s were of critical importance in underpinning tripartite wage bargaining. They may also appear, with hindsight, to have been highly unusual. Specifically, the PNR may come to be viewed as an agreement negotiated, as it were, 'out of the last ditch'—providing an Irish parallel to the successful and, never again to be repeated, British incomes policy of the late 1940s and early 1950s.

What, however, also bears consideration in the context of the theory of liberal pluralism, is the possibility—one cannot, it has to be said, speak of the probability—of an alternative scenario. The pronouncements during and after the PESP negotiations of a number of senior trade union officials regarding future strategies give rise to the possibility that Congress may attempt to institutionalise 'political exchange' in the context of a ten-year programme of trade union policies. These policies include collective goods and services of a distinctly class-related character—employment, social policies, union rights etc (see ICTU, 1990). Such an approach could indicate the operation of a 'learning curve' on the part of union leaders concerning the constraints and opportunities of centralised, tripartite bargaining. It might also point to deepening pessimism regarding the likely future achievements and consequences of free-for-all bargaining, given the changes in employer strategies now in train. In short, influential sections of the Irish trade union movement have perhaps made a strategic decision to 'opt for politics' in a potentially more far-reaching way than in the recent past. Such a strategy will, of course, have to be contingent on the results of tripartism. The alternative unions now face is to revert to decentralised bargaining in a changing system of industrial relations, and attempt to engage in 'pressure-group' politics to counter any trends not tractable to collective bargaining alone.

Sixty years on from the beginnings of industrialisation in the independent Irish State, the choice between politicised industrial relations and the 'autonomous' industrial relations envisaged by liberal theory remains open to trade unions, employers and the State. It is a choice of major significance for the political economy of Irish society. It has not been precluded—nor will its outcome be determined—by social forces associated with industrialisation or economic development. The electoral viability of an interventionist stance on industrial relations arises from the catch-all nature of Irish party politics. In the Irish case, politicised industrial relations and catch-all party politics *coexist*, albeit in an unstable amalgam

and in a manner which limits the effectiveness of tripartite concertation (Hardiman, 1988). Politics and national governance currently turn in important respects on the government's success in managing tripartism. The future is open. Political realignment to the liberal right could undermine tripartism, as, in the short term, could economic circumstances. At the same time, underlying trends in industrial relations could lead to the institutionalisation and stabilisation of political exchange.

Conclusion

This paper has presented a review of the development of Irish industrial relations in the context of the liberal theory of industrialism. It has been found necessary to question the overall validity in the Irish case of the successive claims made by the theory. The peaking of worker militancy in the period 1907–20 was shown to have no meaningful link with the pace or character of industrialisation. Its roots were to be found, rather, in the contagion of British ideas and institutions, cyclical economic developments and the abnormal economic, political and social conditions of the First World War and Anglo-Irish War. While attempts to promote or engage in concerted action by Irish unions have always been compromised by union multiplicity and organisational fragmentation, no clearly defined trend towards 'exclusive unionism' can be identified. Some of the forces unleashed by industrialism were shown to *constrain* union fragmentation and to encourage more 'inclusive' forms of organisation, increasing the capacity for concerted action by trade unions. The evolution of practices and management techniques consistent with a pluralist understanding of 'good industrial relations' failed to bring about a secular decline in strike activity. Thus far, at least, industrial conflict has proved to be 'durable'. The growing conviction of Irish governments that collective bargaining needed to be harnessed more directly to business performance and macro-economic management led to the growing politicisation of industrial relations during the 1960s and 1970s. In the recession of the 1980s employers also showed renewed interest in essentially unitary models of industrial relations, and these are now subject to significant experimentation. The new vogue in unitarism and the reassertion of managerial prerogative at company level have been paralleled by the re-emergence since 1987 of politicised industrial relations at national level. Both trends run directly counter to the predictions of liberal theory. Options as between different sets of social and political arrangements for the conduct of industrial relations are still available to unions, employers

and governments. These options, furthermore, have strikingly different economic and social consequences. Ultimately, this is the most telling evidence against the supposed logic of industrialism on which the liberal theory relies.

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