

Placing Ireland in a Comparative Perspective

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Abstract: Some recent publications have raised the question of placing Ireland in a comparative perspective. Three such comparative frameworks are investigated in this paper: advanced capitalist countries, (West)European countries, and finally semi-peripheral European societies. Although not an advanced capitalist economy, Ireland displays the central institutional features of such societies. But on closer inspection, it seems that such features can be attributed to a European institutional framework, rather than to advanced capitalism as such. Furthermore, Ireland is located, in economic terms, in broadly the same position as countries such as Greece, Portugal and Spain. But it has very little in common with them in terms of socio-political characteristics. Ireland provides in that sense a striking illustration of the disjunction which may emerge between a process of capitalist development and institutional development.

I INTRODUCTION

Recent publications have sought to place Ireland in a comparative perspective. The whole debate on the nature of Irish political life has already focused attention on the type of political system Ireland should be compared to (Mair, 1987). In her study of pay determination in Ireland, Niamh Hardiman (1987) wonders why Ireland has not followed the path of other small European countries towards a stable corporatist arrangement. She asserts that the requirements of competitiveness in an open economy are better satisfied with such corporatist agreements. Joseph Lee (1989) seeks to explain why Ireland, unlike the other small countries in Europe which have found themselves in a similar situation, has not succeeded in its effort to modernise and industrialise. The study of Irish society by Breen *et al.* (1990) concludes that, in the way the state contributes to the shaping of society, Ireland has a great deal in common with countries such as Greece, and possibly the European periphery as a whole.

When Liam O'Dowd asked: "What is the most appropriate international and comparative framework for analysing any state and the two states in Ireland in particular?", he placed this issue right at the core of the study of the state in Ireland. This question concerns the definition of the type of society Ireland is, although the question is usually discussed in a paradoxical way. Most of the time, the analysis does not aim to identify a comparative framework, but to account for the fact that Ireland deviates, that it refuses to correspond to a type. Why does the Irish political system differ so radically from most other liberal democracies? Why has Ireland not developed the stable corporatist framework which is observed in other small, open economies of Europe? Why has it failed to industrialise, while most other European countries in a similar situation have managed to?

The choice of a comparative framework depends on the kind of question being asked. But we may usefully follow Durkheim's principle that comparison is meaningful only if it concerns societies of the same type. In that sense, the present paper is mainly interested in identifying the kind of society Ireland is. It endeavours to locate it within a category of countries which share similar features. Should we think of it as belonging to the category of countries diversely referred to as capitalist, industrial or even advanced societies? Should we think of it as a peripheral or semi-peripheral society? The need to compare obliges us to place Ireland in a class of countries with which it can be associated. It may be safely assumed that any discourse about Irish society starts by relating it to a type.

II IRELAND AND ADVANCED CAPITALIST SOCIETIES

Although Ireland cannot even remotely be called an advanced capitalist society, it participates in diverse international associations, such as the OECD, which bring together the most advanced capitalist societies. It is also engaged, within the European Union, in a process of integration with some of the most advanced capitalist countries. For this reason, it is routinely placed in such a comparative context. But does it make sense to compare Ireland, as it is frequently done, with such "advanced" countries?

The main features of the type of capitalist society which developed after World War II have been described by A. Shonfield in the following terms:

In the chapters which follow I shall try to identify the characteristic institutional features of the economic order which has gradually emerged in postwar capitalism. There are big differences between the key institutions and economic methods of one country and another. The differences are often the subject of sharp ideological cleavages. Yet, when the total picture is examined, there is a certain uniformity in the

texture of these societies. In terms of what they do, rather than what they say about it, and even more markedly in terms of the pattern of their behaviour over a period of years, the similarities are striking. (Shonfield, 1965, p. 65).

The author accepts the wide variations which exist between such countries, but he still considers that they constitute a type or a class of society. His model emphasises the growing intervention of the state in the economy, the provision of social services by the public authorities, rapid technological development, a recourse to some kind of planning and, related to the latter, *concertation* between the major social partners and the state.

The analysis of contemporary capitalist societies has been imbued with such a view. In this context, capitalism does not correspond to a type of economy, but principally to a type of society. The foremost characteristic of these societies, in contrast with earlier so-called liberal capitalism, consists in the mode of articulation of the economy, the polity and also the "social". This mode of articulation has brought the state at the centre, not only of political life, but of society as a whole. Modern capitalist societies have had to elaborate a whole range of institutional arrangements which mark them in many ways: ... "their own efficient functioning [of capitalist market economies] is thereby threatened and can continue only to the extent that this destabilising effect is offset and constrained by quite 'exogenous' institutional arrangements" (Goldthorpe, 1984, p. 4). Such institutional arrangements imply state activity. They include, as their typical elements, state management of the economy, state regulation, a welfare state and, in many cases, corporatist tendencies (*ibid*, pp. 317-323). Serious planning efforts have been dropped in all such societies, but the replacement of a facilitative state by a directive state has been given as one of the major hallmarks of advanced capitalist societies (Winkler, 1976). For instance: "The state can no longer merely facilitate private production; it must aim to direct and restructure economic activity in numerous ways" (Scott, 1979, p. 176). He goes on to identify demand management, welfare expenditure, direct planning and "bringing together the various economic interests" as the major features of such state activity.

A picture of the institutional features of modern capitalism, as defined by Shonfield, pervades the whole field of analysis. It has appeared in analyses which belong to very different perspectives. Alan Cawson (1982), for instance, closely links far-reaching economic state intervention, welfare state, planning and even, in some circumstances, corporatism. He observes that planning is usually tri-partite, an institutional set-up which marks the corporatist framework. Ian Gough (1979) also emphasises the expanded rôle of the state

both in economic and social policy matters, and he points to the emergence of tripartism in public policy-making. In the same way, Claus Offe (1984) sees a link between advanced capitalism, economic state intervention and the provision of social protection.

“Organised capitalism” is the generic name which has recently been given to the form of capitalism which has evolved from the beginning of this century, and asserted itself after World War II (Lash and Urry, 1987). A range of characteristics are attributed to this organised capitalism, and most of them are quite conventional, although debatable (concentration of capital, separation ownership and control of the means of production, growth of a bureaucratic and intelligentsia middle class, etc.). Some central features of this model have to do with the state and its place in society, and correspond quite closely to the model of advanced capitalism we have presented: growth in state organisation of the labour market; welfare orientation; change in the nature of state intervention towards a directive rôle; corporatism. One recognises then, right at the core of such a model, the institutional arrangements which have been highlighted by Shonfield and others.

The purpose of this paper is not to test the validity of a general model of capitalist society. Rather, some institutional features have emerged in many advanced capitalist countries, or are at least frequently associated with them. The main question for us is how does Ireland fare in comparison with advanced capitalist societies? We need to remember at this stage that Ireland can hardly be classified as an advanced capitalist economy, although it is frequently placed in the context of advanced societies. However, Table 1 gives the rank order of 18 OECD countries, including Ireland, on four relevant dimensions of the model of advanced capitalist societies we are considering. A short indication of the procedures used to elaborate scores and rank countries for each dimension is given in the Note below. Ireland fits nicely in the picture, and ranks quite high on three of the dimensions. Only in relation to the organisation of industrial relations, with its traditional emphasis on voluntarism, is Ireland located lower than average. We then end up with the paradox that a country, which does not belong to the category of advanced capitalism, finds itself very much at home in the institutional set up of advanced capitalist countries.

Ireland, despite the relatively low level of capitalist industrialisation, has acquired the central institutional features of advanced capitalist countries. But one wonders if the model under discussion does not in fact represent a model of European capitalism, rather than of capitalism in general. For historical reasons, it can be considered that European countries have developed an institutional style, that they rely on a typical range of institutional devices. Such an hypothesis would also account for the fit which exists, in

Table 1: *Rank-Order of Countries on the Scores of the Dimensions of the Model of Advanced Capitalism*

	A	B	C	D
*Australia	12	17	15	11
Austria	4	9	1	1
Belgium	8	5	1	4
*Canada	8	12	6	11
Denmark	2	2	6	8
Finland	8	11	1	1
France	8	4	13	4
Germany	12	6	1	4
Ireland	4	8	6	11
Italy	12	13	6	17
*Japan	17	18	15	11
The Netherlands	4	3	6	1
*New Zealand	12	14	1	4
Norway	3	7	6	1
Sweden	1	1	6	8
Switzerland	17	15	16	18
United Kingdom	3	10	13	11
*USA	12	16	16	16

A = General score of economic state intervention.

B = General score of welfare provision.

C = Score of state incorporation.

D = Score of state presence in industrial relations.

institutional terms, between Ireland and the model of advanced capitalism.

One can actually check if the model referred to previously is not specifically European, rather than capitalist in general, if this mode of state-society organisation belongs to a European tradition. Out of the 18 countries considered, 5 are not located in Europe. If we look again at Table 1, which gives the rank order of the countries under investigation, we observe that non-European advanced capitalist countries rank low on all but one of the

NOTE: The ranks of each country in Table 1 are based on scores which have been calculated on the basis of a range of indices. The sources, data bases and modes of calculation of scores are available from the author.

- *score of economic state intervention:* tax revenue to GDP; state revenue to GDP, state contribution to capital formation; state consumption expenditures to GDP; percentage of labour force in the public sector; contribution of state to GDP.
- *score of welfare state:* benefits of 5 major welfare programmes as per cent of GDP.
- *state regulation of industrial relations:* state regulation of the determination of pay levels and industrial conflicts; state involvement in the determination of pay levels and industrial conflicts.
- *score of corporatism:* institutionalised consultation of central authorities with core interest groups; tri-partite institutions; interest group participation in the implementation of public policy.

scores. They consistently rank low on state economic intervention, level of welfare provision and also on the score of state presence in industrial relations (with the exception of New Zealand). The picture seems less consistent for the degree of state incorporation (with high ranks for Canada and New Zealand). These ranks alert us, at the very least, to the fact that non-European capitalist countries remain marginal to the model of the advanced capitalist societies we are discussing.

A strong welfare orientation, for instance, represents a "European" institutional response, rather than a universal answer, to the problems of advanced capitalist development. European countries, relatively speaking, ensure a high level of welfare provision, independently of the level of economic development. In a similar way, the non-European countries in the list tend to rank low on the variable of corporatism. The high position of European countries on this variable can only be interpreted in terms of the strength of the corporatist solutions in these countries, independently of the level of state economic development. Incorporation constitutes a European institutional answer.

But significantly from our point of view, the elimination of the non-European countries from the list places Ireland more firmly at the core of the institutional nexus of these European countries. The question of why does the institutional framework of European capitalism differ from non-European capitalist countries is of course of great interest. It seems that the answer points to the presence of an organised working-class and to a compromise between the two major classes of industrial capitalism which it has induced. The compromise has consisted in a regulation of the relations between employers and employees, an attempt at integrating the lower classes within the political system, efforts at involving them in an orderly way in the decision-making process, and also occasional trading off of social benefits for economic concessions, etc.

III IRELAND AND THE SEMI-PERIPHERY OF EUROPE

To speak of a European institutional set-up assumes some sort of unity among European countries. In fact, a distinction is conventionally made between developed or core European countries and what has been variously labelled underdeveloped, peripheral or semi-peripheral countries. ... "There are sufficient similarities in their experiences (Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain) to mark them as a distinctive group of semi-peripheral economies" (Williams, 1984, p. 7). Whatever the validity of including Italy as a whole in this category of Southern peripheral countries, Ireland is conventionally associated with them. "It seems best to class Ireland with the countries of the

Mediterranean periphery” (Seers, 1979, p. 7). The semi-peripheral countries of Europe would constitute the obvious comparative framework for Ireland.

In fact, we have to deal with two different questions. The first one concerns the extent to which a group of countries share characteristics and significantly differ from other societies. In other words, is there a type of society that one can call semi-peripheral European? In the event of a positive answer to this question, does Ireland belong to such a category? The relevant literature points to a model of peripheral societies within Europe, although such a model has not been systematically defined. It appears, even if in diverse versions, in the work of authors such as Mouzelis (1978), Seers (1979), Williams (1984), Hudson and Lewis (1985). A picture of semi-peripheral European societies has been elaborated by listing the characteristics attributed to them by four authors who have written on this topic. The features which are mentioned by at least two authors are retained in our admittedly composite model.

Pronounced inequalities (regional...)	Mouzelis	Seers	Williams	Hudson
Dualism (foreign-domestic sectors)	Mouzelis	Seers	Williams	
Penetration of foreign capital	Mouzelis	Seers	Williams	
Weak civil society (clientelism, social disorganisation, weak bourgeoisie)	Mouzelis	Seers		Hudson
Overriding importance of the state	Mouzelis	Seers		Hudson
Growth of the state apparatus	Mouzelis			Hudson
Chronic unemployment, migration		Seers		Hudson
Inflated service sector	Mouzelis			
Low agricultural productivity	Mouzelis			
Less diversified economy, low technological capacity, low wages		Seers		
Tourism		Seers		
Unstable political system		Seers		

Such a model of semi-peripherality emphasises partial industrialisation and a special form of capital accumulation. Low productivity in agriculture, a large category of self-employed, chronic unemployment and high emigration, a deep penetration by foreign capital and the existence of an industrial dualism, all these characteristics recur in the writings mentioned. But semi-peripherality involves characteristics other than economic. A recurrent theme consists in the overriding importance of the state, its widespread economic intervention, its directive rôle, even when it acts in a fragmented and uncoordinated way. This intense state activity has led to the growth, and some would say the overdevelopment, of the state apparatus in such countries. This high state profile, and autonomy, is possible only because of the existence of a weak *civil society* in these countries. Such weakness derives mainly from the weakness of an indigeneous capitalist class, and from the

low level of organisation by the masses. Finally, the model of a semi-peripheral society emphasises the existence of stark internal inequalities, and in particular of wide regional disparities. We now investigate the validity of such a model of semi-peripherality under the major headings referred to above. A great deal of the information upon which we rely is based mainly on Eurostat official statistics. For this reason, we can obtain standardised information only for EC countries and the tables do not include the whole range of European (OECD) countries. We should not forget that such statistics are politically constructed and that they involve diverse national strategies and manipulations. At the same time, such statistics have the advantage of being formally standardised and can be used, cautiously, for comparative purpose.

(a) A Pattern of Economic Development

A range of economic indicators mark out peripheral societies. Table 2 column A gives the level of affluence and reveals the marked difference in per capita income which exists between a selection of core European countries and the group of semi-peripheral countries under consideration. In the same way, the importance of the agricultural sector in terms of employment remains comparatively high, even if in decline, for the latter countries (Table 2 column C). But the high level of agricultural employment is not accompanied by a high level in terms of contribution by agriculture to the national wealth. Agriculture contributes only 16 per cent of GDP in Greece, 13 per cent in Portugal and 8 per cent in Spain (Williams, 1984). The four semi-peripheral countries we are considering have experienced a long tradition of emigration but, curiously enough, only Ireland and Spain display a particularly high level of unemployment (Table 2 column B). The low level of registered unemployment for Portugal and Greece should not be taken at face value, as under-employment may not always become "unemployment" in more traditional and agricultural societies.

This pattern of economic development does not simply consist in a poor economic performance, which could be explained by late development. It produces a different pattern of development which, some would contend, places such countries into a position of peripherality. At the core of the pattern, one finds the penetration of foreign capital into the economy, more particularly in the manufacturing sector. Some semi-peripheral countries are indeed characterised by a significant presence, and even in some cases a dominance, of foreign capital. But relevant figures, for instance the sales of foreign owned enterprises as a percentage of total sales by manufacturing industries (Fishwick, 1982), indicate a great deal of variation both within core countries and within the semi-peripheral ones. A dualism is also said to exist

Table 2 : *Indicators of Capitalist Development*

	A	B	C
Belgium	17,444	11.6	2.8
Denmark	18,478	7.2	6.0
France	19,244	10.2	6.4
Germany	18,703	7.1	3.7
Italy	18,841	9.6	9.3
Luxemburg	22,311	2.9	3.4
The Netherlands	17,605	10.5	4.7
United Kingdom	18,402	11.4	2.2
Greece	9,353	7.8	26.6
Ireland	11,534	18.2	15.1
Portugal	9,452	8.8	18.9
Spain	13,324	21.8	13.0

A: Level of affluence (per capita Purchasing Power Parity) 1989.

Source: Eurostat 1991, p. 40.

B: Percentage of the labour force unemployed 1990.

Source: Eurostat 1991, p. 126.

C: Percentage of the labour force employed in agriculture 1989.

Source: Eurostat 1991, p. 119.

in such countries between a foreign (modern) and a domestic (traditional) sector. Assessing the amount of dualism between the foreign sector and the domestic industrial sector is beyond the realistic scope of this analysis, for it would require a detailed analysis in each country. But that the modern and traditional sectors are better integrated in core countries than peripheral ones is at the very least open to doubt.

(b) The Central Place of the State

The state is said to occupy a particularly central position in the semi-peripheral societies of Europe. Widespread intervention in all aspects of life imposes on the state a directive rôle. But the figures shown in Table 3 do not uphold such a conclusion. The state contribution to GDP only reveals marginal differences between peripheral and core societies. If anything, Greece, Portugal and Spain have a low rate of state contribution to GDP. Furthermore, Ireland differs from other peripheral countries in this context. In terms of the percentage of state revenue to GDP, Greece and Spain reach a far lower level than core societies, while Ireland is at a similar level.

Table 3: *Measures of the Centrality of the State*

	A	B	C	D
Belgium	15.58	52.44	30.3	56.6
Denmark	20.12	65.04	24.8	60.7
France	12.40	53.24	34.6	50.7
Germany	8.97	55.40	32.5	49.4
Italy	13.73	44.94	30.1	53.7
Luxemburg	17.6	57.52	30.5	54.3
The Netherlands	13.66	65.64	33.7	63.7
United Kingdom	13.09	63.06	32.4	47.4
Greece	9.12	36.31	17.4	36.5
Ireland	16.75	56.90	28.0	57.1
Portugal	11.57		17.0	
Spain	9.60	31.14	13.7	34.1

A: Percentage of state contribution to GDP, 1981.

Source: OECD 1983, from Tables 5 and 6.

B: Percentage of state revenue to GDP, figures for 1980 or 1981 or 1982.

Source: OECD 1984, Tables 112 to 134.

C: Total outlay of government as percentage of GDP, 1960.

Source: OECD, 1984, Table 6.5.

D: Total outlay of government as percentage of GDP, 1982.

Source: OECD 1984, Table, 6.5.

(c) *The Growth of the State*

Independently of the character of state activity, semi-peripheral countries would also be characterised by an excessive growth of the state apparatus. Such an "overdeveloped state" manifests itself by extensive employment in public administration or in the public sector in general. The percentage of the labour force in public employment (a category which covers public administration, defence and compulsory social security) does not reveal a marked difference between advanced and semi-peripheral countries in this respect (Table 4). The state has considerably increased in size since the 1960s, but such an increase has been quite uneven among advanced capitalist countries. Countries such as Portugal and Spain started from a very low level, and doubled their size between 1960 and 1979, but so did some core societies.

The intervention of the state has also been growing in social matters, although the levels of welfare provision in semi-peripheral countries do not compare to that of core countries. If one considers the level of security receipts as percentage of GDP, as a measure of welfare effort, Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain are found at the lowest levels. But Ireland remains very close to the level of welfare provision (welfare effort) in

Table 4: *Percentage of Labour Force Employed in State Activities*

	A	B	C
Belgium	12.2	17.6	15.7
Denmark	13.2	25.5	12.5
France	12.1	14.2	
Germany	8.0	14.7	18.3
Italy	8.1	14.3	
Luxemburg	9.7	11.0	
The Netherlands	11.7	14.7	11.5
United Kingdom	14.9	21.5	11.2
Greece			12.6
Ireland	11.2	14.3	13.0
Portugal	3.9	8.1	
Spain	6.6	12.6	13.8

A and B: Percentage of labour force employed in public sector in 1960 and 1979.

Source: OECD, 1982, Table 1.

C: Percentage of labour force employed in public administration, defence and compulsory social security, 1987.

Source: Eurostat, 1989, Table III/2

Germany, while Portugal trails far behind with only 10 per cent of GDP going towards social security receipts (Table 5). Ireland would be hardly distinguishable from core countries if health services and education were included in the figures. It would also markedly contrast with the other semi-peripheral countries. Furthermore, welfare services have not developed significantly faster in semi-peripheral countries, except perhaps in Spain. Neither is the *statist* character of welfare provision particularly marked in these countries. The latter do not particularly rely on the central state in order to finance or manage the welfare services. In a similar way, the state does not rely specially heavily on transfer payments, as opposed to the direct provision of social services by the state in core countries. Transfer payments certainly constitute a high proportion of social expenditure in these countries, particularly in Greece, but not significantly higher than in core countries.

(d) *A Weak Civil Society*

The central position of the state in semi-peripheral countries is generally said to be related to the weakness of the civil society. This weakness stems from different sources. Society may find it difficult to structure itself, possibly because no social group or class is able to lead this process. Or else, it is associated with an inability or a difficulty for large socio-economic categories to organise themselves in an autonomous way. In both circumstances, the

Table 5: *Some Features of Welfare Provision*

	A	B	C	D	E
Belgium	28.2	390	37.5	29.61	76.87
Denmark	29.0	443	85.9	80.29	62.87
France	30.2	460	22.7	18.24	67.91
Germany	24.3	299	27.4	25.56	68.85
Italy	26.4	354	34.0	29.49	73.05
Luxemburg	27.5	314	27.6	38.59	73.77
The Netherlands	37.3	494	18.3	14.50	78.59
United Kingdom		275	55.6	41.27	67.55
Greece	18.6	273	12.6	16.87	86.88
Ireland	23.2	358	60.8	61.13	66.36
Portugal	10.0	451	10.1	24.66	68.61
Spain	17.6	565	22.8	27.39	75.41

A: Social security receipts as percentage of GDP, for 1983.

Source: International Labour Office, 1988.

B: Index of growth for 1977 of welfare provision (1960 = 100).

Source: International Labour Office, 1984.

C: Percentage of state contributions as source of social security receipts, 1983.

Source: International Labour Office, 1988.

D: Percentage of state contributions as source of social security receipts, 1988.

Source: Eurostat, 1991.

E: Transfer payments as percentage of social expenditure.

Source: Eurostat, 1991.

structuration of society occurs through the state, and it creates a subordination of civil society to the central powers. The idea of a "weak civil society" is not itself well developed or unambiguous, and the impressionistic nature of the evidence does not allow us to reach a definite conclusion. The weakness of the civil society in Greece is widely asserted, and is conventionally explained by a high state control over the whole social formation (Iaokimidis, 1984), or by an extensive clientelism (Mouzelis, 1978). Some major classes, such as the middle class, owe their formation to the state (Petmesidou, 1991), while large segments of the population are linked to the central authorities through clientelism. On the other hand, the weakness of civil society is denied in contemporary Spain, and Giner and Sevilla (1984) speak of increasing interest group formation.

One may take, as one possible measure of the strength of civil society, its autonomous organisational density: namely, the capacity of different socio-economic categories to organise themselves in an autonomous way, to define their interests and impose their presence as a significant interlocutor/partner. Such an index is not easily available, and the rate of unionisation of

the employees can be used as a rough, and not entirely adequate indicator. Table 6 shows the trade union density in a range of Western European countries. Semi-peripheral countries do not seem to differ from core European countries.

Table 6: *Trade Union Density in Selected European Countries*

	<i>Estimated Percentage 1970s / 1980s</i>
Belgium	75
Denmark	79
France	22
Germany	33
Italy	37
Luxemburg	
The Netherlands	38
United Kingdom	54
Greece	30
Ireland	52
Portugal	40
Spain	35

Source: Lane and Ersson, 1987, Table 2.31.

(e) Social Inequalities

Marked inequalities, and more particularly regional disparities, constitute the final major characteristic associated with the model of semi-peripheral European countries. The evidence is not straightforward in this respect. According to a composite index, regional disparities are quite marked for semi-peripheral countries, more so than for core countries (Table 7 column A). But if calculated in terms of the percentage of EC average per capita income, regional differences do not appear more significant in semi-peripheral countries (Table 7 column B). In the same way, the pattern of income distribution, within each country, does not set semi-peripheral countries apart (except for Greece, which has the highest Gini coefficient).

We started with a model of semi-peripheral European countries, based on the analysis of several authors writing on this topic. We set two conditions for validating such a model: that the alleged semi-peripheral countries differ significantly from core European countries, and also that they demonstrate some kind of homogeneity. The available evidence allows us to come to a definite conclusion in relation to the first condition: Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain stand apart in terms of economic performance and characteristics, although not for foreign capital penetration. These four countries are located

Table 7: *Indices of Regional Inequalities*

	A	B	C
Belgium	0.157	184	0.340
Denmark	0.248		0.380
France	0.257	215	0.417
Germany	0.163	154	0.383
Italy	0.271	234	0.398
Luxemburg			
The Netherlands	0.139	304	0.354
United Kingdom	0.103	158	0.318
Greece	0.342	148	0.460
Ireland	0.268	169	0.361
Portugal	0.459	166	
Spain	0.266	223	0.355

A: Regional income index (data for the 1970s).

Source: Lane and Ersson, 1987, Table 2.32.

B: Index of regional disparities (100= region with lowest per capita).

Source: Eurostat, 1991; different source for Ireland.

C: Gini coefficient for income distribution.

Source: Lane and Ersson, 1987, Table 2.29.

in a broadly similar position in terms of capitalist development. But except for their low level of welfare provision, they do not significantly differ from other European countries in relation to the general (non-economic) features which have been assigned to semi-peripheral countries. One fails to identify a type of European society which, outside economic features, could be called semi-peripheral on political or social grounds.

The four countries which have tentatively been included in this semi-peripheral European type differ from each other in many respects. Ireland remains in many ways closer to the so-called core countries than to the semi-peripheral ones. The inclusion of Spain in this type of semi-peripheral society also creates difficulties, as the following statement suggests: "Be that as it may, there is little in the new corporatist structuration of Spanish society that may look unfamiliar or surprising to an observer from an advanced western democracy. Spain's *differentia specifica* still lies elsewhere, in a number of cultural patterns, social institutions and ethnic considerations, a combination of which is unique" (Giner and Sevilla, 1984, p. 136)). Only Greece seems close to this model of society. This does not mean, however, that some of these countries do not share a range of characteristics: simply that they do not amount to a type of society. On the basis of such findings, European mediterranean countries do not provide a relevant comparative framework for Ireland.

IV CONCLUSION

Ireland displays major institutional features which are closely associated with advanced societies, although it cannot be defined as an advanced capitalist economy. To the extent that one focuses on central institutional features of advanced capitalist societies, it becomes meaningful to compare Ireland to such countries. We also investigated the suggestion that Ireland fits into the category of advanced capitalist countries not so much because of the capitalist character of these countries, but because of its participation in an institutional arrangement typical of European countries. It has been contended that (West)European countries have an inclination to rely on definite institutional responses, such as welfare provisions and neo-corporatism which are induced by a class compromise.

In both cases, Ireland would have acquired the institutional features of societies which have reached a different level in the process of capital accumulation. The category of European countries itself includes two very different sets of countries, defined in terms of the level of capitalist development. The model of European semi-peripheral societies (focused mainly on Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, but also on regions within more developed capitalist countries) includes such features as a weak civil society, widespread economic intervention by the state, an overgrown state and a rapidly growing welfare state. Two very basic conditions need to be met in order to speak of a European semi-periphery: first, that they stand apart, as a whole, from core countries and, second, that they share similar characteristics. But these countries have little in common, beyond being located at a lower level of capitalist development. Even there, apparently different levels of unemployment and foreign capital penetration suggest the possibility of different locations in, or types of, "peripherality". To the extent that it is possible to speak of a semi-peripheral type of society (as distinct from a semi-peripheral economy), Ireland does not participate in it. One may furthermore suspect that, from this point of view, Greece would have little in common with Spain or Portugal.

Ireland provides a striking illustration of the disjunction which emerges between a process of capitalist development and the institutional development in these countries. Ireland, although very differently located in the process of capitalist accumulation, has developed major features of advanced capitalist societies. In the same way, although it participates in the process of capital accumulation within the semi-periphery of Europe, Ireland shares few of the institutional features of other semi-peripheral countries. One should be wary, then, of deciding that societies are comparable because of their similar position in the process of capitalist development; or that they cannot be compared because they are not similarly located in such a process.

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