

# The Theory of Industrialism and the Irish Case

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## Introduction

IN THE PRECEDING PAPERS in this collection, authors have attempted to provide empirically well-grounded accounts of various aspects of the development of industrial society in Ireland and, on this basis, have sought to address, where it appeared appropriate to do so, more general questions concerning the nature of industrialism and its social concomitants. This concluding contribution has, however, a rather different emphasis. The substance of the Irish case is here treated only selectively, while theoretical issues become the focus of attention. Specifically, the concern is with the implications of the Irish case for the theory of industrialism that has prevailed—or, at all events, that has had by far the greatest currency—within western social science over the last three decades.

This theory, which will be labelled the ‘liberal theory’ of industrialism, was elaborated in the 1960s by chiefly American authors (see, esp., Kerr *et al.*, 1960; Kerr, 1969; Parsons, 1960, 1967) in close relation with concurrent analyses, theoretical and historical, of economic growth and yet more ambitious treatments of social and political ‘modernisation’. The theory, it is true, never went unchallenged. In fact, it attracted sharp, and mounting, criticism (for a bibliographical review, see Badham, 1984), and by the 1980s was sometimes thought of as being discredited and defunct. This must, however, be reckoned a serious misjudgment. The theory achieved an undoubted centrality within comparative macrosociology and, although in various respects refined and modified in response to both

criticism and events (see e.g. Dunlop *et al.*, 1975; Kerr, 1983), still remains as a major influence—more so in fact today than a decade ago.

Two reasons for this durability may be noted. First, the theory is, formally at least, a highly attractive one. It starts from the assumption that industrialism exercises a powerful 'demonstration effect': given the opportunity, non-industrial societies—their elites and masses alike—will opt for industrialism, primarily on account of the unparalleled material benefits that it confers. The theory then seeks to show that, once such a commitment to industrialism is made, constraints are gradually but unremittingly imposed on social structures and processes, and also on political institutions, by an inherent 'logic of industrialism': that is, by the functional exigencies of the technical and the economic rationality on which industrialism depends. All actual industrial societies will converge in their development on the 'pure' industrial type (see esp. Kerr *et al.*, 1960: chs. 2, 10). In turn, then, a wide range of quite specific propositions may be derived about the major trends of change that should be observable in societies within the industrial world. Few, if any, other sociological theories have succeeded so well in combining boldness with clarity and openness to empirical examination.

Secondly, the credibility of the theory has of late been greatly enhanced by the collapse of the state socialist regimes of eastern Europe. One of the most challenging arguments to which the theory lead was that regimes that imposed command economies and sought to maintain a virtual monopoly of political power could not adequately respond to the demands of advancing industrialism. The latter required, rather, an essentially liberal order, of which a market economy and a democratic and pluralist polity were the defining characteristics. Some exponents of the liberal theory did indeed expressly predict the demise of state socialism (e.g. Parsons, 1964: 349–50); and, after the event, triumphalist reformulations have not been slow to emerge (see, notoriously, Fukuyama, 1989).<sup>1</sup>

No apology is therefore required for returning once more to the critical examination of the liberal theory. And in this respect, as will be seen, the Irish case offers important strategic advantages, not least in providing an example of a society within the western world which became industrial only in the mid-twentieth century. For, whether or not recent events in eastern Europe do underwrite the liberal theory as unequivocally as is claimed, it may still be held that it is in regard to developments as yet most

<sup>1</sup> One of several ways in which Fukuyama's argument goes beyond that of earlier exponents of the liberal theory is that he sees no need to accept any degree of 'two-way' convergence (cp. Kerr, 1983: ch. 1) between liberal and state socialist societies. Liberalism has won 'an unabashed victory' (1989: 3).

evident in the West that the more serious difficulties faced by the theory arise (cf. Goldthorpe, 1984, 1991). These involve a range of issues which, for the purposes of the review that follows, will be categorised as presuppositional, empirical and ideological.

## Presuppositional Issues

The liberal theory of industrialism can be seen as falling in line of descent from both nineteenth-century theories of social evolution and from Marxism. It takes societies—usually national societies—as its units of analysis and seeks to account, in essentially functionalist terms, for the long-term trends of change in structure and process that they display (cf. Nisbet, 1969: ch. 7; Goldthorpe, 1971). For all theories of this general type, crucial questions then arise of how far the units of analysis that are distinguished are to be treated as being independent of each other; and further, to the extent that some degree of *interdependence* is acknowledged, of the implications that this carries for the explanatory approach that is pursued.<sup>2</sup>

As already noted, the liberal theory does in one respect clearly recognise interdependence, namely, through the demonstration effect: the industrially more developed societies hold up to those that are to follow them 'the image of their own future'. But, beyond this, what would seem to be assumed is that the development of particular societies will be determined primarily by internal or 'endogenous' factors: in effect, by the degree to which aspects of the traditional society and the strategies of dominant elites either facilitate or obstruct the logic of industrialism. The presence of already more advanced nations enters into the analysis, if at all, simply as constituting a more or less benign 'setting'.<sup>3</sup>

This assumption is, however, one to which objections can obviously be raised—and not least when the case of Ireland is considered. To begin with, it is now far more difficult to believe than it was in the 1960s that relations between nations at different levels of industrial development will

<sup>2</sup> Such questions were in fact raised in connection with some of the earliest attempts at a functionalist macrosociology: most notably, in the case of Galton's objections to Tylor's analysis of functional associations ('adhesions') in marriage customs, on the grounds that examples drawn from different cultures could not be treated as independent owing to the possibility of diffusion. For further discussion of the 'Galton problem', see Naroll (1970) and Przeworski (1983).

<sup>3</sup> The works earlier cited, both of Kerr and his associates and of Parsons, are indeed remarkable for their almost total lack of reference to international relations, economic or otherwise. Cf. in this respect the apt comments of Nisbet (1969: 233–9).

—in consequence of expanding trade and the principle of comparative advantage—be ones from which ‘mutual benefit’ may be expected. In this regard, the orthodoxy of neoclassical economics has been powerfully challenged, even if not decisively overthrown, by alternative theories of ‘dependency’, ‘displacement competition’, ‘late development’ etc., which emphasise essentially asymmetric relations between the nations of the ‘centre’ and those of the ‘periphery’. From the complex debate that has ensued, what can perhaps be most safely concluded is that rival theories perform better or worse depending upon the specific historical conditions that obtain; and thus, that in the analysis of particular cases—the Irish included—history must carry at least as great a weight as theory. It is, fortunately, not necessary here to attempt adjudication on the question of whether Irish industrial development has been more aided or impeded by relations with more advanced nations, and especially of course with Britain (for differing views see Crotty, 1986; O’Malley, 1989, and this volume; Girvin, 1989; Lee, 1989: 522–40; O’Hearn, 1989; Mjøset, 1992: ch. 3; Kennedy, this volume). It is sufficient to observe that no one would now wish to suppose that the course and pattern of Irish industrialisation is comprehensible without such relations being taken into account or, that is, simply in terms of the internal dynamics of Irish society itself.<sup>4</sup>

In this connection, a matter of particular relevance is of course that of emigration. As Coleman points out in his contribution to this collection, large-scale emigration has allowed Ireland to establish a remarkable record in demographic history: a hundred years of relatively high natural increase in population without any sustained effect on population size. Emigration has made possible a demographic regime in which ‘feedback’ on fertility levels from population pressure has been largely eliminated. Emigration has, in other words, substituted for, and thus greatly delayed, the decline in fertility which the logic of industrialism should have engendered: that is, by removing the need for the expansion of employment or, alternatively, for the reduction in living standards that would otherwise have obtained (cf. NESC, 1991).

Furthermore, the effects of emigration on the nature of the industrial society that now exists in Ireland can only be reckoned as far-reaching, even if the counterfactual form in which claims in this regard have usually to be made will always leave some room for argument. Thus, emigration could scarcely avoid having a pervasive influence on family relations—most obviously, perhaps, because of the geographical dispersal of

<sup>4</sup> Debate centres, rather (cf. O’Hearn, 1990) on the *degree* of autonomy that may be attributed to the Irish state and to dominant elites, as against constraints imposed both by internal class and other conflicts and by the international political economy.

kin that it entailed. Further, though, in removing pressure for a reduction in family size or for an increase in employment, emigration helped maintain a traditional sexual division of labour within the family, and can then in turn be reckoned as one factor in the distinctively low labour force participation rates that Irish women continue to display (Pyle, 1990). At the same time, it can also surely be said that the shape of the Irish employment and class structure today 'reflects the selective process of emigration to Britain of young men and women as much as it does the growth of new opportunities' (Breen *et al.*, 1990: 54). And there is likewise good evidence for supposing that emigration effects, although often difficult to determine precisely, have been, and remain, of significance in regard to such other processes as social mobility (see Hout: 1989: ch. 1), political participation (see Mair, this volume; and cf. Hirschmann, 1981: ch. 9) and the formation of national culture and identity (see Lee, 1989: 374 *et seq.*).

The crucial point to be made here is, then, that in so far as emigration has in fact shaped the development of industrial society in Ireland, the resulting features of this society would appear to fall outside the explanatory scope of the liberal theory. That is to say, they must be seen as reflecting not functional exigencies inherent in industrialism itself, but rather 'functional alternatives' allowed by the—quite contingent—fact that large-scale emigration was a possibility. Irish men and women were able to respond to the demonstration effect of industrialism, and for many it would appear the only feasible response, by seeking its benefits elsewhere—in Britain or the USA. If this possibility had not existed, it is difficult indeed to imagine Irish society tracing the same developmental path as it did or being as it is now.<sup>5</sup>

The implicit presupposition of the liberal theory that societies follow each other on the 'ladder of industrialism' as essentially independent entities, sharing only a common goal, is also involved in, and compounds, certain other basic problems that the theory encounters. Two of these at least are again particularly well illustrated by the Irish case and may here be noted.

The first concerns the nature of the pre-industrial society on which the

<sup>5</sup> For a general treatment of the possible implications, for sending nations, of emigration and of its prohibition, see Hirschman (1981: ch. 11). It is of particular interest that Hassner (1989) should note, specifically in response to Fukuyama, the inapplicability of an 'Irish solution' in the event of the former nations of the Communist world failing to achieve capitalist prosperity, despite their citizens' mounting desire for this: 'while all the ideological challenges to the West have failed . . . [it] is as incapable of integrating the hundreds of millions of potential immigrants as it is of creating the conditions, in their home countries, which would make them want to stay there.'

logic of industrialism is seen as exerting its transformative effect. The underlying assumption of the theory is that pre-industrial society is 'traditional' society. The process whereby traditional society yields to the imperatives of economic and technical rationality—or, in other words, becomes 'modernised'—is identified with that through which an industrial society is created. The course of the long-term trends of change for which the theory seeks to account is in effect delimited by a series of simple binary oppositions, which can be understood largely as derivations from the seminal *Gemeinschaft–Gesellschaft* distinction of Tönnies, and which achieve their most elaborate expression in Parsons' 'pattern variables'.

However, the significance of the Irish case in this respect is that it clearly reveals the difficulty that can arise in treating modernisation and industrialisation as if they were but one and the same process. By the criteria that the liberal theory would adopt, the modernisation of Irish society must in fact be seen as running well ahead of its industrial development throughout most of its recent history; and again the part played here by outside influences, especially, though not only, ones emanating from Britain, is of major importance.

For example, under British rule Ireland acquired a modern state apparatus and a modern financial system—which the Free State could take over in 1922 more or less unchanged. Further, the new nation came into being with literacy rates of approaching 100 per cent and also, in Lee's words (1989: 76), 'belonged to a western European pattern of access to higher education.' Again, as Fahey (this volume) brings out, the leading role played by Ireland in the nineteenth-century revitalisation of the Catholic church entailed a remarkable application of one of the major instruments of modernity, that is, organisational rationality—even if in the service of an ideologically anti-modernist movement.<sup>6</sup> And finally, it must be recognised that although until well into the twentieth century Ireland was still an agrarian rather than an industrial nation, this is not to say that Irish agrarian, or rural, society remained set on a traditional pattern. By the time of independence, agriculture was mostly market-oriented; and, as Hannan has shown (1979), while in some areas a form of peasant economy and culture did persist, this could scarcely be equated with traditionalism—despite the imaginative efforts of social anthropologists to suggest otherwise. Thus, for example, the institutional bases of the

<sup>6</sup> The paradox here implied is intensified in that, at the ideological level, the Irish Church was rather distinctively reactionary and unresponsive to new initiatives—as, for example, in Catholic social theory. On the other hand, Fahey's argument is reinforced by an observation made by Lee (1989: 90–1): 'The organisation of the American and Australian Catholic Churches counts among the major administrative achievements of modern history. Those achievements were in disproportionate measure Irish achievements.'

communities in West Clare, described by Arensberg and Kimball (1940) as if their origins were lost in the mists of the past, had in fact been established for no more than two generations.

In a cogent essay, Wrigley (1979) has urged the need for the concepts of modernisation and industrialisation to be clearly distinguished, rather than being set together in polar opposition to that of traditionalism. Furthermore, he goes on to propose that the actual relation between the two processes should be seen as contingent, not necessary: no automatic connection can be shown in either theory of historical experience between, on the one hand, the increased economic efficiency that may be expected from modernisation and, on the other, the economic growth and structural change that are implied by industrialisation. In the context of European history in general, Wrigley suggests, industrial development might be better understood not so much as a seamless continuation of modernisation but rather as a possible solution to a major problem that prior modernisation helped create, namely, that of population pressure—with mass emigration being then the obvious alternative if industrialisation is too long delayed. The Irish case is one that would appear to fit especially well into this line of argument.

The second problem to be noted is that of what might be called 'sequencing'. Various specific trends of change that the liberal theory would envisage may quite typically be observed in societies in the course of their industrial development; but, from case to case, these trends can proceed at differing rates or with a different timing relative to each other. Exponents of the liberal theory have not been unaware of this fact, nor indeed of the long-term consequences that variation in sequencing may have (see, e.g., Dunlop, 1958: ch. 8 and cf. Roche, this volume). But its actual occurrence is something that would again appear to require explanation, and in part at least because of the lack of independence of national cases, in terms that are clearly extraneous to the theory.

Thus, in the Irish case, as in that of any industrialising society, a decline can be traced over time in employment in the agricultural sector and in the size of agricultural classes, along with an increase in size of the industrial working class and also in that of the white-collar salariat or service class. However, as is now well-documented (see, e.g., Breen *et al.*, 1990: ch. 3), surplus labour from the agricultural sector was not in Ireland, as it was, say, in Britain, more or less directly transferred, whether through intra- or intergenerational mobility, into an expanding industrial work force. The surplus could not in fact be absorbed, and for many decades emigration 'filled the gap'—that is in fact, until it proved possible to step up the pace of industrial development in the 1960s. At this point, moreover, rapid growth began in both the industrial working class and the

service class *together*, whereas in Britain, as in other early industrialising nations, the growth of the former was close to its peak (and agricultural employment at a near minimum) *before* the main acceleration in the growth of white-collar employment occurred. As Whelan, Breen and Whelan then show in their paper above, this particular sequencing in the process of class structural change is in turn chiefly responsible for certain distinctive features that appear in the pattern of class mobility in present-day Irish society: most notably, a level of service-class recruitment from among the sons of farm families that is unusually high, and especially so relative to that of recruitment from among men of working-class origins.

Another of the preceding papers offers a further and, if anything, yet more striking example of the implications of sequencing: that is, in regard to the growth and present form of the Irish welfare state. O'Connell and Rottman observe that the Irish experience does not accord well with the idea that in western nations welfare state development has occurred essentially as a *response* to the functional requirements of industrialism, with political democratisation serving as little more than a mediating factor (cf. e.g. Wilensky and Lebeaux, 1958; Wilensky, 1975). The legacy of British rule meant that in Ireland democratic institutions, as well as a modern state apparatus, were in place well in advance of the period of rapid industrialisation of the 1960s, as also in fact were a range of welfare provisions deriving from British legislation of the Edwardian period. In the early decades of independence, the particular governmental form that had been inherited—the 'Treasury model'—served to inhibit the further growth of such provision; but, subsequently, industrial development and the extension of the 'social rights of citizenship' went ahead more or less *in tandem*, with the state playing a crucial part, as both 'arena' and 'actor' alike. At the same time, O'Connell and Rottman seek to show that this sequencing also helps explain the distinctive character of Irish welfare programmes and their tendency, even while exerting a major influence on the shape of the class structure, still to leave the extent of class inequalities little altered. Once more, then, the point is well brought out that the functional logic of industrialism that the liberal theory invokes cannot provide an adequate basis for understanding the course of change in particular nations to the extent that the presupposition of essentially independent developmental paths is breached.

## Empirical Issues

In this section, the emphasis shifts from features of the Irish case that serve to reveal limitations in principle to the explanatory power of the liberal



theory to consideration of Ireland as a strategic case for evaluating the theory within, so to speak, its own frame of reference. In particular, Ireland offers an outstanding opportunity for testing empirically certain claims, central to theory, that concern the effects of industrial development on processes of social stratification and on the nature and extent of social inequality.

According to the liberal theory, the logic of industrialism progressively undermines traditional processes of stratification based on criteria of ascription, and promotes the emergence of new forms based on criteria of achievement. The demands of economic and technical rationality mean that 'social selection' must be determined by what individuals are able to do rather than by who they are, in terms of descent, social background etc. Moreover, with advancing industrialism, human resources become increasingly valuable; talent must be fully exploited wherever in society it is to be found. Thus, educational provision is expanded, and educational institutions are reformed so as to widen access. Changes in economic organisation further encourage the trend towards an 'achievement-oriented' society. Employment becomes increasingly concentrated in large-scale, professionally managed enterprises, while small-scale, family-based concerns, in which ascriptive tendencies are most likely to persist, steadily decline in importance. In sum, what is envisaged is the development of a far less rigid form of stratification than that which previously prevailed. The association between individuals' social origins and their educational attainment will weaken, while that between their educational level and the kind of employment they obtain will strengthen. Thus, an increasingly mobile and 'open' society will be created, in which it will be possible for such intergenerational continuities of social position as may still be observed to be explained—and at the same time legitimated—in essentially 'meritocratic' terms.<sup>7</sup>

In this connection, Irish industrialisation is of significance for two main reasons. First, its critical period is one that is unusually well documented. Largely on account of the fact that a modern state apparatus was already well established, far better information is available for the decisive transformation of Irish society that occurred between, say, the 1950s and the 1970s than for most corresponding periods in either earlier industrialising nations in the West or 'newly industrialised countries' elsewhere. From both official statistics and the results of various other kinds of state-supported investigation, it is possible to trace in some detail the course

<sup>7</sup> Further elaboration of this position can be found in, e.g., Blau and Duncan (1967: ch. 12 esp.) and Treiman (1970).

and the concomitants of the changes that led Irish society from being one in which farmers, farm workers, small proprietors and artisans predominated to one in which the large majority of the active population are wage- or salary-earners employed in manufacturing and services.

Secondly, Irish industrialisation over the period in question, through being promoted and guided by the state, would appear to have been actually *informed* by ideas integral to the liberal theory—especially as these were mediated and disseminated by international agencies such as the OECD, World Bank and IMF (Breen *et al.*, 1990: 128–30). Thus, educational expansion was undertaken with the explicit aim of meeting the need that, it was believed, industrialisation imposed to build up the nation's 'human capital'; and reforms intended to increase access to secondary and higher education were represented as necessary so that at one and the same time an economically unacceptable wastage of talent could be prevented and a greater equality of opportunity established. In these respects, it is therefore scarcely too fanciful to view the Irish case as a kind of 'naturally occurring experiment' in which the liberal theory was applied in the real world.

What, then, one may ask, were the results that this experiment provided? How far do they lend empirical support to the theory? To begin with, a substantial increase in participation in the educational system was clearly achieved, and most notably at the secondary level (cf. Rottman and O'Connell, this volume). Although the *rate* of increase in enrollments did not rise much from what it had been since the 1920s, simply through this rate being sustained the objective of 'secondary education for all' came close to being realised. Moreover, educational expansion and reform were associated with some reduction in class differentials in transition rates through the different levels of the system; or, in other words, some—slight—weakening did occur in the overall association between class origins and educational attainment. To this extent, therefore, it could be said that the expectations of the liberal theory were borne out.

However, what further emerges from more detailed analysis of the relevant data (see esp. Hout, 1989: ch. 8; Raftery and Hout, 1990) is that this reduction in class differentials was the outcome essentially of expansion itself, rather than of any changes in the criteria of educational selection or of any decline in the influence of class on selection processes. That is to say, through expansion, the Irish educational system became less selective and especially in the transition to the secondary level—with some benefit thus accruing to children from less advantaged class backgrounds; but, *wherever selection remained*—as, most importantly, *within* the

secondary level and in the transition to higher education—class effects were undiminished.<sup>8</sup>

Further still, there is little evidence to suggest that changes brought about in the distribution of educational attainment have in turn led to changes in rates and patterns of social mobility of a kind that would indicate greater 'openness' and equality of opportunity. Thus, Halpin (this volume) shows that although among men studied in 1973 the propensity for movement between different class positions over the course of working life tended to increase somewhat from older to younger birth cohorts, no corresponding change is to be found in the underlying pattern of association between class as determined by employment on entry into the workforce and class at age 35. Again, both Hout (1989; ch. 3) and Erikson and Goldthorpe (1992; ch. 3), using the same data as Halpin but in order to investigate *intergenerational* mobility, report a similar finding. Observed, absolute rates of such mobility clearly changed in response to the transformation of the class structure; but, in intergenerational perspective also, the association between class of origin and of destination considered *net* of all structural effects—or, that is, the pattern of relative mobility rates or of social fluidity—remained little altered over successive cohorts. Finally, Breen and Whelan (this volume), who are able to compare the 1973 intergenerational mobility data with those of a further enquiry of 1987, show that between these two dates the stability of relative mobility rates was largely maintained and that where shifts could be detected, these were by no means ones pointing consistently towards greater openness.<sup>9</sup>

In other words, the idea that changes in processes of social selection, as necessitated by the logic of industrialism, will in themselves create a more fluid society is one that the Irish experience can scarcely sustain. By the 1970s, a class structure recognisably that of an industrial society had emerged and educational expansion and reform had been implemented much on the lines that the liberal theory would anticipate. But although the pattern of actual mobility flows, both over working life and intergenerationally, was thus reshaped and a substantial enlargement of human

<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that insufficient time may have elapsed for the effects of more recent educational reforms to show up in the birth cohorts studied by Hout and Raftery. However, as discussed further below, the results they report are very much in line with those emerging from studies in a number of other nations whose educational systems have evolved in quite diverse ways.

<sup>9</sup> To judge by the experience of other nations, it is in fact rather surprising that *any* significant change in relative rates should be detected over a period of no more than a decade and a half, at least on the basis of samples of the size in question. The present author would still incline to the view that Irish 'peculiarities' of some kind or other, most probably associated with mobility propensities into or out of the agricultural sector, are chiefly at work here.

capital no doubt achieved, the supposed effects of such developments in reducing the influence of class on educational attainment and in turn on mobility chances show up but weakly, if at all. Far more striking, it could be thought, is the degree to which class inequalities in these respects have been found to persist, notwithstanding the rapidly changing structural and institutional contexts within which they operated.

However, if the Irish case is here of particular significance, as earlier suggested, this is not to imply that the results it provides are at all atypical. To the contrary, in the light of the foregoing, one could say that its interest lies chiefly in the fact that it lends support, in a detailed yet rather dramatic way, to a conclusion now emerging from research undertaken across a range of other societies: namely, that industrialisation does *not* create a new basis for social stratification of a kind that allows for, and indeed promotes, greater mobility, in the way that the liberal theory would claim. Industrial development may well require educational programmes of the kind envisaged by the theory—and which were accordingly carried through in Ireland. In turn, such programmes may bring about some reduction in class differentials in educational attainment, although it would appear that more often than not they fail to do so (see Shavit and Blossfeld, eds., 1992). But even if some greater educational equality *is* thus achieved, a major empirical difficulty for the theory still remains in that this does not then automatically, or even usually, show up in a greater equality of mobility chances (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992: ch. 3 esp.).<sup>10</sup> At this point, the supposed logic of industrialism evidently breaks down; and thus, it may be argued, an inherent weakness in the form of the liberal theory is revealed.

As earlier noted, the theory derives its explanatory potential from the notion of the functional exigencies of an industrial society. But it has then the problem, like all functionalist theories, of showing why the courses of action that are actually pursued by individuals and collectivities—or at least their outcomes—*should be* ones consistent with the exigencies that are specified. Thus, when it is held that an emphasis on achievement rather than ascription in social selection and the creation of a more open society are ‘required’ by the logic of industrialism, the obvious question arises of

<sup>10</sup> A divergent view is to be found in Ganzeboom, Luijkx and Treiman (1989), who believe that they can discern in cross-national and over-time data a ‘world wide secular trend towards increased societal openness’. However, it is still unclear how far they would regard their analyses as lending support to the liberal theory, since they also show many nations at a relatively early stage of industrialisation as being more open than more advanced societies; and their results can in any event be questioned, both on grounds of data comparability and of the modelling from which they derive (see Jones, 1991; Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992: 99–101).

just why this requirement should in fact be met. Why should it not rather be—and as the empirical evidence would indeed suggest—that those individuals and families in superior class positions will use their advantage and power in order to react against what may appear as tendencies dangerous to their position, and quite regardless of the consequences for the functioning of the society at large?

If, for example, educational attainment does become more important to mobility chances, those families in a position to do so can use more of their resources in order to maintain their children's competitive edge in this respect: as Halsey has put it (1977: 184), 'ascriptive forces find ways of expressing themselves as "achievement".' And if, none the less, educational attainments do become somewhat more equally distributed among children of different class origins, then within more advantaged families resources can be applied through *other* channels in order to help their offspring preserve their class prospects—as against the threat of meritocratic selection via education. Thus, to revert to the Irish case, Hout (1989) has emphasised the part that would still appear to be played in mobility processes by patronage, favouritism and other 'particularistic' influences, largely mediated through family relations; while Breen and Whelan (this volume) underline the continuing importance of the possession and transmission of family property.<sup>11</sup>

In short, one could say that what is crucially brought into question by the empirical results reviewed is the *cogency* of the logic of industrialism. Nothing in the liberal theory tells one why it is this logic that should in the end prevail, and especially where, as with social stratification, it is not difficult to envisage an opposing 'logic': that according to which those holding more advantaged and powerful class positions have thereby the capacity, as well as the motivation, to act effectively in order to preserve the *status quo*.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> More specific analyses are now in fact emerging that call directly into doubt the existence of any long-term trend towards meritocratic selection in industrial societies—at least if 'merit' is taken to be indexed by educational attainment. See for Britain, Heath, Mills and Roberts (1991) and for Sweden, Jonsson (1991).

<sup>12</sup> In other words, just as the old functionalist theory of stratification (Davis and Moore, 1945) did not explain by what means the 'necessary' effects of social inequalities served also to keep these inequalities in being, so the liberal theory gives no account of why 'necessary' processes of social selection making for greater equality of opportunity should in turn guarantee their own persistence. In this connection, it is of further interest to note (as pointed out to me by Christopher Whelan) that the concern of Irish governments with the formation of human capital and the promotion of meritocracy tended in fact to give way after the 1960s to much narrower preoccupations with 'fine-tuning' educational outputs to meet supposed shortages in particular kinds of skilled labour. On the general failure of functionalist explanations in sociology—in contrast with those in biology—to specify appropriate 'causal feedback loops', see Elster (1979) and also Stinchcombe (1968: 58–9, 80–101).

## Ideological Issues

To describe the theory here examined as the 'liberal' theory of industrialism is appropriate in that, as earlier noted, a central conclusion to which it leads is that only a liberal social order, characterised by a market economy and a democratic and pluralist polity, will in the end prove functionally compatible with industrialism. Thus, according to the theory as it was elaborated in the 1960s, the state socialist industrial societies of the Soviet bloc were fraught with contradictions that threatened their long-term viability, while other versions of socialism which might be aspired to were either ones that 'history' had already rejected or merely Utopian. The inevitable consequence of advancing industrialism, it was held, was that 'real ideological alternatives' were steadily narrowed down (cf. Kerr *et al.*, 1960: 283) until in fact only one possibility, that of a liberal order, remained. With the actual collapse of state socialism in most of eastern Europe, such arguments have then been reasserted, and in more extreme forms. Thus, Fukuyama (1989: 4) has proposed that western liberal democracy should now in fact be seen as marking 'the end of history': with the universalisation of liberalism, the final form of human government and 'the end point of mankind's ideological evolution' will be reached.

Historicism of this kind is open to major objections in principle, both intellectual and moral (cf. Popper, 1957; Goldthorpe, 1971). However, in the present context, attention may better be focused on certain more specific issues. These arise from arguments, developed after the ending of the 'long boom' of the post-war years, which have posed a threat to the liberal theory of industrialism at its very core: that is, in questioning whether a democratic and pluralist polity, however desirable in itself, is that most conducive to the efficiency and growth of a modern market economy.

It should be noted, first of all, that the most powerful of these arguments do not emanate from the left but are advanced, rather, by authors who would themselves lay claim to a liberal position (see e.g. Brittan, 1977, 1983; Scitovsky, 1978, 1980; Olson 1982). Their common concern is that while modern liberal democracies allow, and indeed encourage, the formation of a wide range of organised interest groups, as an essential element in pluralist politics, the operation of these interest groups within the economic system may well have damaging consequences for its performance. This comes about because trade unions, professional associations, industrial cartels and the like all seek to strengthen their members' positions primarily through action that is in some way taken *against* market forces— via organisation, regulation, legislation, etc.; and further, because such bodies tend to concentrate their attention on

'zero-sum' issues, where their own members' interests can only be protected or advanced at the expense of those of other groups. As, therefore, the number of competing organisations grows and pluralist, pressure-group politics intensifies, the tendency is for market mechanisms—and in turn the economic efficiency that they guarantee—to be progressively impaired. Thus, far from democratic pluralism representing the essential political counterpart of a modern industrial economy, its consequences are seen as being, at all events, an important contributory factor in endemic problems of industrial unrest, inflation, unemployment and slow growth.<sup>13</sup>

Such an analysis would therefore suggest that to create the conditions necessary for improved economic performance, change must occur in one or other of two directions. Either relations among major economic interest groups have to become more 'concerted' than the pluralist model would imply, so that distributional conflict is made less damaging to market mechanisms and thus to the economy overall; or, alternatively, *some* economic sectors have to be more fully exposed to market forces in order to compensate for 'rigidities' elsewhere. The main indication of the force of the analysis is then that tendencies in these two directions can in fact be observed in many western nations from the 1970s onwards (Goldthorpe, 1984, 1987). And in this connection, the particular interest of the Irish case lies, to begin with, in the fact that during the recent past attempts have been made to move first in the one and then in the other direction, without, however, any decisive outcome having been so far achieved. The difficulties that may in each case be encountered are thus illuminated, but so at the same time is the extent to which major questions of national political economy remain essentially open and, moreover, ones that offer—indeed demand—crucial ideological choices.

In his contribution above, Roche has described how institutions providing for 'industrial citizenship' and for the 'joint regulation' of employment relations developed in Ireland much on the lines that the liberal theory would propose. But, as he further shows, the consequences that followed proved to be far less consistent with the theory's expectations. Although organised labour abandoned politically-oriented militancy at an early stage, no decline occurred in the level of industrial conflict, no 'withering away' of the strike; and within the institutional framework that was

<sup>13</sup> The intervention of these authors thus serves to expose a strong tension within the liberal camp in regard to whether greater weight should be given to freedom of association and collective action or to the 'freedom' of market forces. The divergence between 'political' and 'economic' liberals is well captured in Scitovsky's observation (1980) that the former possess 'an excessive faith in capitalism and in its ability to fly however much its wings are clipped.' A very early statement of essentially the same argument is to be found in Lindblom (1949). Kerr (1955) showed awareness of the argument but sought to play down its importance.

established—the pluralist ‘web of rules’—unions were able to increase their capacity to press claims, to expand their negotiating agendas and to create wage-bargaining structures of a kind often inimical to the efficient functioning of labour markets. By the end of the 1960s there was in fact widespread recognition of an industrial relations crisis, manifested in a high level of industrial disputes and in inflationary wage spirals, which undermined Ireland’s international competitiveness and the ability to attract foreign investment on which the national economic strategy depended.

It was in response to this situation that the first efforts were made at reconstructing industrial relations on a more orderly basis. These lead through a series of National Wage Agreements (1970–78) to the National Understandings of 1979 and 1980, in which government, along with unions and employers, was directly involved. What was attempted was actually quite modest in comparison with the scope and objectives of similar tripartite arrangements in nations where concertative or ‘neo-corporatist’ tendencies were more securely established. However, the NUs failed to produce results satisfactory to any of the participants and were abandoned in some disillusionment (Hardiman, 1988). A return to decentralised bargaining followed and indeed a period in which, as Roche further describes, employers took the lead in what could be regarded as attempts to subvert, rather than to go beyond, the institutions of ‘pluralistic industrialism’: that is, by seeking, where possible, to avoid union recognition and to impose ‘monistic’ forms of industrial relations (cf. McGovern, 1989), and further by developing ‘secondary’ labour forces whose members in some degree or other fell outside the protection that industrial citizenship afforded against market forces and managerial absolutism. But although these initiatives were taken in a context of rapidly rising unemployment, with the balance of market power thus clearly in employers’ favour, they received little support from government<sup>14</sup> and, in the outcome, unions were not seriously weakened nor labour markets ‘dualised’ in any radical way. Moreover, as the economic situation deteriorated further, a reversion to a concertative response was signalled by the Programme for National Recovery of the new Fianna Fáil administration that entered office in 1987 and the subsequent Programme for Economic and Social Progress of 1991—the still uncertain prospects for which are considered in Hardiman’s paper above.

<sup>14</sup> It should, however, be noted that the IDA, having initially played an important role in facilitating ‘sweetheart’ or single-union arrangements for incoming employers, apparently ceased in the course of the 1970s to advise such employers to accept unionisation (McGovern, 1989).



What is ultimately involved in these shifting, yet inconclusive, approaches to problems of political economy can perhaps best be brought out by going back to the famous metaphor of Lemass for the initial drive for growth of the 1960s: 'the tide that will raise all boats'. This gave graphic expression to a key idea of the liberalism of the post-war era: namely, that economic growth could substitute for attempts at redistribution. Governments that achieved, or at all events that presided over, economic growth would thereby avoid the need to take any serious action on questions of class and other inequalities. However, in the far less congenial economic climate after the ending of the long boom, the inadequacy of this idea is fully revealed. Attempts made to reduce the 'perils of pluralism' for economic performance—whichever direction they take and whatever their degree of success—inevitably raise distributional questions that cannot be disregarded by governments, however much they might wish to do so, and that, still within the context of a liberal polity, create ample scope for ideological division.

Thus, even if a dismantling of pluralist institutions or an increased evasion of their constraints by employers does help produce an increased rate of economic growth, it can scarcely be assumed that this will then simply mean an all-round improvement in living standards, while the pattern and extent of inequality remain unchanged. To the contrary, the probability must be that inequalities will *widen*. The objective is after all to modify the interplay between politics and markets so that certain groups within the labour force are unable to compensate for their lack of strength in the market through either organisational power or regulatory intervention. Furthermore, with such a 'free market' strategy, no linkage can be expected between growth and high levels of employment. Governments will decline responsibility for maintaining employment at any particular level; and the empirical evidence is that dualised labour markets, even while allowing greater flexibility to employers, still show little more tendency to clear than do those operating under pluralistic rigidities. In other words, with any economic 'tide' that is in this way created, the most likely outcome must be that some boats will rise much higher than do others, and that some will indeed be left more or less deliberately stranded.

Concertative strategies have likewise to be seen as implying an attempt to redefine relations between politics and markets. The immediate aim of such strategies is to create arrangements under which conflict among major organised interests within enterprises and labour markets can be so contained as to minimise their economically damaging effects—most typically, through some form or other of wage regulation. However, while such arrangements are often presented in the rhetoric of 'national consensus' or 'social partnership', it is in fact essential to their survival that

the conflicts in question should not be merely denied or suppressed. They must, rather, be effectively transferred into the political domain.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, as analysts have recurrently found (see e.g. Lehbruch and Schmitter, eds, 1982; Goldthorpe, ed., 1984) the continued participation of labour in neo-corporatist institutions depends upon unions being able to achieve politically—and demonstrate to their members—some *quid pro quo* for their abstention from the pluralistic free-for-all. Under ‘bad weather corporatism’, as attempted in Ireland after 1987, this may be no more than an assurance that labour will not bear an undue share of the costs of recovery programmes (cf. Hardiman, this volume). But in so far as concertative institutions do help to strengthen economic performance, the demands made upon processes of ‘political exchange’ are likely to mount, at all events from the side of labour. Pressure must be expected for greater priority to be given to the reduction of unemployment (cf. Korpi, 1991) and for fiscal and social policies from which labour can be seen to gain advantage. In Ireland such pressure is indeed already apparent even with the very limited economic improvement of the last few years (cf. Wilkinson, 1991).<sup>16</sup> In other words, concertative strategies in their very nature make it impossible for governments to avoid an involvement in distributional, and especially class distributional, questions. Which boats rise with the economic tide, and how high, cannot be left as the outcome merely of the play of market forces or of pluralistic bargaining, but has in important part to be determined by what Korpi (1983) has described as ‘societal bargaining’ within the national political arena.

In the context of the foregoing, one further significant feature of the Irish case is then apparent. The dominant position in Irish politics of ‘catch-all’ parties, the weakness of the class basis of party support and the infrequency with which political agendas are set in class terms would all suggest that Ireland might be regarded as a nation in which ‘the end of ideology’ was indeed reached *avant la lettre*. In the light of the liberal

<sup>15</sup> The one area where a basic consensus would seem necessary is that of economic analysis. As British experience well brings out, it is difficult to develop any concertative strategy if government, employers and unions adhere to quite different theories of the working of the economy. Roche (1989) notes a similar difficulty in the Irish case, but cf. Hardiman (this volume) with reference to the PESP.

<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, as Wilkinson is chiefly concerned to show, the Industrial Relations Act of 1990 seems likely to be a source of future difficulty, since, while conceived as an essential element of a concertative strategy, the advantage to labour is not readily apparent. Thus, the union leadership is exposed to rank-and-file attack for ‘trading concessions in return for little benefit’ and in turn the strategy as a whole can be represented ‘as an attempt not so much to incorporate the unions as social partners in the organization of the economy, but to restrict their ability to protest the neo-liberal economic agenda begun by Fianna Fáil in 1987 and continued since.’ (1991: 36).

theory, this seemingly precocious political development should then be of major benefit to the project of industrial advance.<sup>17</sup> However, a directly contrary view is now indicated. It may rather be that the distinctive structure and culture of Irish politics stand as barriers to the resolution of persisting economic problems, precisely because the strategies and policies offering the best chances of success would be divisive in class terms, and could thus be carried through only by parties ready to face such divisiveness and to address the ideological issues that arise.

Thus, as one factor in the failure of the concertative attempts of the 1970s, Hardiman (1988) has identified the reluctance of governing parties, dependent upon cross-class electoral support, to accept the distributive conflicts and associated ideological clashes that would be involved if national pay agreements were to be turned into more stable 'class compromises', through which the achievement of macroeconomic goals might be facilitated. And likewise, as regards the failure of governments to give support to employers' attempts at weakening organised labour, Breen *et al.* (1990: ch. 8) have argued that, because of the non-ideological character of Irish party politics, any such aggressive 'free market' strategy could not appear electorally attractive (cf. also Roche, 1989). From this standpoint, then, the logical conclusion must be that the 'straws in the wind' noted by Mair (this volume), which suggest in present-day Ireland a waning of the 'politics of national interest', growing socio-political dissensus and the possibility of parties more closely reflecting class interests, ought not to be viewed with dismay. To the contrary, if such straws can indeed be seen, they should be clutched at, since there may be few more hopeful signs so far as the future of Irish political economy is concerned.

## Conclusion

The chief aim of this paper has been to exploit the strategic advantages offered by the Irish case for the critical examination of the liberal theory of industrialism. Difficulties arising with the theory have been suggested on several, quite different grounds. First, it has been argued that the implicit presupposition of the theory that societies can be understood as making the transition to industrialism as essentially independent entities must seriously limit its explanatory power. Many features both of the

<sup>17</sup> It should, however, be noted that no very obvious explanation for this development is itself derivable from the liberal theory—that is, in terms of the logic of industrialism as this operated in the Irish case.

actual course followed by industrialisation in Ireland and of the society that has by the present time emerged cannot be adequately accounted for in terms of internal processes—that is, of the progressive reshaping of a ‘traditional’ order by the functional logic of industrialism—but reflect, rather, major external influences, inseparable from Ireland’s particular history as a European and a post-colonial nation.<sup>18</sup>

Secondly, it has been shown that in an area where the ‘endogenous’ processes directly addressed by the liberal theory might be regarded as primary, that of the changing nature of social stratification, expectations deriving from the theory are still not well supported by the empirical evidence. Ireland provides an unusually good test-case for the claim that advancing industrialism is associated with the creation of a more achievement-oriented and open society—which turns out, however, to give largely negative results. Even if, then, it is accepted that a logic of industrialism is here at work, what may still be questioned is its force, and the assumption of the liberal theory that it must prevail when opposed by the actions of individuals and families concerned to maintain the relative power and advantage that they presently possess.

Thirdly, it has been observed that the ideological ambition of the liberal theory—to promote, one might say, the ideology of the end of ideology—though furthered by the collapse of state socialism in eastern Europe, is at the same time threatened in the western world. An awareness has emerged that a pluralist polity may not, at a high level of development, be that functionally most compatible with a market economy. The Irish case well illustrates the unintended and undesirable consequences for economic performance that the institutions of ‘pluralistic industrialism’ can engender and, in a rather distinctive way, the difficulties of seeking either to transcend or to weaken these institutions in a situation where non-ideological politics are already established.

To end with, then, it would seem appropriate to ask: if such criticism of the liberal theory can be sustained by reference to the Irish case, what in turn follows for Ireland and for those concerned with the future of its industrial society? In response, two things might be said. First, although, as remarked at the outset, the liberal theory is a theory of constraints, it still fails to provide an adequate account of the way in which the development of industrial societies is thus shaped. The emphasis placed on constraints supposed to follow from the functional exigencies of industrialism

<sup>18</sup> In this last respect, however, the foregoing analysis would suggest that more emphasis needs to be given to the fact that the Irish situation was one of ‘internal’ rather than of ‘external’ colonialism (cf. Hechter, 1975), as a result of which certain ‘core’ political and social rights were extended to the economic periphery.

would seem exaggerated—to the neglect of others which, in regard to Ireland at least, need to be accorded much greater importance. That is, on the one hand, external constraints deriving from relations with other nations and increasingly, one could expect, with multinational business enterprises and supranational political agencies; and, on the other hand, internal constraints stemming not from the logic of industrialism but from social structures and processes expressing established relations of power and advantage within Irish society that have evident self-maintaining properties. Secondly, though, there is still no reason to accept that constraints of whatever kind operate to such an extent that major political choices are narrowed down in the way that exponents of the liberal theory have wished to claim. The idea that in the more advanced western societies, polity and economy have by now come into such a degree of functional harmony that an ‘end state’ must be recognised is not one that can withstand empirical examination. Even if the ‘universalisation of liberalism’ is assumed, significantly different versions of industrial society are still possible, and may be seriously pursued, within the limits thus set. And in Ireland especially, it could be argued that the prospects of creating a more successful industrial society could only be enhanced by changes in political culture and organisation that would encourage the ‘real ideological alternatives’ that do in fact exist to be more vigorously explored and contested.

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