RAYMOND CROTTY, a leading economic historian, analyses the problem of whether Ireland's modernisation has been a real or cosmetic process. He does so with reference to two books:

- L.M. Cullen, *The Emergence of Modern Ireland, 1600-1900*, London: Batsford Academic, 1981;
- T.W. Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution, 1846-1882*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981.

In the first of a two-part series, Crotty challenges the view that Ireland is an essentially "western" country. He suggests that colonization, in which a tribal land tenure system was destroyed by the imposition of private property rights, produced the under-development that is characteristic of the histories of Third World countries. The bibliography will appear in Part II, in the July-August issue of *Land and Liberty*, which will assess Michael Davitt's role in the campaign for land reform.

# 'FATALLY FLAWED' ECONOMY

TWO books, each by an eminent Irish historian, provide much material relating to Ireland's evolution through recent centuries: Professor Cullen's is "an attempt to integrate the varied themes of Irish history into a general framework which will make its complexity and evolution more intelligible"; Professor Moody's book "is intended to cover the career of Michael Davitt in the context of the two Irish revolutionary movements, the Irish republican or fenian movement and the Land League movement, which during 1879–82 interacted on each other with momentous results".

The books appear at a time of exceptional crisis in Ireland. The number getting a livelihood in the Republic continues its 140-year-long decline, with the gainfully employed population down from three million in 1841 to 1.1 million in 1981, a lower figure than at any time in the past two centuries. The population of the Republic, however, has in recent years reversed its unique 140-year-long decline and is now, as in the 1840s, increasing, and doing so more rapidly than that of any other west European country.

Nearly half the people in a fatally flawed Irish economy in the 1840s subsisted entirely on the potato, an exotic crop from the New World that had come into general use in Ireland little more than a century earlier [*O'Neill*, 1952]. Now the Irish economy is hardly less dependent on foreign borrowing, soaring beyond control and liable to be withdrawn as suddenly and as disastrously as the exotic potato crop which failed in the 1840s. It may be useful under these circumstances to consider Professor Cullen's and Professor Moody's books from the point of view of the the theoretical framework within which the facts are marshalled and interpreted.

Professor Cullen sees "the emergence of modern Ireland between 1600 and 1900" as an "archaic" society being "firmly modernized" through the agency mainly of English landlords and gentry (who rate 105 index entries in 250 pages of text), of English and Scottish settlers, and of middlemen. Rapid modernization involved the construction of villages, mainly in the 17th century and mainly by landlords and settlers. It also involved a high degree of "commercialism" of agriculture which, together with population growth, caused major changes in diet. The principal dietary changes, which are the subject of two out of 12 chapters, were from a mainly milk-based diet to one that included more meat and crop products. The expedited process of "firmly modernizing" an "archaic" Ireland caused some disruption and a certain loss of identity, which are manifested now on the one hand, by an aggressive nationalism and, on the other hand, by a frequently seemingly callous disregard for the past, other than a fairy-tale one of a land of saints and scholars and of milk and honey. Professor Cullen otherwise places the modernization of Ireland fairly within the broad pattern of western development and economic growth.

Another, and it is suggested a more correct, interpretation of the events described by Professor Cullen as the modernization of archaic Ireland is that these were the responses of individuals who were the agents of an historical process that they little understood and were even less capable of influencing. The individual in Ireland, more than in any other European country, whether landlord, middleman, merchant, land reformer or peasant, has been singularly incapable of influencing a course of events that has been determined, to an altogether exceptional extent, by external

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forces. An institutional framework was established in Ireland 400 years ago by those outside forces. Irish society has since responded to changing external circumstances within an essentially unchanging institutional framework.

Professor Cullen omits to mention an important item in the Irish diet up to the 18th century. This was blood drawn from the veins of live cattle. A diet comprising milk, its products, and blood has been standard for pastoral peoples for millennia. It continues to be the diet of the Masai, Fulani and other African pastoralists. Caesar reported it as the diet of the Germans and Britons two thousand years ago. [*Caesar*, 1951: 36, 136]. It was a diet, however, that had disappeared from most of western Europe perhaps a millennium before Professor Cullen's period. The persistence of a milk/milk product and blood diet in Ireland was one of a number of features that justify the perceptive observation of an Irish historian that, in the whole of Christiandom in the Middle Ages, the country where conditions were most similar to those of Ireland was at the opposite extreme of the Christian world, Ethiopia [*Nicholls*, 1972:3].

Though Christianity had been readily adopted and had been stoutly defended against pagan invaders in Ethiopia and Ireland, both countries remained firmly outside the sphere of the individualism, rule of law and private property that formed the basis of western Europe's political economy and made possible its evolution and development after the collapse of the Roman empire. Ireland's climate, a couple of degrees of temperature lower and a couple of inches of rainfall higher, hindered spontaneous escape from tribal pastoralism. So, when the Normans, less prudent than the Romans, attempted to transfer to Ireland the crop-growing culture of western Europe, they had either to revert to pastoralism and become *Hiberniores ipsos Hibernos*, or to withdraw to the driest, warmest part of the country, a small enclave within the Pale on the east coast. Ireland, alone of west European countries, failed to generate an indigenous capitalism.

● Peasants ploughing a pappy field with a bullock. Is Ireland's economy closer to Thailand's than Europe's?

Neighbouring England, with a mean temperature a couple of degrees higher and a rainfall a couple of inches lower, did lie within — though barely — the limits of medieval crop-growing. The fact of its marginality enabled England, in a remarkable way, to avail itself of Europe's expanding demand for wool and cloth, especially in the boom conditions following the Black Death of the 14th century; and by means of the resulting trade, to transform itself from a European backwater into the foremost power in capitalist Europe's worldwide expansion [*Crotty*, 1980: 22–6].

The existence side by side of the politico-economically least and most advanced countries in Europe at the commencement of Europe's worldwide expansion precipitated in Ireland, alone of European countries, that clash between an indigenous, non-capitalist culture and European individualistic capitalism that has dominated the history of the non-European world for the past four centuries. Having capitalist institutions and technology superimposed on its indigenous, non-capitalist, tribal pastoralism was a traumatic experience peculiar to Ireland among European countries. It has been a four-century-long experience that in important ways links Ireland more closely with the Third World of Latin America, Africa, South and South East Asia than with the countries of Europe; or with the countries of the New World, where no similar cultural clash occurred and capitalism was established on a *tabula rasa*.

The superimposition of English, protestant capitalism on Irish, catholic tribalism involved the appropriation of the communally held clan lands as private property. The driving force behind the changes since then, which are recorded by Professor Cullen, has been the pursuit of profit from that land, uninhibited by concern for the defeated, disaffected and rebellious natives; within limits that have been closely circumscribed by difficult conditions of agricultural production; and in response to changing external demand.

IT IS HIGHLY desirable to defuse the national antipathy that leads patriotic young Irish people to massacre ceremonial troops on the streets and in the parks of London. That can best be done by acquiring a better understanding of the centuries-old relationship between the two peoples and, on the basis of that, undoing as far as possible the continuing baneful consequences for Ireland of the relationship.

This is not furthered either by overstating or — less commonly — by understating the effects of the relationship. Professor Cullen appears to engage in the latter when he suggests that the responsibility for Irish poverty of the British colonising power is less than generally believed because, *inter alia*, Ireland lacked the minerals that were the basis of European wealth in the 19th century. The fact that a number of politically independent, but minerally poor, European countries — Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands and Switzerland — shared in full measure Europe's growing prosperity suggests that, though independence was probably not a sufficient condition, the possession of minerals was certainly not

The author's suggestion that

"as early as 1749" there was a "more ready sale or higher prices for the young stock that smallholders could not carry themselves" conflicts with trends in the cattle industry. Exports of mature cattle or beef had been secularly static for almost a century previously and were to remain so for almost a century subsequently [*Crotty*, 1966: 16, 276]. That implied a static demand for young stock. The supply of young stock, on the other hand, had been increasing in line with secularly expanding butter exports and numbers of dairy cows. The market for young stock must, therefore, have been extremely depressed throughout this period.

The author's perceived connection between poverty and the localization of the textile industry is questionable. "Another response" by smallholders whose acreage was declining "was increased employment in weaving and spinning. . . . Moreover, precisely because those counties (Mayo and Galway) were poor and families needed every penny they could lay hands on, they were much slower to abandon domestic activity than more prosperous counties as the returns in it diminished". There is a more plausible explanation that accords better with the facts of the concentration in the late 18th century of the linen industry in Ulster and on the west coast, and its decline in east Munster and Leinster. Young people in Leinster and east Munster, with no more assets than a spade and a basket of seed potatoes, under the particular commodity price relationships that obtained during the reign of George III, from 1760 to 1820, and on a very freely working land market, were able to acquire land exhausted by cereal-growing, grow potatoes on it, feed themselves on the potatoes, fatten a pig for sale on the surplus potatoes, pay the rent, and leave the land rehabilitated for another crop of profitable cereals. They did what young people similarly circumstanced anywhere in the world at any time


have done: they mated and established their own homes. In doing so they created and expanded into the largest social class in the land, within the reign of a single English monarch, an Irish coolie class, living by crop-growing without assets other than a spade and some seed, located 20 degrees of latitude higher than any other similar class in the world, and absolutely dependent on the potato crop introduced from the Americas two centuries previously.

The Irish coolies had not the capital to grow and spin flax, and their parents no longer had the family labour to do so. Opportunities for the capital-less young were poorer in the wetter west, where little corn was grown; and in Ulster, where the Ulster Custom recognized the prescriptive rights of mainly protestant, settler tenants and impeded the free working of the land market. The combination of family capital and labour, characteristic of west European agriculture from the Middle Ages, was thus better maintained on the west coast and in Ulster, enabling these provinces better to respond to the growing demand for relatively capital- and labour-intensive textiles. This, and not the greater prosperity of the east, would seem to account for the concentration of the Irish linen industry.

THE PURSUIT of profit from land has determined the course of Irish life for the past four centuries to an altogether exceptional extent. Population has adjusted so as to maximize these profits, expanding or contracting according to the requirements of an agriculture dominated by external demand. Demand in the eighteenth century was for butter, pigmeat and grain; and that demand originated principally in England, either directly or triangularly via the West Indies, where Irish provisions fed the slaves growing tropical products for the English market. Potatoes were the key to meeting that demand. They prepared the ground for the cereals crops, of which the grain was exported and the straw provided critically scarce winter fodder for milch cows. Potatoes surplus to the cultivator's nutritional needs were marketed through fattened pigs, "the gentlemen who paid the rent". The number of pigs exported, therefore, provides a good measure of the externally determined demand for Irish labour in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The appropriators of Irish tribal lands under the Tudors lost no time in realizing their extra-

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ordinary profit potential. A country that had previously engaged intermittently in exporting mainly hunted, gathered or crude pastoral products, acquired under the early Stuarts what was certainly the largest livestock export trade in the world at the time. Annual cattle exports to England exceeded 45,000 and may have reached 100,000. Sheep exports were on a similar scale [*Woodward*, 1973]. This was a remarkable achievement, given the scale of the contemporary English market and Ireland's very recent emergence from tribalism.

Irish livestock exports on this scale adversely affected the ascendant English parliamentary forces in three important ways. First, the king received customs due on livestock imports. Second, the trade made Irish land valuable, and an able representative of the king in Ireland, like Wentworth, was able as a result tc extract votes of taxes from the owners of the recently appropriated Irish land. The crown in both cases acquired resources that were beyond the control of the Westminster parliament. Finally, the trade, in addition to strengthening the financial position of the Stuart monarchy *vis-à-vis* parliament, also weakened that of the parliamentary landowners by depressing, through competition, prices generally of the pastoral products that were the principal source of their wealth.

Understandably, the Restoration Parliament lost little time in passing the Cattle Acts, which excluded virtually all Irish agricultural produce from England. One major result of the Acts was that Irish livestock exports, which had grown so rapidly under the early Stuarts, virtually ceased and in the 1820s, long after the repeal of the Acts, were no greater than they had been 160 years earlier, before the passing of the Acts [*Crotty*, 1966: 16, 277].

If the 60-year reign of George III may be taken as marking the English industrial revolution, the subsequent decades were the period when the English industrial masses began slowly to secure some of the benefits of industrialization in the form of steadily rising incomes. One manifestation of these rising incomes was a gradual, sustained shift away from high energy foods, especially bread and butter, and towards high protein foods, especially beef. This has been reflected in an increase in Irish beef and cattle prices of fivefold relative to grain and of threefold relative to butter over the 150-year period 1820 to 1970 [*Crotty*, 1980: 32]. This fundamental change in external demand and the transformation in the overwhelmingly important agricultural price relativities that it initiated destroyed the economic basis of Ireland's largest social class, the coolies or cottiers. The Irish coolie class, which was brought into existence by one set of external demand conditions during the reign of George III, was obliterated by a very different set of price relationships during the reign of Queen Victoria. As cattle and sheep stocks expanded in response to the changed external demand conditions, Ireland's capital-less peasants were wiped out by famine, enforced celibacy and emigration.

[*To Be Continued*]

# ISSUE DODGED IN HAMILTON BANK CASE

## LETTER

*Sir*, I was startled to come across Walter Rybeck's account (September-October 1986, page 86) of the *Hamilton Bank* case, which — to put it charitably — bears at most a casual resemblance to what actually transpired there.

In 1973 a developer in Williamson County, Tennessee, obtained informal approval for a large, 736-unit subdivision on some 676 acres, which he proceeded to build out in stages. But in 1979 the County changed the rules, insisting that only another 67 units could be built out, whereas under the owner's original plans he would have built another 476.

The developer was foreclosed on (which is how the bank got into the picture). The bank tried to pursue the original plans as the land's new owner, but to no avail. And so — after some complex administrative maneuverings — the bank sued in federal court, alleging a constitutionally forbidden deprivation, or taking, of its property.

Both the federal judge sitting as a chancellor and the jury agreed that under Tennessee law the developer's right to finish the subdivision had vested, and the county's conduct was illegal. The judge ordered the county to permit completion of the project as originally planned, which was done by a post-trial settlement agreement, substantially on the developer's terms.

But the jury had also determined that the county's unlawful (albeit temporary) interference with the owner's lawful use of his land deprived him of all economically viable use of it, causing losses of $350,000 which the jury awarded, but whose payment the judge blocked. It was the entitlement to the payment of that $350,000, that was the sole issue on appeal, which eventually the U.S. Supreme Court did indeed dodge on procedural grounds.

In short, whatever transpired in that case, it can hardly be depicted as a "tightening of land use rules" or of "lost profits", as Rybeck would have it.

Since the *Hamilton Bank* case the U.S. Supreme Court ducked the issue once again last year in the *MacDonald, Sommers & Frates v. Yolo County* case. It has since then accepted three taking-by-regulation cases which I expect to be decided by the end of June. Two of them have already been argued. Stay tuned.

I note Rybeck's rhetorical question of whether the landowners will insist that they must "repay [sic] society when public action *adds* to the value of their land." How very ingenious! When the government removes administrative obstacles, by the way, which the government itself imposed in the first place and which are now wrong (which is why they are being removed), that is something the land owner must pay for? Dare I mention that he already pays for the increased value through taxes (ad valorem, income and inheritance) whether Rybeck approves of the particular method of taxation or not?

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