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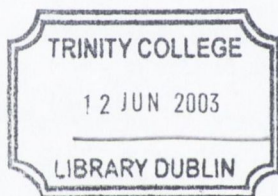
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Theorising Welfare State Development: A Case Study of Social Insurance in the Republic of Ireland

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Ph.D Thesis
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Summary

This thesis has attempted to account for the development of social insurance in post-war Ireland by providing a theoretically informed analysis of the genesis of, and outcomes in, the 1952 Social Welfare Act. It begins with an overview of the main theoretical perspectives on the development of contemporary welfare states, highlighting the shifting concerns with similarity and difference that have informed research over the previous three or so decades. As the thesis moves on to suggest, much of the standard literature is somewhat problematic from an Irish perspective, and the 'state of the art' of contemporary Irish theorising reveals that there are many unanswered questions about the central determinants of the Irish welfare state. This reflects the very limited amount of research focused on locating Ireland in the now extensive literature on modern welfare states. This thesis has attempted to contribute towards filling this gap by assessing the extent to which diverse theoretical perspectives provide useful insights in accounting for the specific outcomes in one particular policy sector.

This research has drawn on a variety of archival sources, including departmental files in the National Archives and the personal papers of some key actors, as well as parliamentary debates, newspapers and secondary sources. Three central aspects of the policy debate were examined, directing attention to different factors influencing outcomes. The three key issues examined were conflicts over the administrative structure of social insurance, the problems policy-makers identified surrounding attempts to apply social insurance to a primarily agricultural society, and debates over which categories of workers should be compulsorily insured. These debates indicated that, contrary to some standard accounts of welfare-state development in Ireland, the Catholic Church was not an influential actor in this particular policy area. On the other hand, the centrality of agrarianism was clearly evident, as was the manner in which the interests of different groups were mediated politically.

These findings suggested that some distinctive aspects of Irish socio-political development do create problems in applying standard theories of the welfare state to the outcomes in social insurance examined in this thesis. However, drawing in particular on the insights of researchers seeking to understand the apparent exceptionalism of the American welfare state, this thesis argues that explanations that stress politics and those that focus on statist or institutionalist explanations can be usefully combined to account for outcomes in Irish social

insurance. The thesis concludes by suggesting that the Irish case provides some insights into the concerns with convergence and divergence that much contemporary welfare-state theory addresses.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter One: From the Welfare State to Welfare States.....	5
Introduction	5
From convergence to divergence	6
Explaining divergence: ‘politics matters’	15
The institutionalist critique.....	21
Methodological concerns	26
Conclusion: contemporary concerns	32
Chapter Two: Theorising the Irish Welfare State	35
Introduction	35
Focusing on convergence: the logic of industrialism	38
Politics and welfare: towards divergence	44
A role for the state: an institutionalist focus.....	55
Conclusion.....	61
Chapter Three: Catholicism, Corporatism and Social Insurance in Ireland.....	64
Introduction	64
Catholicism, Christian democracy and welfare states.....	67
Beveridge, subsidiarity and social insurance in Ireland	76
The role of policy legacies	76
Social services and administrative reform.....	82
Things that were better left undone: the Dignan affair	87
Vocationalism: an attack on ministerial prerogatives?.....	97
The final nail in the coffin: Norton and the NHIS	100
Catholicism, corporatism and theories of the welfare state.....	104
Conclusion.....	110
Chapter Four: Land, Labour and Social Security in Post-war Ireland.....	113
Introduction	113
Agrarianism and welfare state theory.....	117
The politics of land in Ireland	125
Legacies from colonialism: cultural and institutional factors	126
Agrarianism and electoral politics in independent Ireland.....	130
Social security and agriculture in post-war Ireland.....	135
Fianna Fáil and subsistence agriculture.....	140
The inter-party government: farmers against labourers	147
Fianna Fáil: from subsistence agriculture to subsidising agriculture	157
Conclusion.....	163

Chapter Five: Institutions and the Politics of Redistribution: Solidarity or Discriminatory Taxation?..... 166

- Introduction 166
- The state in society: the interaction of politics and institutions 171
- A conservative revolution: old institutions in a new state..... 177
- A government divided: the inter-party government and the question of scope 181
 - The 1949 White Paper 184
 - Social Welfare (Insurance) Bill 1950..... 192
 - Social Welfare (Insurance) Act 1952 199
- Conclusion..... 207

Conclusion 209

Bibliography..... 213

Abbreviations

CIE	Córas Iompair Éireann
CORI	Conference of Religious of Ireland
DATI	Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction
DD	Dáil Debates
DDA	Dublin Diocesan Archives
D/Taoiseach	Department of the Taoiseach Files
D/Social Welfare	Department of Social Welfare Files
ESB	Electricity Supply Board
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
FRW	Federation of Rural Workers
LAOS	Irish Agricultural Organisation Society
ICTU	Irish Congress of Trade Unions
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMA	Irish Medical Association
ITGWU	Irish Transport and General Workers Union
ITUC	Irish Trade Union Congress
NESF	National Economic and Social Forum
NHIS	National Health Insurance Society
UCD	University College Dublin

List of tables

Table 1.1	Functionalist accounts	P. 14
Table 1.2	Political theories	P. 20
Table 1.3	Institutionalist theories	P. 25
Table 2.1	Institutional variation among western capitalist democracies	P. 59
Table 4.1	Strength of agrarian parties at general elections, 1922-61	P. 131
Table 4.2	Agricultural Occupations: 1936 census	P. 144
Table 4.3	Number of Males over 14 engaged in farm work, by province	P. 144
Table 4.4	Male Employees over 14 by size of holding, 1949	P. 145
Table 4.5	Number of holdings by size, 1949	P. 145
Table 5.1	Differences between Norton scheme and Ryan Bill	P. 205

Introduction

This thesis focuses on the development of social security in the immediate post-war period in Ireland. On one level, this period can be seen as an expansionary phase in terms of social expenditure: ‘Between 1947 and 1951, public social expenditure doubled from £31.8 million to £62.5 million and increased its share of GNP from 9.6 per cent to 14.9 per cent’¹ (Kennedy, 1975, p. 11). However, the period is more usually seen as marking the limits to reform. Following intense and often acrimonious debate about social policy in Ireland, the 1953 Health Act and the 1952 Social Welfare Act inaugurated limited reforms which defined the nature of the Irish welfare state until the 1960s and 1970s and, perhaps, to the present. The failure of radical health reforms meant the continuance of a two-tier health system while, in social welfare, ‘the Irish system remained essentially fragmented and showed little commitment to inter-class solidarity’ (Cousins, 1995, p. 20). The primary focus of research has been on explaining why Ireland lagged behind developments elsewhere in Europe in this period, and attention has focused on explaining ‘both the absence of welfare state expansion before the 1960s and its rapid advance thereafter’ (O’Connell and Rottman, 1992, p. 231). As well as the timing of public social expenditure, the overall impact of this expenditure has also been a research issue. In the very few attempts to place Ireland in a comparative context, Ireland has been seen as ‘an incongruous, even irreconcilable case’ (O’Donnell, 1999, p. 85). In terms of both the periodisation of the welfare state and welfare state typologies, Ireland presents problems for welfare theory.

A major difficulty in addressing these issues is that there is a dearth of research on the Irish welfare state from an explicitly theoretical perspective. It is, for example, extremely difficult to specify the key claims about the determinants of the Irish welfare state. This is because there are simply too few researchers to constitute clear ‘schools’ of research. It might be said that research has fallen into two broad camps. On the one hand, detailed studies of developments in particular policy areas that, while valuable, have not had an explicitly theoretical or comparative focus. On the other hand, highly theoretical work that lacks detailed analyses of particular policy areas. Most of the second type of research has commented on the problems in applying comparative theory to Ireland. In no particular order, colonialism, late industrialisation, Catholicism, an activist state and a weak left have all been

¹ Kennedy points out that economic activity in the period was very depressed.

put forward as important factors. However, none of these have been subjected to detailed examinations to assess their contribution to shaping welfare outcomes in Ireland.

This thesis contributes to the emerging literature on the Irish welfare state by providing a bridge between these two types of research. On the one hand, it is a detailed analysis of a particular policy area: social insurance from 1942–52. More centrally, it attempts to place this policy area firmly in the context of welfare state theory. The ‘state of the art’ in Irish welfare theory means that theoretically informed micro-level studies constitute an essential contribution to debates about the problematic aspects of Irish welfare development. As I argue in more detail later, contemporary welfare state theory generally suggests the value of theoretically oriented, comparatively informed case studies. This thesis focuses in detail on the factors determining outcomes in the 1952 Social Welfare Act.

The 1952 Act was intended to ‘integrate, simplify and improve the existing social insurance services’ (Commission on Social Welfare, 1986, p. 38). The Act co-ordinated the various schemes for unemployment, widows’ and orphans’ pensions and national health into one single scheme. Although clearly influenced by developments in Britain, there were important differences between it and the Beveridge scheme as ultimately applied. Most notably, the self-employed and higher-paid workers were excluded from the scheme. This was to have long-lasting effects, since social insurance was not extended to higher-paid workers until 1974 and to the self-employed until 1988. In tandem with the extension and development of social-assistance schemes, this would have important consequences for the redistributive character of the Irish welfare state. Other differences to the British scheme existed, too. One of the best-known aspects of the UK scheme was flat-rate contributions and benefits: that is, everybody paid the same contributions and everybody received the same benefits. The Irish scheme did not go down the alternative route of pay-related social insurance, but instead created a hybrid scheme where some paid lower contributions yet received the same benefits. Partially as a result, Irish social insurance is, as Cousins (1997) has pointed out, ‘somewhat more diffuse than is generally recognised’, with different schemes for private and public employees and – later – the self-employed, and several sub-categories for specific types of worker (Cousins, 1997, p. 231 and p. 233 fn. 24). It is not, however, a corporatist insurance scheme; rather, it straddles the universalistic UK scheme and the more-differentiated Continental schemes. This points us to the administrative structure: the period sees administrative centralisation of social insurance under the control of the Department of Social Welfare, and the abolition of the

National Health Insurance Society of Ireland (NHIS), which had been set up to replace the friendly societies originally entrusted with administration. In itself, this may seem unsurprising given that the UK has clearly been of such central importance in shaping outcomes in Ireland. However, this contrasted sharply with the corporatist or vocational structures favoured by the Church, and which existed in other countries where Catholicism was an important explanatory factor in shaping welfare states. Given that the Church has been deemed a central factor shaping welfare outcomes in Ireland, the absence of corporatism is surprising (Korpi, 1992). On a micro-level, then, social insurance points to some of the problems which researchers encounter when attempting to find a home for Ireland in the 'worlds of welfare' which have become so central to comparative research.

A great deal of research has already been carried out on Irish social-policy development in the period (Whyte, 1971; McKee, 1986; Barrington, 1987; Lee, 1989; Keogh, 1996, *inter alia*). This is because policy proposals in the health field emerged into the public domain in a blaze of controversy, contributed to the collapse of government and opened up intense debate about Church–state relations. The dramatic nature of events surrounding the 'Mother and Child Scheme' has meant that social policy in the period has been viewed largely through the prism of health, and explanations for the failure of the radical health proposals have tended to become explanations for delayed development generally. This thesis argues that the focus on developments in the health sector have meant that outcomes in social security have been relatively under-examined, with important implications for our understanding of the determinants and nature of the Irish welfare state. So, for example, while the Church was, indeed, a key player in the field of health, I argue that its role in social security was minimal and that this requires us to re-evaluate the implications and meaning of its activism in other areas.

In assessing the extent to which standard theories of welfare development can explain outcomes in social insurance in post-war Ireland, three core perspectives are examined: functionalist accounts, politics-centred explanations and statist, or institutionalist, perspectives. While much of the thesis points to the inadequacy of standard welfare theory, it nevertheless suggests that the Irish experience is congruent with contemporary concerns. Although standard theories utilise concepts that are often difficult to apply to Ireland, their underlying concerns do have relevance for understanding the determinants of the Irish welfare state. In particular, both the perspectives that stress politics and those which stress

institutional contexts help explain outcomes in social security in the immediate post-war period. This is not to deny the problematic aspects of contemporary welfare theory in terms of its application to Ireland. Rather, it suggests that the problematic aspects highlighted by this case study are increasingly of concern to theories of the welfare state generally. The Irish welfare state may be peripheral in many respects, but the lessons learnt from examining it are in the mainstream of contemporary research. An examination of the 1952 Social Welfare Act illustrates, then, both the limitations of much theory, but also its continuing utility.

Outline

Chapter one reviews theories of the welfare state, using the concepts of convergence and divergence to highlight the weaknesses of 'grand theory' and the contemporary emergence of mid-range theory seeking to understand different paths through similar processes.

Chapter two examines the application of these theoretical perspectives to the Irish welfare state, highlighting some explanatory weaknesses in dealing with atypical paths of social and economic development, but also pointing to the insights which standard theories can generate.

Chapter three examines the institutional structure of social insurance in Ireland. It argues that outcomes were shaped by the specific institutional context of politics in Ireland, and questions standard assumptions of the role of Catholicism in shaping social security.

Chapter four focuses on the scope of social insurance in Ireland, arguing that the agrarian structure of Irish society was fundamental to shaping outcomes. Its centrality reflects both the particular path to industrialisation and modernisation in Ireland, and the way in which interests are represented politically in Ireland.

Chapter five examines the battles over the inclusion of higher-paid workers or civil servants in social insurance. It argues that partisan differences, mediated institutionally by both the nature of the party system and the structure of the state, were central in structuring redistributive outcomes.

Chapter One: From the Welfare State to Welfare States

Introduction

The problems facing any attempt to provide an overview in the field of welfare state theories are formidable. The territory of welfare state studies has been described as resembling ‘a battlefield, with researchers sending waves of hypotheses across it, hoping to claim sovereignty for one theory or another’ (Amenta, 1993, p. 752). The range and number of theoretical perspectives is so great that, as Uusitalo (1984) points out, ‘there is no agreement even about how theories of the welfare state can be classified’ (p. 412). This bewildering diversity of approaches has also been observed by Baldwin (1990):

Explanations of the origins, rise and development of the welfare state abound. Scores of theories compete to explain why it exists at all, dozens of comparative analyses account for its variations, legions of narratives detail how individual examples contradict or confirm general hypotheses ... Even the seasoned observer may be forgiven for feeling lost in this academic Babel of paradigms, models, interpretations, accounts. (p. 37)

Moreover, as van Kersbergen (1995) notes, ‘the range of research designs and methods is probably as wide as the theoretical approaches that can be distinguished’ (p. 8).

Lurking beneath this battlefield is the perennial problem of competing definitions of the welfare state itself, and very different conceptions of what the object of study is. As Veit-Wilson (2000) notes, ‘much argument between authors might be explained by their apparent unawareness that they are pursuing disparate projects and doing so in incompatible discourses’ (p. 8). Hence, he identifies six separate projects: among other issues, researchers may be concerned with explaining how states came to be involved with welfare, they may want to evaluate how effectively states carry out their welfare functions, or they may wish to define and classify types of welfare states. Any attempt to review theories of the welfare state encounters the problem that there are, in effect, different ‘welfare states’ with which theories are concerned.

Having said this, as bibliographical references demonstrate, there are common concerns and interrelationships across the different welfare state projects. One such link, which both informs this research and provides some sort of guide through the thicket of welfare theories, is the tension between similarity and difference between welfare states. In O’Connor’s (1988)

words, a key question concerns whether *convergence* or *divergence* is the central trend in welfare development. Both convergence and divergence have been conceptualised in varying ways, responding both to what might be called paradigm shifts within wider social science which change the focus of contemporary concerns, and to methodological advances which provide new lenses through which to examine these shifting concerns. Hence, at different times, different processes, actors and outcomes have been prioritised. So, for example, the first wave of welfare theorists tended to address convergence as resulting from a 'logic of industrialisation', while for many contemporary theorists, convergence may be said to arise from a 'logic of globalisation'. Nevertheless, an exploration of the tensions between an underlying idea of 'the' welfare state and the existence of a variety of actual 'welfare states' underlies many studies in the field.

This chapter explores the evolution of these concerns with similarity and difference by focusing on three, main theoretical approaches: functionalist theories, political theories and institutionalist theories. Before jumping to the detail of these perspectives, though, it is important to note that the clarity of this approach is more apparent than real. While it can be argued that these theories have arisen in a roughly chronological fashion and are clearly distinguished from each other by very different foci and concerns, there is nevertheless considerable overlap, both chronological and thematic. This becomes clear towards the end of this chapter, where it will be argued that a contemporary concern with heterogeneity in terms of causes and outcomes, as well as methodological eclecticism, has blurred the boundaries between these approaches. I begin by outlining the three approaches, move on to consider some methodological issues, and conclude by locating this thesis methodologically and theoretically.

From convergence to divergence

It is surprising, given the bewildering variety of theoretical perspectives, that much of the theorising of the welfare state is, in fact, relatively recent. Partially, this is because the idea of 'the welfare state' as a research problem emerged slowly. It is well known that it was not until the 1960s and 1970s that the term became widely used (Kuhnle, 1991, p. 636). Initially, its use was largely confined to the British welfare state and, as a result, English-language studies were primarily in the tradition known as 'social administration'. One of the earliest and most influential theorists in this school, Richard Titmuss, had serious reservations about the term

(Titmuss, 1968). These reservations perhaps reflect the empiricist, problem-centred and Anglo-centric focus of social administration in immediate post-war Britain (Jones, 1985; Pinker, 1971). Given that the welfare state was associated with the specific package of social policies inaugurated by the post-war Labour government in Britain, and was thus seen to arise from specifically British experiences, it is unsurprising that there was little comparative material. Attention tended to focus on specific social problems and the responses to them (in housing, education, health, etc.), rather than addressing them in the round as comprising a 'package' to be considered as an inter-related whole and which merited comparison with other 'packages' in other countries. As late as 1971, Pinker commented on the dearth of comparative studies: 'The lack of basic and reliable empirical material on the development of social policy and administration in other countries is the most serious obstacle to a comparative approach. As a discipline, the study of comparative social administration scarcely exists' (Pinker, 1971, p. 48 fn.).

Some important qualifications to this picture need to be made immediately. The work of two figures in particular – T.H. Marshall (1950) and Richard Titmuss (1968) – indicates that much contemporary theorising has roots dating from the post-war period. Despite this, it remains true that it was the 1970s that really saw the birth of welfare theory (Myles and Quadagno, 2002). Initially, interest in the welfare state grew out of the dominant orthodoxy of social science in the 1950s and 1960s; welfare theory is inescapably located in broader social-science paradigms. Various terms the 'logic of industrialism' or the 'end of ideology', this posited a blanket tendency to convergence, with convergence in social security being merely one aspect of a much wider process. The general terms of the debate were sketched out by the path-breaking work of Kerr et al., first published in 1960. This argued that there was a logic to the process of industrialisation, which was inexorable and universal:

the logic of industrialism prevails eventually, and such similarities as it decrees will penetrate the outermost points of its universal sphere of influence. Each industrialised society is more like every other industrialised society – however great the difference among them may be – than any industrial society is like any pre-industrial society. (Kerr et al., 1973, p. 56)

The 'logic of industrialism', as conceptualised by Kerr et al., had a much wider remit than social policy. However, attempts to empirically validate this theory led to research that looked at a range of public policies to assess the impact of 'industrialisation' on policy outcomes. Cutright (1965) and Wilensky (1975) are usually cited in tandem as among the earliest

expressions of the 'logic of industrialism' as applied specifically to welfare states, rather than as wider theories of societal development generally. Their work has left a number of profound legacies, in terms both of conclusions and of methodology. Their primary finding has been taken to be that economic rather than political factors lie behind the development of the welfare state. In addition, these studies were influential in shaping the development of cross-national quantitative research, utilising various measures of welfare effort. It is worth looking briefly at both studies, and considering their methodological approach as well as their findings.

Cutright (1965) constructed an indicator of social-security development to establish the relative weight of political and economic factors. Based on the idea that the number of years of a social-insurance programme can be used as an indicator of development, he compared seventy-six nations' social-insurance-programme experience (SIPE) so as to examine the effects of economic development and political structure. He measured economic development by utilising measures of energy consumption, urbanisation and literacy, and concluded that 'the level of economic development has a powerful role in determining the level of social-insurance development' (p. 77). His findings are still frequently cited as an exemplar of convergence theory. His methodological approach is also interesting: the choice of social security as the dependent variable would be replicated in many studies, even if operationalised in varying ways.

Wilensky's (1975) findings were based on data for sixty-four countries. His assertion – that 'economic growth and its demographic and bureaucratic outcomes are the root cause of the general emergence of the welfare state' – must be one of the most cited quotes in the history of welfare state theory (p. xiii). His findings are usually seen to represent the strongest case for the logic of industrialism, or for convergence theory generally:

The welfare state is a major structural tendency of modern society. With economic growth all countries develop similar social security programs. Whatever their economic or political system, whatever the ideologies of elites or masses, the rich countries converge in types of health and welfare programs, in increasingly comprehensive coverage, and to a lesser extent, in methods of financing. (Wilensky, 1975, p. 86)

As a result of these findings, Wilensky's research (at least, in this period) is generally cited as functionalist: that is, welfare states are seen as being functional for industrial societies. As is

well known, this perspective sees industrialisation as generating new needs and new resources, creating demands for social security as a matter of ‘technical rationality’ (van Kersbergen, 2001, p. 89). Other less-quantitatively-based studies can also be identified.

Social security has become as much a part of a modern economy as large-scale industry, mass distribution, mass communication, and a co-ordinated financial system. ... It is clear ... that the need for a highly organised form of income protection increases as a society becomes industrialised and this need is independent of the nature of the socio-economic order. (Rimlinger, 1971, pp. 333–4)

Industrialism theory, then, was not dependent on quantitative cross-national methodologies, though these are the most cited studies.

Before moving on to consider other functionalist accounts, it is worth noting that the emphasis on convergence can be overestimated. Rimlinger, for example, while stressing the centrality of industrialisation, identifies different paths through the industrialisation process. As a result, he is sometimes cited as exemplifying a ‘national values’ approach (Skocpol, 1995). It is also a mistake to over-simplify Wilensky’s findings – he saw variation among rich countries, too. Rich countries, he argued, diverged in big ways and small, and these differences could be explained ‘by the degree of centralization of government, the shape of the stratification order and related mobility rates, the organization of the working class, and the position of the military’ (Wilensky, 1975, p. xiv). Wilensky usefully represents the pitfalls of ‘state-of-the-art’ reviews. This is that, in identifying perspectives, or schools of research (‘logic of industrialism’), and assigning theorists to each it, is necessary to do some damage to the theorist. Having said this, there is a broad consensus that the thrust of Wilensky’s (1975) work was to stress an underlying logic of industrialism that impelled countries at a certain level of economic growth towards a similar end. From its roots in Kerr et al.’s (1960) interpretation of the nature of industrial societies, this theoretical approach has broadened and developed, and been applied with increasing sophistication and complexity in an attempt to explain the origins of welfare states.

One key development has been that industrialisation has at times been subsumed into a broader account of the link between *modernisation* and welfare states. The best-known account of this is probably Flora and Alber’s (1981). ‘The concept of modernization has largely replaced the traditional concept of development as well as superseded more specific concepts such as industrialization and democratization’ (Flora and Alber, 1981, p. 38). The

logic of modernisation has been described as ‘a politicised version of the industrialism thesis’ (Pierson, 1991, p. 21). Politics, in this sense, is less the clash of organised interests and more the wider process of democratisation, which acts in tandem with industrialisation to create a need for social policies to meet the demands of modern industrial societies. Flora and Alber (1981) focused on the chronological development of social insurance. They identified four key stages: a classical introductory stage from early German initiatives until World War I, a phase of extension between the two world wars, a phase of completion immediately after World War II, and a period of consolidation and reorganisation after 1950. The timing and development of social insurance is related to variations in socio-economic development, political mobilisation of the working class, and constitutional development. Variation, then, is also embedded in Flora and Alber’s (1981) account. Yet they are generally seen as stressing convergence: this is because there is an implicit ‘progressive-evolutionary’ logic in their approach (Pierson, 1991, p. 21). Countries may be ‘late’ or ‘early’, but the process is one which all societies will ultimately undergo in some manner. Hence, Flora and Heidenheimer describe it as ‘a more or less conscious or reactive response to long-term processes and basic developmental problems’ (1981, p. 22).

In tandem with the broadening of the concept of industrialisation to include the process of modernisation, has gone a tendency towards a spatial narrowing in the range of countries with which theorists have been concerned. Increasingly, the testing of these grand theories has been narrowed to a band of about twenty countries, or less. Hence, Flora (1986) described the *Growth to Limits* study as ‘an analysis of the long-term development of the European welfare states which has been characterised by common growth tendencies and similar developmental problems as well as persisting institutional variations’ (p. xii). In general terms, then, we can identify two trends in convergence theory. Firstly, a narrowing of the range of countries under consideration, and secondly, a broadening of the wider societal processes driving welfare development from the narrower process of industrialisation to the wider concept of modernisation. The perspective remained located in a wider paradigm of modernisation theory and might be thought of as being subject to similar weaknesses. I discuss these weaknesses below, but before doing so, there is another, important functional approach to consider. This is what has sometimes been termed a ‘logic of capitalism’ or, in other words, a Marxist account of the welfare state.

Marxist accounts present some problems in being considered alongside other functional approaches. The central problem is that, while it is true that Marxist accounts have focused on a 'logic of capitalism', they have also tended to suggest that there is, in effect, an 'illogic' of capitalism as well. For neo-Marxists, welfare states are *both* functional *and* dysfunctional for capitalism. That is, 'while the functional necessities of capitalism have led to greater state involvement in the system, the latter in turn has contributed to the development of a new crisis' (Mishra, 1984, p. 69). Marxist accounts, then, differ considerably from the perspectives outlined above. Nevertheless, in that outcomes are deemed to result from broad and impersonal economic forces, their accounts are generally seen as inherently functionalist, and I deal with them as such here.

Among the best-known versions is that of Gough (1979).² For Gough, the welfare state is a 'constituent feature of modern *capitalist* societies' (1979, p. 3). His definition of the welfare state is broad, and encompasses state activities that go beyond the provision of social services. The central feature of the welfare state for Gough is its contradictory features, which reflect 'the root contradictions of capitalist society; that between the *forces of production* and the *relations of production*' (p. 11, emphasis in original). Welfare states embody positive tendencies (such as enhancing social welfare), but also negative tendencies (repression and control). His account stresses the extent to which the welfare state is a 'contradictory unity'. The ideas of contradiction and crisis have also been developed by Offe (1984) and O'Connor (1973). Hence, O'Connor (1973) lays stress on the contradictions between the dual imperatives of capitalist systems to facilitate capital accumulation on the one hand, and to pursue legitimation on the other. Unlike the logic of industrialism, Marxist accounts have largely failed to generate cross-national quantitative studies. Partially, this is because it is very difficult to operationalise Marxist theses (Pierson, 1991). So, for example, Stephens (1979) discusses the problems with operationalising key concepts related to the concentration and control of capital (1979, ch. 4). Hence, as Skocpol and Amenta (1986) note, the methodology has focused on 'abstract conceptual elaborations tied to illustrative case materials' (1986, p. 135). Gough's (1979) account is a good example of this approach.

Because of the lack of quantitative research evaluating the Marxist perspective, little can be said about empirical validation of the predictive power of the theory. However, those aspects

² Gough himself differentiates Marxist accounts from functionalist accounts. He suggests instead that Marxism bridges functionalist accounts, which 'objectify' history, and pluralist accounts, which 'subjectify' history.

of the Marxist analysis that stressed the extent to which welfare states were *dysfunctional* for capitalism seemed to accurately point to the economic problems which OECD countries began to face in the 1970s. These problems seemed to raise questions about the long-term future of the welfare state and, in the process, brought into question functionalist theories, too. What if, rather than being a product of the needs of industrialised or modernised societies, welfare states were, instead, a block on their productive abilities? If welfare states were not, in fact, 'functional' for industrialised societies, then much of the logic of convergence collapsed. These problems certainly raised questions for functionalist theory – and continue to do so to the present (Pierson, 1996). But chronologically, and perhaps logically as well, it was other problems with functionalist theory that initially shifted the focus of theorising. A key problem was that the validity of the theory of modernisation became increasingly open to question.

The wider manifestation of modernisation theory – which saw all societies as being on a common trajectory of development, with some societies merely 'behind' others but engaged in a process of catching up – collapsed under a weight of evidence which suggested that the processes of industrialisation and modernisation which 'core' countries had followed was proving impossible for 'less-developed' countries to follow. The predictive ability of the theory lacked clout. Likewise, in its manifestation as welfare state theory, it faced similar problems. The initial flowering of post-war welfare states had, perhaps, naturally focused attention on similarities among states; yet, as quantitative cross-national survey techniques became more sophisticated, and as a wider variety of measures of welfare effort were drawn upon, it became clear that there were important qualitative differences between national welfare states. How might divergence be accounted for? These problems reflect some important conceptual weaknesses in convergence theory.

At the core lies a generalised weakness of structural/functional accounts. Commenting on the liberal theory of industrialism, Goldthorpe remarked:

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. (Goldthorpe, 1992, p. 422, emphasis in original)

That is, the theory paid little attention to the processes by which the 'demands' of industrial societies were translated into outcomes; outcomes were assumed to be an automatic effect,

'called forth' in some unspecified way by very broad processes. The link between an apparently objective need and a particular response was entirely inadequately conceptualised and theorised. In a similar vein, van Kersbergen notes that functional theories took 'little or no account of the causal mechanisms producing functional responses' (2001, p. 90). This criticism applies equally to Marxist and modernisation approaches.

A second weakness was poor conceptualisation. For theories which lay such stress on the processes of industrialisation and modernisation, surprisingly little attention has been given to defining these terms. This applies separately to both the concepts of industrialisation and of modernisation, and is compounded when the two are treated as one process. On a global level, the twentieth century has seen multiple paths to, and varying kinds of, industrialisation. Contrary to most conceptualisations, it is possible that modernisation may precede industrialisation (Wrigley, 1972; Goldthorpe, 1992). Convergence theory has rightly drawn attention to the importance of profound changes in how societies may be organised, including, for example, shifts in the balance between agricultural and industrial employment, urbanisation, changing family forms, extensions of the franchise and a variety of developments in how governmental power is organised. These, however, are neither universal nor inexorable in their timing, they may take a variety of forms and, moreover, may not occur in combination with one another.

One of the central reasons why functionalist accounts have been poor at explaining variation is that they are reliant on processes that are less standard and generalisable than is usually recognised. Flora and Heidenheimer (1986) were clear about the basis of their claims: 'The modern welfare state is a European invention – in the same way as the nation state, mass democracy, and industrial capitalism. It was born as an answer to problems created by capitalist industrialization; it was driven by the democratic class struggle; and it followed in the footsteps of the nation state' (Flora and Heidenheimer, 1986, p. xxi). It is obvious that this creates problems in any attempt to apply welfare state theory outside of Europe. However, it also overstates the extent to which the creation of the nation state, capitalist industrialisation and the democratic class struggle have taken the same form even *within* Europe. A relatively wide recognition of the inadequacies of functionalist theories meant that, by the 1980s, they were 'virtually dead' (van Kersbergen, 2001).

Table 1.1: Functionalist Accounts

Theory	Dependent variable	Independent variable	Methodology	Major finding	Convergence	Divergence
Cutright, 1965	Social insurance programme experience	Economic growth (energy consumption, urbanisation, literacy, governmental representativeness)	Quantitative cross national: 76 nations, developed and less developed	Level of economic development determines level of social-insurance development	Yes	
Wilensky, 1975	Social security expenditure as % GNP	GNP per capita. Also age of social security system, proportion over 65	Quantitative cross-national: 64 countries	Economic growth (and demographic correlates) root cause of emergence of welfare state	Yes	Variation among rich countries
Rimlinger, 1971	Social security	Industrialisation	Comparative historical	Modern social security systems are a product of the shift from agrarian to industrial societies	Yes	Variation around different socio-economic settings of industrialisation: liberal, authoritarian or centralised
Flora and Alber, 1981	Social insurance development: index of social-insurance coverage	Modernisation and democratisation (Socio-economic development, political mobilisation of the working class, constitutional development)	Quantitative/comparative historical. 12 western European countries	Multi-dimensional processes of modernisation create pressures for state intervention	Yes	Interaction between variables (e.g. timing suffrage/Bureaucrat-isation) will promote or retard welfare development
Gough, 1979	State provision of social services, and regulation of private activities in post-war UK	Capitalist economy	Comparative historical.	Welfare state product of contradictory development capitalist society	Yes	Balance of class forces and relationship with centralised state

Source: Adapted from Uusitalo, 1984.

Perspectives stressing convergence, however, were re-awakened in the 1990s by claims that the pressures of globalisation were eroding national distinctiveness, and I return to this point at the end of the chapter. I turn now to consider theories focused on variation among states, which eclipsed functionalist theories for a decade or so.

Explaining divergence: 'politics matters'

The perception that variation required as much explanation as similarity reflected methodological developments (discussed below), as well as perceived failures of functionalist theories. As Skocpol and Amenta (1986) comment, 'once research became more longitudinal or sensitive to earlier or later periods, and once the specific features of social policies were more closely examined, this perspective was undermined as a sufficient guide to causal processes' (p. 133). Yet it is important to note that theorists of convergence and divergence shared many central assumptions about the key factors shaping welfare states, such as the view that the broad processes of industrialisation and democratisation were central. What differed was the stress on the possibility of alternative paths through shared processes. Theorists stressing variation argued that politics mattered in shaping welfare states. This was a fundamental shift: outcomes were not 'automatic' but reflected political processes of varying kinds. It may be true that modern industrial societies generated new needs, but the processes by which these needs were translated into policy outcomes involved *actors*.

The earliest and most influential account focusing on political factors was the well-known 'social democratic' theory of welfare development (Hewitt, 1977; Stephens, 1979; Korpi, 1978). This focused on the way in which the class struggle generated by the processes of industrialisation and democratisation could have very different outcomes. Industrialisation created the working class, democratisation gave them political weight, but only in some countries did this translate into control of government. This translation was initially seen as the crucial factor accounting for diversity among countries. Hewitt (1977), for example, reviewed Wilensky (1975), Cutright (1967) and others, arguing that politics in the form of democratic socialist parties does have an impact on variations in equality. An important aspect of Hewitt's work was a focus on the effects of varying dependent variables. He argued, for example, that measures of expenditure as a proportion of GNP (as used by other researchers) were not a good measure of redistributive efforts. Partially, this was because its interaction

with taxation needed to be taken into account. A key point was Hewitt's claims that to accept the conclusions of earlier research 'requires that one accept the various measures of social equality, democracy, and socialism that have been used in these studies' (Hewitt, 1977, p. 453). From very early on, then, we can see the meaning of Amenta's insight that 'proponents of theories that lose a test often claim that their ideas were unjustly undermined by unfair operationalizations or inappropriate analyses' (Amenta, 1993, p. 750). In the event, Hewitt's findings were that 'Strong socialist movements are associated with a greater proportion of the national income being redistributed' (Hewitt, 1977, p. 459).

Although formulated in a number of different ways, the essence of the social-democratic account is that 'working-class power' matters in shaping social-policy outcomes (Shalev, 1983). Hence, Stephens' (1979) account is essentially an analysis and defence of the argument that a parliamentary road to socialism is possible. His concern with showing that 'social and political variables account for the *variation* among developed capitalist democracies' is an attempt to prove that (socialist) politics matter in terms of outcomes (Stephens, 1979, p. 104). This perspective shaped empirical research for much of the succeeding decade and, indeed, is a continuing influence (Huber and Stephens, 2001). But since this first generation of researchers seeking to understand the root causes of diversity, a deeper understanding of the *way* in which politics might matter has developed. At the heart of the social-democratic perspective is the ability of organised workers to take control of government and shape social policy 'from above' – albeit that the impetus may have come from below. Because of this, attention focused initially on political parties who, of course, compete electorally for control of government. Most commonly, 'social democratic movements are simply equated with whatever locally constitutes the "left"' (Esping-Andersen and van Kersbergen, 1992, p. 189). Quantitative studies, then, compared welfare outcomes/efforts in different countries based on 'left' control of government to account for variation among welfare states, often with considerable empirical validation (Hewitt, 1977; Stephens, 1979). Hence, Hewitt focused on 'the annual average proportion of seats held by socialist parties in the national legislature, over the first twenty postwar years' (Hewitt, 1977, p. 458). Gradually, however, this perspective was broadened: firstly, to look outside of political parties to encompass interest organisations, and secondly, to include political parties other than those of 'the left'.

The definition of working-class power has broadened from a measure that utilised only political parties to one that includes the trade-union movement (Cameron, 1978; Stephens,

1979; Castles, 1982). Growing out of this, to some extent, has been an interest in the importance of neo-corporatist arrangements. 'There appears to be a growing consensus that parties or unions have little effect, that successful social democratization, so to speak, requires a configuration of strong left parties in government backed by an encompassing and centralized trade union movement' (Esping-Andersen and van Kersbergen, 1992, p. 193). Hicks and Misra (1993) argue that the key 'infraresource' of social-democratic theory is what they term 'left corporatism': that is, the organisation of both trade unions and political parties, and their incorporation into the policy-making process of the state. Probably the essential point, then, is a broadening of what is meant by politics from a focus on partisan composition of government towards a wider analysis focusing on the organisation of interests in society. As we will see below, this implies more in common with institutional perspectives than may be realised. But before turning to institutionalist perspectives, the further development of explanations focused on politics needs to be examined.

The initial flowering of the social-democratic perspective was a deepening understanding of how working-class power might best translate into policy outcomes. Gradually, however, new approaches emerged. While these concur that politics are important, there are competing accounts of what *type* of 'politics matters'. One of the earliest qualifications was Castles' (1978) contribution that argued that the weakness of the right was central; this insight generated interest in parties other than social-democratic parties. This view was strengthened by comparative historical research that argued that many welfare reforms – most famously, Bismarck's social-insurance innovations – had conservative roots. Arising out of this, religion – or more specifically, Christian democracy – has been posited as important.

This thesis is most associated with van Kersbergen (1995), but from quite early on, researchers suggested that religion might be a factor (Stephens, 1979; Wilensky, 1981; Castles 1982). However, it was probably not until Esping-Andersen's (1990) account that it began to be seen as a well-recognised independent variable in its own right. Castles (1994) and van Kersbergen (1995) have helped to clarify the essential argument that Catholicism or Christian democracy can in some ways act as a functional equivalent to social democracy. This insight has gradually been expanded into a recognition that, while Christian democracy might also lead to expansion, it was, perhaps, expansion in a qualitatively different fashion than social democracy (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Huber, Ragin and Stephens, 1993; Huber and Stephens, 2001). At the heart of this argument lies a gradual realisation that the interaction of various

dependent and independent variables is crucial in accounting for conflicting findings, and I return to these ideas in more detail in the methodological section below. The current 'state of the art' in relation to the impact of politics is probably represented by Huber and Stephens' (2001) conclusion that 'the dominant political coloring of the incumbent government – social democratic, Christian democratic, or secular center and right – over the three or four decades after the war is the most important determinant of the kind of welfare state that a given country had in the early 1980s' (2001, p. 1). This conclusion also alerts us to a shift in focus in the analysis of variation in welfare states – that the tensions between similarity and difference become more explicit as methodological and theoretical developments allow for more sophisticated analyses incorporating the interaction of multiple variables.

The outcome is that, while, on the one hand, we see continuing developments in the attempts to account for diversity, we also see the emergence of attempts to account for similarity as well as difference. The initial formulation of the social-democratic perspective occurred as a debate with the then dominant logic of industrialism (Esping-Andersen and van Kersbergen, 1992; Myles and Quadagno, 2002). This debate was to a large extent won decisively by the social-democratic perspective, in that few now dissent from the view that diversity exists and needs to be accounted for, and that 'politics' is central in explaining this diversity. Yet inherent in the bulk of the studies above is a perception that important cross-national similarities exist. This is *implicit* in the view that 'the left' is a phenomenon that exists in a range of countries, differentiating countries with a strong left from those with a weak left. The bulk of quantitative cross-national studies focused on contrasting groups of countries linked by shared patterns of party-political or interest-group organisation. It is not surprising, then, that emerging from this outburst of new theoretical and methodological perspectives, we see attempts to re-conceptualise *both* similarity and difference. Building on 'a veritable mountain of data and years of endless statistical manipulations', Esping-Andersen attempted to pull together the perspectives generated by comparativists to provide a synthesis incorporating both similarity and diversity (Esping-Andersen, 1990, preface). In the process, he sparked off what has been termed the 'welfare modelling business' (Abrahamson, 1999).

This is essentially based on the perception that, while there is diversity among Western industrialised nations, there are also patterns. There are, it has been argued, 'a limited number of well-defined welfare regimes' (p. 394). As Abrahamson notes, the concern with 'ideal-typical' welfare states is less new than has frequently been assumed, dating back, for example,

to Titmuss' tripartite division in the 1950s. But it was Esping-Andersen's oft-cited worlds of welfare that translated this into the dominant perspective of the end of the millennium. This work drew on the by now extensive range of research on both outcomes and origins, summarised very briefly above, to argue that there were three main worlds of welfare or welfare regimes. In this sense, the work was informed by different 'projects' attempting to deal with issues raised by methodological debates concerning what was being measured, as well as the more-theoretical accounts focusing on the broad mechanisms shaping these outcomes. In this view, politics remained central to explaining the differential patterning of welfare across the three worlds; yet nations were united (or divided) by the slow evolution of different modes of politics. Its ambitious scope in drawing together a vast range of methods and theoretical perspectives meant that this was undoubtedly one of the most influential works of the previous decade, and much recent work has been a response to its vision.

The idea of welfare regimes has been enthusiastically embraced, but many have disputed how these regimes may be identified and classified. It is the existence of multiple competing typologies that leads to the suggestion that there is a 'welfare modelling business' (Abrahamson, 1999; *see also* Arts and Gelissen, 2002). It is possible to abstract two approaches in particular. One centres on gender and argues that the notion of 'de-commodification' which underlies the division is a highly gendered notion, and that once a sensitivity to the profoundly different role men and women play in capitalist societies is taken into account, we can then see that regimes cluster in quite a different way to that envisioned by Esping-Andersen. Hence, it is possible to argue that his typology lacks 'systematic discussion of the family's place in the provision of welfare and care' (Art and Gelissen, 2002, p. 147). In addition, women's inclusion or exclusion from labour markets is not considered. The second approach questions whether there are three worlds of welfare or more; the alleged misspecification of Mediterranean and/or Antipodean welfare states has been particularly central.

In considering the multiple approaches focused on explaining differences among welfare states, it should be noted that divergence theory has strayed less far from convergence theory than might often have been thought. While arguing against the focus on the economy, theorists have still tended to see certain broad patterns as universal. The focus may have shifted to politics, but underlying an apparent focus on diversity, there remains an understanding informed by a perception of shared experiences. This becomes clear if we

return to consider the types of political parties seen to be central in the ‘politics matters’ perspective – these have been parties of ‘the left’, parties of ‘the right’ (among them Christian-democratic parties) and, to a much lesser extent, agrarian parties. These are essentially the parties identified by Lipset and Rokkan (1967) in their enormously influential account of the development of European party systems. Their work stresses the stability of European ‘party families’, and accounts for this by seeing them as the product of four great cleavages: a centre–periphery cleavage, a Church–state cleavage, an urban–rural cleavage and a class cleavage. It is the interaction of these great divisions that has created the European party systems, laying down patterns of political organisation that persist to the present.

Table 1.2: Political Theories

Theorist	Dependent variable	Independent variable	Methodology	Main findings	Convergence	Divergence
Hewitt, 1977	Government redistribution, income inequality, equal opportunities	Democratic experience, social democracy	Quantitative: 25 industrial (non-socialist) countries	Social-democratic parties reduce inequalities in industrial societies	No	Yes
Stephens, 1979	Percentage GNI devoted to non-military public spending	Union density and organisation, rule by socialist parties	Quantitative (17 countries) Historical comparative	Welfare state is the product of the struggle to transform capitalism	No	Yes
Van Kersbergen, 1995	Social security spending, weighted average replacement rates, administration of welfare institutions	Christian democracy	Quantitative and historical comparative: varying number of countries, all OECD.	There is a core of social policies which is distinctively Christian democratic	Decline of Christian democracy may indicate a general disintegration of traditional politics	Yes. Also variation around a common core of Christian democracy
Huber and Stephens, 2001	Multiple variables: ILO social-security expenditure, OECD transfer payments, size of total revenue and expenditure	Multiple variables: Christian democracy, social democracy, constitutional structure, female labour force participation	Quantitative and comparative historical	Partisan politics most important factor shaping development of welfare state. Also constitutional structure	Yes	No

Source: Adapted from Uusitalo, 1984.

Despite an apparent concern with divergence, standard theoretical perspectives still stressed shared patterns – in effect, a particular type of politics arising from the shared experience of

core European countries remained the dominant perspective among welfare state theorists. Divergence was best explained by differences in the interactions between shared phenomena. Objectively, however, while all countries have politics (and social policies), quite different lines of division may underlie their party systems. The variations by which interest groups, classes, religion, urbanisation and so on may be expressed politically is not adequately captured by Lipset and Rokkan (1967) or by theorists working within this framework. While all advanced industrialised countries may have ‘workers’ and ‘capitalists’, not all have a party system predicated on ideas of ‘left’ and ‘right’. The inability of core theories to stress politics as accounting for the experiences of some countries was, thus, the key factor giving rise to quite a different perspective on welfare states. I turn now to consider institutionalist accounts of the welfare state.

The institutionalist critique

Although the perspectives outlined above may be divided by whether the emphasis is on convergence or divergence, they have all focused on shared processes and patterns in search of generalisable theory transcending national boundaries. This concern with what has sometimes been termed ‘grand theory’ was assisted by methodological developments allowing for ever-more sophisticated measurements (for example, pooled time-series analysis) that appeared to allow these theories to be empirically validated. Hence, the heyday of social democracy as an explanatory account of welfare states goes hand in hand with an ever-growing body of quantitative cross-national research. Comparativists sought to cut through ‘idiosyncratic, country specific categories’ in search of broadly applicable concepts and variables (Thelen and Steinmo, 1992). But despite the flowering of ever-more sophisticated cross-national studies, questions about difference were not satisfactorily resolved. Central among them were questions about ‘why interest groups demanded different policies in different countries and why class interests were manifested differently cross-nationally’ (ibid. p. 5).

Attempts to answer these questions led to the emergence of theories that ‘emphasize the irregularities rather than the regularities of history and demonstrate the limits of universal causal models’ (Immergut, 1998, p. 15). No-one better illustrates the emergence and development of this perspective than Skocpol, whose contribution to *Bringing the State Back In* (Evans et al., 1985) is frequently cited as the starting point for ‘state-centred’ perspectives

on welfare states. As with much welfare theory, this perspective was not solely or even primarily focused on welfare states. As Skocpol remarked:

A sudden upsurge of interest in 'the state' has occurred in comparative social science in the past decade. Whether as an object of investigation or as something invoked to explain outcomes of interest, the state as an actor or an institution has been highlighted in an extraordinary outpouring of studies by scholars of diverse theoretical proclivities from all of the major disciplines. (Skocpol, 1985, p. 3)

As our starting point (the logic of industrialism) demonstrated, welfare theory is inescapably located within wider social-science paradigms.

However, statist approaches were soon seen to offer valuable insights to welfare theorists, and we see the emergence of research that looked not merely at broad processes, or at organised interests, but at the distinctive institutional structures within which these were located. A core insight suggests that: 'Not only may political institutions, political authorities, and political culture play a critical role in the definition, mobilization and organization of interests, but the structure of political opportunities will shape the strategies of organized interests and their beliefs regarding the efficacy of different types of political action' (Immergut, 1998, p. 16). If politics-centred accounts stressed actors, then statist perspectives stressed the structures within which actors were located. In its essence, then, the focus is on the processes through which outcomes eventually emerge.

The centrality of contributions made by theorists seeking to explain developments in the US cannot be doubted (*see*, for example, the contributions to Weir, Orloff and Skocpol, 1988). Perhaps the starting point was a perception that many of the broad processes taken for granted by standard theories of welfare development simply did not apply to the US, either in their focus on convergence or their explanations of variation. This is, in many respects, due to reasons already highlighted: the assumption implicit in key theoretical approaches that certain broad processes and their outcomes are universal. But the path to industrialisation and democratisation (combined in many theories into a grand process of modernisation) were highly distinctive in the US. For example, mass electoral democratisation preceded state bureaucratisation in the US (Skocpol, 1992). Likewise, it could be argued that the social-democratic approach 'deflects our attention from other socio-economic forces that have intersected with the US federal state and with decentralised American political parties to shape social policies' (Weir, Orloff and Skocpol, 1988, p. 15). In effect, many American

theorists have suggested that standard theories of the welfare state ‘have been argued with certain state and party structures in mind, namely, centralized and bureaucratized states with parliamentary parties dedicated to pursuing policy programs in the name of entire classes or other broad, nation-spanning collectivities’ (Skocpol, 1995, p. 19). Dissatisfaction with grand theories based on taken-for-granted processes of industrialisation, democratisation and state formation was instrumental in the emergence of this perspective. Having said that, statist approaches need to be located in the context of an ever-widening school, sometimes termed the ‘new institutionalism’, which constitutes a range of work in a diverse selection of fields.

As Guy Peters (1996) comments, the term, ‘new’ institutionalism, presupposes an ‘old’ institutionalism. The institutionalist perspective has roots which pre-date contemporary concerns with the state, and it may, therefore, be more accurate to discuss the ‘re-discovery of institutions’ (Rothstein, 1996, p. 141; *see also* Heclo, 1974, discussed below). Additionally, Hall and Taylor (1996) suggest that it is most useful to think of ‘new institutionalisms’, since the field ‘does not constitute a unified body of thought’ (p. 936). Among these diverse institutionalisms, what has been termed ‘historical institutionalism’ has been especially fruitful from a social-policy perspective.

Historical institutionalist analysis is based on a few key claims: that political processes can best be understood if they are studied over time; that structural constraints on individual actions, especially those emanating from government, are important sources of political behaviour; and that the detailed investigation of carefully chosen, comparatively informed case studies is a powerful tool for uncovering the sources of political change. (Pierson, 1993, p. 596)

Historical institutionalism has generated important insights that continue to inform research into contemporary welfare states. Perhaps the best known is the idea of ‘path dependency’ – essentially, the insight that earlier policy choices shape later choices. Although this insight is typically associated with the ‘new’ institutionalism, it is also a point made by Heclo (1974). In his discussion of what he terms ‘political learning’, Heclo draws our attention to the ‘incrementalism pervasive in policy making’ (pp. 315–16). He cites income maintenance in particular: ‘The inheritance of income maintenance policies has served as a path through the immense complexities facing social policy-makers and has facilitated the creation of subsequent responses’ (p. 316). A key insight is that ‘the content of a policy can itself be a crucial independent factor in producing effects on the policy-making process’ (Heclo, 1974, p. 5). This idea has clear echoes in the contemporary concept of ‘policy feedback’, which

describes the idea that 'policies themselves must be seen as politically consequential structures' (Pierson, 1993, p. 624).

Rather than beginning with the perspective that policies emerge from the actions of contending interest groups, historical institutionalists have often focused on how interest groups have been shaped by policies. Policies may create incentives for groups to organise, may shape preferences in particular directions, or make some types of action easier than others (Immergut, 1992; Pierson, 1993; Skocpol, 1995, *inter alia*). Hence, Immergut focused on the differing political institutions of Switzerland, France and the UK to explain why medical interests varied in their ability to shape outcomes. Arguing that 'social demands must be channelled through political institutions if they are to have an impact on political decisions', she suggests that these institutions can provide incentives, opportunities or constraints (Immergut, 1992, p. 19). She suggests that, rather than thinking of veto *groups* (Heclo, 1974), it is more useful to think of veto *points* in particular systems. This approach has become an important component of theories attempting to explain retrenchment: certain structural legacies are said to make retrenchment either more or less feasible (Pierson, 1996).

There is a growing consensus that policy outcomes cannot be understood without an acknowledgement that 'institutions provide the context in which political actors make their political choices and define their policy preferences' (Steinmo, 1989, p. 334). Perhaps the clearest indication that institutionalist insights have been widely accepted is the recent attempts to operationalise them for use in quantitative cross-national research (Huber, Ragin and Stephens, 1993; Huber and Stephens, 2001). This has presented some problems, as I discuss below in more detail, but some insights have proved amenable to relatively clear operationalisation. Huber and Stephens (2001) have drawn on Immergut (1992) and Maioni (1998) to devise a measure of state structures that create veto points in the policy-making process. Their conclusions were that constitutional structures were important both during expansion and during the retrenchment period. For example, in the expansion era, systems with many veto points (such as those of the US and Switzerland) retarded welfare state expansion, while those with few veto points (Denmark and the UK) allowed for rapid expansion. Institutional perspectives, then, seem capable of providing concepts capable of being empirically 'tested' in cross-national research. However, it is clear that only certain kinds of institutions lend themselves to generating testable hypotheses, and this points to the criticisms that have been levelled at institutionalist perspectives.

Table 1.3: Institutional Theories

Theory	Dependent variable	Independent variable	Methodology	Main findings	Convergence	Divergence
Heclo, 1974	Income maintenance: unemployment insurance, old-age pensions, state superannuation	National bureaucracies. Previous policies	Historical comparative: Britain and Sweden	Social policy emerges from process of political learning: collective puzzlement over previous policies	No. However, policy diffusion can lead to some similar outcomes	Yes. Differences (e.g. policy inheritances) create different background for change
Skocpol 1992	US public social provision	Historical formation of the state: large-scale historical processes	Qualitative and historical	Effect of US state formation on goals, capacities and alliances of social groups influenced patterns of social provision	No	Yes
Immergut, 1992	Health insurance	Political institutions: constitutional rules, organisation of political parties, electoral participation	Historical comparative: three countries	Political institutions structure political conflicts and hence account for divergent outcomes	No	Yes
Huber and Stephens, 2001	Multiple variables: ILO social-security expenditure, OECD transfer payments, size of total revenue and expenditure	Constitutional structure: federalism, presidential government, strong bicameralism, and provision for referenda	Quantitative and historical comparative	Structure of decision resulting from constitutional provisions (in context of partisan government) affects expansion and retrenchment	No	Yes

Source: Adapted from Uusitalo, 1984.

A fundamental concern focuses on what is meant by an institution. The simplest suggestion is that institutions are the ‘rules of the game’. But there is profound disagreement within the field as to what exactly counts as a rule – formal rules (presidential versus parliamentary systems) versus informal rules (shared social norms or culture) (Rothstein, 1996, p. 145). Thelen and Steinmo (1992), for example, include ‘the rules of electoral competition, the structure of party systems, the relations among various branches of government, and the

structure and organisation of economic actors like trade unions' (1992, p. 2). Skocpol (1995), in particular, defines her key institutional parameters very broadly. Describing how 'state formation' has influenced US social provision, she describes this as including 'constitution making, involvement in wars, electoral democratization and bureaucratization – large scale historical processes, in short, whose forms and timing have varied significantly across capitalist industrialising countries' (p. 19). The attraction of such a broad definition of institutions is obvious – the pitfalls of an approach in which virtually anything appears to be an institution are likewise obvious. As Rothstein (1996) comments: 'if it means everything, then it means nothing' (p. 145).

A related question, which I return to below, is the extent to which the theory generated by the institutionalist perspective leads to findings which are not generalisable. In explaining difference, perhaps they have put too much focus on uniqueness and, hence, while their findings are interesting, it may be argued that they are not very useful. This raises a final point that later chapters will consider in more detail. This returns us to issues raised above – it may be that explaining similarity requires *macro-level* concepts such as, for example, class. In neglecting these concepts, it may well be that, as Baldwin (1990) suggests, 'they have abandoned the ambiguity of a larger question for the certainty of a smaller and less important one' (p. 47).

There is a powerful sense in which very big questions of class, power and inequality are not captured by the intermediate-level focus of institutionalists. Institutions are in many ways a 'venue'. As such, it has been successfully argued that they have powerful effects in structuring interests and in structuring outcomes. Yet we may be more interested in the *existence* of clashes of interests, and the *impact* of distributional outcomes, than on theories which focus on medium-level variations in these. As Gilbert and Howe (1991) suggest, it is possible that statist or institutionalist perspectives 'oversimplify societal forces and ignore class conflict within and beyond the state' (p. 205). The necessity of considering both the state and the wider society within which it is located informs much of the work of this thesis, and it is to the location of this research in the perspectives outlined above that I now turn.

Methodological concerns

As the introduction to this chapter suggested, a key problem in theorising the welfare state is the diversity of theoretical and methodological approaches. This diversity is, in fact, so great

as to have generated a sub-field of welfare theory – ‘state of the art’ reviews which attempt to survey findings and identify unresolved issues (Uusitalo, 1984; Skocpol and Amenta, 1986; Quadagno, 1987; Amenta, 1993; Myles and Quadagno, 2002). In the sections above, the ideas of *convergence and divergence* acted as a guide through these diverse theoretical perspectives. In switching the focus to methodological concerns, the ideas of *uniqueness and generalisation* echo the theoretical concerns outlined so far (Mabbett and Bolderson, 1999). An important point made by this section is that theory shapes methodological approaches and, in turn, methods affect the ability to confirm, deny or question the utility of theoretical perspectives. Since the two are inescapably connected, it is useful to conclude this chapter by considering the interaction of theory and method in the debate over uniqueness and generalisation.

It has become increasingly clear that methodological concerns are central to understanding conflicting accounts of the origins and determinants of welfare states. We can identify two broad areas of debate. On the one hand, within quantitative cross-national studies, there are important arguments about choices and operationalisation of dependent and independent variables. On the other hand, there are wider debates about very different methodological approaches: quantitative versus a comparative, historical, case-study approach. Issues of generalisability can be explored in both debates. I begin by considering briefly some of the issues in the quantitative approach, before turning to consider a case-study approach in more detail. Many of the debates have been signalled in the process of outlining different theoretical approaches above, and I draw them together here to clarify how this thesis relates to the perspectives outlined above.

A useful starting point is to consider the sample of countries that have been the focus of research (Uusitalo, 1984). As the tables above indicate, the range of countries considered in the research process began to narrow almost from the first generation of studies. Hence, while Cutright (1965) focused on seventy-six nations and Wilensky (1975) focused on sixty-four, contemporary researchers tend to focus on a narrow sample of advanced industrialised countries. Even Wilensky’s study narrowed the range for some aspects, focusing on the twenty-two richest countries for more detailed analysis. In explaining this, he presciently drew attention to two important aspects of focusing on a more limited range of countries: ‘Emphasis on the rich countries is not only desirable for testing convergence theory, but necessary because of well-known limitations of data’ (Wilensky, 1975, p. xii). This draws attention to the practical and/or theoretical reasons dictating the number of countries studied,

an aspect that Uusitalo also identifies as central (Uusitalo, 1984). As Uusitalo notes, rich countries are rich in data. He notes, too, the risk that some findings may be explained by the focus on a narrow range of countries: surveys including developed and less-developed countries are more likely to find that economic level is an important explanatory factor than surveys focusing on a small number of developed countries. As O'Connor (1988) remarks, the dichotomy between convergence and divergence may, in this sense, be more apparent than real: '... diversity among a small population of economically homogeneous countries may reflect *stability* in such diversity' (O'Connor, 1988, p. 279). Amenta, too, has argued that 'The history of rich capitalist democracies from 1960 through the early 1980s is far too restricted a pool of experience, and social spending effort is far too narrow an outcome, to make strong generalisations about social spending policy and to answer questions researchers have been asking' (Amenta, 1993, p. 758). In terms of generalisability, then, it might be noted that the bulk of quantitative studies have focused on 'advanced industrialised nations', and this, in itself, might raise questions about its applicability to the Irish case. Ireland's location among the advanced industrialised countries of the world is not (or at least, has not been) unproblematic, and raises issues about the processes of industrialisation and modernisation, which I explore in some detail in the next chapter. These debates, in turn, impinge on the debates about choices of dependent and independent variables, and indicate that quantitative studies are perhaps not always as generalisable as they would wish to be.

This is clearly indicated by the discussions about operationalising the independent variables in studies focusing on 'politics'. As the tables above indicate, it is possible to conceptualise these in diverse ways (Uusitalo, 1984; Huber, Ragin and Stephens, 1993; Huber and Stephens, 2001). One of the main ways in which the politically oriented perspective has developed has been by a widening of the *ways* in which politics might be said to matter. Yet despite this, the choice of independent variable has remained fixed in a very narrow range. The left-right or secular-Christian-democratic operationalisation of the key independent variable (partisan composition of government) in Huber and Stephens (2001) is certainly not applicable to the US, as Skocpol has pointed out in earlier work. Nor, as this thesis will discuss, is it particularly useful in Ireland. Hence, attempts to consider the applicability of much quantitative research to the Irish case is hindered by a choice of variables that has been guided by inappropriate theories. It is, then, the theory (of party systems, for example) underlying the operationalisation of key variables which needs revision in the Irish case. The extent to which

quantitative research is highly dependent on the theory that informs it can be seen by further consideration of the development of variable choice over the previous few decades.

If we turn to consider dependent variables, we see that the key focus, at least initially, has tended to be on 'welfare effort'. Again, operationalising this has led to intense debates between researchers. Mabbett and Bolderson (1999) suggest that the two most widely used have been 'transfer payments alone, and government expenditure on welfare service provision plus transfer payments' (p. 42). More recently, the extent to which single indicators are useful has been questioned. A move away from ranking welfare states (better/worse), and a move towards conceptualising different kinds of welfare state, has led to a realisation that there may be important patterns that cannot be captured by single-indicator measures of welfare effort (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Huber, Ragin and Stephens (1993), and Huber and Stephens (2001) usefully capture the problems in considering how best to assess the impact of two competing independent variables: social democracy and Christian democracy. As the discussion above has indicated, numerous quantitative cross-national studies have come to conflicting conclusions on their relative impacts. But to some extent, these contradictions can be explained by the different measures of welfare effort used (Huber, Ragin and Stephens, 1993; van Kersbergen, 1995). In effect, while both social democracy and Christian democracy might have a positive effect on welfare state expenditure, they may vary substantially in the composition and impact of that expenditure, reflecting their different ideologies and constituencies. Among a variety of differences, it has been argued that Christian democracy has focused more on transfers and has a less redistributive impact, while public delivery and financing of services is central to social democracy, and this has a more redistributive outcome. Hence, contradictory results are, to some extent, due to measures that have not been sensitive to these differences. Shifting theoretical perspectives, then, have interacted with debates about operationalising dependent and independent variables. Much of these theoretical insights, which have contributed to enriching and developing quantitative work, have come from a very different methodological approach, with different strengths and weaknesses, and it is to this I now turn.

Not all accounts of the welfare state have utilised quantitative cross-national approaches. Van Kersbergen (1995), for example, points to 'a comparative historical design, which is case-oriented, examines many variables and offers an in-depth study of a single or limited number of cases by looking at complex historical conditions and sequences' (p. 8). A starting point is

to consider methods used in a historical case-study approach. Unlike the quantitative studies discussed above, no single method of gathering data is used: government archives, parliamentary debates, newspaper reports, contemporary accounts, census data and secondary sources all form part of the evidence used to suggest a particular interpretation of events. As Mabbett and Bolderson (1999) suggest, inductive and interpretative methods lie at the heart of historical case studies. In other words, qualitative rather than quantitative methods dominate in case-oriented strategies (Ragin, 1994). By their nature, these methods are less likely to operationalise either dependent or independent variables in a uniform, standardised manner, and this obviously raises questions regarding the generalisability of their findings.

In considering the implications of this, a useful resource is Ragin's (1994) consideration of some of the differences between case-oriented and variable-oriented research strategies. He notes multiple differences in their view of cases, causation, explanations and goals. One difference has already been noted. This is that quantitative research tends towards a competitive approach in that 'variables are pitted against each other in a contest to explain variation' (Ragin, 1994, p. 303). Case-oriented work has very different goals. So, for example, in case-oriented research, 'explanations are interpretive accounts of how conditions come together in historically specific ways to produce outcomes in specific cases' (p. 303). Because the goals of case-oriented research differ from variable-oriented research, the methodology also differs considerably.³ Underlying these diversities is a very different role for theory; '... the case-oriented approach uses theory to aid historical interpretation and to guide the identification of important causal factors; the variable-oriented strategy, by contrast, usually tests hypotheses derived from theory' (Ragin, 1987, p. 55). Fundamentally, case-oriented work tends to have a greater interest in casual heterogeneity and outcome heterogeneity. To an extent, then, it is clear that the type of research strategy chosen might vary depending on one's relationship to theory, and that this lies at the heart of the decision to take a case-oriented approach.

It is the lack of a convincing theoretical perspective that often impels people into a more inductive, open-ended and interpretative approach. As the previous section argued, institutionalist perspectives, which have been standard-bearers for case-oriented approaches, emerged partially because 'grand theory' provided few answers for the questions researchers

³It should be noted that Ragin suggests bringing the two together via qualitative comparative analysis, which attempts to import quantitative techniques into qualitative studies.

were asking. Hence, Amenta (1993) suggests that ‘only comparative historical research can untangle issues of causality for which quantitative indicators are too highly correlated to interpret’ (p. 760). Mabbett and Bolderson (1999) point to Heclo’s (1974) ‘early and deliberate step away from standardizing methodologies and mono-causal frameworks and explanations’ (p. 49). Heclo, himself, remarks: ‘Understanding how, or whether, politics has affected the advent of modern social policy seems to depend less on statistically unearthing and more on inductively building up generalizations from detailed if somewhat less tidy accounts’ (1974, p. 12). Quantitative methods seem less useful in *generating* hypotheses than in *testing* them, and are extremely reliant on qualitative, historical, narrative accounts to generate hypotheses.

It is clear, I hope, that the general methodology of case-oriented work needs no defence. What might need some attention is the focus on a *single* case, rather than the more usual contrast of a small number of cases (Rimlinger, 1971; Heclo, 1974; Immergut, 1992, *inter alia*). Again, this is not an approach without precedent: it is the approach taken very successfully by US researchers, as Weir, Orloff and Skocpol (1988) demonstrate. The reasons for having made the US a candidate for focused attention apply also to Ireland. Two, in particular, command attention. The first is the apparent inapplicability of many standard welfare state theories: as the next chapter discusses in more detail, it is remarkably difficult to successfully apply theory which is predicated on patterns of industrialisation, democratisation and state formation which simply do not apply to the Irish case. In this broad sense, there are remarkable parallels between Ireland and the US, making the methodology generated there very attractive. The details of the Irish case, though, are very different and this is, in fact, the second reason why a case-study approach is very rewarding. A striking feature of the Irish welfare state is the extent to which it is under-theorised. The starting point for the next chapter is the dearth of theoretical literature: theory is, in fact, so absent that a whole series of case studies are needed simply to provide a starting point from which a debate on the determinants of the Irish welfare state can begin. Two intertwined factors, then, account for the methodological approach of this thesis; the inapplicability of standard theory combined with a theoretical vacuum at the heart of the Irish welfare state require an inductive, interpretive approach with theory as ‘the servant rather than the master, generating explanations and guiding the search for data’ (Mabbett and Bolderson, 1999, p. 36). In taking this approach, the thesis is located at the heart of contemporary concerns about the tensions between similarity

and difference, uniqueness and generalisability, and I conclude by making some final comments on this.

Conclusion: contemporary concerns

Tensions between convergence and divergence continue to shape research; an important contemporary concern is the impact of globalisation on welfare states. Initial suggestions that the pressures of globalisation meant that welfare states faced a crisis which threatened their very survival has softened into a more nuanced approach to the varying responses states may take to shared global processes. While some theorists continue to assert the primacy of globalisation and debate the emergence of a 'European welfare state' as a result, there is much evidence that, in fact, diversity remains central. In varying ways, all of the perspectives above offer insights, and a variety of theoretical perspectives can and are being drawn on to explore these issues.

The process of considering these tensions over the previous thirty or so years has led to both theoretical and methodological eclecticism. Hence, some recent research explicitly integrates quantitative and comparative historical research on these grounds (Huber, Ragin and Stephens, 1993; van Kersbergen, 1995; Huber and Stephens, 2001). Huber and Stephens (2001) for example, discuss the 'benefits of actually bringing quantitative and comparative historical analyses into a systematic dialogue with each other in the context of a single work' (2001, p. 8). Even the very interpretative, diffuse work of historical institutionalists, whose conclusions may be predicated on explaining the uniqueness of a single country, has begun to be translated into 'testable' hypotheses. Alongside this, it is possible to argue that the rigidities of the traditional comparative method have begun to crumble. For example, though, on the surface, Baldwin's well-received (1990) work focuses on a number of countries and is, therefore, a standard comparative account, a close examination of his work leads to the conclusion that it is, in effect, a series of single-case studies collected together to sustain a particular argument. Although it presents itself as a study of the 'class bases of the European welfare states from 1875 to 1975', and focuses on five countries (Britain, France, Germany, Denmark and Sweden), it is difficult to argue that it is a comparative study of all five countries across those hundred years. Instead, Baldwin (1990) casts his spotlight on countries sequentially in a manner dictated by the logic of his theoretical concerns. This is far from a criticism; rather, it simply recognises that eclecticism in the comparative method underlies

more work than may be immediately obvious. Amenta's conclusions on the state-of-the-art in welfare state research indicate that diverse methodological approaches are required to enhance our understanding of contemporary welfare states. 'In the next generation, advances in knowledge will continue to be made by case studies, close comparisons, qualitative comparative analysis and quantitative analysis' (Amenta, 1993, p. 760).

Linked with methodological eclecticism is a growing tendency to combine diverse theoretical approaches in an attempt to straddle the gap between difference and similarity. 'The leading hypothesis of contemporary comparative research is that the established institutions, relations of power among interests that these institutions generate, and the political and administrative mechanism of social policy still govern patterns of variation in social policy-making, policy implementation, and policy outcomes to a considerable extent' (van Kersbergen, 1995, p. 93). This comment clearly combines the insights of many schools of thought. It points to potential pitfalls in the attempt to synthesise the diversity of insights about the origins and determinants of welfare states. The attempt to combine explanations indicates the extent to which few of the dominant 'grand theories' appear satisfactory when attempting to explain single-country developments. While there will always be gaps between universal theories and their ability to explain the minutiae of developments in all and every country, there are limits to how large a gap is tolerable. For increasing numbers of scholars, the gap between many standard theories and their applicability to a diverse range of countries is unacceptable. It is clear that this reflects the narrow base on which these have traditionally been predicated. As Cousins (1997), amongst others, has noted, dominant theories are and remain 'core-centric' in very fundamental ways. If we wish to understand developments in a handful of countries, this may not trouble us. For theorists seeking to explain welfare development in countries – be this Japan, southern Europe, Central America or Ireland – outside of the 'traditional' twenty or so states on which research has focused, it is deeply troubling. Few would dispute, I think, that industrialisation, democratisation, class, religion and the other key concepts which have been marshalled to explain how and why welfare states have come into being do not lie at the heart of any attempt to explain the welfare state. These concepts, however, have multiple manifestations: industrialisation and modernisation are not unilinear, class can manifest itself in a variety of political forms, religion can interact with the state and political parties in differing ways. Understanding welfare outcomes requires far greater sensitivity to these variations.

However, the discussion of historical institutionalism indicates that substituting attempts to explain convergence with attempts to explain divergence has pitfalls, too. The growth of statist or institutionalist perspectives represented a dissatisfaction with ‘grand theories’ that seemed unhelpful in explaining diversity along a range of fronts. But arising out of that, there is a strong sense that institutionalism provides intermediate-level explanations. As Thelen and Steinmo (1992) comment, the theoretical niche is at the middle range (p. 11). Similar points have been made by Pierson (1991), and Bonoli and Palier (2000). Bonoli and Palier (2000) comment that institutions ‘mediate the impact of socio-economic and political developments on policy-making’ (p. 17). This focus on the mediating role of institutions has important implications for the kinds of theory generated by institutionalists. Broadly, they are, perhaps, better suited to explaining uniqueness or variation than similarity.

But a sensitivity to variation ought not to blind us to shared outcomes. There is, it is clear, something called the welfare state, though we may debate exactly how it is defined. In seeking to explain the emergence and development of similar social policies across a diverse range of countries, it is important that commonalities be identified. There is, within social science, an inherent need to attempt to create ‘grand theories’ which cut through apparent diversities to identify shared experiences and concerns. This, however, can only be successfully achieved by a deeper understanding of ‘causal heterogeneity and contextual effects’ (Amenta, 1993, p. 760). Convergence and divergence need to be thought of in tandem rather than in opposition. All of the approaches above provide valuable insights – large-scale processes such as industrialisation do throw up similar pressures, and these pressures motivate political actors whose actions are mediated by institutional structures. How they combine and interact, producing patterns of similarity and difference, is central to understanding contemporary concerns about welfare states. As the next chapter argues in some detail, the Irish case is uniquely well located for addressing these concerns. Because of the nature of the Irish state, tensions between convergence and difference have been at the heart of Irish social science across multiple disciplines for many decades. Indeed, a central argument of this thesis is that it is the interaction between convergence and divergence in Irish political and institutional life that explains the problems of locating Ireland in contemporary welfare theory. The following chapter focuses in detail on locating the Irish welfare state among the perspectives outlined above.

Chapter Two: Theorising the Irish Welfare State

Introduction

One of the most distinctive aspects of welfare state theory in Ireland is its late emergence and relative underdevelopment. Writing as late as 1984, Coughlan noted that, given the sparse attention which the welfare state had received in Ireland, 'sections of F.S.L. Lyons's *Ireland Since the Famine* (1973) are still the best account of the interaction of Irish social policy with general history over that time' (p. 37). As the previous chapter demonstrated, comparative welfare theory is characterised by a bewildering variety of theoretical perspectives, each with scores of researchers defending, refining and applying their theories to contemporary welfare states. Nothing comparable exists in relation to the Irish case, and it remains true that much of what passes for welfare state theory must be extracted from work for which the welfare state is but a subsidiary concern. McCashin (1982), commenting on the paucity of historical research in the Irish context, suggested that 'Ireland is a virtual laboratory for the testing of hypotheses about social, political and economic determinants of the growth of welfare' (p. 206). Over the course of the last decade or so, a slightly more substantial body of theory-driven research has emerged, but it is still not possible to identify research which examines all of the theoretical issues addressed earlier from a specifically Irish perspective.

It is tempting to suggest that the primary reason for the relatively underdeveloped state of welfare state theory in Ireland is the late emergence of a developed welfare state. Although the roots of the Irish welfare state can be traced back to the 1847 Poor Relief Act, Ireland did not participate fully in the major expansionary stage of welfare development of post-war Europe, the so-called 'golden age' of the welfare state (Maguire, 1986). As I have discussed, it was this growth of welfare expenditures across industrialised countries which kick-started comparative theory on welfare states. As we have seen, this theorising could build on a base of substantial empirical research in the 'social-administration' approach. In Ireland, however, theorising and description occurred, to some extent, in tandem because of the timing of welfare development. Much early work was, therefore, primarily concerned with describing and assessing the effectiveness of newly expanded social services.

The earliest work dates from around the early 1960s. An example from the social-security field is Farley's (1964) study of social insurance and social assistance in Ireland. This is a

valuable source for tracing the administrative history of the social-security system, but does not attempt to place social security in a theoretical context. The three decades from the 1960s witnessed the emergence of a wealth of valuable studies of specific policy areas, in particular health, housing and education (Hensey, 1979; Baker and O'Brien, 1979; Coolahan, 1981, *inter alia*), and a number of overviews of social services generally (Kaim-Caudle, 1967; Curry, 1980; Maguire, 1986). Among these, Barrington's (1987) study of the health services deserves mention for looking beneath the surface of statutory developments to examine the policy process. Also worthy of note is Powell's (1992) overview of almost three centuries of social policy. This combines a broad-brush historical approach with the stated aim of providing a view from the 'bottom up.' Hence, Powell does not attempt to assess the merits and demerits of rival theoretical perspectives.

Alongside work concerned with outlining developments in particular policy areas or examining the growth in public social expenditure generally, the largest body of work has been concerned with assessing the effectiveness of public social expenditure in reducing poverty and inequality. Much of this has had an explicitly comparative focus, either in terms of methodology (for example, how best to measure poverty) or outcomes (for example, is expenditure more or less effective in Ireland than elsewhere?). The emergence of studies whose focus was explicitly the evaluation of the effectiveness of state social expenditure is generally dated from a conference on poverty in Kilkenny in 1971, and the publication of O'Cinnéide's *A Law for the Poor* (1970). Since then, the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), in particular, began to provide a body of researchers whose work questioned the relative effectiveness of state social expenditure.⁴ To these have been added reports and studies by the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF), the Combat Poverty Agency (CPA) and the Conference of Religious of Ireland (CORI). It does not detract from the value of these studies to comment that the primary focus has generally not been on theories of the welfare state.

Despite a late start, then, there is an extensive and growing body of research on all aspects of the Irish welfare state. Much of it, however, is only tangentially concerned with the primary focus of this study, which is the applicability of theories of the welfare state to Ireland, and it is to this that I now turn. The choice of convergence and divergence as a theme to tie diverse

⁴ A review of some of the main issues and bibliographical details are to be found in Johnston (1999).

theoretical perspectives together in chapter one was not a random selection. Not only are these concerns that underlie much contemporary theory, but they have also been among the dominant topics in Irish social science generally and, to a growing extent, among Irish welfare state theory in particular. A fundamental debate has been the extent to which Ireland's social, political and economic history has been 'atypical', with consequent problems for locating Ireland in a comparative or theoretical context. The level of specificity has varied from the problems of locating the Irish party system in standard typologies to attempting to define the type of society Ireland is (Mair, 1987; Peillon, 1994, *inter alia*). Given that Ireland has presented comparison problems in the fields of economics, politics and sociology in particular, it should be no surprise that much recent welfare theory has also focused on the issue.

The problems arising in locating Ireland in any of the 'worlds of welfare' is a key example. Cousins (1997) identifies Ireland's colonial and post-colonial status, the importance of agriculture, the impact of being a dependent and peripheral country, the role of the state and the centrality of Catholicism as factors which have had an impact on the development of the Irish welfare state, and which are not well dealt with in welfare state studies. In a survey that underlines Cousins' conclusion, O'Donnell (1999) outlines the problems with placing Ireland in a number of typologies (*namely*, Jones, 1985; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Lewis, 1992; Castles and Mitchell, 1993; Liebfried, 1993). On the other hand, McLaughlin (1993, 2001) argues that Ireland can indeed be captured by regime theory, being (at least, until recently) an example of Esping-Andersen's world of Catholic corporatism. From a slightly different perspective, O'Connell and Rottman (1992) also offer more optimism about the usefulness of theories of the welfare state. Assessing three core theories of the development of welfare states – the logic of industrialism, the social-democratic perspective, and state-centred approaches – they argue that, while no one perspective fully explains the Irish case, the state-centred approach offers a useful explanation of the distinctiveness of Irish welfare state development. I review these perspectives in the course of examining the key schools outlined in chapter one.

In the following sections, I assess the logic of industrialism, the 'politics matters' perspective, and statist, or institutionalist, perspectives. I argue that both the logic of industrialism and the 'politics matters' perspective have problems in accounting for the development of the Irish welfare case. This is because many of their core assumptions do not apply to Ireland. Yet at the same time, they do capture important aspects of the Irish experience. The institutionalist

perspective, on the other hand, seems initially the most promising theoretical perspective, but the extent to which it provides a completely satisfying account is debatable. Centrally, the current 'state of the art' in Irish welfare state theory points to many unanswered questions, indicating the pressing need for theoretically focused studies to provide a detailed analysis of policy determinants.

Focusing on convergence: the logic of industrialism

As the previous chapter noted, the logic of industrialism is a functionalist account which is part of a wider paradigm of convergence, and which sees the processes of industrialisation as having wide-ranging social and economic impacts which are essentially similar across all societies (Kerr et al. 1973). Among the various functionalist accounts, industrialism has dominated in Irish social science. This is because, as a late-industrialising European nation, Ireland's experiences have been seen to be useful in exploring the theory of industrialism generally. There is, consequently, an extremely large body of work that attempts to understand the Irish case (Wickham, 1983; Kennedy, 1989; O'Hearn, 1989, 1995, 1998; O'Malley, 1985, 1989, *inter alia*). Underlying much of this work is a concern with the extent to which the Irish experience of industrialisation supports the theory's claims to convergence, or the extent to which the Irish experience is divergent, implying some flaw in the theory of industrialism itself. Rather less work has been done on the more specific claims that the emergence and development of welfare states is a response to these large processes.

The proposition that the emergence of welfare states is essentially a response to the 'logic of industrialism' seems superficially attractive in the Irish case. On the surface, welfare expansion and economic expansion seem to be closely related. One of the most extensive surveys of Irish welfare development is Maguire's (1986) contribution to *Growth to Limits*, a comparative project that stresses the impact of industrialisation and modernisation on welfare development in Europe. She remarks: 'There can be little doubt that the marked acceleration in economic growth rates since the beginning of the 1960s has been a crucial factor in the development of the Irish welfare state' (p. 328). She identifies two factors that partially explain this, both of which are familiar from the 'logic of industrialisation' thesis. These are the increase in resources created by economic expansion, and the creation of new pressures and needs generated by industrialisation. Late industrialisation and late welfare development,

therefore, seem intimately related and provide grist for those who see convergence as the central theme in welfare studies.

However, as McCashin (1982) notes, this may 'posit too mechanistic a link between the economy and the welfare services' (p. 203). Indeed, Maguire (1986) points out that the overlap between phases of economic growth and phases of social-expenditure growth has not been perfect, and suggests that economic factors could provide only a partial explanation (p. 331). O'Connell and Rottman (1992) broadly agree, arguing that the theory of industrialism does not fare well in Ireland. This last conclusion is worth exploring in some detail, since it remains the most explicit attempt to apply diverse theoretical perspectives on the welfare state to the Irish case. The article emerged from a conference that was explicitly concerned with assessing the applicability of the theory of industrialism to Ireland from a number of perspectives, indicating the centrality of these concerns in contemporary Irish social science (Goldthorpe and Whelan, 1992).

Perhaps the central feature of O'Connell and Rottman's article is that it is not concerned with assessing a particular policy area, but looks at the entire package of activities which collectively can be considered as the 'the welfare state'. Their account of what constitutes the welfare state bears some similarities to Esping-Andersen's (1990) in going beyond social expenditure as a measure of 'welfare stateness'. However, rather than his notion of de-commodification, they refer to 'social citizenship': 'a package or regime of programmes that guarantee socially acceptable living standards independent of pure market forces' (1992, p. 209). Their analysis focuses on three broad sets of state policies, programmes and activities designed to alter market outcomes. These are policies affecting the range of positions in the labour market, policies affecting recruitment to those positions, and policies that redistribute income to offset market-generated inequalities. In terms of the first set of programmes, they include as part of the process of state-led industrialisation and the associated transformation of the class structure all the following: shifting patterns of agricultural, industrial and service employment, all public employment including semi-state, 'spin-off' employment for professionals and administrators, state policies on entrepreneurship, regional policies (i.e. location of industry) and rationalisation policies facilitating self-employment. In terms of the second set of programmes (relating to recruitment to those positions), O'Connell and Rottman focus centrally on the education system in terms of participation, funding, and the impact on class and gender. The third set of policies and programmes effectively concerns the

interaction of the tax and social-welfare system. Here, and in their discussion on education, they include private sources of education, health, pensions and housing.

The authors are well qualified to take such a wide-ranging approach. Both have contributed to numerous ESRI studies on the distribution of income, social mobility and changing class structure in Ireland, and it is clear that the article draws on an intimate knowledge of the quantitative data on the effectiveness of Irish social expenditure.⁵ Their conclusion is that, while on the surface, 'social citizenship' has expanded in Ireland, this expansion has been nominal rather than real, and has left privilege essentially undisturbed. 'What has evolved is a pay-related welfare state in which minimal levels of universal entitlement to income and services are supplemented by market based resources' (p. 208). This claim then acts as the basis for the rejection of both the logic of industrialism and social-democratic approaches, and the thesis that a state-centred approach is the most useful. I consider their arguments on social democracy and a state-centred perspective separately below, and concentrate here on their assessment that industrialism is an inadequate account.

Two key reasons underlie their rejection of the theory of industrialism. The first relates to the nature of the Irish welfare state. The theory fails because the expansion of social rights in Ireland has been nominal rather than real, and because of 'the failure, thereof, of advancing industrialism and expanding social citizenship to create a more open, achievement-oriented society' (p. 238).⁶ Their second reason essentially concerns the functionalism inherent in the logic of industrialism. Implicit in the theory is the idea that the role of the state is determined by socio-economic forces, with political development a function of economic development. 'The state in Ireland, however, must be seen as an independent rather than a dependent variable; this inverts the causality that the theory of industrialism asserts' (p. 238). If we look beneath some of the detail of O'Connell and Rottman's account, we can see that their rejection of the logic of industrialism has parallels with the wider welfare state literature.

⁵ For example, O'Connell, P. (1982); Rottman, D. and O'Connell, P. (1982); Rottman, D. and Reidy, M. (1988), *inter alia*.

⁶ They also note that the 'level of spending on welfare state functions, conventionally measured, is underpredicted by level of development'. (p. 207) It seems that, on the one hand, social expenditure has advanced more rapidly than the theory of industrialism suggests, thus negating the theory of industrialism. On the other hand, it seems spending has only been 'nominal', which also undermines the theory of industrialism. These are, of course, two different ways of measuring welfare states: one concerned with levels of expenditure, one with outcomes of expenditure. I think it is fair to say that O'Connell and Rottman are arguing that the second dimension is central.

The article illustrates in microcosm some of the issues raised in the introduction to chapter one. O'Connell and Rottman's work can be located within two central types of welfare state studies or projects: the development of typologies on the one hand, and theories explaining the development of welfare states on the other (Cousins, 1997). Their work illustrates the manner in which these two projects are intimately interrelated, if qualitatively different. It is probably fair to say that it is the second type of approach that most engages O'Connell and Rottman – that is, they are most concerned with explaining the factors which account for the development of the Irish welfare state. However, their assessment of the applicability of theory to the Irish case rests on a claim that Ireland is a *particular* type of welfare state. In effect, they argue that the logic of industrialism does not explain why the expansion of social citizenship in Ireland is nominal rather than real and, hence, it lacks explanatory power. Purely functionalist explanations are, in this respect, unsatisfactory. Their dissatisfaction with the logic of industrialism is no different from the dissatisfaction within the wider body of theory, which led to the emergence of alternative perspectives in an attempt to explain distinctiveness (or, in other words, variation) across industrialised nations. Were we to leave the theory of industrialism there, then we might conclude that Ireland is merely another example of the weaknesses in purely functional explanations of welfare development; that is, if the logic of industrialism is unsatisfactory in the Irish case, it is for largely similar reasons to those that have made it inadequate in explaining other welfare states, too. However, it is not clear that it is useful to consider the applicability of the theory of industrialism solely through the focus of events from the 1960s on. While it is true that the period marks a major expansion in welfare expenditure, it is debatable whether we can argue that the Irish welfare state 'began' in this period. In fact, considering what the logic of industrialism might say about earlier developments is helpful both in pointing to some problems with the general theory and in highlighting why Ireland has been so difficult to either explain or classify.

The extent to which it can be said that the welfare state 'began' at some fixed, identifiable point in time is debatable. Nevertheless, it has become conventional to consider the introduction of social insurance in the 1880s as marking an important transition. The transition is measured both quantitatively (in terms of rising social expenditure) and qualitatively (in terms of emerging social citizenship) (Flora and Heidenheimer, 1981; Pierson, 1991). The logic of industrialism perspective has most commonly been applied to explain this transition from poor-law provision to provision 'as of right'. From this narrow perspective, Ireland's welfare experiences can appear mainstream.

As in other states, welfare provision in Ireland has its roots in poor-law legislation. As elsewhere, early legislation reflected a desire to distinguish between the deserving and the undeserving poor, was localised in character and contained strong punitive elements (Burke, 1987; Pierson, 1991; Goodin and Mitchell, 2000). The roots of contemporary welfare provision in a variety of fields can be traced back to these early beginnings. Similar points can be made about the introduction of later legislation around the period described as the ‘birth’ of the welfare state. If the introduction of insurance is used to mark the birth of the welfare state, Ireland appears in the mainstream of European welfare development. Workman’s compensation in 1897 and health and unemployment insurance in 1911 reflected broad European trends (Flora and Alber, 1981). But within this lurks a paradox, which is that the roots of the Irish welfare state pre-date (Irish) industrialisation. It is this (among other factors) that has led Cousins (1997) to argue that any understanding of Irish welfare history must encompass its history of colonialisation. We cannot understand the Irish welfare state solely by looking at Irish conditions, but must look, too, at the factors which led the British state to make the transition from the Poor Law in the early twentieth century. I do not look at these factors here, but few would dispute that the impact of the Industrial Revolution and its attendant social and economic changes is central to our understanding of the origins of social insurance. In this sense, aspects of the Irish welfare state *are* explained by a logic of industrialism – insofar as the theory explains developments in the (then) wider UK. Long before the delayed industrialisation of the country – due to its colonial status – Ireland had an embryonic income-maintenance system predicated on an employment experience created by the process of industrialisation.

A second characteristic of colonialism that mattered in Ireland was that legislation (designed for British industrial conditions) was either applied differently in Ireland or, over time, was shaped by the different Irish social and economic conditions. The early period of the Irish welfare state has been described as reflecting ‘colonial paternalism’. Ireland ‘was treated differently and less favourably than any other part of the Kingdom, being more like a colony than an integral part of the Union’ (Kiely, 1999, p. 1). The new English Poor Law of 1834 was not extended automatically to Ireland, but followed a long period of debate over the extent to which English solutions were relevant to Irish problems (Burke, 1987). In the event, these solutions proved inadequate given the scale of Irish poverty, exacerbated by the Famine, forcing some abandonment of the all-or-nothing principle. The growth of a dispensary system

providing relief to the poor outside the walls also reflected adaptation to Irish conditions. The roots of income support as expressed in the 1847 Poor Relief Extension Act, and the existence of a dispensary system, reflected, then, both the factors which gave birth to the Poor Law in the wider UK and indigenous factors which forced adaptation (Burke, 1987). These interactions shaped later developments: the 1911 National Insurance Act, for example, was not applied in its entirety to Ireland because of the combined impact of the Irish Parliamentary Party, the Church, and the existence of a dispensary system (Barrington, 1987).

We can draw together what have been quite diverse points and point to the single biggest problem with the theory of industrialism for the Irish case by returning briefly to O'Connell and Rottman. As Goldthorpe (1992) remarks: 'The underlying assumption of the theory is that pre-industrial society is "traditional" society' (p. 416). As I discuss in chapter one, implicit in many accounts of the impact of industrialisation is a perception that modernisation is a synonym for industrialisation. This perception, however, is undermined by the Irish case. We have seen that, as O'Connell and Rottman suggest, the Irish state played a central role in the industrialisation process in Ireland. Implicit in this, and brought out strongly in their analysis, is the existence of a developed, modern state *prior to* industrialisation. As Goldthorpe discusses, many of the key aspects of a modern society were in place long before the industrialisation of the 1960s. Ireland had a modern state apparatus and financial system, mass literacy, a market-oriented agricultural sector and a long history of electoral participation in evolving democratic political institutions (Goldthorpe, 1992). The problem with the application of the logic of industrialisation to the Irish case is that the central assumptions of the thesis cannot be applied to a state whose welfare history is shaped by an industrialisation process it did not, in fact experience until much later, and whose journey from a 'traditional' to a 'modern' society has been by routes not on the map of comparative theory. The Irish case, then, demonstrates the well-accepted problems functionalist perspectives face when accounting for divergent outcomes, but perhaps, even more importantly, is clearly at odds with the basic preconditions of the theory itself.

We might, then, wish to turn to theories that have stressed differences rather than similarities in our quest for an understanding of the determinants of welfare development in Ireland. Pre-eminent among these have been theories which have argued that while underlying processes such as industrialisation may be important, we need to understand how their outcomes have been shaped by political actions. Industrialisation helps explain the emergence of social

insurance across a range of countries (including, as we have seen, Ireland) – but does not explain the profound variations in these schemes. So, for example, Bismarck and Lloyd George are united by social-policy initiatives featuring social insurance, but divided by administrative details that inaugurated two quite different welfare regimes. Hence Britain and Germany developed in very different ways over the long-term (Clasen, 1994). These differences might be said to owe their origins to the very different constitutional, social and economic context in which policy innovation was located. In Esping-Andersen's terms, the 'class coalitions' in which welfare state regimes were founded explains their past evolution and future prospects (1990, p. 33). Again, the impact of colonialisation affects how we might approach a consideration of the role of politics in Ireland. If, for example, we consider the period of the 'birth' of the welfare state, we can see that we need to look at the intersection of two political systems. On the one hand, the well-examined politics of the liberal conversion to social reform and, on the other hand, the emerging politics of a very different society. Two actors, in particular, were central – the Irish Party and the Catholic Church. The 1880s have been said to have marked the birth of modern Irish electoral politics. The social issues that dominated were the relationship between Ireland and the UK, between Catholics and Protestant, and between tenants and farmers (Coakley, 1999, p. 11). In the next section, I pick up and examine some of these political factors in more detail.

Politics and welfare: towards divergence

Politics can be conceptualised in diverse ways. Hence, Hicks and Misra (1993), for example, consider a range of theoretical perspectives and construct an overarching 'political resources' model which draws on what they term 'social democratic, statist, pluralist, and mass political conflict' perspectives. They include in their perspective 'parties and voters, protestors and bureaucrats, economic growth and strain' (pp. 670–1). I have considered statist approaches as being rather different than a 'politics matters' perspective. It is not entirely clear, however, that the two perspectives *are* at odds. I discuss this at more length below and, again, in more detail, in chapter five. However, a central focus of attention in the perspectives stressing politics has been on party control of government (Castles, 1982), and this section focuses largely on political parties, and considers wider 'political' issues towards the end.

Welfare state theory stresses that parties matter because, as Castles (1982) comments, they have diverse ideological leanings which – through their control of government – have been

translated into diverse patterns of policy implementation (p. 26). In Ireland, however, political parties have often been deemed relatively unimportant in shaping welfare outcomes. Curry, for example, remarks: 'While party political ideology may have influenced the shape of social service provision in other countries, its impact in Ireland has not been significant' (p. 8). To a large extent this is because the cleavages on which Irish political parties are based are not those that standard theories have identified as being relevant in determining welfare outcomes. Commenting on the application of comparative theory on party systems to the Irish case, Mair (1987) remarked: 'At worst, Ireland is ignored by the comparative literature. At best, it is accorded to a residual category where few of the conventionally accepted theories apply' (pp. 7–8). Irish political parties have generally been seen as lacking the 'social bases' that have provided parties in other countries with distinctive stances on social policy.

Although the view that Irish parties do not matter is a useful way into a consideration of how politics may have shaped welfare outcomes in Ireland, it is an oversimplification of a rather more complex, if underdeveloped, account of the role of political parties in Irish welfare state development. In fact, parties *have* been given a role by various authors. The role of Irish political parties in shaping the welfare state has largely been considered in relation to two key periods in the development of the Irish welfare state. The first period is that of the 1920s and 1930s, an important period in both party formation and welfare development. The second period is the period of economic and social modernisation from the 1960s on. While parties have been accorded a reasonably central role in the first period, they have been seen as only tangentially important in the second period. The transition period between these two dates (with which this study is concerned) is less clear. It has been described as a pivotal period for understanding the dynamics of party politics, and it is also a period about which much has been written from a social-policy perspective, given the controversial nature of social policy in the period. But these two perspectives have rarely overlapped. To the extent that politics has been seen to matter from the perspective of social policy in this period, parties have fared very poorly relative to the attention given to other actors, such as the Church, other key interest groups, individuals and the central bureaucracy. However, considering the role of political parties in Ireland in different periods raises some interesting questions about the factors shaping social policy in Ireland. I begin by looking at the period between independence and World War II, which I will refer to as the inter-war period.

This period has sometimes been seen as rather uneventful in social-policy terms. 'The period between the attainment of independence and the end of World War II saw few new developments in social policy. The existing institutions were taken over as they stood by the incoming regime and continued to operate in a relatively unchanged fashion for the following two decades. Social policy was low on the list of priorities of the newly independent state' (Maguire, 1986, p. 245). But for other authors, the 1930s were more important from both a social-policy perspective and a political-party perspective. Cousins (1995) is not alone in arguing that 'the lack of development of the social welfare system up to 1932 and the subsequent growth in the 1930s were linked to the differing political ideologies of the Cumann na nGaedheal and Fianna Fáil parties' (p. 42). Dunphy (1995), Lee (1989) and Mair (1987) also stress the centrality of social policy to political strategies in the period.

In fact, the inter-war period is important for students of social policy for a variety of reasons. For one thing, it marks the emergence of an independent policy process. The characteristics taken on in this period were crucial in shaping later developments during more activist periods. As in earlier periods, we can see important differences between Irish experiences and those of other welfare states. In other (European) welfare states, most of the central characteristics of the political system were in place. In Ireland, however, this period marks both the foundation of the state and the establishment of a distinctive party system, though within the context of a longer electoral history. These often momentous events occurred, however, *after* the introductory stage of social insurance and other aspects of the Irish welfare state, and this accounts for some of the difficulties in categorising the Irish experience. Hence, from the perspective of 'institutions and practices', as well as from a 'politics matters' view, it is worth noting briefly some features which emerged from 1922 on.

Despite Maguire's comments above, the inter-war period was one where some administrative reform did occur, largely in the interests of greater efficiency (Barrington, 1987). The outcome was centralisation under the control of central government. The Ministers and Secretaries Act of 1924 established the doctrine of ministerial responsibility, with the establishment of the minister as a 'corporation sole'. As later chapters discuss, this was to have an important effect on the context of social-policy formation, with politicians acquiring and developing strong conventions shaping their policy preferences. The Department for Local Government and Public Health became, as the title suggests, the key department for health-related functions. Also, reform of local government and the Poor Law saw

amalgamation and rationalisation. The extent to which this involved improving relief functions is debatable. Lee (1989) remarks acerbically that ‘The government introduced Poor Law legislation in 1923 which substituted for what the Democratic Programme had called “the present odious, degrading and foreign poor law system”, an odious, degrading and native system’ (p. 124). In terms of reform and innovation, then, conservatism has been said to be the central feature of social policy in the first decade of the new state. In terms of considering the extent to which politics matter, an obviously important question concerns the *source* of this conservatism. That is, what accounts for the undoubtedly conservative nature of social policy in the new state?

One answer is that the source lies in the nature of the state, rather than in political parties. O’Connell and Rottman (1992) suggest an important role for a ‘post-colonial legacy’ which can be seen in the policy stance of the state itself. ‘The Department of Finance, which, following the Treasury model inherited from the British administration system played a dominant role in state policy formation for much of Ireland’s post independence history, was opposed in principle to increases in state expenditure and taxes, and in particular to increased commitments to social welfare’ (p. 231). Undoubtedly, as Fanning (1978) clarifies, and as my own work indicates, the Department of Finance has been a consistent opponent of public spending. But there is a major problem in assigning the state bureaucracy responsibility for the direction of social policy in the period. The problem is that the policy stance of the state shifted significantly with a change in the partisan composition of government in 1932. This raises the clear possibility that party politics, as much as inherited post-colonial legacies, played a role in shaping policy outcomes.

Although it seems clear that bureaucrats in the period had strong and distinctive conservative views on public expenditure, Cumann na nGaedheal itself shared much of this economic conservatism. Its adherence to classical liberal economics was not merely a ‘colonial legacy’, but was rooted in its understanding of the nature of Irish society. Mair (1987), commenting on Cumann na nGaedheal’s conservatism, points out that its constituency tended to reflect its conservative bias, being strong in areas dominated by large, commercial farming interests. Both Barrington (1987) and Lee (1989) have suggested that the primacy of agriculture was a key factor in understanding why the focus of early reform was on economy and efficiency. Cumann na nGaedheal believed that economic development in Ireland would, of necessity, be

based on the agricultural sector. Hence, farmers' costs had to be kept low, given the centrality of agriculture to the economy, and, consequently, rates must be kept low, too.

This view provided much of the rationale for the austerity of the first independent government, notorious among social-policy students and contemporaries for its decision to reduce the old-age pension as an economy measure. This broad ethos was applied to social policy in general, and also to the insurance system in particular. In 1924, the government's contribution to the insurance fund was reduced. The question of medical benefit was re-examined but, despite the majority recommendations of an inter-departmental committee set up to examine the question, the government opted not to provide this to insured workers, again on the grounds of the existence of a dispensary system. But while Cumann na nGaedheal was in the process of developing an economic policy based both on inherited ideas and on its appraisal of Irish conditions, an opposition was emerging which differed substantially on both of these perspectives. Fianna Fáil emerged in the late twenties and early thirties with an appeal to different support bases and, consequently, different socio-economic policies. It appealed to the less well-off – and this included the less well-off among the agricultural population as well as the urban working class. Its stance on social policy can be explained by its desire to appeal to this distinctive constituency in a way which differentiated it from Cumann na nGaedheal. Once in power, Fianna Fáil initiated welfare reforms designed to appeal to the constituency which had won it power (Dunphy 1995).

Hence, a number of income-maintenance schemes were inaugurated in the period – a sharp contrast with the retrenchment of its predecessors. As well as a wet-time insurance scheme in 1942 for workers in the building trade, a widows' and orphans' pension was introduced in 1935. This included both a contributory and a non-contributory scheme. Both were necessary because of the limited scope of the insurance scheme, with only thirty-two per cent of the male population of insurable age covered by social insurance (Commission on Social Welfare, 1986). Widespread unemployment in the 1930s, coupled with the narrow coverage of social insurance, meant that an unemployment-assistance scheme was introduced in 1933. Housing was another central area of activity. In the field of social insurance, the main developments were again administrative. As outlined above, social insurance was shaped by British imperatives, leading to the role of friendly societies in welfare provision. Consequently, friendly societies played a role in Ireland, though they were far fewer in number because of the small size of the industrial workforce. By 1933, a variety of problems led to reform.

Centrally, societies catering for higher-risk groups were encountering severe financial problems, while wealthier societies were able to offer groups enhanced benefits. By 1933, there were approximately 474,000 insured persons in the state, catered for by sixty-five approved societies with membership varying from fifty-five to over 100,000. In 1933, all these societies were amalgamated into the National Health Insurance Society (Barrington, 1987). Bishop Dignan became chairman and was to be an important actor in the post-war-reform period. In addition, the actuarial basis of the insurance scheme changed from a funded scheme to a pay-as-you-go scheme.

Hence, while it is true that in many respects ‘the social services which existed at the end of World War II differed little in their essential characteristics from those of the early 1920s’ (Maguire, 1986, p. 247), nevertheless the period was one where social policy clearly emerged as a major marker of party-political differences. Were our attention focused solely on this period, it might be easier to conclude that politics mattered. Two factors, however, make the Irish case problematic. The first is that the extent to which parties *retained* the divergent social-policy stances acquired in this mobilisation period is unclear. Social policy, while important, was not the central line of division between the parties – and it has been argued that, as the party system developed, these early differences were eroded. By the time we move to the ‘take-off’ period of the 1960s, it has been suggested that all parties shared a broadly positive perspective on increasing social expenditure and, because of this, their impact in the expansion period was negligible. The second factor, related to this, is that the social bases on which these (perhaps short-lived) policy differences were based fit uneasily into comparative party typologies and, hence, into theoretical perspectives on the determinants of welfare states. We can consider both of these factors by turning our attention to the 1960s.

As outlined above, delayed welfare development has meant that this is the period on which most attention has focused in terms of attempting to understand the determinants of the Irish welfare state. There has been broad agreement that the explanation for this expansion does not lie in the ideological complexion of Irish parties. Having said this, parties *have* featured in explaining expansion. Maguire (1986), for example, has argued for a role for politics. She begins by outlining what has been seen as one of the central features of Irish party politics – the absence of parties based on the social cleavages common to other countries, and the gradual emergence of a party system where alternative governments are similar in class terms. Nevertheless, she argues for a role for political factors. In her analysis, however, it is not the

ideological complexion of political parties which is central, but rather the rise in the political salience of social policy which she sees as contributing to the expansion of welfare from the 1960s. The rise in the political salience of social policy in the period reflects changes in the 'terms of the major political opposition' in the post-war period. The central change is the emergence of the well-known pattern of 'Fianna Fáil against all the rest', identified by Mair (1987), the origins of which lie in the transition period with which this thesis is concerned. This pattern of competition has distinctive outcomes: 'The net effect of a Fine Gael/Labour Party coalition is to produce a government which is as heterogeneous in terms of its support base as is Fianna Fáil' (Maguire, 1986, p. 333). This, she argues, leads to the expectation that government alternation should have little effect for the development of the welfare state. She examines different phases in the development of the welfare state from the Second World War on, primarily through the lens of expenditure, but also through the enactment of 'core' laws. She compares these phases with the composition of government, and concludes that neither in terms of expenditure nor in terms of legislative activity does party alternation in government play a very significant role in the development of the welfare state. She argues then that parties have mattered solely because of the rise in the political salience of social policy, through which electoral competition and 'counter bidding' contribute to explaining expenditure increases.

On the surface, then, the fact that governments of whatever party complexion were equally active (measured by expenditure and numbers of laws) does seem to be fairly conclusive evidence that, while politics may have mattered elsewhere, it did not do so in Ireland. However, at the core of perspectives that stress the importance of politics are arguments that parties matter not merely because they differ in terms of commitment to, or opposition to, public spending, but also because not all spending counts equally, and because the input of parties affects outcomes in ways which expenditure measures alone cannot capture (Esping-Andersen, 1990; van Kersbergen, 1995; Huber, Ragin and Stephens, 1993; Huber and Stephens, 2001). Arguing that all parties were 'pro-welfare' tells us little about what was envisioned by them in terms of degree of welfare and in terms of welfare for whom. We know from comparative studies that the way in which spending is structured can have profound differences for the quality of welfare experienced by citizens, in terms, for example, of whether it contributes to maintaining status differentials, or whether it contributes to greater equality. In the Irish case, Maguire argues that increased social expenditure (and legislative activity) did not necessarily mean greater equality. In fact, she argues that 'the re-distributive

process operates unevenly from a social class perspective, treating the property owning classes in a relatively favourable fashion' (p. 320). How did this outcome emerge despite a broad pro-welfare stance on the part of all key political parties? One suggestion is that it reflects the specific ways in which Irish parties were pro-welfare.

Once we turn our attention to considering what kind of welfare commitment was envisioned by Irish parties, a second possibility occurs. This is that perhaps parties may have been *united* in being pro-welfare, but *divided* by differing perceptions of what this implied in practice. So, for example, Mair (1987) has argued that beneath the consensus on welfarism in the period, 'the language and ideology within which that commitment was expressed differed markedly across the political spectrum' (p. 208). In particular, he argues that these differences lay in contrasting emphases on redistributive issues. Two central points emerge from this discussion. The first is that, while on the surface the lack of strong ideological differences between parties may lead us to assume their impact on outcomes was negligible, this assumption needs closer examination. The second is that we may need to enquire more deeply into what Irish parties conceive of as constituting welfare and the extent to which this conception was identical across the political spectrum. In effect, this means that we need to link our consideration of the role of parties to a more nuanced consideration of outcomes. Unfortunately, there are few studies available which combine a consideration of the nature of the Irish welfare state with an attempt to relate this to the nature of the Irish party system.

One exception is O'Connell and Rottman (1992), since, as we have seen, their conclusions on the nature of the Irish welfare state rest strongly on their perception of what kind of welfare state it is, and who have explicitly considered how this relates to comparative theory. They address the earliest and most influential strand of the 'politics matters' school, the social-democratic approach. However, they reject it on the grounds that 'The welfare state expanded in Ireland in spite of the weakness of left-wing political parties, and neither the timing of that expansion nor the nature of the new citizenship rights can be explained by reference to working class strength' (p. 239). Expansion cannot be explained by the strength of the left, since the Irish left is electorally weak and is, moreover, divided by a fragmented union movement. Additionally, and crucially, the nature of that expansion runs counter to what might be expected from a 'social democratic' type state – expansion consolidated the position of the middle class, not the working class. Hence, they reject the social-democratic perspective and argue, instead, for a state-centred perspective. However, social-democratic

parties are not the only parties which might shape welfare outcomes. As we have seen, van Kersbergen (1995) and Huber and Stephens (2001) have argued that Christian-democratic parties have also presided over increases in expenditure, though that expenditure has had different outcomes to expenditure sponsored by social-democratic parties. O'Connell and Rottman have asserted only that welfare outcomes in Ireland have not been shaped by social democracy. Having examined and rejected only one strand in the complex 'politics matters' perspective, they use this rejection as a springboard to argue that it is, therefore, the state which has shaped social policy outcomes in Ireland. This leaves us with unanswered questions about the role of other types of parties in the political system.

Although social democracy has been a dominant perspective, more recently, claims have been made for the alternative role of Christian democracy (van Kersbergen 1995). As already noted, McLaughlin (1993, 2001) has argued that, until perhaps the 1990s, Ireland could best be understood as a Catholic corporatist welfare state. Intuitively, this is an attractive thesis: the dominance of the Catholic Church in Ireland has been well documented (Whyte, 1980; Keogh, 1996). However, there are problems with the perspective in terms both of determinants and outcomes. In terms of determinants, one key question concerns the role of Christian-democratic parties and, in particular, the extent to which we can consider Ireland to have a Christian-democratic party.

The social-democratic perspective has one key advantage in terms of its applicability to Ireland – it is relatively easy to identify the central party of the left. It is when we come to the 'right' of the divide that we encounter problems in locating Irish parties in comparative typologies. The right is generally considered to include two main kinds of parties: Christian-democratic parties, on the one hand, or secular conservative parties, on the other (Gallagher, Laver and Mair, 2001). Both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael sit uneasily in these categories; Fine Gael is not clearly Christian democratic, nor is Fianna Fáil clearly secular conservative, since both stem from very different origins than either of these two types. We can see the problems for theories of the welfare state if we turn to consider Castles' (1982) comments on classifying parties in support of his thesis that parties of the right have a negative impact on public expenditure. His thesis requires identification of the single, strongest party of the right. This, he claims, presents problems only when the right of the political spectrum is occupied by both a sizeable secular party and a party of Christian-democratic persuasion. On the whole, his thesis would prefer only secular parties of the right, since Christian-democratic parties

attract strong, cross-class support. The problems should be obvious, then, in the Irish case. In his analysis, Fine Gael is classified as the 'major party of the right' and Fianna Fáil as an 'other governing party'. He does not grapple with the problems involved in this categorisation, which are, perhaps, relatively unimportant for his thesis given Ireland's size and peripherality. But in terms of applying his thesis to Ireland, there are enormous problems in considering whether Irish parties are comparable with parties of the right as conceptualised by his thesis.

If we return, then, to theories stressing Christian democracy, it could be argued that, if Ireland does exhibit characteristics of Catholic corporatism, it has reached this point by very different routes. However, the extent to which the label is entirely appropriate is debatable. In terms of outcomes, what exactly constitutes a 'Catholic' welfare regime is not entirely clear, though the structure of income-maintenance systems, and the retention of status and hierarchy appear central. McLaughlin, however, tends to focus on what might be termed the social and moral aspects: the roles of the family and of women provide the core of his argument, with health and education also important. He does not focus on income maintenance, which does not, in fact, reflect corporatist thinking in many key essentials. It is undeniable that Catholicism has played a role in shaping aspects of the Irish welfare state, but in a distinctive fashion that has not been adequately captured by comparative thinking. The absence of corporatism in Irish social insurance is a feature that tells us much about both the determinants of the Irish welfare state and the ambiguous assumptions of comparative theory. Chapter three examines this in detail.

What conclusion can we draw from this extended discussion? It is clear that, at certain periods, politics has mattered, but has done so in ways which have been little examined. Maguire (1986) and O'Connell and Rottman (1992) stress the salience of political competition, yet all do so in a fashion that denies much salience to parties. Maguire implies that, apart from being a factor in accounting for expenditure rises, political parties were essentially neutral. This perspective is probably accounted for by the nature of her study which, as the introduction suggests, was a much-needed synopsis of developments across a variety of programmes, rather than a sustained attempt to place Ireland in a comparative or theoretical perspective. As a result, questions about the type of welfare state that emerged were not at the core of her study. O'Connell and Rottman's account was almost the complete opposite. Rather than being concerned with a detailed empirical analysis of the development

of the Irish welfare state, they were focused on what type of welfare state it was and what theoretical perspective most easily accounted for this. While they accorded politics a key role, they saw this role as being essentially about how the state interacted with class and organised economic interests. What is missing is a sense of the *actual* way in which Irish political parties have conceptualised social policy and how they may have contributed to shaping policy outcomes.

Although it is possible to argue that a close examination of the policy process reveals that politics has mattered in Ireland (albeit in a manner imperfectly captured by much theory), there is one central objection that may be launched against this thesis. This is that political interests may be shaped and constrained by the institutional context within which they are located. For example, in any consideration of the agricultural sector in Ireland, a starting point is the atypical relationship between industrialisation and modernisation that exists in Ireland. One of the aspects of late industrialisation is that a large, yet relatively modern, agricultural sector existed in the context of a modern, democratised state. It has been argued that it is with this state that we should be concerned, since, in the Irish case in particular but also in general, states must be considered to have their own interests to pursue. I consider statist perspectives in some detail below, but before doing so, there is one final area of research that needs some consideration. This is the question of the impact of gender on the Irish welfare state in general, and on social insurance in particular.

Given the extensive treatment of political parties and the expression of class interests in the Irish political system, it might be expected that the question of gender should receive equal treatment. Contemporary theorising has placed gender relations on an equal footing with class relations in understanding welfare outcomes – indeed, debates about post-industrial restructuring of welfare states might suggest that questions of gender relations and family forms have become even more central than class (Myles and Quadagno, 2002). Yet this thesis does not focus on the impact of gender on policy outcomes in the 1952 Social Welfare Act. This seems profoundly counter-intuitive since the structure of social insurance has been intimately bound up with theories about the impact of gender on welfare states. Many authors have drawn attention to the centrality of gender in structuring the Irish social-security system (Lewis, 1992; Cook and McCashin, 1997; Yeates, 1997). There is a broad consensus that ‘gender inequality has been an organising concept of the system from the foundation of the social welfare system in the nineteenth-century to the present day’ (Yeates, 1997, p. 145).

Yeates refers specifically to the 1952 Act to support this conclusion. She remarks that, while 'it may have addressed the exclusion of a substantial proportion of the workforce, it reinforced the gendered principles underlying women's entitlements and the position at the margins of social welfare' (p. 155). Cousins (1995) points out that, while it abolished some aspects of direct discrimination in relation to single women, it continued to provide differential treatment for married women. On marriage, women's insurance was terminated in exchange for a lump sum. Should she re-enter insurance after marriage, she would begin with a new contribution record and would qualify for lower rates of benefit since she was deemed to be a dependent of her husband. Payment was also made for a shorter period (Cook and McCashin, 1997; Cousins, 1995). As we will see, though male employees in agriculture and domestic service were included in the 1952 Act, female agricultural and domestic employees were excluded. As a result, and drawing on the insights of comparative theorists, there is a consensus that the Irish system is a strong 'male breadwinner system' (Lewis, 1992; Cook and McCashin, 1997; Yeates, 1997, *inter alia*).

It is the extent of this consensus that accounts for the decision not to focus on gender in this thesis. No other theoretical school of thought on the welfare state has generated as much Irish research as those related to gender. There is, to the best of my knowledge, no dissent from the perception that gender is a core determinant of social-security outcomes in Ireland and elsewhere. The discussion of class and politics above focused on pointing out the extent to which the lack of research means that there are unanswered questions about policy determinants; the close examination of the policy process surrounding the 1952 Act is designed to provide at least some tentative answers to these questions. There are, I feel, no unanswered questions about the interaction between gender relations and policy outcomes in social insurance. Consequently the omission of a gender dimension is a conscious decision rather than an unfortunate oversight.

A role for the state: an institutionalist focus.

The 1980s and 1990s saw a renewed interest in the state among Irish social scientists, as was the case elsewhere. In arguing for a state-centred perspective on the welfare state, O'Connell and Rottman (1992) were reflecting a wider social-science interest in conceptualising the role of the state in Ireland. Partially, this was because of idiosyncratic features of Irish political

and economic development, and the consequent perception that an activist state was particularly central in the Irish case (King, 1986; Hardiman, 1988; Breen et al., 1990; Peillon, 1996, *inter alia*). O'Connell and Rottman's (1992) work was clearly influenced by the statist perspectives outlined in chapter one. As we have seen, they argued that neither the logic of industrialism nor the social-democratic approach were useful, to a large extent because of the distinctiveness of the Irish case which involves a combination of a 'dependent, peripheral and relatively less-developed economic structure with the liberal democratic political institutions of an advanced capitalist society' (p. 230). Hence, they argued for a perspective which put the focus on the state as an actor: 'Both the logic of industrialism and social democratic approaches view the state as determined by, or responsive to, societal forces and interests. The state centred approach, in contrast, regards the state as an organisation with interests of its own to pursue' (p. 208).

Their work is extremely useful in providing an example of Irish research that treats the state as 'an independent rather than a dependent variable' (p. 238). In particular, it points to the possibility that standard welfare theory can encompass the Irish experience. This reflects arguments made in the preceding chapter that the idea of variation has been inherent in statist perspectives from the start: hence, the suggestion made there that these approaches focus on the 'irregularities rather than the regularities of history' (Immergut, 1998, p. 15). Perhaps the most important general point to be taken from O'Connell and Rottman is the idea that Irish distinctiveness 'requires' that a priority be given to the structure and policies of the state itself. A core suggestion is that state-driven development can be viewed as a partial explanation of why 'the Irish welfare state expanded in so distinctive a manner and with consequences that proved to be so favourable to privilege' (p. 206). This provides a valuable starting point for an attempt to incorporate the insights of welfare theory into the Irish case: distinctiveness is something which can be explained by standard theoretical perspectives. Having said that, a closer look at the details of their conclusion points to the need for a more focused case-study approach so as to contextualise and clarify what are rather broad, if generally useful, insights.

This conclusion remarks that state-centred approaches cannot be applied mechanically. Such an application would not, in fact, explain welfare outcomes in Ireland at all, since the logic of a state-centred approach would require that welfare expenditures be reduced, while they were,

in fact, substantially expanded.⁷ Their account, then, is one in which ‘political factors are subsumed within the state centred approach’ (p. 239). Their explanation ‘is a state-centred conjunctural one that examines both the state itself and the major organised interests in Irish society’ (p. 234). In other words, it is a state-centred account that has a central role for politics in explaining the precise nature of outcomes in the Irish case. However, perhaps because of the restrictions imposed by an article-length approach, the processes by which ‘politics’ and ‘the state’ interact are left unexamined. This lacuna may also be due to the period in which the article appeared. In their 1986 review, Skocpol and Amenta summarised the then ‘state of the art’ by commenting that ‘states are being conceptualised as partially autonomous actors and as consequential structures and sets of policies’ (p. 147). These two insights were separated out to assess ‘emerging ideas’ around two key areas: states as actors and structures on the one hand, and, on the other, a more ‘fine grained and inherently dynamic’ focus on the political consequences of already instituted policies (pp. 147–51). Since they wrote, both aspects have subsequently generated more specific findings and, in the process – at least in the field of welfare state theory – the focus has to some extent shifted from the rather broad concept of ‘the state’ to the intimately related but slightly different idea of ‘institutions’. We can see the utility of thinking rather more *specifically* about the institutional composition of the state if we return briefly to O’Connell and Rottman and to other Irish authors.

A central problem with O’Connell and Rottman’s account is that they do not provide any definition of the state. We can, however, look to other sources. King (1986), for example, who also argues strongly for a state-centred model for Ireland, uses what he terms a conventional conception of the state as ‘a set of bureaucratic institutions which are occupied by full-time appointed personnel and alternating elected officials’ (p. 83). This definition clearly links state structures and politics: elected officials are, after all, essentially party politicians. Indeed, the ‘politics matters’ perspective sees politics mattering because political parties, who then shape political outcomes, essentially capture governmental authority. Yet this presents us with a problem. In many ways, a state-centred perspective stresses the constraints imposed by state structures. This, surely, is what O’Connell and Rottman mean by suggesting that the state is an organisation with interests of its own to pursue rather than one which is determined by, or responsive to, societal forces and interests. And, as we have seen, they reject the main thesis

⁷ Their argument is that state-centred approaches would lead to this expectation since this was the explicit policy position of the Department of Finance. This, in turn, points to assumptions about what is meant by the state in their account.

that 'politics matter' on the narrow grounds that Ireland lacks a social-democratic political party. Their account does not provide useful tools for deciding when outcomes are the result of political forces or when they are the result of state actions, because the two are not clearly differentiated. Implicitly, their account seems to rest on a view of the state as a collection of bureaucrats, but this is never clearly addressed.

Breen et al. (1990) consider what is meant by the state in more detail, in a manner that seems congruent with how the term is conceptualised by O'Connell and Rottman. For Breen et al. (1990), the state is 'a type of organisation', a defining characteristic of which is that only one such organisation can exist in a society at a given time:

In practice, of course, we can identify a diversity of organisations as constituting 'the State'. These share a common purpose of governing, a monopoly on the use of coercion, and a form of administration based on an executive comprised of individuals who act in the capacity of office holders within carefully specified rules and regulations. The State is the structure that underlies and unites these agencies, offices and individuals, a structure that can be thought of as either a set of organising principles or of regulations. (p. 12)

The idea that the state can be thought of as a set of organising principles or regulations is reminiscent of the definition of institutions in chapter one as the 'rules of the game'. This conception of the state as being composed of diverse institutions governed by formal and informal rules has, in a relatively short time, spawned a large body of work that has generated some valuable insights.

Chapter one outlined how initial, wide-ranging concerns with state capacities and autonomy has generated (as we have seen) increasingly specific hypotheses about the impact of variations in state structures on social policy. As suggested there, the main emphasis has been on variations in the structure of political institutions that either facilitate or impede expansion. The last decade has seen a rapidly growing body of work and on the centrality of varying institutional configurations. It is fair to say, I think, that the concept of 'the state' has been decomposed in a variety of ways, as theorists have chosen to focus on diverse but specific institutional configurations, or on what have been termed the 'rules of the game'. Hence, Thelen and Steinmo (1992), for example, suggest that 'institutionalists have constructed important analytic bridges: between state-centred and society-centred analyses by looking at the institutional arrangements that structure relations between the two' (p. 10). In effect,

institutional perspectives focus on the ‘*process* of politics and policy-making within given institutional parameters’ (p. 7). Although institutionalist perspectives are frequently termed ‘statist’, I argue that they tend to operate at a lower and less abstract level than ‘theories of the state’ in general. But in the process, they provide the type of tools missing from O’Connell and Rottman’s account, which allows us to consider the interaction of bureaucrats, elected officials, structures of government and ‘rules of the game’.

In terms of the usefulness of the institutionalist perspective to the Irish situation, it is helpful to consider the application of institutionalist perspectives in two main ways. The first is in terms of the general idea of institutions as sets of formal and informal rules, or as the institutional context within which policy is made. The second approach is in terms of the idea of policy feedback. Although differentiating the two this sharply is, in some ways, an artificial distinction, it is analytically useful in considering its usefulness to Ireland. I begin by making some points about the ‘rules of the game’ in the Irish context: these are examined in more detail in later chapters.

An important starting point is that at the heart of institutionalist perspectives is the idea that, for a variety of reasons, different institutional configurations generate different outcomes (Maioni, 1997). So, for example, Rothstein (1996) calculated that even utilising an extremely crude distinction between opposite institutional formats generates 1,024 possible ways of configuring the political institutions of a modern, Western, capitalist democracy:

Table 2.1: Institutional Variation Among Western Capitalist Democracies

<i>Party system</i>	Two-party vs. multi-party system
<i>Electoral system</i>	Proportional vs. majoritarian
<i>Legislative assembly</i>	Unicameral vs. bicameral
<i>Government structure</i>	Unitarian vs. federalist
<i>Central authority</i>	Parliamentarian vs. presidentialism
<i>Court system</i>	Judicial review vs. judicial preview
<i>Local government</i>	Weak vs. strong autonomy
<i>Civil service</i>	Spoils recruitment vs. merit recruitment
<i>Armed forces</i>	Professional vs. conscription
<i>State-economy relation</i>	Liberal vs. corporatist

Source: Rothstein, 1996, p. 135.

The policy process is located in a particular institutional framework that varies from state to state, and this may shape the policy preferences of actors in various ways and, hence, affect policy outcomes. It has been suggested that Irish institutions are a hybrid, or mixture, of models (Gallagher, 1999). The above points about institutional variation notwithstanding, political scientists have tended to try and generalise about ‘packages’ of institutional frameworks in a manner reminiscent of regime theory in welfare studies. Hence, a basic distinction within parliamentary systems has been between a consensus model and a majoritarian (Westminster) model. The key features of a majoritarian model are ‘single-party and bare-majority cabinets, no effective separation of power between government and parliament, unbalanced bicameralism, a two-party system, a plurality electoral system, unitary and centralised government, and the absence of a written constitution’ (ibid., p. 178). The key features of a consensus model, on the other hand, are ‘government by grand coalition, a genuine separation of powers between government and parliament, balanced bicameralism, a multi-party system, a proportional representation electoral system, and a written constitution’ (p. 178). It can be seen that Ireland has features of both models: it has obviously been strongly influenced by the Westminster model, but has key features of the consensus model, too. In fact, the post-war period with which this thesis is concerned is one that sees institutional development on a number of important levels; in particular, by seeing the emergence of coalition government in what had, until then, been a majoritarian system. This, in turn, influenced the shape of the party system. As the following chapters clarify, the institutional context of Irish politics has structured outcomes in a variety of ways, in particular, by mediating the way in which class interests were expressed politically, but also by shaping the policy preferences of policy-makers.

The second important insight generated by institutionalists was outlined in chapter one: the idea that ‘policies make politics’. The extent to which this aspect of institutionalist thinking has influenced Irish researchers is very limited. Indeed, the only specifically institutionalist account is from the perspective of sociological institutionalism, is a very broad overview, and pays little heed to specific outcomes (Healy, 1998). There are accounts that, while not consciously institutionalist, clearly echo institutionalist concerns. The idea that earlier choices shape later ones is obviously to some extent intuitive. Hence, as early as 1969, Ó Cinnéide, commenting on the home-assistance scheme, remarked: ‘The various features of the present service can be traced back in unbroken lines to administrative and legislative decisions made over a period of a century and a half’ (p. 307). But there has been little consideration given to

the details of how institutional and policy legacies have actually constrained choices or shaped preferences in particular directions. We may have a general sense that policy continuity is important; yet change occurs, too. When, and under what circumstances, have policy legacies counted, and when have they been outweighed by, for example, the strength of political preferences? Thelen and Steinmo's (1992) reflection that what has been missing in institutionalist thought generally 'is more explicit theorising on the reciprocal influence of institutional constraints and political strategies and, more broadly, on the interaction of ideas, interests and institutions' (p. 14) is very relevant to Ireland. Only a detailed analysis of a particular policy area can provide insight into this area.

Conclusion

Although the discussion above pointed to some problems within each of the perspectives outlined, there was nevertheless some explanatory potential in each. We could, on the one hand, stress similarities: broad economic processes have left their mark, competing social groups have struggled to have their interests expressed, and have been constrained by the institutional structure in which they have been located. To some extent, standard welfare theory captures all this – even if no *one* theory can combine them. On the other hand, we could lay our stress on differences: the path to industrialisation and modernisation escapes theory, the party system struggles to find a home in comparative theory, and there are distinctive aspects to the structure of the Irish state.

However, the precise weight to be given to divergence over convergence is not clear. The discussion of the existing welfare state literature in Ireland has pointed to a bewildering number of questions that we might ask about the determinants of the Irish welfare state. The few attempts to provide answers have raised further questions. Among these questions are those relating to the impact of politics, and in particular the impact of political parties said to have no or weak social bases. One reason why parties have traditionally been accorded a relatively unimportant role is that attention has focused on the period of economic expansion, when we see the emergence of a pattern of competition based on 'two broad coalitions of diverse social groups, two large catch-all electorates which are more or less indistinguishable from one another in terms of class, region or whatever' (Mair, 1987, p. 40). Since the resulting governments are broadly cross-class in their support bases, the argument can be made that partisan control of government has been neutral for the welfare state. Yet it is likely

that cross-class governments produce outcomes that are, in themselves, highly distinctive. We can see that this is possible if we pause and ask ourselves what a neutral 'pro-welfare' stance would look like: it is, I think, impossible to conceptualise given that welfare is inherently ideological. A central point, then, is that the catch-all nature of the Irish party system, often used to negate a political perspective, might, in itself, be a factor shaping particular policy outcomes. Chapter five focuses in some detail on this aspect.

This latter point can be further developed when we consider that it is governments, rather than parties, which are 'cross-class' in Ireland. That is, though the social bases of party support are weak in Ireland, there are differences between the parties: the argument about cross-class government has been largely predicated on the contrast between a single-party, Fianna Fáil government with a Fine Gael–Labour government. Irish parties do have some social bases, which have varied over time (Mair, 1987, 1992). These, however, have not been well captured by political theories that have tended to focus on what might be termed a 'labourist' interpretation of class (Baldwin, 1990) since, among other factors, it is different voting patterns within the agricultural population which has been one of the most distinctive features. The weakness of the left in the Irish party system, coupled with the problems of locating Ireland in comparative party typologies, has deflected attention from how social interests are actually expressed in the party system. I argue in chapter four that the structure of agrarian interests in Irish politics has been underestimated as an important social force and, in chapter five, that the nature of the party system mediated the representation of class and, consequently, had an impact on distributional outcomes.

A final question about the role of politics concerns timing. For reasons outlined above, O'Connell and Rottman, and others, are centrally concerned with accounting for the shift in policy from the 1960s on, yet the explanations for the absence of a strong social-democratic party and the existence of a party system with distinctive social bases long pre-dates these events. Their state-centred account is, I think, contingent on the existence of a distinctive party system – it is difficult to argue that state-sponsored industrial expansion and development *created* this system. If welfare development is viewed as a long, evolutionary process, then we need to put the period of expansion and development more clearly into a historical context. Questions of continuity raise issues about the factors shaping social policy before the emergence of an activist state and the extent to which these factors continued to shape policy even after the 1960s. Some of these continuities, in terms of party politics as well

as legislative inheritances, are obscured by a focus on the period of change in the 1960s. For example, we have seen that social policy was a central feature in the emergence of the Irish party system in the 1920s and 1930s. We have also seen that, by the 1960s, a pattern of competition based around cross-class governments, all broadly pro-welfare, had emerged. We might, then, wish to know rather more about the transition between these two periods, particularly since the period is one of intensive and often controversial activism in social policy. In terms of the impact of political parties, the impact of a particular pattern of party competition deserves closer attention.

Questions about continuity and change point to the unanswered questions about the impact of policy legacies and the effects of institutional structures at the heart of the state. As outlined above, a strong case has been made for a central role for the state in shaping welfare outcomes, but there is no detailed account of what, in practice, this might mean. In considering the state, it is not clear if we should be focusing on the autonomous actions of bureaucrats, on the role of elected governments, on the state as a set of organising principles, or on some combination of these. I turn in the following chapter to a closer consideration of these issues, using questions about the impact of Catholicism on the structure of social insurance to consider the role of institutional legacies on shaping outcomes.

Chapter Three: Catholicism, Corporatism and Social Insurance in Ireland

Introduction

The extent to which Catholicism 'makes a difference' in shaping social-policy outcomes has been debated by a number of theorists in recent years (Huber, Ragin and Stephens, 1993; Castles, 1994; Therborn, 1994; van Kersbergen, 1995; Schmid, 1996; Huber and Stephens, 2001). Castles (1994) has argued that there is evidence that 'a Catholic world of welfare' may exist, where Catholicism has influenced patterns of expenditure, family policy and labour-market outcomes. In putting forward this suggestion, he picks up on arguments put forward by Esping-Andersen, whose 'conservative' world of welfare owes something to the influence of the Catholic Church (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

If Catholicism was an influential factor shaping social-policy outcomes, we might expect Ireland to exhibit some of the features of a Catholic welfare regime, given that over 90 per cent of the population are Catholic and that religious practice is among the highest in western Europe (Whyte, 1980; Hornsby-Smith and Whelan, 1994). Indeed, McLaughlin (1993, 2001) explicitly argues that Ireland embodied some of the characteristics of a Catholic corporatist welfare regime: 'Until the 1960's Catholic teaching largely determined the nature of Irish social policies. Strict adherence to the subsidiarity principle ensured that the austere state had a limited welfare role' (p. 232). Other authors have also stressed the impact of the Church and given a central explanatory role to the Catholic Church in explaining the limits to reform in Ireland. 'Attempts during the 1940's and 1950's to copy the advances being undertaken by other countries in health and social welfare provisions were met by sufficiently strong opposition from the Catholic Church to frighten politicians into headlong retreat' (Breen et al., 1990, p. 30).

The perspective that the Irish welfare state has been profoundly influenced by Roman Catholicism relies heavily on references to the Mother and Child Scheme, a shorthand term for a complex series of events centred on Church and medical resistance to proposed reforms of the health services. Briefly, a scheme to provide free health care to mothers and children

emerged from the processes of administrative reform (discussed in more detail below). The scheme, drafted as part of a proposed radical reform of the health services generally and in response to very high rates of infant mortality, envisioned a non-means-tested health service. This was seen to run counter to Catholic social teaching, and the government of the day (an uneasy coalition of five, diverse political parties) came under intense behind-the-scenes pressure from the Church Hierarchy to modify the scheme.

Amidst internal governmental conflict, the outcome was the resignation of the minister for health following a lack of support from cabinet colleagues for the scheme, his decision to publish the correspondence with the Hierarchy in the newspapers, the collapse of the government shortly afterwards, and a decision by the next government to remove some of the 'objectionable' aspects of the scheme. It also sparked off a continuing debate about the role of the Church in public affairs in Ireland, and it remains one of the best-researched and debated episodes in the history of the Irish welfare state. While it undoubtedly contributes to our picture of the influence of the Church, it should be noted that the role of the medical profession has also been said to be crucial, as have 'political' factors such as the relative inexperience of the health minister and severe personality differences within the cabinet (Whyte, 1980; Barrington, 1987; McKee, 1989; Lee, 1989; Keogh, 1996).

The dramatic nature of events surrounding health reforms in this period has meant that the reforms being debated in the field of social security, culminating in the 1952 Act, have not received as much attention. In particular, the differences between the attitude and role of the Church to outcomes in social security as opposed to health have been relatively little examined (*though see* Peillon, 1996). The question of reforming social security and, in particular, of consolidating existing schemes into a unified social-insurance scheme on British lines, was begun under the Fianna Fáil government, which had been in power from 1932 and was to lose power only in 1948. In the midst of its plans for reform, a very public controversy erupted between the minister for local government and public health, Seán MacEntee, and the bishop of Clonfert, Bishop Dignan. Dignan, who was at that time a leading figure in the area of social services, had suggested social-security reforms that were based on vocationalist ideas. His suggestions were not merely ignored but were treated with hostility by MacEntee, and an extremely public dispute between the two figures took place (Whyte, 1980; Barrington, 1987; Riordan, 2000). Explaining the nature of this dispute and understanding its outcomes is central to any understanding of the influence of Catholicism on social security in

Ireland, and I consider it in detail below. No legislation actually emerged during this period, but the incoming coalition government in 1948 both inherited a reformed administrative system and had access to a wide range of policy suggestions, which influenced the 1949 *White Paper on Social Security*.

The White Paper outlined the plans of the government to extend and co-ordinate social insurance in Ireland. The proposed changes were very much in line with British developments, proposing the extension of social insurance to the majority of employees and providing coverage for the core risks of unemployment, sickness, disability, maternity and old age. Perhaps the key difference between it and the Beveridge scheme was that it did not include the self-employed. However, the inter-party government collapsed in 1951 in the aftermath of the mother-and-child scheme and, with it, the legislation on reform of social insurance, which had only reached its second reading. The government had, however, moved towards unification by centralising the administration of all social-insurance schemes under the minister for social welfare. As I discuss below, this represented a decisive move away from the corporatist ideas that were supposedly influential among the Catholic Hierarchy in this period, and which had been central to the Dignan plan. Two successive governments, then, felt free to ignore Catholic doctrine on the administration of social security.

In the 1952 Social Welfare Act, the incoming Fianna Fáil government implemented many of the proposals put forward in the 1949 White Paper, albeit in a more limited form. For example, old age was not included as a risk to be covered by social insurance. The differences between the two schemes is interesting from a number of perspectives, and chapter four examines these in more detail. In terms of the influence of Catholicism, however, the central point is that the proposals of neither the Fianna Fáil government nor its inter-party predecessor appear to have been strongly influenced by doctrines of subsidiarity.

This chapter examines the extent to which theories stressing the impact of Catholicism on welfare states are useful in explaining policy outcomes in social insurance. It looks in detail at the processes by which the institutional legacies of British rule appear to have been more influential than the impact of Catholic social teaching in the field of social security. Two central factors appear to have been crucial – the policy legacies of social-insurance schemes which pre-dated independence, and an adherence to a ‘Westminster style’ of government that conflicted with Irish interpretations of ‘subsidiarity’. However, a central point is that this

chapter also questions the strength of the Church's adherence to the doctrine of subsidiarity, arguing that the historical circumstances which gave rise to this doctrine were very distant from the concerns of the Irish Church in the 1940s. The association between Catholicism and corporatism is, in fact, historically and spatially specific, reflecting the experience of core Continental countries from around 1870 to 1940. Viewed in this light, the absence of corporatism in Irish social insurance is less surprising than it appears on the surface. This, in turn, has implications for the motivation behind Catholic activism in other areas of the welfare state, as well as for theories that stress Catholicism as an important independent variable influencing welfare outcomes.

I begin by looking in more detail at these theories and at the extent to which Ireland appears to diverge from expected outcomes. I then turn to look in detail at the policy legacies and policy processes which shaped outcomes in post-war Ireland.

Catholicism, Christian democracy and welfare states

The perspective that Catholicism is an important factor in shaping welfare states lies in the growing realisation, explored in more detail in chapter one, that 'there might be different aspects of welfare effort, both among countries with high effort and those with low effort, and that these different aspects might have different causes' (Huber, Ragin and Stephens, 1993, p. 712). Initially, researchers identified social democracy as the key political factor underlying variation between welfare regimes, though there were early suggestions that religion might also be a factor (Stephens, 1979). Esping-Andersen (1990) considerably expanded the range of historical and political factors seen to influence outcomes in identifying three separate 'worlds of welfare', among them a conservative Catholic world. This conservative world reflects a number of intertwined influences: feudalism, etatism and corporatism. A unifying theme, though, is that 'traditional status relations must be retained for the sake of social integration' (p. 58). These ideas were, to some extent, implicit in Catholic social teaching as expressed in the papal encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), which will be discussed in more detail below. A key insight, therefore, is that welfare regimes might be influenced by Catholic social thought.

Esping-Andersen's insights have generated an enormous range of theorising around the idea of worlds of welfare, and one strand of this debate has focused on the influence of religion on welfare states. Perhaps the most influential contribution has been van Kersbergen's (1995)

study of 'social capitalism'. His work is, in many ways, a deliberate corrective to the dominance of the social-democratic thesis. He argues that even those who are explicitly arguing for alternative conceptions (such as Esping-Andersen, 1990; Baldwin, 1990) nevertheless think in terms of a social-democratic paradigm that sees the 'natural' expression of wage labour as being social democracy.

In other words, labour has autonomous social policy needs which would normally lead to social democratic power mobilisation concentrated around the goals of solidarity, equality and universalism, unless those demands are 'filtered' and 'interpreted' (and implicitly assumed to be 'distorted') by other movements, notably Christian democracy. (van Kersbergen, 1995, p. 26)

Van Kersbergen suggests that wage-earners are not necessarily social democrats by nature and that it may be useful to consider a Christian rather than social democratisation of capitalism. His central conclusion is that 'Christian democracy is a distinctive political phenomenon that – despite variations – nourishes a distinctive welfare state regime' (p. 231). From an Irish perspective, his thesis presents problems highlighted in chapter two. These problems concern the extent to which any Irish political party can legitimately be considered 'Christian democratic' and, indeed, van Kersbergen himself points to this problem in relation to Ireland (p. 50 fn). If it is difficult to clearly identify any party as Christian democratic, then it may be difficult to extend his insights to Ireland. Alternative approaches, however, may be more relevant.

Castles (1994) expanded the debate by questioning whether the idea of a Catholic world of welfare 'travels'; he considered its application to southern Europe, as expressed in welfare expenditure, family policy and labour-market outcomes. He concludes that there is a distinctive Catholic family of nations in policy-outcome terms. In the process, however, he raised a central issue. He criticised the use of Christian-democratic parties as the 'operational definition of membership of the Catholic family of nations' (p. 23). This is because it 'denies the power of the Church in predominantly Catholic countries, such as France and Ireland, to influence politicians of all parties through its role as an elite pressure group and as a force shaping the demands of the electorate at the mass level' (p. 24). Hence, he suggests that countries with 'a predominantly Catholic population' should be seen as being potentially part of a Catholic family of nations. However, while he includes Ireland in order to make the point that the use of Christian democracy underestimates the power of the Church in some

predominantly Catholic countries, he then, in a detailed footnote, suggests that it may be ‘that the Irish case cannot properly be subsumed as part of an argument that explicit Catholic doctrines of subsidiarity lead to higher transfer expenditure’ (p. 37 fn).⁸

A number of authors have criticised Castles’ suggestion that Catholicism should be substituted for Christian democracy as the key independent variable (Therborn, 1994; Schmid, 1996; van Kersbergen, 1995). Some of the criticisms of Castles are relatively straightforward: for example, Schmid (1996) and Therborn (1994) both object to his classification of Greece as Catholic. On a similar note, questions arise where there is a mix of denominations. But the key issue is perhaps that of the operationalisation of religion: what exactly should be measured to define the independent variable? It is clear, I think, that this is an important issue if we wish to consider how Catholicism may have influenced the Irish welfare state. Van Kersbergen (1995) makes the point that using numbers of Catholics in a population as the criterion presents problems: for one thing, states vary enormously in terms of what percentage of ‘nominal’ Catholics are actually ‘practising’ Catholics. A related point is that there is also cross-national variation in the extent to, and method by, which the Church influences policy outcomes. Hence, ‘it matters considerably for the political direction of political Catholicism how Church–state relations are defined and to what extent the social movements are integrated into the party’ (van Kersbergen, 1995, p. 51).

In a similar vein, Schmid (1996) suggests that

it would make more sense to consider separately the proportion of denominationally-tied citizens, the strength of the Churches (operationalized by funds and personnel), of Christian democratic parties (by votes and membership) of Christian democratic trade unions (by membership) of denominational charity organisations (by funds and personnel) and to use all these figures as indices in a statistical analysis. (p. 104)

It is, perhaps, not surprising that this approach has so far not generated quantitative studies, and that recent work has opted to focus on cabinet shares of Christian-democratic parties instead (Huber, Ragin and Stephens, 1994; Huber and Stephens, 2001); that is, Christian democracy is relatively easily defined and measured, and admirably suited to quantitative cross-national studies, where it can easily be contrasted with cabinet shares of social-democratic parties to determine if there are contrasting outcomes. Catholicism is a more nebulous concept, and difficult to conceptualise and measure. Much of the discussion in this

⁸ I consider his reasons in more detail below.

chapter, however, indicates that equating Catholicism with Christian democracy is obviously a problematic approach from an Irish perspective. At the same time, theories stressing Christian democracy are not, therefore, irrelevant.

It is clear that it is difficult to disentangle ideas about Catholicism from ideas about Christian democracy. 'The "little" tradition of social Catholicism has provided the Christian democratic movements of western Europe with a distinctive social theory of capitalism, a common core that all movements share' (van Kersbergen, 1995, p. 230). However, the impact of Christian democracy is, to some extent, contingent upon the structuring of power relations and coalitions within the political system, leading to divergent outcomes across political contexts (p. 178). It is certainly problematic to consider Christian democracy as a straightforward operationalisation of Catholicism, since it reflects certain strands of Catholicism and not others, and since, as a political movement centred on electoral politics, its character is also shaped by nationally specific factors. Nevertheless, with these caveats in mind, research on Christian democracy provides a valuable starting point for considering the Irish case. This is because there is general agreement that Catholicism is by far the most important factor shaping the character and social-policy aims of Christian democracy, and there is growing evidence that, despite variations, there is a common core of policy outcomes that can be linked to Christian democratic incumbency. In other words, current research on Christian democracy offers a starting point by indicating what we might expect to see if Catholic social teaching has influenced welfare outcomes.

As chapter one discussed, quantitative studies based on cabinet shares of Christian-democratic parties have corroborated van Kersbergen's insights. Huber, Ragin and Stephens (1993) found 'contrasting effects of Christian democracy and social democracy on transfer payments, social benefits expenditure, and total government revenue' (p. 711). Welfare states influenced by Christian-democratic parties place 'a greater reliance on transfer payments, a deemphasis of the provision of subsidised goods and services, and weak active labour market policies' (p. 740). One of their core insights is that some of the apparently contradictory findings in quantitative studies can be explained by recognising that social democracy and Christian democracy have qualitatively different outcomes. Hence, Wilensky (1981) concluded that Christian democracy was a key force, based on his use of ILO (International Labour Organisation) measures of social-security-benefits expenditure, while Cameron (1978) and Stephens (1979) used total revenue and concluded that social democracy was more important

(p. 743). 'The commitment of social democracy to the correction of inequalities created by the market finds its reflection in an expanded public sector; the commitment of Christian democracy to a protection of the position in the labour market acquired by individuals and families from such adversities as sickness and old age is reflected in large transfer payments' (p. 740). These outcomes can be clearly traced to Catholic social thinking on the role of the state, the family and the individual.

Fairly specific claims for the influence of Christian democracy and/or Catholic corporatism have also been made for the structure of social insurance. Esping-Andersen sees social insurance in the conservative Catholic world as being influenced by both etatism and corporatism. Etatism has influenced, in particular, the tradition of endowing civil servants with 'extraordinarily lavish welfare provisions' (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p. 59). Corporatism, particularly as expressed in the papal encyclicals, *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), led also to a focus on status maintenance.

Either because of state recognition of particular status privileges, or because organised groups refused to be part of a more status-inclusive legislation, there emerged the tradition of constructing a myriad of status-differentiated social-insurance schemes – each with its peculiar rules, finances, and benefit structure; each tailored to exhibit its clientele's relative status position. (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p. 60)

Van Kersbergen (1995) also argues that a bipartite or tripartite structure in the control of social-security schemes is related to Christian-democratic strength. Huber, Ragin and Stephens (1993) suggest similar effects. 'The typical Christian-democratic welfare state ... is segmented, and it tends to reproduce social inequalities, not reduce them. Different occupational groups have different insurance schemes, with different contribution requirements and different benefits' (p. 740). Castles (1994) also identifies the corporatist social-insurance systems common in southern European as being suggestive of those countries' membership of a Catholic family of nations.⁹

Hence, in a Catholic welfare state, we might expect to see classical corporatist arrangements in the administration of social insurance. These generally involve occupationally distinct social-insurance schemes with tripartite participation by employers, employees and the state

⁹ His analysis here, however, may be flawed. While social insurance in southern Europe superficially resembles Continental schemes, there are also profound differences in outcome and, in particular, in the factors shaping administrative structures. Clientelist and patronage-oriented political systems, for example, seem likely to be a central part of the explanation for 'dualism and polarisation' in social insurance (Rhodes (ed.), 1997).

in the governing of social-insurance systems (Korpi, 1992, p. 18). This may also be linked to a particular pattern of financing social-security expenditure, with more focus on insurance contributions than on direct taxation (Castles, 1994; Wilensky, 1981). As I have suggested above, however, these features are largely absent in Ireland. Commenting on this, Korpi (1992) remarked: 'When I compare the institutional structures of Irish social insurance programmes with those in Europe, it strikes me that something is missing. What one might have expected to find in a country with such a strong Catholic Church are the classical corporatist arrangements in the institutions of social insurance programmes' (p. 18).

The administration of social insurance in Ireland is centralised in the Department of Social and Family Affairs (formerly the Department of Social Welfare). Benefits are flat-rate and, hence, lack the 'status-maintaining' impact of corporatist schemes, and both contributions and benefits tend to be lower than in other EU states.¹⁰ Nor is social insurance the primary transfer method. For example, Ireland is second only to the UK in having the lowest combined employee-employer contribution rate. This is largely because social insurance accounts for a much smaller segment of social-welfare expenditure than is the case in many other EU countries. Only 42 per cent of social-welfare expenditure is financed by social insurance, compared to approximately two-thirds in Germany, France and Belgium (Department of Social Welfare, 1996).

Hence, the social-insurance scheme in Ireland seems, in many important respects, to belong to what has been variously described as a liberal, or English-speaking, family which has a greater tendency to rely on means-tested 'assistance' schemes, with few universal benefits, and a greater tendency to finance from general revenue (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Castles, 1994). In the attempts at explaining this, attention has focused on the close historical ties between Ireland and the UK:

In spite of political antagonism against Britain in certain circles in the Republic, in spite of a very different economic structure and in spite of a much lower level of income, Irish legislation in social and economic matters has been more influenced by

¹⁰ Experimentation with pay-related benefits did occur from the 1970s, but this was reversed in the 1990s. It should also be noted that there is some occupational differentiation *within* the administratively centralised Irish scheme. But, as I discuss below, the central focus from the perspective of Catholic social teaching in Ireland was on the administrative structure of social insurance, arguing for institutions which were not centralised under the control of government departments, rather than on issues relating to occupational differentiation. The existence of different categories within social insurance reflects factors other than Catholicism, and I return to these in more detail in chapters four and five.

happenings in Britain than by those in any other country. This is especially true in the field of social insurance. (Kaim-Caudle, 1967, pp. 39–40)

This was also partially the reason for Castles' (1994) exclusion of Ireland from the Catholic 'family of nations' in social security. He remarks that 'the shaping of the Irish social security system owes much to the legacy of English rule in the formative period of welfare formation (which is, of course, an assertion that Ireland was once a member of a quite different family of nations)' (p. 37). This implies that the legacies of British rule outweigh the influence of Catholicism on the Irish welfare state. On the surface, then, the Irish case seems to offer support to institutionalist arguments for the importance of policy legacies and lends credence to the core concept of 'path dependency'.

There are a number of questions raised by this argument. The most obvious is that this is counter-intuitive since, as the introduction suggests, authors in a variety of fields have drawn attention to the strength of the Church in Ireland and its influence on policy outcomes in diverse areas. In fact, as noted above and in chapter two, some have explicitly singled out the Church as a key part of the answer to the question as to why welfare development was retarded in Ireland. Welfare theory in general suggests that social security is a 'core' area for Catholic influence, yet the influence of the Irish Catholic Church seems particularly low here. One question, therefore, is how we can reconcile arguments that the Irish Catholic Church has been uniquely influential, with its apparent lack of influence on the structures of social insurance.

There is little doubt that the Catholic Church in Ireland has generally been seen as particularly influential relative to the Church in other countries – though there is debate over whether Ireland is, or was, a 'theocratic' state (Whyte, 1980; Keogh, 1996). Certainly, the Church has been in a uniquely powerful position in Irish society and cannot be thought of as merely one among a number of pressure groups. Its influence is due to a number of factors. Religious homogeneity is one: in 1926, shortly after independence, there were 2,751,269 Catholics in what is now the Republic and a mere 220,723 non-Catholics (Keogh, 1996, p. 103). The Church had a well-developed infrastructure and through the nineteenth century had become embedded in the provision of a range of social services, especially in the fields of health and education.

It has also been suggested that the Church's influence owes much to the new state's desire to achieve legitimacy in the aftermath of civil war (pp. 102–4).

Possessing a strong popular base, exercising a profound ideological influence over the leaders of the new Irish State, and speaking as one voice through the National Conference of Bishops, the Catholic Church was traditionally in a position to mobilise its resources to protect its interests. This position lasted virtually unchallenged until the 1960's. (Keogh, 1996, p. 94)

Here, however, it is the Church's social teaching that is of special relevance. A widespread interest in Catholic social thought took hold rather later in Ireland than in other European countries (Whyte, 1980). A Catholic social movement had become influential in many parts of the European continent during the years 1880–1920, but remained relatively weak in Ireland until the 1930s. However, by the 1940s, Catholic social teaching seems to have become well entrenched. As elsewhere, the papal encyclicals, *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), were influential in shaping a distinctive attitude to social policy. The central doctrine was that of subsidiarity – that the state should not take upon itself what could be left to 'lesser and subordinate' organisations (Whyte, 1980, p. 67). Side by side with this was the doctrine of vocationalism. This sought to counter what was seen as excessive state centralisation by devolving authority for various issues to vocationally organised bodies – that is, to organisations based on people's vocations, or occupations. In addition, of course, Catholic social teaching accorded a primary position to the family and to the position of fathers as providers.

It is clear that this perspective had, at least potentially, implications for the development of social insurance in Ireland. State welfare schemes, by this perspective, could have potentially far-reaching implications. The comments of Rev. E.J. Hegarty (1950) on the 1949 White Paper are clear about this. He argued that 'comprehensive State Welfare Schemes are opposed generally to moral, legal, social and economic principles, and are utterly discredited by experience and history' (Hegarty, 1950, p. 1). Governments, he comments, were not instituted by God to take over the work of families in providing for the members, but to safeguard their function which 'is inviolable and prior ... to any State power' (p. 2).

From this principle the arguments for the unity and indissolubility of marriage derive; so if the State can take over these duties of the family, there is no compelling reason against polygamy or divorce! In fact, you might well ask: why ought people to bother with any form of marriage at all, if the State will care for them 'from the cradle to the

grave' by maternity benefits, children's allowances, public housing, free education, free medical attention, vouchers for food and clothing and fuel, free dole for the idle, finally a life-pension, a grant at death, and pensions for widows and orphans? There is much sober truth in the paradox that we have as much right to free love as to free spectacles. (pp. 2–3)

The Church argued that its opposition to the Mother and Child Scheme was based on Catholic social thinking. Politicians of every hue responded to the expressed opposition of the Church by stressing their adherence to the teaching of the Church (Whyte, 1980). At the height of the Mother and Child Scheme, for example, the taoiseach wrote to the archbishop informing him of the government's decision to withdraw the scheme: 'that decision expresses the complete willingness of the Government to defer to the judgement so given by the hierarchy that the particular scheme in question is opposed to Catholic social teaching' (Quoted in Whyte, 1980, p. 232).

This picture of an ardently vocationalist Church opposed by a largely supine state is, however, profoundly misleading. Outcomes in social insurance cannot be explained without realising that, in reality, the Church was neither as committed a supporter of vocationalism, nor the state as much a hostage to the power of the Hierarchy as some perspectives on the Mother and Child Scheme might suggest. To understand this, we need to step back and place in context both Catholic social teaching in Ireland and government plans for social-service reform. To some extent, the emergence of conflict between Church and state in Ireland reflected the fact that the issue of social-service reform was topical and relevant for *both* Church and state. Two stories, then, need to be told side by side. On the one hand, the publication of the Beveridge report in the UK made the issue of social-service reform electorally important for the government of the day, and started off a process of consideration of 'social services', and the possibility of their extension and consolidation. This process went beyond a narrow concern with income-maintenance schemes. Indeed, the idea that income maintenance was an administratively separate area, as distinct from health for example, was something that slowly emerged as part of the reform process. In considering these issues, policy-makers were located within a distinct set of inherited policies, and operated within a particular institutional framework of formal and informal rules. Vocationalist ideas were anathema to these inherited modes of activity and thought.

Rather surprisingly, much the same can, in fact, be said for the Church in this period. Certainly, the period was one where 'social' Catholicism was emerging as an important concept, and lay and clerical Catholics were beginning to apply what they saw as the teaching of the Church to specifically Irish contexts. But the Church in Ireland was located in a very specific context. O'Leary's (2000) definitive study of vocationalism has overturned the consensus on the extent of the Church's attachment to vocationalism in the period, and I draw extensively on his account below. He suggests that, for much of the Hierarchy, vocationalism was a concept to which they paid public lip service but which, in private, was seen as disruptive to the structure and operation of the Church in Ireland in general, and to their relations with governments in particular. 'In public they eulogised *Quadragesimo Anno* without reservation. In practise they either opposed or failed to support vocationalist schemes' (O'Leary, 2000, p. 52). Perhaps more than anything else, the failure of corporatism in Ireland can be traced to the fact that the Church was no more ideologically committed to vocationalist ideas than was the state. This is because of the particular nature of the Catholic Church in Ireland and its relationship with the state. We need, then, to turn to some of these inherited institutional legacies and their impact on policy processes and outcomes.

Beveridge, subsidiarity and social insurance in Ireland

As 'historical institutionalism' tends to argue, shaping policy is rarely a matter of starting from scratch. Instead, policy-makers generally operate in the context of institutional legacies that shape the nature of the choices they make. This was very much the case with the 1952 Act in Ireland. To clarify this, we need to begin by looking in some detail at the policy legacies that faced policy-makers in post-war Ireland. I follow this by looking at the processes of administrative reform, and at conflicts between differing views of how social insurance should be administered in Ireland.

The role of policy legacies

The 1911 National Insurance Act has, to some extent, acquired an importance over and above its actual provisions, in that it is one of a cluster of legislative initiatives deemed to signal the shift from the poor-law period to the development of social insurance inaugurating the welfare state (Rimlinger, 1971; Flora and Heidenheimer, 1981). The inauguration of social insurance combines two measures of welfare stateness; increasing social expenditure and institutional innovation (Flora and Heidenheimer, 1981). Famously, the UK was influenced by the earlier

German example, yet the two schemes differed considerably in terms of the influences that shaped them and, consequently, the form they took. Rimlinger (1971), for example, argues that Germany, as a late industrialiser, developed its insurance model in terms of the patriarchal tradition of the absolutist state. On the other hand, the British model was a late adaptation to industrialisation, which had occurred under the influence of the liberal tradition.

In Britain, friendly societies were a core part of the scheme. There were approximately six million members of around 2,500 societies (Barrington, 1987). Friendly societies had been central in providing protection against some risks for the large class of industrial workers and had, in fact, initially been hostile to state schemes. Although the model for the plan was the trade-union and friendly-society schemes, it provoked trade-union hostility at the greater risk-pooling involved by the inclusion of unorganised workers (Heclo, 1974). The TUC (Trades Union Congress) had called for non-union workers to be excluded. The state contribution to the scheme 'prevented the more regularly employed workman from having to bear the extra cost of bringing along his high-unemployment-risk brethren in the same public insurance program' (pp. 86–7). The scheme was thus financed on a tripartite basis and was administered by those organisations that had already been involved in the administration of sickness benefit.

The 1911 Act was extended to Ireland, though in a slightly amended form. In terms of unemployment, the Act applied to Ireland in essentially the same form as in the UK. As in the UK, benefits and contributions were flat-rate and the scheme was financed by contributions from employees, employers and the state (Kaim-Caudle, 1967; Commission on Social Welfare, 1986). The much smaller number of friendly societies existing in Ireland pointed to the large differences that existed between the two countries – it has been estimated that only around 40,000 people were members of friendly societies in Ireland. Two main reasons accounted for the lack of friendly societies in Ireland. The first was that the industrial working class was small, and concentrated largely in Dublin and Belfast. The second was that some of the functions friendly societies fulfilled were met by the existence of a dispensary system providing free health care in Ireland. The Irish Poor Law had diverged from the British Poor Law, largely under the impetus of the Famine. Consequently, Ireland during this period had a 'free' medical service based on a network of dispensary doctors operating under the aegis of the Poor Law Boards of Guardians (Burke, 1987). Therefore, different arrangements for the operation of insurance had to be made for Ireland. In Ireland, the Act was supervised by the

Irish Insurance Commissioners. The Act allowed that trade unions could become 'approved societies', accounting for a large rise in trade-union membership in Ireland, especially for the ITGWU (Irish Transport and General Workers' Union) (Keogh, 1994). By April 1913, 700,000 persons were insured (Barrington, 1987).

A key area of difference concerned medical benefit. The Act allowed for a compulsory health-insurance scheme for virtually all manual workers and for lower-paid, non-manual workers, administered by non-profit-making Approved Societies. However, medical benefit (coverage for treatment by a doctor and prescriptions), which was included in the provisions for elsewhere in the UK, was excluded for Ireland. The exclusion of medical benefit reflected pressures from the Catholic Church and the medical profession in Ireland, which in turn reflected profound social and economic differences between the two countries. In broad terms, Ireland was a largely agricultural nation with a small, industrial working class. This had a number of effects, as already noted; Ireland lacked the extensive system of friendly societies on which the UK system was based, and a much smaller group would be covered by the scheme since there were relatively few employees. Arising partially from these differences, earlier social-policy developments differed in Ireland.

Although the Church opposed the 1911 National Insurance Act, it is worth stressing that its opposition was not based on doctrines of Catholic social thought, such as 'subsidiarity', but, rather, on the grounds that the bill was unsuited to Irish conditions. As noted above, Irish Catholicism was slow to develop an interest in social policy, and ideas current in other European countries were weakly developed in Ireland. Likewise, the context within which Catholicism was operating was also quite different – the pressures which industrialisation threw up in many European countries were absent here. Hence, the clergy's arguments have been said to reflect its 'predominantly rural and capitalist eyes and [to come] from the standpoint of the farmer and small trader' (Barrington, 1987, p. 50). Other authors have noted the extent to which the preferences of the Church were synonymous with those of farmers. Lee (1989) has described the clergy in this period as 'strong farmers in cassocks, [who] largely voiced the concern of their most influential constituents, whose values they instinctively shared and universalised as "Christian"' (p. 159). The Church's influence in 1911, then, must be placed in the context of the wider social structure – notably, a society in which a system of 'peasant proprietorship' had been created following a series of land Acts through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This social structure owes its roots to the

nationalist struggles of the nineteenth century, and Catholicism in Ireland in this period and later was shaped by these struggles.

Secondly, while the Church was influential in having medical benefit excluded, the bulk of the Act *was*, in fact, applied to Ireland, shaping a model of social insurance along UK lines. This has been said to reflect the political skill of Irish politicians (in Westminster) in preserving most of the benefits of the bill for the Irish working class, and to indicate that 'the situation was not a simple one of clerical command and obedience by politicians' (Barrington, 1987, p. 64).

The birth of social insurance in Ireland, then, occurred during the period generally seen as the birth of the welfare state across Europe. However, many of the arguments that have been put forward to account for this did not, in fact, apply to Ireland (*see*, for example, Flora and Alber, 1981). The roots of the 1911 Act lay in the growth of an industrial working class in the UK, which was beginning to assert its electoral muscle; but Ireland, in this period, was a predominantly rural, agricultural country, dominated by owner-occupiers, and with a proportionally tiny, urban working class. It is true that this *was* a period of labour organisation and unrest, in which we see the foundation of the ITGWU (organising unskilled workers), an embryonic Labour Party in 1912 and the great Lockout of 1913. But, nevertheless, conditions differed profoundly from those in the UK or, indeed, Germany, the other path-breaking social-insurance nation in this period. As noted above, the extension of social insurance, rather than reflecting the strength of trade unionism, contributed to increasing the numbers of Irish trade unionists in what might be seen as reverse causality. As I discuss in more detail below, the concerns of continental European Catholicism in this period were very different and, consequently, the factors shaping the institutional structures of social insurance in the period differed considerably also.

Independence in Ireland was initially to see little development of the social-insurance system. A contributory and non-contributory widows' and orphans' pension was introduced in 1935. This had been preceded by a committee of inquiry, which makes it clear that elements of Catholic social teaching had begun to influence the terms in which public policy was spoken of. Importantly, it is clear that contributory schemes are seen as being in line with Catholic social thought. Contributory schemes, as contrasted with non-contributory schemes, apparently strengthened individual responsibility and gave the state a lesser role than in

schemes funded entirely from general revenue: 'The payment of direct contributions by the insured can be justified on the responsibility of the insured themselves in the occurrence of risk, the necessity for considering their self-respect, the desirability of encouraging thrift, on their right to share in the administration and in effecting economy in its working.'¹¹ Hence, contributory schemes appeared to be congruent with the doctrine of subsidiarity. In the Dáil debate on the scheme, the minister for local government and public health, S.T. O'Ceallaigh, quoted the report approvingly:

It may not be out of place here to refer to the implication of schemes where the burden of social protection is borne by the general resources of the whole community. In looking to the State alone for protection against all the contingencies of life, the tendency is to weaken personal and family responsibility and to strengthen correspondingly the conception of the overriding authority and responsibility of an abstract State. It is necessary to state that, in this country at any rate, such a tendency is not in accord with the type of social philosophy predominantly held.¹²

As chapter two outlined, the mid-1930s saw some institutional changes to the Irish social-insurance scheme. Among other reforms, the 1933 National Health Insurance Act instituted a committee of management for the new society. This consisted of a chairman, three trustees and three employers' representatives appointed by the minister for local government and public health, and eight representatives of insured persons. Three of these were nominated by the Irish Trade Union Congress (ITUC) and five were nominated under a delegate system by local authorities (Riordan, 2000). In 1936, the bishop of Clonfert, Dr Dignan, became chairman of this organisation. The NHIS and its chairman figure largely in the events surrounding the gestation of the 1952 Act.

Post-war debates, then, took place in the context of already existing schemes of social insurance, and the adoption of corporatism would have involved a sharp turn away from existing practice. This point was explicitly made by policy-makers in a memo on reform in anticipation of the creation of a Department of Social Welfare, and in the 1949 *White Paper on Social Security*.

These sources make it clear that there was a broad awareness that variable rates of contribution and benefit was the method generally adopted in all countries except Britain,

¹¹ Appendix c, *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Widows' and Orphans' Pensions*.

¹² DD, vol. 56, 4 June 1935, col. 2277.

New Zealand and some of the Swiss cantons. However, it was felt that this was essentially due to, what we would now call, institutional legacies present in these countries, but not in Ireland. The point is made very clearly in the 1949 *White Paper on Social Security*:

It is seldom realised that the administrative background which makes variable rates feasible in European countries is not present in Ireland. On the Continent, administration is generally through a number of bodies or societies organised on an occupational or regional basis and the principle of varying rates was in operation before the State intervened. In most cases the State has done no more than to make insurance compulsory, to prescribe minimum requirements and, as a corollary, to grant subsidies, the principle of varying rates being carried into succeeding developments of compulsory insurance. It would be no easy matter to establish, *ab initio*, a suitable administrative mechanism in this country. (Department of Social Welfare, 1949, p. 18)

The previous creation of the NHIS, too, was cited as an obstacle to bringing in vocational-type schemes. The assumption that the NHIS was vocational was incorrect, a point made in the *Report of the Departmental Committee on Health Services*: ‘The replacing at the end of 1933 of the network of approved societies by a single unified society covering the whole country was not a development but an abandonment of vocational organisation in the sphere of social insurance.’¹³

A central factor, then, which dictated the emergence of a social-insurance system which was not corporatist was the legacy of schemes whose origins lay in *British* experiences. The Church’s input in this crucial period was influential but not central. To the extent that it was influential, its input was not shaped by the doctrines of subsidiarity – which have been seen as crucial in shaping corporatist schemes in other countries – so much as by its specific location in a colonial and agricultural country. Having said this, it is possible that the comments on vocationalism cited above were influenced less by a genuine view that administrative legacies dictated avoiding corporatism, and more by personal animosity on the part of both bureaucrats and politicians. This is because the Dignan scheme, and the hostility to bureaucrats shown in the *Commission on Vocational Organisation Report* (discussed below), are key parts of the post-war evolution of social insurance.¹⁴ Partially, this is because the question of administration was a key issue, and I consider the broad context of post-war reforms now.

¹³ D/Taoiseach S11109A. (Extract regarding objections to and defects in Dr Dignan’s plan.)

¹⁴ The Commission on Vocational Organisation was set up in 1939 to examine the practicality of developing vocational organisation in Ireland. The commission presented a 300,000-word report in 1943 that recommended vocational organisation as an alternative to bureaucracy, which it criticised heavily. It was also critical of politicians. In return, the report was received negatively by both civil servants and the government of the day (Lee, 1979; O’Leary, 2000).

Social services and administrative reform

In December 1943, the secretary of the NHIS, Henderson, presented a paper on social security to the Institute of Chartered Accountants, a copy of which he sent to the taoiseach in January 1944.¹⁵ This was essentially a comparative survey of developments in social security, which Henderson argued had, with World War II, come to mean

a promise to the people's of support in their struggle to live, a promise of a new order in society in which men will be freed from the spectral anxiety of poverty, a promise to the unborn generations of a better land in which the dragons of prolonged and mass unemployment, preventable sickness, unnecessary hunger, inadequate shelter, dependent and servile old age, will be as unfamiliar as the dragons of our fairy tales are now to us.¹⁶

He examined the extent to which Ireland had participated in world trends and cited a range of legislation to suggest that Ireland had been in tune with social thought in Europe. With specific reference to social insurance, he remarked that the unification of the approved societies in 1933 was seen by competent European observers as 'a decisive and fundamental step towards the objective of a full comprehensive co-ordinated scheme which would meet the needs of Irish workers, industrial and agricultural, and of their families.'¹⁷ However, this programme had not been realised because the financial structure of national health insurance demanded a radical change from British concepts and 'because of the many and varied vested interests which would be affected by radical reorganisation of our entire range of social services.'¹⁸

As it turned out, it was perhaps the vested interests of the NHIS that suffered the largest blow in the reorganisation of social services in the post-war period. A central issue in any question of social-service reform is obviously the extent to which it fosters (or does not foster) redistribution and equality, and these issues are tackled in later chapters. But issues of administration are also central, and questions of administrative control and organisation are the key to understanding events in the early part of the period under consideration.

¹⁵ Henderson, R., 'World Trends in Social Security', D/Taoiseach S13053A.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

There is, in fact, such a bewildering complexity of schemes, counter-schemes, analyses, committees and sub-committees in the early 1940s centred around 'social-service reform' that it is difficult to provide a clear chronological account which does not run to many thousands of words; this account provides a relatively brief version of some events and a fuller account of others. As will become clear, though, understanding the reaction of Seán MacEntee to the Dignan report necessitates an understanding that its emergence and the subsequent debate were contemporaneous with an ongoing process of administrative reform in which MacEntee was intimately involved, and which involved him in the defence of the interests of his department.

Some interest in social-service reform can be seen in the pre-war period. We have already seen that the 1930s saw the emergence of an interest in Catholic social thought in Ireland. This interest was mirrored, to some extent, in official circles, as the emergence of children's allowances suggests (Cousins, 1999). From about as early as 1937, prompted by a request from the NHIS, the question of co-ordinating all social and health services into a single department began to be considered by government (Cousins, 2003). At the time, a variety of different bodies and departments operated the various income-maintenance schemes: unemployment insurance and assistance as well as workmen's compensation were under the control of the Department of Industry and Commerce, health insurance was administered by the NHIS, old-age pensions by the Revenue Commissioners, and so on. But very little was done in moving towards a consideration of co-ordination until the issue became a matter of more public concern.

The publication of the Beveridge report in Britain in 1942 had a major impact in Ireland. As a memo in the Department of Local Government and Public Health (dating from 1944) remarked:

The publication in England of the Beveridge report, of the British Government's White Paper on social insurance, and on the Comprehensive Medical Service have undoubtedly awakened interest and expectation of similar developments in this country. The Trades Union Congress has asked that the government should give early and favourable attention to a proposal that all the social services should be unified; there is a motion on the order paper to the same effect; the Plan has received much publicity and has attracted comment and approval. The government may decide to make this question the subject of examination.¹⁹

¹⁹ *Observations on the Dignan Report*, MacEntee collection P67/257 (2).

The Labour leader, William Norton, raised a question in the Dáil on the issue in February 1942. Following the publication of the Beveridge report, two deputies of the National Labour Party tabled a question about social-security policy. As Hugo Flinn, parliamentary secretary to the minister for finance remarked, the Beveridge report could be a godsend for the Labour Party and, properly worked, worth quite a few seats (quoted in Feeney, 2001, p.65). Electoral factors made it clear that Fianna Fáil was likely to face growing competition in the post-war period. An election in 1943 marked Ireland as one of only two European nations to hold an election in wartime (O’Leary, 1979). Fianna Fáil, campaigning under the slogan, ‘Don’t change horses when crossing the stream’, lost its majority in this election (ibid., p. 35). Labour gained ten seats and Clann na Talmhan – on its first outing – gained 10 per cent of the vote and thirteen seats. As the war moved slowly towards its conclusion, growing electoral competition, then, also contributed to the interest in reform.

However, a move from a generalised consideration of ‘social-service reform’ to concrete proposals in distinct fields took some time. This is clearly indicated by an exchange of letters between the Departments of the Taoiseach and Finance. The taoiseach’s department wrote to Finance in December 1943, requesting information on expenditure of social services: ‘It is very clear, I think, that social services will figure largely in coming discussions about post-war reconstruction etc. and there are bound to be repeated requests from various quarters for information as to what is our expenditure on such services both absolutely and in relation to our total annual expenditure.’²⁰ Finance did not reply until May 1944. In the course of doing so, the department took the opportunity to consider what exactly was meant by social-service reform in some detail. The response must be partially understood as a typical Finance attempt to stonewall in the face of requests that might possibly lead to public expenditure. Nevertheless, the comments are interesting from a social-policy perspective since, to some extent, they prefigure debates about what exactly is meant by a welfare state. In particular, though, they point to the fact that initial considerations of reform were not neatly subdivided into the fields of health, income maintenance, education and so on.

²⁰ D/Taoiseach S13384A1.

The response begins from the perspective that defining expenditure on social services is rather more difficult than might be expected. In support of this argument, the memo cites a guide to social services first published in 1941, and updated in 1944.

The Booklet gives information as to the various State and other services by which persons may benefit and deals with a wide range of topics from what we would call the social services proper e.g. Old Age, Blind and Widows' and Orphans' Pensions, to such things as the Defence Forces, Loan Schemes for Farmers, Afforestation and the Gaeltacht £2 grant Scheme.²¹

The memo moves on to consider how a social service might be defined. Three broad suggestions are made:

If we were asked to define a social service we might do so in a number of ways:-

(a) In the most general sense as a service to which an individual is entitled or to which he has access by reason of his being a member of organised society. In this sense all the facilities provided by the community for its members could be said to be social services.

(b) More narrowly, it could be described as a public service aimed directly at raising the living standards of the community physically, like the public health services; intellectually or morally, like the educational system or economically like the measure for improving the lot of the small farmer or the industrial worker. In this sense the term would comprise also amenities like libraries, public parks etc.

(c) More narrowly still it might be described as any form of assistance given by organised society to its weaker members i.e., those who by reason of poverty, ill health, infirmity or old age have a moral claim to the protection of the community as a whole. In this sense of the term the essential element is the care for the less well-off section of the community by the better-off. That this narrow definition is the most correct is borne out by the examples already given which are generally accepted as being undoubtedly social services viz. Old Age, Blind and Widows' and Orphans' pensions. Sir William Beveridge and others use the term 'social security' in a similar – but somewhat wider – sense for all the measures necessary to secure freedom from want for the members of the community.

From the publication of the Beveridge report, then, through to the end of the war, we see the slow emergence first of a realisation that social-service reform was a key electoral issue and, then, as we move through 1943 and, in particular, into the key years of 1944 and 1945, we see the emergence of concrete proposals in diverse fields. For our purposes, a key event was the appointment of Seán MacEntee as minister for local government and public health in 1942.

²¹ D/Taoiseach S13384A.

His department was to be briefly the fulcrum on which debates about social-service reform revolved and, following administrative reform, was to be the genesis of the Department of Social Welfare that emerged in 1947.

He became minister as 'the centralisation policy of the Department of Local Government and Public Health quickened in pace' (Barrington, 1987, p. 140). He is an enigmatic figure, lecturing simultaneously on the evils of Beveridgeism while supervising a Department that proposed 'probably the most radical document ever produced on the Irish health services ... [offering] ... the goal of a free national health service for all who wished to avail of it' (p. 165). As well as being 'a little bit vain', he has been described as 'an elegant little man, always beautifully turned out, with most courteous manners, a bon viveur, a cultured intellectual and charming' (Deeny, 1989, pp. 156–7). Perhaps his most salient characteristic was that he was 'completely political' (p. 157). It seems likely that both his vanity and his political instincts were offended by the Dignan plan.

The publication of the plan coincided with moves towards reforms in the field of health that would ultimately culminate in the Mother and Child Scheme. Although our focus is on income maintenance, a few comments are necessary, and a fuller account is to be found in Whyte (1980) and Barrington (1987), *inter alia*. Briefly, we might note that some responsibilities in the department had been delegated to the parliamentary secretary, Dr Ward, that under Ward, the department had begun drafting a Public Health Bill, and that towards the end of 1944, a departmental committee had been set up to examine the public medical services. This would be the main vehicle for an official examination of the Dignan plan, which had emerged just before the committee was being set up.

The dispute between MacEntee and Dignan lasted just under a year. It began with MacEntee's outraged response to the newspaper coverage given to the plan in October 1944, and culminated in the decision to replace Dignan with a civil servant when his term of office expired in August 1945. (A full account can be found in Whyte, 1980 and Riordan, 2000.) While it lasted, it coincided with the inter-departmental consideration of the desirability of setting up a Department of Social Services, where it has been suggested that MacEntee was embroiled in a 'territorial war' at departmental level (Feeney, 2001, p. 67). His department argued that rather than creating a Social Welfare Ministry, which would take over health insurance, a Department of Public Health should be set up. The NHIS could then be attached

to this department. The Department of Local Government and Health was in a minority in putting forward these arguments and, in fact, the outcome was the setting up of a Department of Social Welfare with responsibility for old-age pensions, blind pensions, widows' and orphans' pensions, national health insurance, unemployment assistance, children's allowance and other services for the relief of necessitous persons. (Cousins, 2003).

MacEntee's battle with Dignan, then, occurred simultaneously with developments in health and with wider administrative reform, where MacEntee was fighting to extend his departmental remit. Additionally, the developments in health had stimulated the medical profession to produce its own plans; two conflicting medical plans emerged, both concerned, to varying degrees, with defending the turf of the medical profession from what it suspected might emerge from the Department of Local Government and Public Health. The conflict, then, was far from being a simple Church–state clash.

What we might call the 'Dignan affair' has attracted attention from a number of scholars, who have, however, differed somewhat in their analyses. Briefly, some have stressed the centralising and authoritarian tendencies of MacEntee, others the aggressive and uncompromising vocationalist ardour of Dignan (Whyte, 1980; Riordan, 2000). I turn to this in more detail now.

Things that were better left undone: the Dignan affair

As noted above, the bishop of Clonfert, Dr Dignan, had been appointed as chairman of the National Health Insurance Society in 1936. Although, previously, Dignan had not appeared to have a strong interest in social issues, this appointment 'gave him a practical knowledge of the workings of the social services which made him the Hierarchy's leading authority on the subject' (Whyte, 1971, p. 74). In 1944, Dr Dignan published a paper entitled *Social Security: Outlines of a Scheme of National Health Insurance*. The scheme was, in fact, concerned with the reform of social services generally, rather than merely health insurance. For Dignan, as for many others in this period, a central problem with Irish social services was that they retained the stamp of the Poor Law in many respects. Commenting on the public-assistance system, Dignan (1944) remarked: 'The system is tainted at its root and it reeks now, as it did when introduced, of destitution, pauperism, and degradation' (p. 12).

Dignan recommended sweeping reforms of social services. His proposals are clearly influenced by the Beveridge plan, in that they envisioned a wide extension of social insurance as a response to the problems of poverty and destitution in Ireland. But the plan diverged from the Beveridge scheme in a number of essentials. Firstly, it was self-consciously based on Catholic social thinking in many respects. It begins, for example: 'As Ireland is a Christian and Catholic country, our Social Services ought to be Christian, that is, the spirit and teaching of Christ must be their life and their soul' (p. 7). Hence, he argued that it was the family, and not the individual, which deserved prior place in planning a social-security scheme. Within the family, there was an obligation on the father to maintain his family. 'Care must be taken in any scheme of Social Services claiming to be Christian not to attempt to relieve him of this obligation to support his family: all we should do is assist him so that he can better meet his family and social obligations' (pp. 8–9).

More specifically, while the plan proposed the unification and co-ordination of social services 'to remove redundancies, duplication, overlapping and other anomalies', it nevertheless attempted also to decentralise them. This was to be achieved by placing social services under an autonomous governing body that would be 'the Committee of Management of an improved and greatly expanded National Health Insurance Society' (p. 10). The committee, remarked Dignan, was the nearest thing to vocational organisation in Ireland. Hence, the doctrine of subsidiarity could be combined with aspects of Beveridgeism to provide an Irish solution to the problem of poverty.

There is, too, a second interesting feature of the Dignan report, which is that it was influenced by wider European models of social insurance. Dignan broke with the flat-rate UK model and suggested, instead, earnings-related contributions and benefits. One author has commented that this vision of an autonomous social-insurance scheme, organised vocationally and based on earnings-related benefit, was closely related to the Continental pattern (Kaim-Caudle, 1967). To some extent, then, the Dignan plan may be seen as a proposal for 'Irish corporatism'. Many aspects of the Dignan plan have been seen to function well in other European countries.

The best-known account of the clash between MacEntee and Dignan is probably that of Whyte (1980), who suggests the emergence, by the mid-1940s, of a conflict between different 'philosophies of government'. The vocationalist perspective has been outlined above. The

contrasting position, which Whyte labels 'bureaucratic', 'defended the centralisation of authority in government departments' (Whyte, 1980, p. 117). In accounting for the 'virulence' with which MacEntee responded to the Dignan report, he stresses Fianna Fáil's succession of six general-election victories and the possibility of 'hubris', as well as questioning the role of the civil service. But he lays pre-eminent stress on the doctrine of ministerial responsibility and its hold on government and the civil service generally. Although Whyte has a number of criticisms to make of the Dignan report, and comments on its intellectual shortcomings, he nevertheless sees it and the vocational organisation report as 'sincere attempts by public-spirited men to grapple with what they believed to be important issues' (1980, p. 106). The intellectual shortcomings of their opponents 'were, if anything, worse' (p. 117).

More recently, Riordan (2000) offers a differing perspective. She suggests that 'Dignan and MacEntee were engaged in a real, no less than a philosophical, power-struggle' (p. 45). She points to earlier confrontations between the Department of Local Government and Public Health and the NHIS, and lays stress on the manner of publication of the Dignan report. 'Dignan's actions were, and were intended to be, aggressive and uncompromising' (p. 61). She lays stress, too, on 'Dignan's combination of right-wing Catholic ideology with a broad popular appeal', and the tendency of the vocationalist movement to 'foster a climate of contempt for the existing parliamentary forms'. Overall, her research 'suggests that Dignan's was a particularly "belligerent expression" of vocationalism and that MacEntee's response should be regarded in this light' (p. 45).

A central plank in Riordan's argument is probably the method of publication of the Dignan report, which certainly raises unanswered questions. On 18 October 1944, Dignan's proposals for reform were published in the national press. The following day, a letter from MacEntee's secretary followed, questioning reports that a scheme had in fact been submitted. 'If by a scheme for the extension of social services is meant a proposal substantially worked out in detail, supported by factual argument and embodying estimates of the expenditure involved and concrete proposals for defraying the cost, the Minister can categorically state that no such scheme has been submitted to him.' O'Leary (2000), drawing on an interview in the 1990s with MacEntee's secretary, Tom Barrington, suggests that this was a crucial factor: 'This lack of courtesy and tact was one of the main reasons for MacEntee's negative response. The minister, much renowned for his vanity, was incensed when he learnt of the Dignan plan through the newspapers' (p. 111). While he would still have rejected the report, O'Leary

argues that he would have done so in a more conciliatory manner. Certainly, he made clear his objections to the manner of publication.

The extent to which MacEntee took events personally cannot be doubted when one examines the material in his papers. Briefly, his department began the task of critically dissecting the scheme, and also undertook a process of investigation into the background to the publication of the report, which was characterised by hostility to the committee of management. He corresponded with the minister for the Department for Posts and Telegraphs, criticising the coverage of the scheme on the radio and questioning the source of that coverage, which he suspected emanated from Hendersen. He drafted and on occasion sent a number of hostile letters to Dignan. In addition, he wrote two extremely long speeches outlining in enormous detail his account of the manner of publication and his justification for opposition. He pressed forward with legislation to strengthen the powers of the minister in relation to the NHIS, he attempted to place civil servants on the committee of management and, of course, he did not reappoint Dignan when his term was up, but replaced him with a civil servant, an act which can only be seen as a calculated insult given the hostility to the bureaucracy shown in the report of the Vocational Commission.

On 21 October, following the newspaper reports of the Dignan plan, the secretary of the Department of Local Government and Public Health, J. Hurson, wrote to the committee. The minister, he said, had directed him to refer to the 'grave issues raised by the manner of publication', central among them being newspaper reports that the committee had been considering the propositions over the past ten years. The letter refers to sections of the National Health Insurance Act 1933, arguing that this prescribes unambiguously that the business of the society is to transact health-insurance business and that the society is definitely prohibited by statute from transacting any business other than health-insurance business:

Notwithstanding this, however, it is to be apprehended from the reports in the newspapers that over a period of 10 years the Committee of Management has taken upon itself, without reference to the Minister, to consider, adopt and publish propositions for a 'fundamental change in the nature, the administration and the quality of our Health Services' involving, inter alia, the creation of a special Ministry for Social Services, the establishment of a new and autonomous body to supersede and replace in regard to all health services the Minister for Local Government and Public Health and all existing authorities concerned therewith, and the repeal of such comprehensive measures of reform as the Public Assistance Act 1939.

The letter says that the minister, therefore, must ask the committee why propositions which would affect the powers of the minister himself, as well as of other members of the government and, indeed, the constitutional position of the government as a whole, had been adopted and published without securing his approval. 'On this point the Minister feels it right to say that he has knowledge of the fact that, while the Committee withheld from him all information as to what it was doing in this regard, it referred its proposals, under secrecy, to certain organisations for their views and approval.'

Hendersen replies with an account of events that disputes this interpretation. According to his letter, the following was the series of events leading to the Dignan plan and the subsequent controversy.²² At a committee meeting on 18 August 1943, Dignan referred to the need for looking ahead and planning for the future of national health insurance. 'No-one, he said, was satisfied that the scope of the present scheme was adequate and there was need for maintaining a wider conception of the society's possibilities in the future. After discussion the Secretary, at the request of the Committee, agreed to consider and prepare proposals for a suitable scheme.' In April 1944, Dignan called on the parliamentary secretary 'and, in the course of general conversation, informally mentioned the proposals for an extension of National Health Insurance and promised to send the Parliamentary Secretary a copy when the final proposals were ready.' The matter was raised at a number of committee meetings in May, June and July of 1944 and, on 21 June, the secretary's memorandum was left over for consideration at the next meeting. On 19 July, 'His Lordship the chairman stated the paper "Re-Planning National Health Insurance" would be re-drafted by him and it was hoped to have a copy in the hands of the members at the next meeting.' On 22 July 1944, the secretary, by direction of the chairman, sent a letter to the parliamentary secretary and enclosed a complete synopsis of proposals that were subsequently embodied in the paper read by the chairman. The parliamentary secretary acknowledged receipt on 24 July. On 23 August and 20 September, the chairman outlined his proposals: 'At the committee meeting on 11th October 1944, His Lordship the Chairman formally read the paper and stated he accepted full responsibility for it and, if published, it would go out as a paper read by him to the committee.' On 14 October 1944, the secretary sent a complete copy of the paper, with a covering letter, by hand to the parliamentary secretary. On 17 October, the secretary gave copies of the paper to the newspapers.

²² This account of events has been disputed by MacEntee, and I return to this in more detail below.

Riordan (2000) suggests that 'What is clear is that a decision was taken to by-pass official channels and put the plan directly before the public' (p. 53). This was almost certainly MacEntee's view. Two items in his private papers are suggestive of his access to private information that may have confirmed him in this view. One is a copy of a draft of the scheme circulated to the committee on 17 August 1944, presumably in advance of the meeting on 23 August referred to above. This was headed 'Private and Strictly Confidential'. The letter itself states: 'it is particularly requested that you will regard it as extremely confidential and not to be shown to or discussed with anyone outside the Committee of Management prior to the meeting.' (At the same time, however, the letter remarks that the proposals are 'to be put before the Minister'.) Henderson's reply to Hurson on this point is slightly evasive. He remarks that Dignan had told the committee that the proposals were his own, and that he took sole responsibility for them. 'He said that in view of the fact that his proposals were his own the question of members of the committee consulting their various bodies did not arise. The Committee is not concerned with whatever communication, if any, His Lordship the Chairman may have had, at any time, with any outside person or organisation.'

The other items were copies of two letters, whose appearance in MacEntee's papers is interesting. One is from Dignan to Dr Collis, dated 23 October 1944, just after Dignan read his paper, and also after MacEntee wrote to the committee. This almost certainly was Dr W.R.F Collis, who had the year previously published a survey of the Irish health services, suggesting their unification under an autonomous board (Whyte, 1980). Dignan begins:

My Outline-Scheme got too good a press and the reaction will set in shortly and the pendulum will swing as far in the opposite direction. What does it matter? The publicity the Outline received and the interest it seems to have aroused will compel the Government to make some move in the matter. That's what counts. By the way I acknowledge my indebtedness to you for some of the points in the Outline.

I shall be pleased to join with the medical profession and do my utmost to get the government to move. I shall not allow myself to be led into a wrangle with the doctors: I suggest, however, that the doctors should concentrate on the points of agreement rather than emphasise the points on which they disagree with me.

If Dr Shanley thinks it well to have a talk with me I shall be very pleased to meet him (and others) to produce a co-ordinated scheme. So keen am I on having something done that I am prepared to go to Dublin on any day that suits him...²³

²³ MacEntee collection, P67/258.

The second letter is signed 'Bob' (Dr Collis' first name was Robert). The addressee's name is missing, but is probably Dr Shanley. It begins:

I enclose letter from our friend the Bishop. He sent me a copy like he sent you of the National Health report and I replied to him saying there were very marked similarities between his report and the one we were bringing out, but that the question of control was fundamental and one which might cause very considerable difference of opinion and perhaps wreck the whole thing. Now the importance of the National Health plan, leaving out control for the moment, is that they hope to be able to produce a financial scheme which would make medicine self-supporting as it were. That is absolutely fundamental because otherwise whatever arrangements are made we come back to the dead hand of the Department of Finance which will ultimately control our destinies. Looking at the thing from the objective point of view one is faced with three main plans at the moment – ours, the government's and the National Health Insurance, together with to a certain extent the Vocational Commission's report as well and it seems to me that our policy should be to combine as far as possible with the Vocational people, both of whom are really in the same direction as us.

Now whether you consider the present time a good one to meet the Bishop is another matter. I would say personally that if we could have a talk with him privately it might be a very useful thing. The point is where could such a meeting take place. I would be honoured to have you to supper here, but if it got around that such a meeting had taken place it might not help and at the same time obviously one would not want to meet in public or at the National Health Association or the Irish Medical Association. The thing is so important it might be worth getting a private room in the Hibernian or somewhere like that where one could just have a cordial discussion.²⁴

A central question concerns how these letters found their way into MacEntee's hands. One possible answer is that the second letter was addressed to Dr Shanley, president of the Irish Medical Association (IMA) from 1942–44. Dr Shanley was an influential member of Fianna Fáil and on good terms both with MacEntee and Ward (Barrington, 1987, p. 153). He himself had put forward proposals for reform, which had not been accepted by an IMA committee set up to consider the reorganisation of the medical service, and which he had published in the association's *Journal* in the previous April. His plan, interestingly, had 'recommended the appointment of a Minister for Health assisted by a medical council, which would have wide executive powers over the services and be subject only to the overriding control of the Minister in matters of major policy' (ibid., p. 153). As we have seen, MacEntee was to argue strongly for the creation of a minister for health with an expanded role in the inter-departmental proposals for administrative reorganisation. Given uncertainty as to the origins

²⁴ Ibid.

of the letters, this point must remain speculative to some extent. But there are grounds for arguing that MacEntee suspected collusion between Dignan and the doctors, but could not explicitly raise the issue in public because of the nature of his source. This would help account for his spleen – which had initially been stimulated because of the manner of publication of the report.

However, in understanding the role of the Catholic Church, Dignan's motives are also central. This is a harder area on which to speculate, as the documentary evidence is much slighter. However, there are good grounds for arguing that Dignan was not representative of the Hierarchy as a whole, and that this explains the ease with which MacEntee was able to dismiss what was, on the surface, deeply held doctrines of Catholic social teaching.

This interpretation is supported by O'Leary (2000). Among other aspects of vocationalism, he looked in detail at attempts in the 1930s to form a vocational council of education. His analysis of the attitudes of key members of the Hierarchy on the issue of vocationalism in education, including those of Dr John Charles McQuaid – then chairman of the Catholic Headmasters' Association but by the 1940s, archbishop of Dublin – led him to conclude that they were essentially opposed to and, indeed, even deliberately undermined, initiatives towards vocationalism. On the one hand, they were largely satisfied with departmental handling of education. On the other, they feared that 'the proposed council would also diminish the authority of the Irish Catholic Hierarchy over the educational system' (O'Leary, 2000, p. 50). In general, O'Leary notes that 'Matters of personal morality remained their dominant concern. They made no serious attempt to stimulate an interest in the social encyclicals and they were opposed to any radical changes that might disturb the harmonious relationship between church and state' (p. 55). Their opposition, however, was of necessity secretive, since they could not oppose papal encyclicals in public. One outcome was that some loyal Catholics were unaware that the Hierarchy was hostile to such a proposal (p. 53).

It is interesting to note that Dignan did not inform Archbishop McQuaid of his intentions to publish a scheme for reform of social services, especially given that McQuaid has been described as a 'control freak' (Cooney, 1999, pp. 196–9). On 21 October, just after publication of the scheme in the press, and on the same day that MacEntee wrote to remonstrate with the committee, Dignan wrote to McQuaid.

It occurs to me that I should send you a copy of the Paper I read last week to the Committee of Management of the National Health Insurance Society, and I do so because our Daily Press i.e. the Dublin Press made such a feature of it.

I had not the remotest idea it would receive such a favourable reception from the Press and the public. Generally; did I think of or expect this publicity, you would have been the first to receive a copy. You will please excuse my apparent want of courtesy in not sending you a copy before this.

I am fully aware of the many defects and shortcomings of the Paper, and I know when its implications are examined many 'vested interests' will be up in arms against many of the proposals. It will do some good however, and if it does I am more than rewarded for my trouble in writing it. You need not trouble to answer this.²⁵

As I discuss in more detail below, the fragmentary documentary evidence that exists suggests that McQuaid was remarkably sanguine about the very public and bitter conflict between a bishop and a minister. In March 1945, as the tensions between Dignan and MacEntee mounted, Dignan apparently wrote to McQuaid. Only McQuaid's reply is available. It seems that Dignan had asked his advice on a number of points, among them the desirability of accepting an invitation (or invitations) to speak in public.²⁶ McQuaid's reply indicates no major concern about the affair:

Your Lordship will kindly understand that, as far as I am concerned, a lecture by a Bishop in Dublin will always be welcome. In this case, however, all that I can find out confirms my hesitation about the wisdom of lecturing just now. An Rioghacht is a slight body. The U.C.D. Medical Society is not much less slight. And a Bishop's dignity may not easily fit in with such surroundings ... I find the situation rather disturbed by Mr MacEntee and Mr Lemass. I believe it would be well to allow a certain interval of time to elapse.²⁷

Dignan replies on 24 March: 'I now fear I should not have replied to Mr MacEntee at all and should have continued to bear his outburst in silence. People are often forced through good intentions – in this case truth and justice, to do things that were better left undone.'²⁸ Despite this, Dignan issued a letter to the press on 27 March which re-ignited the public controversy between the two, and which led MacEntee to draft (but not send) a series of harshly worded

²⁵ McQuaid papers, DDA AB/8/8/B/XV.

²⁶ The extract below suggests that An Rioghacht had asked him to speak. This was a federation of study circles founded in 1926 by Father Edward Cahill, S.J. Whyte (1980) points out that the Annual Conference of An Rioghacht had welcomed the Dignan plan (p. 117).

²⁷ McQuaid papers, DDA AB/8/8/B/XV: 'The Labour people are not to be trusted in their desire to hear a Bishop: Political opportunism is always to be suspected, in view of the divisions in their ranks. This judgement may seem severe, but the recent disputes and some utterances of the two Larkins indicate the attitude of some members. The vast bulk of labouring men in Dublin is genuinely Catholic: so, too, some of the most prominent leaders. To have explained sound social policy must always be a benefit to these decent people.'

²⁸ Ibid.

letters asking him to resign. It led, too, to a series of cabinet meetings on curtailing the power of the NHIS (Riordan, 2000).

An unanswered question concerns whether Dignan, as a member of the Hierarchy, was aware that other members were, in fact, not ardent vocationalists. It is far from clear that Dignan himself was a fundamentalist on the issue of Catholic social teaching. O'Leary remarks that the vocationalist movement was not monolithic, and included extremes of right and left. The left wing, he argues, 'tended to anticipate the practices of modern social democracy' (2000, p. 44). Among those on the left, he includes Dignan. There are some indications in his personal papers that he was not always in line with the thinking of the majority of the Hierarchy. For example, he has annotated (a draft?) of the Hierarchy's letter to the taoiseach on the Mother and Child Scheme critically and quite extensively. On the well-known argument that the state 'may not deprive 90 per cent of parents of their rights because of 10 per cent necessitous or negligent parents', Dignan writes: 'or because of the high fees of doctors?'. He comments elsewhere on concerns about doctors giving advice on sex relations, chastity and marriage: 'Don't local medical officers advise at present? Who is to give advice? Teach our medical doctors and students Catholic doctrine in these matters'.²⁹

Stronger comments occur in handwritten notes that seem to be a draft of a letter intended to be read to the bishops at a crucial meeting on 4 April.³⁰ What can be made out is that Dignan comments that he writes because, some months ago, two doctors asked his advice on whether the bishops had condemned the Mother and Child Scheme. He was approached, he says, because of his contacts with the medical profession due to work with the NHIS.

I knew I could give them no answer for the present – I now wish their Lordships to agree with me that we have not as yet condemned the scheme ... I myself hold very

²⁹ Dignan papers, X111.K.17. The doctors informed Dignan that at one of their local meetings many of the dispensary doctors were prepared to work it, 'attracted undoubtedly by the large salaries promised'. But they were 'reliably' informed by one of the principal doctors present that the bishop had condemned it and consequently they voted for its rejection.

³⁰ Unfortunately, much of this is illegible and, consequently, the suggestion that it is a draft letter is speculative. However, this interpretation is supported by a letter (dated 6 April 1951) in the Dignan papers from Bishop Staunton (secretary to the Hierarchy) which remarks:

'I received your letter and read it very carefully both before the Standing Committee (twice) and before the General Meeting of the Bishops. I read also a letter from the Minister in which he announced a change which he proposed to make in the Mother and Child scheme, by which the choice of doctor would be in the hands of the mother ... The reading of these letters did not move the Bishops to approve the scheme...'

strongly there is absolutely nothing in the scheme opposed to Catholic teaching ... There are other Bishops I am sure who agree with me: I know one or two.

He continues: 'We have not formally condemned it. I think that is an undoubted fact. Even if a majority is in favour of condemning it, it must be remembered that no majority can bind the whole body in a matter of faith and morals'.³¹ Horgan (2000) also refers to Dignan's apparent support for the scheme, and cites interview material suggesting that Dignan was not necessarily representative of opinion amongst the Hierarchy (p. 134).

It is difficult, then, to locate Dignan between the interpretations of Whyte (1980) and Riordan (2000). On the one hand, Dignan, perhaps because of his position within the NHIS, seems to have been committed to vocationalism and to have been 'out of step' with the Hierarchy on this. This supports Riordan's interpretation, but not Whyte's, who has tended to see vocationalism as a widely held doctrine. However, it is difficult to see him as representing right-wing, fundamentalist Catholicism, as Riordan suggests, given his support for the Mother and Child Scheme. His reaction to the 1949 White Paper, which I discuss below, underlines this. However, for the time being, the key point to be brought out is that it is far from clear that the Irish Catholic Hierarchy were genuinely vocationalist in its approach to social issues. Part of the reason that MacEntee was able to dismiss Dignan relatively easily was, perhaps, simply that Dignan was not representative of the thinking of the Hierarchy in that he had a genuine commitment to, and interest in, social (as opposed to moral) thought.

In considering the conflicts between Whyte and Riordan's accounts, a central issue concerns the extent to which 'a real, no less than a philosophical, power-struggle' took place (Riordan, 2000, p. 45). It is clear, I think, that there was certainly a philosophical power struggle between vocationalism and accepted modes of governance in Ireland. It seems, too, to have been real for the two protagonists, though it is easier to get a sense of MacEntee's genuine outrage and commitment than Dignan's. The extent to which vocationalism posed a real threat, however, is very debatable. The philosophical battle, however, was genuine, and it is to this that I now turn.

Vocationalism: an attack on ministerial prerogatives?

The arguments made so far are not, on their own, a sufficient explanation of the failure of corporatism in Ireland. I have suggested that the historical evolution of social insurance in

³¹ Ibid.

Ireland occurred in a very different historical situation than that of continental European countries. The pressures which gave rise to corporatist structures elsewhere were not in place in Ireland and, consequently, the institutional structures of social insurance reflected British legacies and influences. I have also suggested that MacEntee's response needs to be placed in the context of an on-going process of reform, where he was, perhaps, engaged in 'empire-building' and resented the plan as a personal attack, a perspective which his vanity may have exacerbated (Feeney, 2001). And I have further suggested that Dignan was not, in any case, representative of the Hierarchy as a whole, and might in some ways be seen as a 'loose cannon' among a Hierarchy without a notable interest in social issues. It is not clear, though, that these arguments collectively account for the response of the government of the day to the *Report of the Commission on Vocational Organisation*, or even to the Dignan plan, in particular, which has been described as 'unreasonably hostile' (Barrington, 1987, p. 151). There is, I think, one final issue, which is perhaps the most fundamental reason why vocationalism was not destined to take hold in Ireland.

This is an expansion of Whyte's (1980) argument that by the mid-1940s, a rift between two philosophies of government had emerged in Ireland. As is clear by now, I am dubious about the extent to which vocationalism can be said to genuinely represent the position of the Church. Nevertheless, it is clear that vocationalism was 'harshly critical of the British system of parliamentary democracy' (O'Leary, 2000, p. 43). The *Commission on Vocational Organisation Report* was equally critical of the civil service as being inefficient and undemocratic (p. 103). In return, 'civil servants challenged, sometimes to the point of ridiculing, the findings of the commission' (p. 127). Apart from a natural resentment at the criticism they had received, it is also clear that policy-makers within the governmental system were operating within a set of assumptions about modes of government that were directly at odds with vocationalism.

Whyte has termed this 'bureaucratic'. This, however, may not be the most useful term for what appears to be a defence of a wider model of government.³² This model has been described as an 'early twentieth century Westminster model' of government. From independence on,

³² Whyte does indicate this when he suggests this bureaucratic approach derived from 'the British-derived doctrine of ministerial responsibility', but he does not address this further.

three core conventions of the Westminster model were absorbed into the Irish system: the doctrine of collective responsibility ... the principle that individual ministers are answerable to parliament for the functioning of their departments, and a commitment to cabinet confidentiality that has built into a formidable tradition of executive secrecy. (Farrell, 1993, p. 167)

A number of sources make it clear that MacEntee (and his civil servants) resented what was seen as a usurpation of ministerial prerogatives. This can be seen in the letters and drafts of letters to Dignan and to the NHIS, in various public statements, and in the department's assessment of the plan.

There are numerous examples that indicate that the doctrine of ministerial responsibility was strongly adhered to by MacEntee. In his speech to the Fianna Fáil party responding to Dignan's comments, he remarked:

If I were to admit for one moment that the Chairman of the Committee of Management of the National Health Society was entitled to demand from the Minister who appointed him the reasons for any answer the Minister might give in pursuance of his responsibility to Dáil Éireann then the relationship which exists between the Chairman and the Minister, as laid down in Act of Parliament, would be reversed, and we would have the interesting position that a Minister would be responsible to his appointee for his decisions and policy.³³

He continued:

Ministerial appointees must be persons who will be meticulous to confine themselves to those functions which the Minister appointed them to discharge and, especially, will not arrogate to themselves functions which attach to the Minister or, if not particularly to him, then to the Government as a whole.³⁴

In the *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on the Health Services*, it is argued that the plan would, in effect, abolish the system of central health administration, under which a minister or parliamentary secretary responsible to the Oireachtas is charged with the duty of initiating measures for the improvement of public health and the supervision and financing of

³³ MacEntee collection, P67/257 (3): In January 1945, in reply to a Dáil question, MacEntee rejected the Dignan plan as impractical 'under almost every heading'. Dignan wrote to MacEntee: 'I worked hard for a long time on the "Outlines" and I can assure you I realised the "several very complex fundamental difficulties" involved and I did my best to take "due cognisance" of them.' He asks if MacEntee would be good enough to send him the reasons and the grounds for the department's verdict. 'I may have no right to them, but as Chairman of the Committee of Management I persuade myself I am entitled to have them. And the reason I wish to have them is to answer them - if I am able!'

³⁴ Ibid.

their execution by local authorities: 'The removal of health administration from out of the political sphere has been advocated by the protagonists of particular schools of social reform in other countries. Our Constitution gives no countenance to such a radical departure from the principles of democratic control.'³⁵

The calls for vocationalism in Ireland, then, met with hostility because they were seen as an attack on a firmly held tenet of government. Irish politicians, self-described as 'the most conservative minded revolutionaries in history' had never questioned the *mode* of government in Ireland. Successive Constitutions had enshrined, and indeed, strengthened the Westminster style of government that focused on the power of the executive. In this, Ireland, together with the UK, has been said to diverge from a more 'consensual' decision-making process visible in many European countries (Gallagher, Laver and Mair, 2001). This style of government is not conducive to 'subsidiarity', and made a social-insurance system which was administratively centralised under ministerial control an outcome more in tune with the political institutions of the state and the political culture of policy-makers.

The final nail in the coffin: Norton and the NHIS

The increasing unlikelihood of a vocational solution is underlined by a memo on the proposed new Department of Social Welfare (referred to above) in November 1946 that discussed possible future lines of development. An appendix to the memo discusses the question of administration, pointing out the overlapping bodies administering the social-welfare schemes. This points out that no major economy can be made while the different schemes exist in separate compartments – only when all the different schemes lose their identity in a new unified scheme can any considerable saving be expected. This requires identity of scope, the single card and the single stamp.

Probably the biggest single problem in the question of unified administration is the position of the National Health Insurance Society. As long as Sickness Insurance would require a separate form of administration mainly because of the existence of the Society, no considerable progress can be made. If the full benefit of the establishment of a Ministry of Social Welfare is to be realised there seems no practical alternative to abolishing the Society and transferring all its functions to the Minister.³⁶

³⁵ MacEntee collection, P67/257 (2).

³⁶ D/TaoiseachS13384A.

The question of administration was addressed early by Norton, even before he finalised the draft White Paper. On 10 June 1948, a memo on the future of the NHIS was circulated to the government. ‘The Minister for Social Welfare has in preparation unified and comprehensive schemes of social insurance and social assistance ... This examination has disclosed certain problems of administration – of which a major one is the position of the National Health Insurance Society.’³⁷ The memo stated that the proposals which the minister hoped to bring before the government would include a proposal that the society be abolished and that its functions be transferred to the minister. However, Finance, which had been consulted on this, made a number of objections to the proposal to abolish the society.

Finance disagreed that its abolition would necessarily involve greater economy. Much of Finance’s argument drew on the *Commission on Vocational Organisation Report* and the Dignan plan to argue that vocationalism ‘has distinct advantages over the alternative method of bureaucratic control’. Had a body similar to the NHIS existed in Britain, it was possible that it might not have been abolished but might have continued in operation as part of the Beveridge plan:

Considerable public opposition may be expected to the abolition of the National Health Insurance Society as an example of the insatiable appetite of bureaucracy for swallowing up organisations which are perfectly capable of fulfilling their functions. In fact it might be argued that from the points of view of efficiency and economy some of the Social Services work could profitably be transferred from the Department to the Society and this course was suggested by Dr. Dignan, Bishop of Clonfert and former Chairman of the Society.

Finance appended an extract from the Dignan plan to its submission in support of this point of view. As we will see in chapter five, however, the Department of Finance, under its Fine Gael minister, opposed virtually every aspect of the White Paper, and it is questionable whether its approach represented a genuine commitment to Catholic social thought, as opposed to a genuine opposition to the proposed social-welfare scheme.

Norton succeeded in having his proposal carried by the government, but there are some anomalies in the way in which the decision is recorded. These appear to indicate what McCullagh (1998) has termed, ‘elastic government’. That is, the inter-party government, unused to the conventions of Westminster cabinet government, and composed of diverse

³⁷ D/Taoiseach, S13384A.

parties who sat uneasily together, led to a situation where there were ‘breaches of Cabinet procedure, the virtual abandonment of collective responsibility, and serious tensions with the civil service’ (p. 43. I address this in more detail in chapter five). Following a decision taken by government, it is customary for the secretary to the government to transmit the decision to the private secretaries of the ministers concerned (Dooney and O’ Toole, 1998). In this case, however, two conflicting decisions are in existence. A decision was forwarded to Social Welfare on 12 July, a revised decision was forwarded on 13 July, and the following month, Social Welfare was asked to return ‘as requested orally’ the original decision transmitted on 12 July.³⁸ This, I believe, is not in line with standard procedure. It is worth looking at the two decisions in full, and I have italicised the key differences for emphasis.

The first, dated 12 July, is as follows: ‘I am to refer to your Department’s memorandum no. Z.19/47 of the 10th ultimo³⁹ and to inform you that the Government, at a meeting held on the 12th instant, agreed that *it might be accepted that, at a later date* as part of the unification of schemes of social insurance, *the Government will agree* to the abolition of the National Health Insurance Society and the assumption of its functions by the Minister for Social Welfare.’ (Italics not in original.)

However, a note dated 13 July is as follows: ‘I am to refer to your Department’s memorandum No.Z.19/47 of the 10th ultimo and to inform you that *the Government*, at a meeting held on the 12th instant, *approved in principle* of the absorption of the National Health Insurance Society in the Department of Social Welfare and of the adoption of unified and comprehensive schemes of social insurance and social assistance.’ (Italics not in original.)

These decisions are clearly quite different in import, but accounting for them must remain speculative. Perhaps the most likely answer is that suggested by McCullagh in relation to decisions in different areas. He suggests that, as a consequence of McBride’s distrust of senior officials, Maurice Moynihan, secretary to the Department of Taoiseach, was excluded from all but three government meetings. Instead, Cosgrave or Costello took notes, and transmitted them to Moynihan for processing. ‘An added problem was that, because of the extraordinary length of many government meetings, it was sometimes not entirely clear when a decision had been actually made’ (McCullagh, 1998, p. 56). The above situation may, therefore, merely be

³⁸ D/Taoiseach, S13384A.

³⁹ This is Norton’s memo (quoted above) on the abolition of the NHIS.

a simple error arising from this situation. Having said that, the fact that the two decisions are quite opposed – one, in effect, constituting a victory for Norton, the second a qualified defeat – does raise some questions.

However, the latter decision allowed the 1949 White Paper to be unambiguous on the question of the NHIS:

The new scheme will call for a comprehensive review of administrative methods with a view to securing the most efficient and most economical results from the co-ordination of the different services, including the absorption into the Department of Social Welfare of the National Health Insurance Society, the existence of which as a separate organism operating only part of the unified scheme would be quite anomalous. (Department of Social Welfare, 1949)

Putting this into effect was quite torturous, however, and it took two years between the decision made above and the translation of the proposal into law (McCullagh, 1998).

Despite the fact that this decision ran counter to the expressed preferences of the Church, opposition was muted. The ‘considerable public opposition’ envisioned by Finance does not appear to have materialised. There *was* a response from within Catholicism, as individuals and organisations commented on the developments in social security from the publication of the Dignan plan on. For example, Bishop Lucey remarked on the response to the Dignan plan: ‘most people could not but have an uneasy feeling that ... the Government has little use for schemes for which it cannot take the credit or which propose to curtail its own sphere of influence.’⁴⁰ Likewise, the Catholic Services Vocational Organisation Conference objected implicitly in its response to the White Paper. The statement it sent to the taoiseach in February 1950 pointed out that the White Paper envisioned administration of the scheme devolving entirely on the state. It referred to the section of the White Paper (quoted above) that argued that the administrative arrangements on the Continent were not present in Ireland, and that establishing them ‘*ab initio*’ would be difficult. ‘Are we then to accept the position that in this matter we have proceeded so far in the direction of Statism that there is no turning back and that the line of least resistance should be followed?’⁴¹

⁴⁰ *Leader*, 1945.

⁴¹ D/Taoiseach, S13384C.

These, however, were, by and large, isolated examples which merely highlight the absence of a response from the institutional core of the Church. There appears to have been no correspondence between the Hierarchy and either the various ministers for social welfare or the taoiseach on any aspect of the social-security plan. Norton forwarded an advance copy of the White Paper to McQuaid on 25 October 1949, but there is no record of any response.⁴² Likewise, Lee (1979) has commented on the surprising lack of reaction to the Vocational Commission's report, even within the Catholic press.

On the surface, then, the central argument of this chapter may appear to be that the institutional legacies of British rule outweighed Catholic Church preferences in this period. This argument would imply, firstly, that a corporatist-type social-insurance scheme would have reflected the policy preferences of the Church for vocational structures and, secondly, that the absence of these structures consequently indicates the Church's failure to achieve its preferred social-policy outcomes. However, this conclusion would almost certainly underestimate the extent of Catholic influence in the period, and would leave many aspects of the controversy surrounding the Mother and Child Scheme unexplained. Rather, the argument is that institutional legacies were central *only* because the Church's adherence to subsidiarity was weak. A close examination of the 1952 Act raises questions about the widely held perception that the Church in this period was actively committed to vocationalism, and that this commitment underlay its activism in health. However, other explanations may have to be found for the Church's role in health, since its stance on social welfare indicates, what I term, 'benign indifference' to state activism in the field of social welfare. It is to this that I now turn.

Catholicism, corporatism and theories of the welfare state

What emerges strongly from an examination of the Church's reaction to the 1952 Social Welfare Act is the absence of any reaction from the Hierarchy, either to the personal slight to Dignan, or to the wider issue of the adoption of a centralised social-security scheme which ran directly counter to the vocationalist thinking the Church claimed to hold so strongly.⁴³ Fahey, for example, comments: 'while the Church's role in opposing the government's mother-and-child scheme in 1950–51 has been dwelt on at length, less attention has been given to the

⁴² McQuaid papers, DDA AB8/B/XV111.

⁴³ This conclusion is based on the absence of any correspondence on this issue in the Social Welfare file in the McQuaid archives, in the Department of the Taoiseach files and the Department of Social Welfare files in the National Archives, and in the MacEntee and Norton papers.

broad welcome (or at least acceptance) which it simultaneously accorded the 1952 Social Welfare Act' (Fahey, 1998a, p. 420).

Given the copious correspondence on the contemporaneous developments in health, this absence requires some explanation. One such explanation would be that, though the Church expressed a clear preference for vocationalism, there are grounds for questioning the *depth* of this commitment. The 1952 Act clearly ran counter to the doctrine of subsidiarity or, at least, to how that doctrine was interpreted by the Irish Church. That this evoked what might be termed, 'benign indifference', and that the dismissive response to the *Report of the Commission on Vocational Organisation* also evoked little response, might best be explained by arguing that the doctrine of vocationalism had little relevance to the Irish Church in real terms and that, consequently, the Church's commitment to the doctrine was to a large extent formulaic. To clarify this point, it is necessary to look in more detail at the concept of corporatism and its association with Catholicism.

A closer examination of the concept of corporatism leads to the conclusion that its origins are historically and spatially specific to continental Europe between around 1870 and 1940. The term corporatism is one which is widely used, but which has a number of distinct usages. Hence, Catholic corporatism may be distinguished from neo-corporatism or liberal-corporatism, or from what is sometimes termed authoritarian corporatism (Williamson, 1985, 1989). While common threads unite all these usages, nevertheless, they differ substantially in their theoretical concerns. The specific association between Catholicism and corporatism has long roots. For many authors, the French Revolution and the divisions between Church and state that arose from this are central to understanding the long-term genesis of the emergence of corporatism as a key component of Catholic social and political thought. Having said this, it is the nineteenth century and the response to the disappearance of the *ancien régime* and the rise of industrial capitalism that lies at the core of corporatism. *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno* were concerned with responding to the linked problems of the rise of liberal capitalism and the associated breakdown of the 'organic community' seen to lie at the heart of medieval society, and with countering the threat posed by the socialist response to the class conflicts generated by the rise of industrialised societies (Williamson, ch. 2, 1989).

In addition, the legacy of medieval patterns of organisation find their expression in corporatism in forms of association arising from a long history of worker organisation in

guilds. 'Corporatism has always been a major conservative alternative to etatism. It springs from the tradition of the estates, guilds, monopolies and corporations that organised social and economic life in the medieval economy' (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p. 60). Hence, as Esping-Andersen argues, corporative social welfare emerged as the state built on existing patterns of organisation in Germany, Austria, France and Italy in particular. Catholic corporatism, he argues, is most strongly associated with late-industrialising, continental-European countries with a history of authoritarianism and in which Catholicism was also strong (ch. 3). It is, then, not so much Catholicism *per se*, as the specific context in which Catholicism was located which is central to explaining the association between Catholicism and corporatism. Particular patterns of Church–state relations, of industrialisation and of class mobilisation underlie the emergence of Catholic social teaching in late-nineteenth-century Europe.

As O'Leary (2000) notes, there were a variety of interlocking reasons why social Catholicism was not influential in Ireland in the formative period between the end of the nineteenth century and independence. Firstly, the associated processes of industrialisation and urbanisation were not at an advanced stage. Hence, 'the church pursued its mission in a socio-economic environment which did not threaten its position and [*Rerum Novarum*] had no significant impact on the country' (p. 21). There were also other important differences: Germany, France, Belgium and Holland were not preoccupied with a struggle for national independence; they were not bound up with a social problem comparable with the land question; they had not suffered the suppression of the Penal Laws and did not have to put similar effort into reconstructing basic institutions (p. 21).

Whyte (1980) has argued that '*Quadragesimo Anno* had been written with the experience of industrialised nations on the continent primarily in mind' (p. 106). The attempt to apply in Ireland ideas whose origins reflected different patterns of industrialisation, and different Church–state relations, has been said to lead to policy suggestions which were inappropriate. Whyte remarks that efforts to apply the ideas of *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno* to the entirely different conditions in Ireland was undertaken by a group with little indigenous thinking to support them, and the result was 'intellectually undistinguished documents' (p. 106). Barrington (1987), too, has argued that both the Dignan plan and the Vocational Commission's report were 'a rather simplistic application of Catholic moral precepts to the Irish social situation' (p. 151). It is, I think, clear that corporatist (or vocationalist) thought reflected a very different set of circumstances than those which existed in Ireland, and the

equanimity with which the Church greeted the events surrounding the 1952 Social Welfare Act reflect this reality.

It is also worth considering the processes by which Catholic social teaching might influence social policy. As outlined above, accounts of the influence of Catholicism on social policy have generally rested on measurements of Catholic power expressed in terms of control of government; that is, on Catholicism as expressed in Christian-democratic parties (Wilensky, 1982; van Kersbergen, 1995; Huber, Ragin and Stephens, 1994; Huber and Stephens, 2001). But there are other ways that religion can influence policy. Castles (1994) points out that these processes are likely to be diverse:

Religious beliefs may influence policy because individuals with such beliefs behave differently from those without them, because interest groups and parties may be formed to promote such beliefs, because the views of those who are influential in policy making may be shaped by such beliefs, or even, in quasi-corporatist mode, because the state delegates to the Church the public regulation of certain spheres of social relations. (p. 20)

Stressing *how* Catholicism seeks to influence government points to a need to take into account 'the political dimensions of religion, for example, the state-church-cleavage' (Schmid, 1996, p. 104). Schmid draws attention to the importance of this cleavage, which was central to the genesis of the Christian-democratic parties, and points to its role in shaping the nature of social-welfare organisation, especially in religiously mixed societies. In many respects, the explanations for the lack of Christian democracy in Ireland are compatible with explanations for the lack of corporatism in Irish social insurance.

Unlike many other countries, the influence of the Church in Ireland was not expressed through a political party. Although Fine Gael, the second largest party, sits with the Christian Democrats in the European Parliament, its historical origins are quite different from Christian-democratic parties generally (Mair, 1999). Christian democracy largely emerged where Catholicism was challenged by secular political forces. As Mair argues, in Ireland, political Catholicism emerged victorious with its values enshrined in the political system and, hence, 'uniquely among the Catholic countries of western Europe, Christian democracy never emerged as a distinct political movement in Ireland' (p. 130).

Instead, the influence of the Church in Ireland owes more to the strength of its position in Irish society generally and the loyalty accorded to it by politicians of all political hues. Arising out of this, the mode of influence characteristic of the Irish Church has been described as ‘the politics of informal consensus’, where formal contacts between Church and governments were rare (Keogh, 1996, pp. 103–17). Formal contacts were rare because there was, in general, little discord between Church and state. In his classic study of the Church in Ireland, Whyte concluded that between 1923 and 1979, there were only sixteen pieces of legislation on which one or more bishops were consulted or made representations (Whyte, 1980).⁴⁴ The areas in which the Church made such representations varied over time, and the 1940s and 1950s probably mark the peak of its interest in social policy.

One feature of this politics of informal consensus is that it relied, to a large extent, on private consultations between government and the Hierarchy. Some of MacEntee’s quarrel with Dignan concerned Dignan’s decision to make their disagreements public – something he regarded as ‘a very grave breach of confidence’.⁴⁵ The Mother and Child Scheme referred to above became a major debating point only because of the minister for health’s decision to publish correspondence between him, other members of the government and the Hierarchy. This correspondence was intended to be confidential. The Catholic Church in Ireland, then, did not ‘run for office’ (as a political party) and influence policy through control of government. Instead, the Church was dependent on the extent to which it could persuade governments that they should, for whatever reasons, acquiesce with the wishes of the Church. It relied, to some extent, on a commonality of interest or, where this did not exist (as perhaps in health), on its ability to use its moral authority to persuade politicians to adopt its policies. The Church was aided in this by the fact that its representations were generally not in the public domain.

Although there was diversity within the Church on this, it is clear that many members of the Hierarchy were not automatically hostile to an extension of a state role in the provision of social services. Nor were they necessarily hostile to the extension of social insurance. As we

⁴⁴ Whyte notes that this under-represents the involvement of the Hierarchy since it includes only legislation, and also is probably incomplete. He includes on his list the 1953 Health Act outlined above, but not the 1952 Social Insurance Act.

⁴⁵ MacEntee collection, P67/257 (3), letter marked ‘Draft’.

have seen, Dignan was broadly supportive of a state role in providing compulsory social insurance in Ireland.⁴⁶ He commented on the *White Paper* as follows:

I am all in favour of a scheme: and I want it to be *national* in the sense that virtually all our citizens will be included in it. I want it to be *comprehensive* in the sense that it will go far in providing all the benefits, monetary and otherwise, that are implied in the term 'social security'. And I want an *autonomous* committee to administer it. (Dignan, 1950, p. 104)

Dignan's criticisms, then, focused on two aspects: the fact that it was not a genuinely comprehensive scheme (due to the exclusion of farmers), and the fact that it was to be administered by the Department of Social Welfare rather than an independent committee organised on vocational lines. But this is very far from a hostility to state welfare and a commitment to deep subsidiarity. Catholic social teaching, in Ireland and elsewhere, was concerned not *only* with countering excessive state power but *also* with achieving some sort of balance between labour and capital: 'in Catholic social doctrine subsidiarity is intrinsically linked with other fundamental principles, such as personalism, solidarity, pluralism and distributive justice' (van Kersbergen and Verbeek, 1994).

Dignan was not only – or perhaps not even primarily – concerned with countering state power. His plan was also centrally concerned with removing the taint of 'pauperism, destitution and degradation'. Hence, his scheme was welcomed by the Labour Party, one influential trade unionist even going so far as to suggest that it should be published jointly by Dignan and the Labour Party. The *Report of the Commission on Vocational Organisation*, likewise, was informed not only by a dislike of state centralisation, but also by a desire to achieve a more socially just society. It stressed that 'All would agree that democracies are bound to make the maximum use of their resources and to plan economic life in accordance with the dictates of social justice' (cited in Lee, 1979, p. 335). Few even of the strong vocationalists were as hostile to state welfare schemes as Hegarty (quoted above).

In providing a solution to 'pauperism, destitution and degradation', the *White Paper* and the 1952 Act met much of the demands of Catholic social teaching as it applied to the Irish situation. Social insurance, *however* organised, was seen to encourage individual and family responsibility, and to supplement rather than supplant the role of the father as provider. The

⁴⁶ However, it should be noted that the Dignan papers suggest that Dignan's views represented a minority perspective within the Hierarchy.

White Paper concludes: 'the scheme goes a long way towards recognising the proper status of the worker in a society organised on Christian principles' (Department of Social Welfare, 1949, p. 44). Catholic social teaching is referred to at many points. For example, the White Paper argues that a variable-rate scheme increases state compulsion by requiring more than compulsory insurance for key risks at a basic level:

The flat rate system, which is now well established here, can be held to conform with this view, subject, perhaps to an extension of the plan of additions to benefit, based not on salary or wages, but on family needs. This basis is felt to be more in accord with Christian principles, and indeed, may be related to the special recognition given in the Constitution to the family as 'the natural primary and fundamental unit group of society'.

It is in this sense that I have used the term *benign* indifference to describe the response of the Church. The response was largely benign because many aspects of the plan were, in fact, congruent with the preferences of the Church. And it was indifferent to the apparent discrepancy with vocationalist thought because, in reality, the vocationalist perspective put forward in the 1940s was a solution to quite a different set of problems than actually existed in Ireland. The Irish Church had no real need for solutions that defended its interests from a secularising state, since there was little real conflict between Church and state. Those who promulgated extreme vocationalism were, in many ways, a minority within a minority; the bulk of the Hierarchy was opposed to vocationalist ideas which could threaten not merely its relationship with the state, but its own power base in health and education. Among those genuinely committed to 'social Catholicism', some of the most influential were not necessarily hostile to an increased state role in the provision of welfare.

Conclusion

The historical circumstances which gave rise *both* to Catholic corporatism and to Christian democracy differ fundamentally from the circumstances in which the Irish Catholic Church was located when Catholic social thinking developed in Ireland after the publication of *Quadragesimo Anno*. It is highly debatable whether the doctrine of subsidiarity was genuinely relevant to Irish Catholicism in the 1940s and 1950s. The corporatist outcomes which we see in the conservative family of welfare states appear to have their origins, if not their fullest development, in the *interaction* between Catholicism, industrialisation and the balance of class forces on the European continent between 1870–1940. Corporatism is, in essence, an institutional expression of the doctrine of subsidiarity, and this doctrine owes its origins to the

Church–state cleavages which arose as states sought to respond to the new pressures created by industrialisation. Corporatist outcomes, therefore, reflect not merely Catholicism, but the impact of Catholicism in a very specific time and place. The conflicts that gave rise to the doctrine of subsidiarity, corporatism and Christian democracy were not present in Ireland. Hence, subsidiarity had little impact in Ireland in 1911. By the 1940s, the emergence of consensus between Church and state made the vocationalist structures that the Church put forward largely unnecessary, and the institutional legacies of British rule made them unlikely.

In 1992, Korpi asked why there was no corporatism in Irish social insurance, given the strength of the Catholic Church in Ireland. The answer, perhaps, is that the association between corporatism and Catholicism is not automatic, but is specific to the experiences of core European countries in the period surrounding the birth of the welfare state. The relationship of Irish Catholicism to the state was shaped by very different influences. The Irish social-insurance system owes much to the legacies of British rule. Policy choices that reflected British experiences constrained later policy-makers; hence, the Irish social-insurance system has much in common with that of the UK. However, the choices that policy-makers took in the 1940s and 1950s also reflected the nature of Irish society in the period, and the social-insurance system was also shaped by indigenous pressures. It is, perhaps, this combination of the shared experiences of core countries (via colonisation), and the divergences from traditional paths to industrialisation and modernisation, which makes Ireland difficult to classify in the worlds of welfare. None of this suggests that Catholicism does not make a difference – merely, that we might expect it to make a difference in highly distinctive ways in different places, and at different times.

There are other questions that a close examination of the 1952 Act raises about the role of the Catholic Church in Ireland. Perhaps the most striking point to emerge is the contrast between the ‘benign indifference’ in the field of social security, and the activism in health. The difference between the two has been commented on, though not accounted for, by others: hence, Peillon (1996) attributes ‘a great deal of autonomy’ to the state in relation to social security, but very little in health (p. 12). As I argue above, the doctrine of subsidiarity might, theoretically, have been applied to state activism in both fields; the discussion of social insurance demonstrates that the reality was that its tenets were applied selectively. Catholic social thought, it seems, provides a poor guide to understanding the actions of the Church. We might conclude, therefore, that rather than the doctrine of subsidiarity providing the impetus

to activism in the field of health, it was, perhaps, (state) activism in health which provoked a recourse to the doctrine of subsidiarity. A clearer understanding of the Church's role in shaping the Irish welfare state may require a shift in attention from the theological rhetoric of the Church to a closer consideration of the circumstances that evoke this rhetoric.

This chapter has focused on the administrative structures of social insurance, arguing that the outcomes we might expect from the theoretical literature are absent in Ireland, because Catholicism in Ireland was shaped by distinctive patterns of industrialisation and state formation. It is true, though, that this may only partially capture the extent to which Catholicism may influence welfare states. As noted above, it may be that Catholicism was influential in other spheres. For example, redistributive issues were not explored here. Yet this is crucial in considering the contrasting effects of social democracy and Christian democracy. Christian democracy, very generally, might be said to 'reproduce rather than overcome class and status differences' (van Kersbergen, 1995, p. 152). This may be partially related to the way in which class interests are expressed in Christian-democratic parties. Huber, Ragin and Stephens (1994) suggest a distinctive 'multi-class' aspect to Christian democracy:

Christian democratic parties typically have strong bases among farmers, the petite bourgeoisie, professionals, and even sections of the haute bourgeoisie, in addition to wage and salary earners, and they advocate class compromise and class harmony in their internal operation as well as in their approach to governing. (p. 741)

The administrative structures of social insurance, revealing though they may be of the factors shaping social insurance, can only take us so far. One of the central differences between political parties is how they represent class, and the extent to which those differences do or do not translate into policy outcomes. We need, therefore, to consider social insurance in Ireland from a wider perspective, and it is to issues of class, redistribution and solidarity that I turn in the next two chapters. I begin by considering the frequently neglected agricultural sector.

Chapter Four: Land, Labour and Social Security in Post-war Ireland

Introduction

'on the road of segregating our population into two warring factions of 500,000 working farmers on the one hand, and 700,000 employed persons on the other, nothing but disaster lies ahead'.⁴⁷

In 1944, two deputies from the National Labour Party put forward a motion calling for the unification and co-ordination of all social services under a Ministry of Social Services, and for all in employment to be brought under the provisions of a comprehensive scheme of social insurance. Seán MacEntee, who, as we have seen, was the politically astute minister for local government and public health, requested a full note from his department:

Inherent in the proposed scheme of social security is the analogy between conditions in this country and those in Great Britain where the vast bulk of the people are homogeneous, industrialised and urbanised. Do the movers of the motion mean to include in 'gainful employment' those working on their own account? Would not the difficulties of including under a 'comprehensive scheme of social insurance' people working on their own account such as farmers and artisans, who represent such a large proportion of our population, be very great?⁴⁸

For the next eight years, and through two changes of government, the problem of reconciling the interests of workers and farmers was a common thread running through the diverse issues surrounding the drafting of the 1952 Social Welfare Act. In the Irish context, however, workers were rural and agricultural as well as urban and industrial.

As the previous chapter discussed, while the Beveridge plan was extremely influential in providing a springboard from which policy-makers discussed their plans, the outcome was a somewhat distorted and truncated version of Beveridge. Enough of the key elements of Beveridge were in place to make its influence explicit. Flat-rate contributions and benefits, tripartite financing, and administration centralised in the Department of Social Welfare was distinctively Beveridgean, compared with the corporatist social-insurance schemes of

⁴⁷ Department of Agriculture memo on 1949 White Paper, D/Taoiseach, S13884B.

⁴⁸ MacEntee collection, P67/261.

continental Europe. What was missing, however, was crucial; despite the rhetoric of comprehensiveness, social insurance was limited in scope. A rather large selection of groups were excluded: higher-paid non-manual workers, civil servants, the self-employed and certain categories of women employees (female domestic servants and agricultural employees). As Cousins (1995) noted: 'Thus in contrast to the relative universality of the UK system post-Beveridge, the Irish system remained essentially fragmented and showed little commitment to inter-class solidarity' (p. 20).

This chapter argues that one key reason accounting for this outcome was the centrality of the agricultural sector in Irish political and economic life. The long history of the 'land question' in Ireland, its impact on social structures and, most importantly, its expression in national mythology and in party politics structured debates and outcomes. In fact, agrarianism was so fundamental to the process of state formation, and had an impact on so many diverse aspects of Irish political life, that it is sometimes difficult to separate it from the nature of the state itself. As Bull (1996) notes in his study of the land question in Ireland, 'the issue became so important in national life that it shaped the future of Irish nationalism and the shape of the society which emerged out of the nationalist struggle, creating between the issue of land and nationalism a nexus which was so strong that one issue became effectively a metaphor for the other' (p. 4). As the land question interacted with nationalism in nineteenth-century Ireland, it shaped the emerging party system, was embedded in the developing administrative structures of the state, and contributed to deeply rooted beliefs about the nature of the society itself. Agrarianism in Ireland shaped both the state and the wider society.

As chapter two discussed, debates about the impact of social class on the Irish welfare state have tended to focus on the weakness of the left. There has been, until recently, very little attempt to assess the role of agrarianism in shaping social-policy outcomes (*see* Fahey, 1998b and 2002, discussed below). In fact, the shape, structure and political organisation of farming interests were crucial in deciding outcomes. The first response of policy-makers to demands for comprehensive social insurance was to assess how this would mesh with a primarily agricultural economy with a high proportion of self-employed or independent workers. But this did not translate into a simple dichotomy between 'agrarian' and 'urban' interests. Rather, it opened a debate in which the competing demands of 'privileged' versus 'unprivileged' groups were addressed through the prism of the Irish party system, where the social bases of party support may be obscure, but nevertheless exist. In their attempts to chart a policy course

tackling redistributive issues that encompassed diverse agrarian groups, as well as the interests of 'privileged' urban workers, policy-makers had in mind a particular vision of what was seen as a primarily agrarian society. In some respects, though, this vision was one which only superficially matched the reality of agriculture in post-war Ireland.

To look ahead briefly, it is useful to divide the consideration of reforms into three broad periods corresponding with the three governments who considered the issue. The first government to consider the issue was Fianna Fáil. We have already seen that, with the end of the war in view and the Beveridge report on the table, this government saw itself as facing 'social-service reform' generally. Initially, health and social security were not clearly distinguished administratively or otherwise. Issues of redistribution between different social groups were embedded in a plethora of debates about social services and the role of the state. However, as the process of administrative reform developed, the terms of the debate were set by this government in a number of fundamental ways. It separated social security from health, saw that a co-ordinated scheme was the essential playing field in social security and, crucially, identified farmers and urban workers as the two key groups at issue. It clarified what the problems involved in including farmers in a comprehensive scheme were. The government did not, however, grapple with the specifics of what this might mean in practice.

It was the succeeding inter-party government, with the Labour leader, William Norton, as minister for social welfare, who first tackled the details, and did so in a fairly hostile internal environment. While, technically, the very existence of the government rested on an acceptance of a comprehensive scheme, Norton fought on many fronts a battle over what this meant in practice. It was, as Norton himself commented, 'a long and painful process'.⁴⁹ Based, to a large extent, on the problems identified by the previous government, he opted to exclude farmers. This immediately opened the scheme to accusations that it represented the interests of 'privileged' trade unionists, and this remained the central criticism aimed at his scheme. Norton also grappled with the problems of agricultural labourers, which raised different problems to those raised by industrial workers. The collapse of government ended his hopes of even a truncated, rather than a 'comprehensive', scheme being implemented.

⁴⁹ DD, vol. 130, 27 Mar. 1952, col. 652.

He was, in turn, succeeded by Fianna Fáil, who had problems of its own in tackling the issue. These problems were largely due to the hostages to fortune it had given in its criticism of Norton's bill. Both Lemass (minister for industry and commerce) and Ryan, again the minister for social welfare, had been rather profligate in their promises of what they would do, though they had not gone so far as to promise the inclusion of farmers. All parties, remarked Ryan, were surely agreed that they were not to be included. Yet something better would be produced, even if this involved fundamental shifts in thinking about insurance. In the event, they were straitjacketed by the demands of an existing insurance framework that made radical change difficult without major upheaval. Ryan was not prepared to battle for this major upheaval, and his solution fell between a number of stools, and was mostly notable for its willingness to subsidise the agricultural sector to a much greater degree than Norton.

All three governments shared, in some important respects, the same institutional framework. Yet there were important differences, too. The period witnesses what has been described as a central 'watershed' in the development of the Irish party system. The emergence of the inter-party government in 1948 has been said to initiate a pattern of 'Fianna Fáil versus the rest' that dominated party competition until the 1980s. The emergence of the first coalition government, expressing the underlying logic of proportional representation, marks a departure and points to the dynamism inherent in any political system, but perhaps especially in a state little more than two decades old. As we will see below, and again in the following chapter, social policy was a central element in the internal politics which ultimately doomed the first experiment in 'inter-party' government. A close examination of decisions taken on social insurance opens up the manner in which social-class interests are expressed in the Irish party system, and adds to our understanding of how interests are embedded in institutional settings. State and society need to be considered in tandem rather than as separate and opposed concepts (Gilbert and Howe, 1991).

I begin by discussing the theoretical literature on agrarianism and social policy, and then move on to consider the evolution of agrarian politics in Ireland. The final and largest section considers the post-war policy process in some detail.

Agrarianism and welfare state theory

Although the land question is acknowledged to be one of the key issues in Irish history, the role of agrarianism in the development of social policy in Ireland has only recently attracted any attention (Cousins, 1997; Fahey, 1998b and 2002). In comparative terms, this is perhaps not surprising. Farmers seldom feature in explanations of welfare development; in many respects, this is because key explanations are predicated on the process of industrialisation which rendered agriculture a subsidiary force. For many theorists, as we have seen, welfare states implicitly, if not explicitly, arose as the agricultural sector declined relative to a growing urban-industrial sector. This is not to say that there has been no interest at all – farmers figure largely in Baldwin's restatement of a social explanation for welfare states, and they have been cited as actors in explanations of American exceptionalism (Baldwin, 1990; Gilbert and Howe, 1991). But it is fair to say that they have generally been seen as much less significant in shaping welfare outcomes than their working-class sparring partners.

The literature on the impact of agrarianism is remarkably slight in comparison, for example, to that stressing religion. Hence, one of the few pieces of research that stresses agrarianism presents its case study of the emergence of welfare in Denmark as 'an important corrective to general theories regarding the emergence of welfare states' (Petersen, 1990, p. 70). Petersen examines the Danish 1891 old-age pension, a non-contributory, tax-financed scheme, and argues that it was essentially a response to agrarian demand and pressure. 'Conventional thinking maintains that social security systems emerged in response to the social consequences of industrialisation. The timing and nature of Danish social legislation, however, followed from agricultural conditions' (Petersen, 1990, p. 71). Petersen is undoubtedly correct in his assertion that the bulk of welfare theories have stressed industrialisation and its social and economic consequences as the pre-eminent force shaping welfare states. But there has also been some interest in the impact of agrarianism (Alston and Ferrie, 1985; Finegold, 1988; Baldwin, 1990; Gilbert and Howe, 1991). As I discuss below, however, the focus of these other studies has generally not been on agrarianism as the key independent variable, but on agrarianism as an exemplar of a variety of factors shaping welfare states. This has an important consequence for any consideration of agrarianism and welfare theory: this is that the theoretical literature is simply not extensive enough to permit an account of what an 'agrarian' welfare state might look like – as opposed, for example, to the Christian-democratic welfare state we considered in the previous chapter. However, from

a few disparate accounts, it is possible to draw out at least some tentative suggestions about what one might wish to consider in terms of an agrarian impact on social policy.

It is useful to begin by looking at some of the insights generated by Petersen (1990), who argues that the influence of agriculture on the Danish 1891 Act can be traced to 'agricultural conditions, pressure from farmers, and political circumstances which empowered farmers to enforce their demands' (p. 70). So, for example, he draws our attention to the class-divided nature of Danish agriculture: on the one hand, there were farmers and peasant proprietors, on the other, smallholders, cottiers, agricultural labourers and farm-hands. These divisions were important in structuring the response of the agricultural sector. Wider economic factors were important, too. The Act was, in large part, a response to the agricultural crisis of the 1880s. This crisis had an impact on the agricultural labour market, and this 'fundamental transition of the agricultural labour market changed the climate of opinion among farmers about the legitimate role of the state in general and welfare provisions in particular' (p. 71). A very central issue was the decrease in the supply of labour in rural areas and the resultant rising wages. Social reforms that would benefit agricultural labourers would encourage workers to stay in the countryside (p. 77). Finally, on the issue of farmers' abilities to enforce their demands, an important factor was wider political struggles over parliamentary representation. The centrality of the employing role of farmers, as well as their location in wider political struggles, is echoed in Baldwin's (1990) account of the emergence of solidaristic welfare states.

Despite a relatively widespread recognition that there is an agrarian dimension to the emergence of Scandinavian welfare states, Scandinavia has, nevertheless, generally featured as the premier example of 'social-democratic' welfare states. Baldwin's (1990) account is primarily concerned with reconsidering this 'laborist' or social perspective on welfare states. This perspective is one which 'regards the welfare states of certain countries as a victory for the working class and as evidence of the left's ability to implement universalist, egalitarian social policy on behalf of the least advantaged' (p. 55). Baldwin argues that the focus on the industrial working class as the motivating force behind solidaristic welfare outcomes is simplistic. He does not argue that social class is irrelevant but, rather, that the class interests which have shaped policy outcomes have varied. Workers as a class have not always coincided uniformly with categories of high risk; those with most to gain from solidarity have differed over time. Hence Baldwin attempts to shift the focus from one which assumes a

straightforward link between a particular class category and risk category, and hence to shift the association between one particular class and solidaristic legislation. Solidaristic measures, he argues, have triumphed when ‘otherwise privileged groups realised that they shared a common interest in reallocating risk with the disadvantaged’ (p. 292). His account rests heavily on a re-conceptualisation of the factors shaping Scandinavian welfare states, since they have generally been seen as one of the clearest exemplars of the triumph of social democracy. He returns to the origins of solidaristic welfare in Denmark and Sweden, and suggests that the egalitarian, universalistic outcomes were determined ‘at the behest of parties and classes not associated with the left’ (p. 63). The traditional picture of the factors shaping Scandinavian welfare states has neglected the fact ‘that it was the outcome of battles between a rising agrarian bourgeoisie and entrenched, but declining, bureaucratic and urban elites’ (ibid.). For Baldwin, then, agriculture is used to provide support for wider arguments about the social bases of solidaristic welfare states, rather than being an argument about the agrarian roots of welfare states. But, in the process, he provides a useful account of how social policy might be shaped by agrarian social classes.

We can draw out some common themes between his account and that of Petersen. For one thing, they share a perception that the political context in which agriculture is located matters. In particular, Baldwin argues that farmers felt they were denied the representation to which they were entitled, and social policy became an element in the struggle between this perspective as expressed by liberals, and the conservative representatives of the urban professional and manufacturing classes, and aristocratic estate owners. The 1891 Act represented a compromise position that met farmers’ demands in a number of ways. It eliminated the need for employers’ contributions, which was important since farmers were the largest group of employers. It benefited the rural world at the expense of the urban world, since the countryside contributed proportionally less to central government’s revenues than the cities. And it fulfilled the important condition of making rural life more attractive. ‘Because farmers sought to please a labor force that included both wage earners and smallholders, limiting welfare to the dependently employed, not to mention the urban working class, was out of the question’ (p. 75). Both Petersen and Baldwin, then, identify the heterogeneous nature of the agricultural sector as an important factor.

Baldwin’s account of the emergence of solidaristic social policy in Sweden in 1913 also points to the importance of the agrarian social structure. He points out that Swedish parties

mediated class differences differently from Danish parties. Although Denmark was more urbanised, it was also more economically dependent on agriculture, and with larger farms worked by labourers. In Sweden, small, independent cultivators were central. Farmers were split among several groups and 'acted less as a political than as an interest group' (p. 85). Earlier political concessions meant that their demands had a more restricted and, hence, clearer focus. Having said this, Heidenheimer et al. (1990) have pointed to the protracted policy process: 'Powerful agrarian interests, national administrators, academics, businesspeople, unions, socialists and laissez-faire liberals all disputed the advantages and disadvantages of social insurance' (p. 235). In any event, rather than being a contributory scheme confined to industrial workers, the 1913 scheme involved significant tax-financing. In addition, a three-tier system of income groupings was devised to balance the low contributions the rural population could afford with the high benefits desired by urban workers (p. 236). The outcome, Baldwin (1990) notes, of universalist, tax-financed policy generally associated with social democracy was, in fact, determined 'by the farmers' narrow, but persistently pressed demands' (p. 93). Both Sweden and Denmark, then, provide support for a perspective which sees agrarian social classes as important in shaping social-policy outcomes.

As noted above, to the extent that agrarianism has been recognised as influential, it has been seen as an essentially Scandinavian phenomenon 'where the introduction of a uniform and egalitarian national system can be traced to a class compromise between the industrial workers and the small farmers' (Flora, 1986, p. xx). This, perhaps, is not surprising since 'political agrarianism' in the shape of agrarian political parties has also been essentially a Scandinavian phenomenon (Gallagher, Laver and Mair, 2001). Yet the impact of agrarianism outside of Scandinavia may be a neglected feature. In support of this, it is worth noting that some US researchers have suggested that the organisation of agriculture in the American south was a factor retarding welfare growth, while others suggest that agriculture adds to our understanding of the state-society interaction (Alston and Ferrie, 1985; Finegold, 1988; Gilbert and Howe, 1991). Alston and Ferrie (1985) argue that southern agricultural landlords retarded the growth of old-age insurance because of its perceived effect on labour relations: 'Federal provision of welfare threatened planter paternalism and thereby undermined the dependence of agricultural labour on landlords' (p. 96). The New Deal, they argue, would have offered a substitute for paternalistic benefits, decreased the value of planter paternalism, and made it more difficult to obtain cheap and loyal labour (p. 103). Their ability to resist the

New Deal can be traced to institutional factors that facilitated social and political dominance. Rural élites 'were able to control the election of senators, congressmen, and even governors in some cases' (p. 104). Alston and Ferrie argue that their research has important implications for the belief that special-interest groups always force an expansion of the welfare state. From our perspective, though, their research contributes to a thesis that argues that the structure of agricultural interests can contribute to shaping social-policy outcomes.

From a slightly different perspective, agricultural structures have featured in other accounts of welfare development in the US. Finegold (1988) argues that 'to understand the development of many welfare states, and especially to understand public social provision in the United States, we must analyse the role of agriculture as well as that of industry' (p. 200). He stresses two key legacies which reflect the impact of agriculture: the initial exclusion of farm workers and farm owners from the social-security, old-age insurance programme, and the emergence of food stamps as a central programme of aid (food stamps, which are administered by the Department of Agriculture, reflect the politics of agriculture, argues Finegold). He is concerned with explaining why agriculture in the US had these particular outcomes, rather than others, and he argues that 'arrangements for representation and administration through the state organisations and party systems of the American national government have determined the extent to which agricultural interests would influence social provision' (p. 232). He echoes some of Alston and Ferrie's (1985) comments in stressing how these administrative and representational arrangements prioritised the perspective of commercial farmers, especially southern plantation owners. Finegold is clearly operating from within a statist or institutionalist perspective; hence, he stresses the role of bureaucrats and experts within the administrative structures which surround the agricultural policies of the New Deal. This statist perspective on the role of agriculture in the US has been critiqued as neglectful of the role of class interests (Gilbert and Howe, 1991).

Gilbert and Howe (1991) examine the social origins of state-building in the US as part of their contribution to what they term the 'state vs society' debate. As chapters one and two outlined, one criticism of institutional, or statist, perspectives is that they take insufficient account of class structures in the wider society: Gilbert and Howe (1991) are concerned with exploring how the interrelations between state and society contribute to shaping policy. As with Baldwin (1990), then, their perspective is less with arguing for agriculture as a primary factor shaping welfare states, and more with using New Deal agriculture policy as a case study to

illustrate the centrality of class relations to the policy process.⁵⁰ They take issue with statist perspectives on the New Deal agriculture policy. They examine agricultural state institutions (such as the US Department of Agriculture and related organisations), concluding that, as the state's institutional capacity developed in the agricultural arena, it did so 'in a way that increased the class capacity of the dominant farm groups, subverted that of oppositional groups, and structurally privileged the former within the state' (p. 208). They also examine the structure of farming classes across three key agricultural regions. One of their central points is that the class structure of agriculture varied across different regions, meaning that agricultural policy had to deal with extremely divergent interests. So, while, as we have seen above, plantation sharecropping was dominant in the south, capitalist agriculture dominated in the Pacific West, and family farming in the Midwest, Plains and northeast. Their analysis outlines complex power struggles within diverse state institutional settings, focusing on how the interaction between state structures and class forces influences policy outcomes. The nature of their research means that they do not reach a particular conclusion about the impact of agrarianism on social-policy outcomes. Rather, they suggest that the structure of agriculture is central and, moreover, that its interaction with evolving state structures can privilege certain groups, and not others.

As I remarked in the introduction to this section, it is difficult to draw many conclusions from a handful of texts, which, moreover, are not all arguing explicitly for an agrarian dimension to welfare states. However, they are supportive of an argument that the agricultural sector can shape welfare outcomes. They also draw our attention to the importance of recognising diversity: in terms of land ownership, in terms of the role of agricultural labour, and in terms of the relationship between the agricultural sector and the state. In effect, they suggest that we need to bear in mind that the term 'agrarian' can apply to quite diverse types of agricultural settings, that we are concerned not just with farmers, but with agricultural workers also, and that there may be varying outcomes depending on how these diversities interact with state and political structures. Beyond this, it seems likely that more case studies are needed before any generalisation about the impact of agrarianism can be made. What, then, of the Irish case?

Until very recently, agrarianism has featured little in explanations of Irish welfare state development. O'Connell and Rottman (1992), who (as we have seen in chapter two) provide

⁵⁰ They argue that New Deal agricultural policy has been a key case for state-centred analyses.

one of the few theoretically focused studies of the Irish welfare state, do not mention agrarianism at all. This reflects the focus of their study, which is on evaluating core theoretical perspectives. Since these core perspectives neglect agrarianism, it is perhaps not surprising that agrarianism has been neglected in Ireland. Agriculture has occasionally featured in accounts of Irish welfare state development, but usually as exemplifying the type of society which preceded the flowering of the welfare state from the 1960s. So, Cook (1982) remarks that social-security growth is associated with 'the rapid transformation of Ireland from a rural to an urban society and from an agriculturally based nation to an increasingly industrialised one' (p. 136). He comments on the 'consistent inverse relationship' between the proportion of social-security expenditure as a proportion of GNP and the agricultural labour force as a percentage of the economically active population (p. 137). The growth in manufacturing and service employment leads to income insecurity in urban occupations, where people lack the 'protection and ultimate security of the land'. Similarly, Maguire (1986) remarks that the most active phase of welfare growth coincided with (among other features) significant changes in the structure of production and employment. Growth in wage employment led automatically to an increase in the numbers covered by the social-insurance system, and there was pressure to expand the system to cover a wider range of contingencies. In effect, these accounts restate the link between industrialisation and welfare development, and the association with agriculture is essentially negative – that is, the less agricultural employment, the more social spending.

More recently, though, agriculture has begun to take on a more central role. Cousins (1997) includes agriculture as one of the neglected influences on the development of the Irish welfare state. By the nature of his study, however, his reference is brief. He cites work arguing that farmers in the 1970s and 1980s benefited significantly from direct transfers from the state, and refers specifically to farmers' exclusion from the social-insurance scheme, which is, of course, a central concern of this chapter. Finally, Fahey (2002) argues explicitly that agrarian social classes have influenced the formation of the Irish welfare state, and I discuss this article in detail here.

An important aspect of Fahey's argument is that he links agrarianism with familialism. Hence, he suggests that recent insights into the role of the family in structuring welfare regimes can be brought together with Baldwin's insights into the role of agrarianism. Neither have been taken far enough; 'They can be added to by being brought together and developed into a wider

focus on the role of the family economy in the evolution of welfare regimes' (p. 52). The primary argument justifying yoking together what seem to be very different ideas is that agriculture is an example of family-based production continued into the twentieth century in many modernising economies. Fahey is concerned with two inter-related questions. The first is to do with family-based production, which he suggests can be seen as de-commodifying labour by organising work relations on the basis of kinship rather than the wage contract. This raises the question as to whether state support for the family economy can be seen as support for de-commodified labour relations and, thus, an indirect means of social protection. The second question he is concerned with is a development of this, and concerns the focus of much public policy on support for the small family farm: 'To the extent that we assess state intervention on behalf of the family economy as a form of social protection, then its strong agrarian focus adds a new dimension to the question of the agrarian influence on the welfare state' (p. 53). In effect, then, he argues that in promoting a rural society based on non-wage labour, agrarian policy 'tended to de-commodify labour and therefore merits being evaluated as a functional adjunct to state welfare provisions of the usual kind' (p. 62).

This chapter endorses Fahey's arguments that the Irish case indicates that the agrarian dimension of social policy has 'greater significance in welfare regimes than has yet been adequately recognised' (p. 51). There are, however, some gaps in Fahey's analysis. These relate to a common theme: a neglect to consider how agrarian interests are expressed in the Irish political system. The best illustration of this problem is to consider his central claim that 'massive state intervention in social and economic life designed to promote small-scale family farming was a core element in "social policy" broadly defined' (p. 51). In the course of his article, he gives many examples, drawn generally either from the example of land purchase and redistribution or from his micro-study of housing. So land-purchase schemes from 1870 to the 1940s are included, as are a series of housing Acts from the early twentieth century until as late as the 1970s. These are all examples of 'state intervention' – but what is not addressed is that the period witnessed a revolution in terms of state-building. The Irish Free State of the 1930s and 1940s is fundamentally different to the UK state of the 1870s. Indeed, the state which emerged at independence was one which was *itself* fundamentally shaped by the agrarian policy of the colonial period. Fahey does not distinguish between the two states, and this is a serious problem. It seems likely that the motivation of Gladstone's Liberals and de Valera's Fianna Fáil had different roots, even if both were concerned with agrarian issues.

A secondary (but related) concern is that of the structure of agriculture. Fahey has focused on 'the small family farm' in his analysis. He cites the decline of rural wage labour and its replacement by family labour: 'The family economy distributed the fruits of production to workers within household production units according to concepts of need and entitlement that had little to do with the strict calculus of returns to labour which the wage system embodies' (p. 58). Resulting from this, family farming offered a more natural and wholesome form of social protection than state welfare and this, in turn, contributed to shaping a distinctive welfare regime. However, while the 'family farm' is, indeed, a fundamental unit in Irish society, there is more diversity in farm structures than Fahey's account encompasses. Additionally, he does not consider the way in which agrarian interests are structured politically, and the often bitter and divisive battles over land that have contributed to the shaping of the Irish party system.⁵¹ Agrarianism is central to Irish social policy, but its impact encompasses a wider set of actors than 'family farmers'.

The discussion above suggests that, while we might expect agrarianism to have had an impact on Irish social policy, it is difficult to generalise about what exactly its impact might be. This is particularly the case with social insurance: the outcomes congruent with agrarian interests are highly dependent on the structure of agriculture. Moreover, how those interests are translated into policy outcomes is important. For example, did agrarian interests outweigh those of other actors, such as industrial interests? I consider these questions in the following section.

The politics of land in Ireland

To understand the impact of agrarianism on Irish social policy, we need first to consider the evolution of agrarian politics in Ireland. There are two distinct periods – before independence, when the impact of agrarianism is expressed through legislation emanating from Westminster, and after independence, when agrarianism is expressed through a domestic political and party system. I begin by looking at the legacies of the colonial period, before turning to look at events in independent Ireland.

⁵¹ His unpublished (1998b) paper deals more fully with these conflicts, and I refer to it below.

Legacies from colonialism: cultural and institutional factors

In his study of the Irish land question, Bull (1996) remarks: 'It is an issue which to be understood must be firmly set in both an Irish and a British context, for as a problem it is the product of the interaction of two societies and two cultures' (p. 5). On independence, the Irish state inherited a number of legacies from this complex interaction – the previous chapter has already touched on the centrality of inherited modes of thought at the heart of government. Agrarian issues usefully highlight the extent to which we need to cast our net quite widely in considering the institutional legacies in which post-war policy-making was located.

Perhaps the most obvious legacy of the colonial period (in terms of agrarian issues) is a particular pattern of landholding that, in turn, became associated with a wider set of values and beliefs (Fahey, 1998b and 2002; Hannan and Commins, 1992). These beliefs have been described as 'rural fundamentalism', and see agriculture as the source of national prosperity and, in Ireland at any rate, see the family farm as the natural and desirable form of agrarian structure. From 1870 on, a series of land Acts transformed patterns of landholding in Ireland, as part of a wider policy of 'killing Home Rule with kindness'. 'In 1870 only 3 per cent of the occupiers of Irish agricultural holdings were owners of those same holdings; by 1916 this figure had jumped to 64 per cent and was still rising' (Ó Tuathaigh, 1982, p. 167). The outcome has been said to be the creation of a 'stable, conservative, land-owning peasantry' (Hannan and Breen, 1987). Undoubtedly, then, a key legacy was the creation of a system of peasant proprietorship linked to widely shared beliefs about the centrality of agriculture. This chapter discusses the impact of this legacy on the evolution of social insurance in more detail below. Yet we need to take conflict as well as consensus into account in considering the cultural legacies of the colonial period.

The agrarian agitations of the nineteenth century may have bridged social and economic divisions in Ireland, but they did not eliminate them. Indeed, these divisions shaped the nature of the demands made in the agrarian campaigns (Bull, 1996). A central division was between 'the prosperous tenant farmers of the eastern side of the country and the impoverished tenants of the poor western side' (p. 139). Agrarian agitation had ultimately to encompass the grievances of both; redistribution of land as well as tenure reform became, hence, a key element. But land redistribution 'had potential for social divisiveness, as it contained within it the seeds of distributional conflicts between major agrarian classes' (Fahey, 1998b, p. 4). From the nineteenth century on, attempts to suppress, minimise or redirect the demands of

poorer, landless elements in rural Ireland has been a constant feature of Irish agrarian politics (Bull, 1996). We need, then, to be alert to the legacies of a particular type of agrarian policy: one that needed to juggle with internal divisions, even as it pursued apparently consensual aims. ‘Agrarian grievances were the fabric out of which skilled political leaders crafted an entity in which diversity of interest was consolidated into strong institutional form’ (Bull, 1996, p. 142). One outcome is a relatively substantial administrative legacy that left agrarian issues located at the heart of the state. A second is the impact on mass-electoral politics from their foundations right through to elections in the post-war period. Finally, we can see the legacies in social-policy outcomes both before and after independence. I consider each of these briefly before moving on to look at independent Ireland.

State activism in relation to land in Ireland has a long history and, consequently, left independent Ireland with a substantial administrative legacy. Bull (1996) suggests that legislation as early as the Encumbered Estates Acts of 1848 and 1849 ‘marked the beginning of active intervention by parliament in the problems of land tenure and management in Ireland’ (p. 2). Initially, intervention was targeted at the role of the landlord, but a shift from around 1870 saw tenant farmers become the focus of parliament’s attention, and legislative interventions (*ibid.*). As we have seen, the outcome was a fundamental and revolutionary change in landholding patterns. But the process of transforming landholding structures left institutional legacies, too. The Act of Union, while ensuring that legislation originated from Westminster, did not lead to uniform legislative and administrative development across the United Kingdom. Various governmental agencies, boards and programmes were introduced in Ireland either earlier than elsewhere in the UK, or solely in Ireland (Daly, 2002). As I suggested above, nineteenth-century agrarian agitation encompassed both land-tenure reform and land redistribution, and dealing with both these aspects left administrative legacies. The creation of *ad hoc* administrative bodies was widespread in the Irish administration; at the end of the century, Ireland was said to have ‘as many boards as would make her coffin’ (Chubb, 1992, p. 213). Two key examples are the Congested Districts Board (1891) and the Land Commission (1899). Both were set up towards the end of the century to facilitate in the transformation of landholding patterns. These two bodies brought issues of land redistribution into the heart of government before and after independence – the Land Commission stayed in existence as late as the 1970s.⁵² Agriculture had an additional voice with the foundation of the

⁵² The functions of the Congested District Board were transferred to the Land Commission in 1923.

Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (DATI) in 1900. This 'marked a new experiment in Irish administrative and economic history'. Side by side with the DATI was a consultative Council of Agriculture comprising 102 members, selected essentially by the county councils. The first secretary of the DATI described it as 'one of the governing authorities of the nation, a Department of State, representative of the Crown, of Parliament, and of local authorities of the country, which has been constructed by the will of the Irish people of all parties and [is] the first representative institution of the kind in their possession' (cited in Daly, 2002, p. 17). Arising from the long history of agrarian agitation, then, and the diverse demands which this encompassed, the concerns of a wide section of Irish agriculture, from landless labourers through to prosperous farmers, had an institutional existence at a time when industrial workers were struggling to achieve the right to organise in trade unions. This pre-dated independence but remained a feature of independent Ireland because of the persistence of administrative structures in Ireland. Daly comments that if any government department epitomises Fanning's (1978) claim that there was considerable continuity before and after independence, it is the Department of Agriculture (2002, p. 102). As we will see, one outcome was that the agricultural sector had no need to campaign to get its interests considered in the policy-making process.

Equally important is the fact that the evolution of electoral politics in Ireland is inextricably bound up with the land question. Out of the struggle for the 'land of Ireland for the people of Ireland' emerged the first modern Irish political party, making the story of agrarian politics a part of the wider story of mass electoral politics in Ireland (Coakley, 1999). The 1885 election, said to mark the birth of modern Irish party politics, witnessed the emergence of nationalist domination of the south. The Irish Parliamentary (or Irish) Party, whose origins lie partially in the 1879 Land League, 'stood for Home Rule for Ireland, for defence of Catholic rights and for the principle of state intervention to promote the interests of tenant farmers' (p. 11). The party dominated elections in the south for thirty years, until the watershed election of 1918 witnessed its eclipse by Sinn Féin. Hence, fundamental aspects of Irish political culture pre-date independence and the party system born from the civil war. The commitment to British parliamentary practices and procedures, seen as so central in the previous chapter, can be traced to this long participation in the evolving democracy of the UK. Secondly, the centrality of the land question is carried over into the new party system born in the cauldron of the civil war.

Finally, we can see an embryonic impact on social policy. We have already seen this when the previous chapter discussed the 1911 National Insurance Act. As I argued, the Church opposed the Act, not on theological grounds, but on the grounds that it was not appropriate to Irish conditions, which were agricultural rather than industrial. The outcome was a scheme that differed in some fundamental respects from that operated in the wider UK. Not all of this can be attributed to the impact of agriculture, but Barrington's account does imply the centrality of the agricultural structure of Irish society. Perhaps the most interesting point about the outcome, though, is that the exclusion of medical benefit indicates the emergence of a domestic politics capable of influencing policy, and policy outcomes which are the result of interaction between the politics of two societies. This domestic politics was one that, as we have seen, had needed to fashion a consensus about land which skated over divisions. It is possible to argue that social policy was part of the process of maintaining this consensus, and that this would continue to be a feature of social policy in independent Ireland. We can see this if we consider briefly the case of housing policy.

As outlined above, Fahey's argument about the agrarian roots of Irish social policy rests partially on housing, and on initiatives which pre-date independence. His example of housing is notable, not merely because he argues that Irish housing policy has agrarian roots, but because of his suggestion that it indicates a 'trade-off' to tackle these divisions between landed and landless interests. Constitutional nationalism, he suggests, did not accept that land should be shared out between farm labourers as well as tenants and, instead, opted for a 'trade-off between land for farmers and housing for agricultural labourers' (Fahey, 1998b, p. 8); hence, the 1883 Labourers Act, which began a process of shifting responsibility for housing to Boards of Guardians (Bradley, 1988; Fahey, 1998b). It provided cheap housing for rent to farm labourers, subsidised out of local rates. The 1906 and the 1911 Labourers Acts further facilitated the development of housing, and 42,000 cottages were provided in the twenty-six counties by 1922, while 24,000 more cottages were built between 1945–64 (Bradley, 1988). Fahey (1998b) comments: 'Public housing in Ireland was thus remarkable for the essentially agrarian origins of the campaigns which gave rise to it and the dominance of peasant rather than proletarian concerns in providing the underlying dynamism of those campaigns' (p. 9). There are, then, grounds for arguing that from the inception of modern electoral politics in Ireland, politicians sought to sustain an ideology in which land owning was of central ideological importance, while defusing, where possible, the claims of the landless through targeted social and economic policy.

On independence, then, agrarianism had left multiple legacies that both shaped the institutional context of the policy process and structured the manner in which those interests were represented politically. Additionally, it might be suggested that social policy had emerged as a device that could usefully defuse distributional conflicts threatening a nationalist consensus that rested on obscuring economic divisions. What impact would independence have? Perhaps surprisingly, one impact that it would not have would be the emergence of an agrarian party.

Agrarianism and electoral politics in independent Ireland

Although the land question was so central in nineteenth-century Ireland, one of the striking features of Irish political life has been the absence of a strong agrarian party. Commenting on the absence of a major agrarian party in Ireland, Lee remarked that 'its significance is that of the dog that didn't bark', and has been so taken for granted that 'few have lingered to ponder the implications' (Lee, 1989, p. 74). Despite the size of the rural population in Ireland, and the centrality of the land question, there has never been a successful agrarian party (*see* table 4.1). For Lee, the absence of a strong agrarian party reflects the relative homogeneity of urban and rural society in Ireland, and the existence of an integrated, national polity. It is unclear, though, whether homogeneity can account for the absence of an agrarian party since, as we have seen, the reality of the agrarian sector in Ireland is that there has, in fact, been a diversity of interests in rural Ireland. Even by the 1940s, there was no clear overlap of interests between the still quite considerable class of agricultural labourers, the strong farmers of the east and south of Ireland, or the small subsistence farmers of the west.⁵³ In grappling with redistributive issues in the post-war period, policy-makers sought to walk a tightrope not only between the competing demands of urban and rural Ireland, but between the conflicting interests of differing agrarian groups. What was especially problematic was that the evolution of electoral politics in Ireland meant that all the political parties represented some aspect of agrarian interests.

Typically, agrarian parties have been said to spring from the urban–rural cleavage identified by Lipset and Rokkan in their influential account of the origins of European party systems

⁵³ The extent to which there is a uniformity of interest among 'urban' workers is discussed in the next chapter. The bitterest dispute of the inter-party government after the Mother and Child Scheme was the question of higher-paid versus lower-paid workers.

(Gallagher, Laver and Mair, 2000; Urwin, 1980). Agrarian political parties mobilised around this cleavage in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but only Scandinavia experienced enduring and significant agrarian parties well into the twentieth century. In Ireland, agrarian parties have fallen into the category of ‘minor’ parties, albeit winning around 10 per cent of the vote at certain times (Coakley, 1990).

Table 4.1: Strength of Agrarian Parties at General Elections, 1922–61

Party	Election	Candidates	Seats	Votes no.	Votes %
Farmers' Party	1922	13	7	48,718	7.8
	1923	64	15	127,798	12.1
	1927 (June)	39	11	101,955	8.9
	1927 (Sep.)	20	6	74,520	6.1
	1932	7	3	26,436	2.1
National Centre Party	1933	26	11	126,906	9.2
National Democratic party	1923	4	–	4,966	0.5
Workers' Farming Association	1923	1	–	888	0.1
Unpurchased Tenants' Association	1923	1	–	638	0.1
Evicted Tenants' Association	1923	1	–	625	0.1
Clann na Talmhan	1943	41	12	134,374	10.1
	1944	28	11	131,243	10.8
	1948	25	7	73,813	5.6
	1951	7	6	38,872	2.9
	1954	10	5	41,249	3.1
	1957	7	3	28,905	2.4
	1961	6	2	17,693	1.5

Source: Coakley, 1990, (Table 3, p. 281).

Coakley (1990) commented that we are really concerned with two cleavages rather than one. These two cleavages are ‘the cleavage between the agricultural population and urban dwellers, and the cleavage within the agricultural population between landed and landless groups’ (Coakley, 1990, pp. 280–1). To this, we might, perhaps, also add the lesser divisions between large and small farmers. While the distinction between landed and landless is important, and was a major issue for post-war policy-makers, it is not always easy to make. This is because the categories of ‘small farmer’ and ‘labourer’ merge into each other. Some who were primarily labourers but had plots of land would return themselves in the census as farmers, while some would describe themselves as labourers. These problems are of long-standing origin. ‘In the case of post-Famine Ireland the boundary between agricultural and other

occupations is unusually indistinct, since numerous shopkeepers, priests, teachers and artisans occupied farms, while many “agricultural labourers” and farmers augmented their meagre earnings by working in winter and wet seasons as stone-breakers, road-workers or railway navvies’ (Fitzpatrick, 1980, p. 67). Furthermore, amongst farm workers, there were other divisions, too. Bradley (1988) identifies four, and Breen (1983) also remarks on a subdivision within paid labour on Irish farms. There is, for example, a conceptual distinction between ‘farm servants’ and ‘agricultural labourers’. The distinctions between farmer and labourer interact with, and feed into, distinctions between large and small farmers. Most obviously, large farmers were more likely to employ labour (of whatever type) while, as noted above, small farmers sometimes doubled as labourers (Bradley, 1988; Breen, 1983). We are, then, dealing with a heterogeneous agrarian society, but one in which drawing clear boundaries between different groups is extremely difficult, leading to severe problems in identifying the precise nature of agrarian interests. The interests of agricultural labourers might, at times, coincide with those of farmers (in terms of broad economic policy, for example) but might conflict at other times (on issues of rates of pay and working conditions). A continuing issue, though, were the demands of the landless, and we need to consider how these were expressed in the Irish party system.

Some thought that the struggle for independence would provide the opportunity for the grievances of marginal groups to be heard. The early decades of the twentieth century witnessed widespread unrest among smallholders and landless men (O’Tuathaigh, 1982). Initially, Sinn Féin sought to capitalise on these grievances by developing an agrarian policy with some radical dimensions, and by participating in a variety of rural campaigns centred around the claims of the landless (Rumpf and Hepburn, 1977). This radicalism was short-lived, however, and an order went out to Irish Volunteers not to participate in cattle-driving and ploughing, ‘as these operations are neither of a national nor a military character’ (p. 21). During 1919–20, agitation over land was heightened. Indeed, this period has been described as ‘the zenith of trade unionism on the farm’ (Bradley, 1988). The ITGWU was seeking to organise labourers, there were incidents of agrarian violence, and farmers sought to organise into a Farmers’ Union to resist calls for wage increases. Land Courts were established by Dáil Éireann, but these aimed more at protecting the rights of property and allowing for the national struggle to take predominance than to pursue any radical aims. A Dáil Éireann decree in 1920 stated: ‘That the present time when the Irish people are locked in a life and death struggle with their traditional enemy, is ill chosen for the stirring up of strife among our

fellow countrymen; and that all our energies must be directed towards the clearing out – not the occupiers of this or that piece of land – but the foreign invader of our country’ (quoted in O’Tuathaigh, 1982, p. 171).

Within the bitter divisions of the civil war, agrarian unrest continued. Although the main issue may have been the Treaty, there were, nevertheless, socio-economic dimensions (Dunphy, 1995). Among these, agrarian divisions played their part. A number of authors have noted a tendency for Cumann na nGaedheal to take support from large farmers, while anti-Treaty forces were frequently supported by small farmers and the landless (Ó Tuathaigh, 1986; Dunphy, 1995). The reasons for this tendency are not difficult to deduce. ‘Put very simply, those with least to lose, and everything to gain, tended to oppose the treaty in the hope that an alternative settlement might give them enough land to support their families or some security of livelihood’ (Dunphy, 1995, p. 34). Among the anti-Treaty side were those whose ideology was radical on social issues, as well as those whose radicalism was more tactical. The defeat of the anti-Treaty forces, however, largely spelled the end of this era. ‘The hopes and dreams of radical land reformers, the articulate leaders and the desperate landless men of the west and south-west, could not be realised’ (Ó Tuathaigh, 1986, p. 175). By 1923, it seemed that agrarian radicalism had largely ended, trade unionism had been ‘defeated’, and agricultural interests began to express themselves along the lines of the party system created by divisions over nationalism.

Consequently, Fianna Fáil has frequently been seen as carrying the banner for the hopes of the landless and small farmers. In the same way, though, that Fianna Fáil cannot be said to be a Labour party in all but name, neither can it be said to be an agrarian party in disguise. The Economic War (and the partial retention of land annuities by the Irish state) hit farmers hard. Land reform, too, was limited. In his inimitable fashion, de Valera captured in the Constitution the complexities surrounding attitudes to the rural social structure. Bunreacht na hÉireann stated that the state shall direct its policy towards securing ‘That there may be established on the land in economic security as many families as in the circumstances shall be practicable’. This had the virtue of combining an acknowledgment of the desirability of the land-owning ideal with a recognition of the practical difficulties in implementing it. Moreover, in an implicit recognition of the scale of the practicalities, the article is one of the non-binding Directive Principles of Social Policy. In the event, these practical problems prevented any attainment of the goals of the landless classes. But early social reforms

(discussed in more detail below) were intended to retain Fianna Fáil's constituency of small farmers and agricultural labourers as well as that of urban workers, and others. As well as housing, unemployment assistance in 1933 and non-contributory widows' and orphans' pensions (1935) were deliberately targeted at groups failed by insurance – among them being a diverse selection in rural Ireland. Commenting on this, Lee notes; 'It was one of the innumerable ironies implicit in the pursuit of "self-sufficiency" that among de Valera's attractions for the people of the west, not least of the Gaeltacht, was the increase in state handouts from the apostle of rural self-sufficiency' (Lee, 1989, p. 186).

Despite this, the emerging party system did not always dovetail neatly with the political aims of rural Ireland, and the first thirty years of independence saw recurrent attempts to organise agrarian parties (*see* table 4.1 above). The earliest attempt to represent agrarian interests was the Farmers' Party (set up as the political wing of the Farmers' Union), which contested every election from 1922–32 (Manning, 1979; Gallagher, 1976). It won seven seats (with fifteen candidates) in 1922, fifteen seats (with sixty-five candidates) in 1923, but declined thereafter to three seats in its final election in 1932. Gallagher argues that, while its nucleus was 'relatively wealthy farmers', who constituted its TDs, it also probably attracted support from labourers. This is based on the fact that its support was related to the proportion of farm labourers in an area – though Gallagher does note that this may simply reflect the presence of large employing farmers. Certainly, it attempted to appeal to labourers, as one election advertisement indicates. 'If your Employers prosper you prosper. Support the Farmers Party, which has at its heart the welfare of our common Industry' (quoted in Gallagher, 1976, p. 47). Manning remarks that it was never really a coherent political party, and TDs tended to act more as independents than as members of a political party.

Its policy was vague and generally negative – it opposed and constantly railed against government extravagance and waste; it was suspicious of civil servants, saw no need for a Department of External Affairs or for the ESB. It couldn't make up its mind on whether it was for free trade or protection and even on questions of agriculture had little that was constructive or positive to say. (Manning, 1979, p. 51)

The entry of Fianna Fáil into the Dáil in 1927 forced the party to align itself along civil-war lines, indicating, again, the extent to which nationalism and the agrarian dimension cross-cut each other. In the 1930s, a series of short-lived organisations culminated in the Centre Party, which won eleven seats in the 1933 election. A key issue was its stance on ending the Economic War with Britain. Gallagher's analysis again suggests a support base of farm

labourers; Labour (generally supported by labourers) won its lowest-ever share of the vote in this election. In September 1933, the Farmers' Party merged with Cumann na nGaedheal and the National Guard to form Fine Gael. The best known of the farmers' parties is Clann na Talmhan.⁵⁴ Formed in 1938, it contested its first election in 1943, and I discuss it in more detail below.

The story of agrarian politics outlined above is generally well known, but the extent to which the politics of agrarianism is embedded in the Irish party system has sometimes been underestimated. While no successful agrarian party has been able to sustain a long-term existence, electoral politics emerged from agrarian struggle, and diverse agrarian interests found an expression in the three main political parties. We need to place post-war policy choices in this context. Policy-makers had to juggle distributive choices with an eye to assuaging a diversity of groups whose interests did not necessarily coincide. Conflicts of interest occurred both within rural Ireland, and between rural and urban Ireland, and policy-makers of all shades were alert to these conflicts as the party system was buffeted by rural dissatisfaction in the bleak post-war economic climate. How were these conflicts to be resolved? I turn now to look in detail at social security in post-war Ireland.

Social security and agriculture in post-war Ireland

Although social-service reform took on a new primacy in the post-war period, it did so in a context where a patchwork of provision existed, some pre-dating independence, some initiated by post-independence governments. If we turn to look at these measures, we can see that, while there was no consistent pattern whereby social services were seen to be the preserve of urban industrial workers, nevertheless, the two groups were frequently treated differently. Some services were aimed exclusively at industrial workers, while others incorporated agricultural workers as well. Within this overall context, agriculture was also the main recipient of a variety of state initiatives aimed solely at developing agricultural resources.

Domestic legislators raised early concerns about the extent to which agricultural and industrial workers could or should be treated equally. In 1922, the minister for industry and commerce answered a Dáil question about extending the 1920 Unemployment Insurance Act to

⁵⁴ Usually translated as children (or party) of the soil.

agriculture: 'He claimed that the collection of contributions would be difficult, the prevention of abuse in administration troublesome, that farmers would be definitely opposed to it and that labourers either hostile or indifferent' (Bradley, 1988, pp. 17–18). These arguments would re-surface in later years, as the question of social-service reform became a central issue from around 1942 on. The debate about reform reflected the fact that much social legislation had been concerned with low-paid industrial workers, and explicitly excluded the agricultural sector. Both the Conditions of Employment Act 1936 and the Holidays Act 1939 excluded farm employees, so that in 1946, a nine-hour day and six-day week for agricultural workers was still legal. Likewise, agricultural labourers were specifically exempted from the Industrial Relations Act 1946 (establishing the Labour Court) except for section six making provision for investigation of disputes in agriculture. As mentioned above, they were included in the 1933 Unemployment Assistance Act. This, however, allowed for the exclusion of agricultural workers during periods when it was thought that employment would be plentiful. From 1935–47, such an order was made each year for the months of July and August (Bradley, 1988).

In terms of social insurance specifically, an important piece of legislation was the Widows' and Orphans' Pensions Act 1935. As we have seen in the previous chapter, consideration of contributory versus non-contributory schemes illustrated a general sense that contributory schemes had much to recommend them. Yet they also created problems from an Irish perspective. Calls for a widows' and orphans' pension had been made throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s by the Labour Party, but had been largely ignored by the Cumann na nGaedheal government. Shortly after taking up office, Fianna Fáil set up a committee to examine the issue, leading to the *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Widows' and Orphans' Pensions*. The committee considered that the major question before it was whether the scheme was to be one of contributory insurance or some other principle. In the process, it considered this issue at some length, and was, the report said, mainly indebted to the ILO's surveys of social insurance.

The report included an appendix, entitled: 'Contributory v. Non-contributory Schemes of Social Insurance'. However, the committee clearly had a grasp of some of the key aspects that give social insurance its distinctive character. Among these is the idea of risk pooling, and the consequent necessity for compulsion (chapter five discusses risk-pooling and its implications in more detail). The report remarks that compulsion may be necessary since the problem of 'self-selection' exists. This is a problem inherent in state-run schemes, where actuarial

calculations are not applied as in private insurance. It suggests that voluntary insurance is problematic in that those most at risk are most likely to be voluntary contributors.⁵⁵ The report also indicated that general arguments in favour of contributory schemes were clearly grasped by the committee. Concisely, it remarks: 'The payment of direct contributions by the insured can be justified on the responsibility of the insured themselves in the occurrence of risk, the necessity for considering their self-respect, the desirability of encouraging thrift, on their right to share in the administration and in effecting economy in its working' (appendix c, *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Widows' and Orphans' Pensions*). Equally as important, the committee recognised that 'the essential feature of social insurance is that it must constitute an absolute guarantee of benefit.' The committee divided in its views on whether a contributory or non-contributory scheme should be adopted, but the overwhelming majority suggested a non-contributory scheme, largely in response to the existence of a large smallholder class.⁵⁶

Among other advantages, contributory schemes were seen to be congruent with Catholic social teaching; the previous chapter quoted S.T. Ó Ceallaigh's favourable comments on this aspect. But it was felt to be impossible to provide only for a contributory scheme. The key problem was the large size of the agricultural sector, as Ó Ceallaigh remarked:

It is true to say ... that out of the whole population of workers in the Saorstát whose means are little more than sufficient to provide the ordinary necessities of life, there is a large number of persons who are not in receipt of cash wages at regular intervals. The principal class of this type is the small working farmer whose level of subsistence is comparable with that of the urban wage-earner, and who requires, to the same extent at least, to be protected against the loss which his premature death might bring to his wife and children. No proper solution of the difficulty of applying a scheme of compulsory contributory insurance to persons of this class has yet become apparent. Their inclusion in the scheme is, however, regarded as imperative and it has been decided to include in the Bill provision for the payment of non-contributory pensions to the existing and future widows and orphans of agricultural 'small-holders', where the valuation of the holding does not exceed £8.⁵⁷

As early as the 1930s, then, problems with applying contributory schemes to farmers had become clear to policy-makers. When the question of insuring farmers was considered in greater detail after the war, in the face of 'ever growing public demand for greater measures of

⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the idea of voluntary insurance for key groups was to be suggested again in the future, and would feature as an attempt to resolve the problems of the farming sector.

⁵⁶ Eleven members signed the majority report, two the first minority report, and one the second minority report.

⁵⁷ DD, vol. 56, 4 June 1935, col. 2235.

social security, supervised and administered by the State',⁵⁸ the context was one where a patchwork of provision existed, and which had grown on an *ad hoc* basis before and after independence. Agricultural workers, along with others, were eligible for children's allowances, old-age pensions, blind pensions, non-contributory widows' and orphans' pensions (all subject to a means test), limited unemployment assistance, home assistance, free allotments and (only to constantly employed agricultural employees) national health-insurance benefits. Services available more or less exclusively to the non-rural community were national health insurance, workmen's compensation, and contributory widows' and orphans' pensions. In effect, insurance schemes were largely limited to industrial workers – but the rural population had recourse to a range of tax-financed income-maintenance schemes. It might be said that the distinction largely concerned the financing of social services rather than the receipt of social services, and this was to be a key issue in post-war debates. The first question that faced policy-makers was the extent to which developments in the UK, which would have united the whole population in one scheme, were desirable or possible in the Irish case.

In considering this, all governments shared pressures to consider the interests of the agricultural sector. The immediate post-war period was one where agricultural issues had taken on a new political salience. 1943 saw the emergence of Clann na Talmhan; in fact, this election represented the apex of its support. The party received 10 per cent of the vote and returned twelve candidates. Its support base was distinctive. It was 'arguably the last electoral hurrah of Davitt's smallholders of the west and south-west' (Ó Tuathaigh, 1982, p. 185). Gallagher's analysis suggests that 'Clann na Talmhan's emergence reflected a dissatisfaction in the poorest areas of the country not just with Fianna Fáil but with the whole party system as it then existed' (Gallagher, 1976, p. 55). It was unlikely that Seán MacEntee, for one, would have missed the message implicit in its success.

The centrality of agriculture was also underlined by the agrarian unrest centred on attempts to unionise agricultural labourers. As Bradley (1988) notes, the perception that agricultural labourers had effectively died out by the beginning of World War I means that this period is poorly documented; the following, therefore, is drawn almost entirely from his account. Bradley (1988) notes that earlier attempts to organise labourers foundered on the problems of

⁵⁸ 'Considerations attending the problems of extending Social Insurance in Ireland with special reference to the Rural Community', MacEntee collection, P67/261.

rural unemployment, emigration, and a lack of financial and organisational resources. Yet agricultural labourers, while undoubtedly in decline, remained a substantial class in the early 1940s, albeit unevenly distributed geographically (*see* discussion below). Bradley estimated that they represented some 18 per cent of the agricultural workforce, a figure that rose to 33 per cent in twelve counties (Bradley, 1988). In 1943, the Workers' Union of Ireland (WUI) began to organise farm workers, resulting in the formation of the Federation of Rural Workers (FRW) in 1946. The main issue was the demand for a weekly half-holiday and a week's annual holiday with pay. An increased demand for agricultural labour coupled with a rising cost of living provided a fertile breeding ground for discontent. Dublin, Meath, Wicklow and particularly Kildare were the main counties initially involved, reflecting the areas where farm workers were concentrated. Strike action at a variety of locations around Kildare prompted the *Standard* to condemn the dispute: 'a war of sabotage has swept over North Kildare ... where the FRW, a body organised from Dublin, is in conflict with local farmers on issues which seem to us to be more political than social or economic' (cited in Bradley, p. 84). The 'national emergency' sparked by bad weather and which led to a call for volunteers to save the harvest led to a temporary truce, and the formation of the Labour Court led to an agreement to refer the dispute to it.

The Kildare strike prompted labourers in Cork to organise (table 4.3 illustrates the regional variation in numbers of agricultural workers). Seán MacEntee was moved to comment that the FRW agitation was political on behalf of Mr Norton's 'International Labour Party'. On 10 July 1947, the Labour Court reported; while recognising the right of labourers to free time, it essentially found that the practical problems in applying the principle were too great. The outcome was that, while a settlement was reached with farmers in some areas, in others it was not. Hence, the 1948 election also reflected these issues to some extent. Four FRW representatives were elected. The Agricultural Workers' Holidays Act 1950 was passed by the new government. In addition, the Agricultural Wages Board granted a five shilling increase in all areas, a decision the new minister for agriculture, James Dillon, declared was 'most deplorable'.

The key point to be drawn from this discussion is the continuing diversity of Irish agriculture in the immediate post-war period. By the time Irish economic policy shifted on its axis in the late Fifties and early Sixties, much had changed. Mechanisation, depression and emigration meant that the 1950s saw, finally, the death of the agricultural labouring class; from then on,

the agricultural sector was undeniably more homogenous. But this lay in the future. In the 1940s, the confusing categories of small farmers and labourers were a sizeable and dissatisfied grouping whose interests policy-makers struggled to meet. The first to tackle the issue was Fianna Fáil, and I turn now to consider its efforts in detail.

Fianna Fáil and subsistence agriculture

As outlined above, MacEntee's first response to the call for a comprehensive scheme was to ask his civil servants to prepare notes on the difficulties of including those working on their own account. As we have seen in the previous chapter, in this period, MacEntee was pre-occupied with administrative reform and turf wars which thrust him into conflict with fellow ministers and others. Initially, then, it is predominantly civil servants rather than politicians who engage with the details of proposed schemes. As we have noted already, there was, at first, no clear conception of what exactly might be meant by social security, never mind a detailed analysis of the redistributive consequences of risk spreading across diverse urban and rural groups. These concepts emerged piecemeal as concrete issues were tackled by a succession of ministers and their civil servants.

Having said that, however, in his response to MacEntee, Dr James Deeny, chief medical officer of the department, presciently raises a point that would be to the fore in later debates. He remarked: 'in this country owing to the existing organisation it is almost impossible to introduce any kind of social legislation which will not benefit one class more than all other groups and which will not be to the prejudice of one class more than others. A benefit to the unemployed working man in the town inevitably hits a small farmer.'⁵⁹ Farmers figured largely in his analysis. The people in this country, he comments, are in a peculiar position, in that they have probably a greater degree of social security than elsewhere. 'For example, the Irish farmer, who constitutes the main economic group in this country is among the very few in Europe to own his own land. Therefore we have in Ireland a great group of people with a wide distribution of a relatively large individual capital who have in this way insurance, an insurance which is enhanced by the small demands of their low standard of living.' He does agree that a measure of social security would be of benefit to the small farmer, but remarked it was difficult to see how such a development could be implemented under existing conditions.

⁵⁹ MacEntee collection, P67/261 (170), memo dated 20 Jan. 1945. Dr James Deeny was chief medical officer of the Department of Local Government and Public Health from 1944–46, and was influential in shaping health policy in the period (Barrington, 1987).

Nor was there a spontaneous demand from the vocational agricultural organisations for such a benefit.

Initial wide-ranging considerations such as this were, however, relatively quickly superseded by more-focused concerns. In November 1944, the Department of Local Government and Public Health received a paper that it had commissioned from the ILO on the issue of compulsory insurance for independent workers. Drawing on this, a memo was drawn up, entitled 'Considerations attending the problem of extending Social Insurance with special reference to the Rural Community'.⁶⁰ It is worth examining this memo in some detail. The memo begins by suggesting that 'The greatest problem of all is how to apply Social Insurance measures to a population half of whom are unoccupied and half of whom are in the rural community.' The rural community is divided between farmers, shopkeepers and small tradesmen, their relatives and children, and agricultural labourers, a high percentage of whom are only casually employed. The memo continues with a brief survey of the situation abroad. Of twenty countries in 1932, not including the US and UK, only two insured farmers and the self-employed for old age, disability and health services. These were Sweden and Denmark. This, the memo notes, was based on a 'a long tradition of mutual insurance by co-operative groups and the State merely enforces compliance with a system already developed extensively by individual initiative.' At a later stage, New Zealand, Belgium and Germany inaugurated schemes for the rural community. 'The deduction to be drawn is that a few countries where agricultural life was becoming highly organised had begun to include agricultural workers and farmers in social insurance schemes.' The memo notes that, while Sweden and Denmark are in the same income group as Ireland, the social and economic conditions were very different. First of all, the high degree of civilisation attained in these countries may be said to be largely due to long, peaceful development. There were other factors, too. In the case of Denmark, land division had been completed before the end of the eighteenth century, while universal education and universal franchise were introduced in the early nineteenth century.

Turning to consider what might be done in Ireland, the memo discusses the necessity of 'completely rehabilitating' the agricultural community – a campaign to increase agricultural productivity is an essential contribution to the development of social insurance. It foresaw problems inherent in any attempt to insure the agricultural community: 'in this country it is

⁶⁰ MacEntee collection, P67/261.

commonly thought that great difficulties will be experienced in persuading the agricultural community that they should pay cash contribution towards social insurance. Many farmers live almost on a subsistence basis and many effect their purchases by the medium of exchange, little or no cash passing.' The system of agricultural marketing was 'primitive in the extreme', though collection of contributions might be possible where farmers receive periodic cheques for produce in creamery areas. However, it 'is possible that there is a class of rural dweller who under no circumstances would be capable of paying any contribution which would prove economic having regard to the cost of collection.' Hence, adoption of the English system of collecting standard contributions would be most difficult. The memo presents a view of a primitive subsistence agriculture, where the 'agricultural community' would be unable or unwilling to pay contributions. Initially, then, no real distinction is made between farmers and labourers; all are members of a broadly subsistence agricultural community. How accurate was this picture?

In 1946, just under 50 per cent of farms were under 30 acres, a figure which might be said to be subsistence level (Breen et al., 1990, p. 191). On these farms, the 'relatives assisting' and those who might be irregularly employed certainly presented problems in an attempt to draw them into a social-insurance scheme. Should farmers have to pay insurance contributions for their sons (or other relatives) engaged in labour on the farm? This was a serious issue, given the large number of 'relatives assisting' in the Irish agricultural system. According to the 1946 census, about 35 per cent of agricultural occupations were relatives assisting. Considering how to treat these in a contributory scheme would certainly be problematic.

A more central concern was the question of agricultural employees. Contrary to the perception that agriculture in the period can be characterised unproblematically as 'family farming', there was a relatively sizeable paid workforce in the agricultural sector. In fact, just over a quarter of 'agricultural occupations' were employees. Of these, the majority were returned on the census as agricultural labourers. There were, however, profound regional variations. Central Statistics Office figures for 1944 give us an idea of regional variation in both workforce and size of holdings (*see* tables 4.2 and 4.3). In Connacht, for example, only about 12 per cent of those engaged in farm work were labourers. But a contrasting picture emerges if we look at Leinster. Here, almost 43 per cent of those engaged in agriculture were employees. (*see* tables 4.1 - 4.4)

We have, then, a farming sector with some large employing farmers on one end, and very small farmers on the other, who probably slid into the category of agricultural labourer. The National Farm Survey of 1956–57 found that, while 31 per cent of western and north-western farmers were classified as subsistence, less than 3 per cent in the south and 9 per cent in the east and midlands could be so classified (Hannan, 1979, p. 32). ‘The western system of production co-existed with a highly developed capitalist farming system which had been characteristic of most of Leinster and Munster since the mid-eighteenth century’ (p. 35). The discussion of agricultural unrest outlined above fits in with this picture. Yet it was not the picture we see expressed in policy documents, written initially not by politicians, but by civil servants. Here, the perception of policy-makers seems to be that the agricultural sector had such a large subsistence element that insurance was highly problematic. The diversity of the agrarian sector, outlined above, was at best touched on. It might be argued that one legacy of the agrarian struggle was a picture of rural Ireland which only imperfectly matched the reality, but which was so deeply ingrained that it had become embedded at an institutional level.

Of course, a central issue was that, while insurance presented administrative and other difficulties, it was very clear that those who were at the subsistence end were in as much, if not more, need of assistance as industrial employees. This was clarified as consideration of social-service reform became more focused. This is clear in a memo written in advance of the setting up of a Department of Social Welfare.⁶¹ This acknowledged that social-service reform was also applicable to the agrarian sector: ‘The economic condition of many small-holders and self-employed artisans is no better than that of wage-earners, and for them and for their families (as in the case of wage-earners) the occurrence of illness, disability, premature death and old age may have serious consequences. They need protection against these risks just as much as the wage-earner.’ However, the memo noted that development of insurance of independent workers has been slow generally, and has usually occurred in association with an intensive development of local friendly societies heavily subsidised by the state. Again, the main difficulty that the memo foresaw was the collection of contributions. This was ‘a difficulty which varies inversely with the margin between income and subsistence. In the case of the small-holder producing mainly for his household’s consumption, where the cash income is small and precarious, this difficulty is regarded as insuperable.’

⁶¹ D/Taouseach S13384A

Table 4.2: Agricultural Occupations, 1946 Census

Agricultural occupations	Males	Females
Farmers	207,895	42,003
Farmers' sons and daughters assisting on home farm	131,083	28,941
Farmers' other relatives assisting on home farm	34,296	9,140
Farm managers and foremen	2,317	39
Agricultural labourers: not living in	86,749	635
Agricultural labourers: living in	26,250	178
Gardeners and nurserymen	6,915	130
Gardeners' labourers	664	30
Foresters and woodmen	2,559	7
Other agricultural occupations	13,399	423
Total paid agricultural employees	138,853	1,442
Total farmers and family workers	373,274	80,084
Total agricultural occupations	512,127	81,526
Agricultural employees as % agricultural occupations	27%	2%

(Central Statistics Office, *Statistical Abstract of Ireland*, 1951)

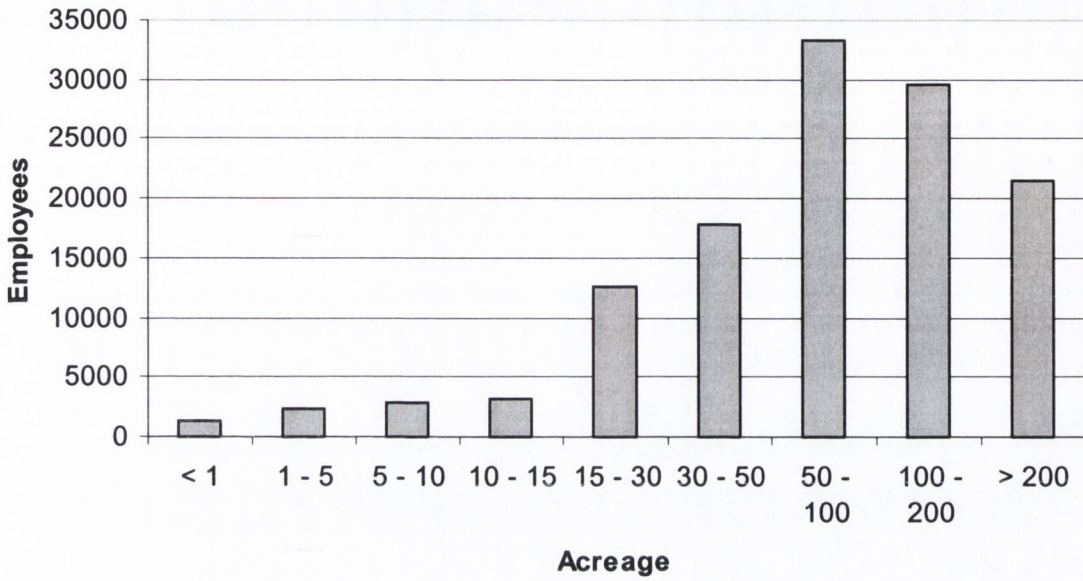
Table 4.3: Number of Males Over 14 Engaged in Farm Work, by Province, 1 June 1944

Province	Members of family	Employees: permanent ⁶²	Employees: temporary	Total employees	Total males in agriculture	Employees as % total males in agriculture
Leinster	83,836	40,854	21,942	62,796	146,632	43%
Munster	122,243	34,547	15,292	49,839	172,073	29%
Connacht	121,047	6,252	10,291	16,543	137,590	12%
Ulster	57,072	5,921	6,859	12,780	69,852	18%
All	384,189	87,574	54,384	141,958	526,147	27%

Source: Adapted from Central Statistics Office, *Agricultural Statistics 1934-56*.

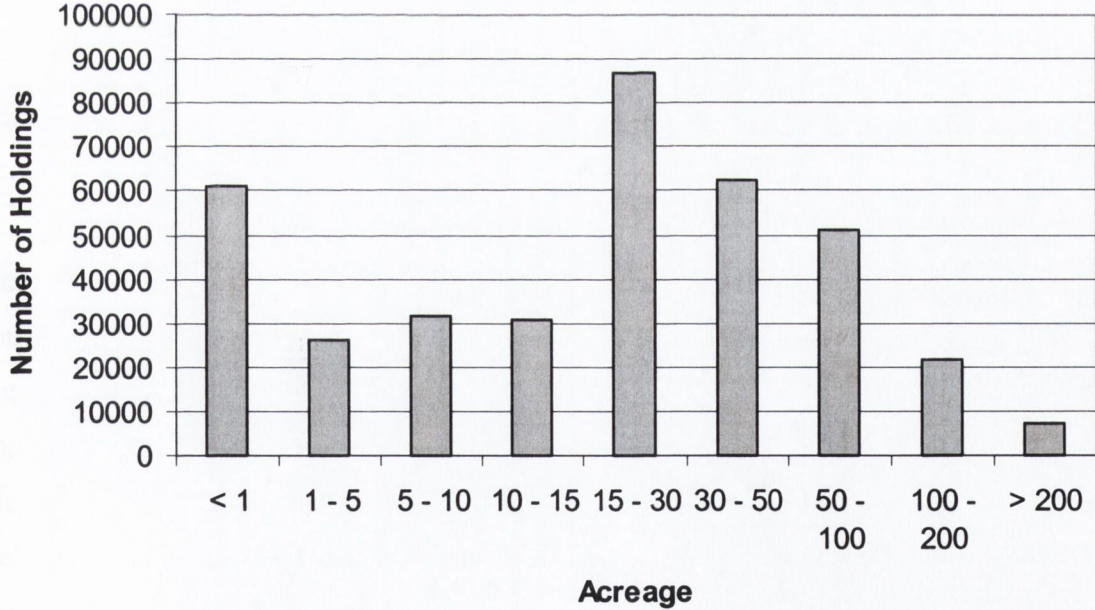
⁶² The numbers of employees is drawn from Table 25 in *Agricultural Statistics 1934-56*. It assumes that those described there as 'other males: permanent or temporary' are employees. As the discussion above suggested, they may be engaged in diverse kinds of farm work, and not all may be agricultural labourers. This point also applies to Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Male employees over 14 by size of holding (1949)



Source: Adapted from Central Statistics Office, *Agricultural Statistics 1934-56*.

Table 4.5 Number of holdings by size (1949)



Source: Adapted from Central Statistics Office, *Agricultural Statistics 1934-56*.

Importantly, though, the memo offered four possible lines of development, which implicitly acknowledged variations within the agricultural sector. It is worth looking at the various suggestions put forward. The first possibility was to recognise that social insurance could only be applied to employed persons, but to include agricultural labourers for unemployment benefit. Those outside the scope of the scheme would be provided for by a centrally administered national assistance scheme 'with rates of benefit approximating more closely to those of the insurance schemes but all subject to a means test.' A second possible line of development would be to include old age and workmen's compensation under social insurance, again only for employees. A third route was to include independent workers in social insurance, with certain limits. For example, there would be an income limit of £500, the self-employed would not be insured for unemployment and there would be restrictions on the extent to which they would be covered for sickness. This path presented difficulties, however. These were the 'well recognised difficulty of exacting contributions from small-holders'. Additionally, the 'convenient machinery' of collecting the contribution through employers at time of paying wages was missing. A major problem was the income limit – in effect, this would mean a type of means test would need to exist, thus losing one of the main benefits of social insurance. I return to this point in the next chapter; as we will see, rather ironically, a means test was included, but it was focused on urban rather than rural workers. The last possible line of development was to adopt the principle of compulsory contributory insurance for all in a unified scheme on the model of the British national insurance scheme.

There is one indication that the Fianna Fáil government had decided that the self-employed would be excluded. This is in the speech made by William Norton when introducing his bill (outlined below). Norton remarked that, in 1947, a conference took place between representatives of the Department of Social Welfare and representatives of the British Ministry of National Insurance. 'At that conference, the secretary to the Department of Social Welfare was instructed by the then Minister for Social Welfare to inform the British representatives that, in his approach to the problem of social security, that he did not, at that time, intend to cover within the scope of a comprehensive Bill any but the employed classes'.⁶³ Before moving on to look at events under this government, it is worth reviewing some of the implications of these early considerations of reforming social security. The obvious point is that the issue of the self-employed or independent workers was clearly seen

⁶³ DD, vol. 124, 2 Mar. 1951, col. 1075.

by policy-makers as a key issue to be considered, but the approach to be taken was not resolved quickly. However, a starting point was a perception that it was subsistence farming which formed the barrier to a comprehensive scheme. Although this group was only one section of the farming community, early responses tended to see them as the key group. Even later, the problems of collecting contributions from this group continued to be seen as a major stumbling block. Gradually, we see some recognition that larger farmers existed, in that means testing was suggested as a possibility. But this was seen to present a problem in that it would negate the very thing that made social insurance desirable.

A second and related point was that social insurance was not seen as a stand-alone package. One possible response to the problem of subsistence agriculture was to exclude the self-employed. But if this were done, it would require *enhancing* social assistance for excluded groups. The perception that social assistance could compensate for exclusion from social insurance is crucial. Finally, there was initially little awareness shown that agricultural employees were a distinctive sub-group within the rural economy. Agriculture was not an industry employing close to 140,000 workers in concerns of varying sizes – it was a society composed of subsistence smallholders who either would not, or could not, be made to pay contributions, and for whom alternative routes to social security almost certainly needed to be devised. It was to fall to William Norton to move beyond these general lines of inquiry to arrive at a concrete scheme where abstract issues were expressed in actuarial terms, and where costs and benefits to various groups emerged relatively clearly.

The inter-party government: farmers against labourers

In this period, Fianna Fáil were still seen as being concerned with representing the interests of small farmers and labourers. What of the inter-party government? Considering how the interests of the agricultural sector were represented in this government is not easy. An obvious starting point is Clann na Talmhan, generally said to be the representatives of smallholders. However, they were not well served by their member in government; the party leader, Joe Blowick, who became minister for lands, is described by McCullagh (1998) as ‘a somewhat inarticulate man’ (p. 45). He comments that his colleagues had little respect for him, and that a regular attendee at cabinet meetings cannot remember a single contribution from him. He appeared to lack charisma (Lee 1989). In that he was representative of the disaffection of small farmers and agricultural labourers, his presence alone was perhaps important. A more

vocal representative was the minister for agriculture, James Dillon. Dillon, having resigned from Fine Gael over the issue of neutrality, was an independent TD at the time (Daly, 2002). He was the son of John Dillon, a founder of the Land League and an Irish Parliamentary Party MP (Manning, 1999; Daly, 2002). His interest in the agricultural sector was profound.

Noel Browne, silent on Blowick, had more to say about Dillon. He was ‘a shallow person with an unoriginal and uncreative mind’ who ‘refashioned other people’s ideas for use in support of his consistently mean, conservative, small time prejudices’ (Browne, 1986, p. 205). Certainly he had a strong interest in the agricultural sector. Daly (2002) comments that he saw himself as an heir to Patrick Hogan.⁶⁴ He told Dáil Éireann that he had ‘sought to crystallise the agricultural policy of this Government in the aphorism: “One more cow, one more sow, one more acre under the plough”’ (Daly, 2002, p. 277). In particular, he was the driving force behind the Land Rehabilitation Project (Lee, 1989). This, Lee comments, had more political than economic merit, being almost certainly an attempt to attract the constituency which Clann na Talmhan had indicated was ripe (p. 303). Dillon himself, as we will see below, rated it above social insurance in terms of its merits to the agricultural community. In addition, Fine Gael might perhaps be said to represent the interests of some large farmers, and Labour the interests of agricultural labourers. Bradley notes that Norton had ‘championed the farm workers’ cause regularly in the past, sponsoring bills for holiday legislation, so that he could be expected to use influence for them now’ (Bradley, 1988, p. 91). As a result, the coalition represented the diversity of Irish agrarian life and was perhaps a government divided by its conflicting views of what the interests of the agricultural sector might be. As noted above, one of the key features of this period is that it has been seen as marking the beginning of politics dominated by cross-class government, either of the Fianna Fáil or coalition variety. From an Irish perspective, cross-class in this sense might be said to refer to agrarian classes as well as to urban industrial classes. We can see this more clearly if we look at attempts to devise a social-insurance scheme which would meet the diverse interests represented by the inter-party government.

William Norton, as minister for social welfare, was in an interesting position in this respect. Clearly, we might expect him to be the representative of urban trade-union interests, and there

⁶⁴ Hogan was minister for agriculture from 1922–32. He took the view that ‘national development in Ireland, for our generation at least, is synonymous with agricultural development’ (quoted in Daly, 2002, p. 124). Lee (1989) comments that Hogan equated the welfare of the agricultural community with the welfare of the farmer and, moreover, with that of large farmers (pp. 112–08). Daly (2002) broadly concurs with this assessment.

are indications that this constituency had a perception that farmers were paying less than their due and that reform of social security should tackle this. An Irish Trade Union Congress sub-committee on social-security reform remarked: 'The farmers' income presents a special difficulty, as very few farmers keep accounts, but at least we know that farmers are undertaxed.'⁶⁵ However, Norton might also be expected to champion the cause of agricultural workers. If this were to threaten only the interests of large farmers, then Norton's task might have been much easier – but the overlap between small farmers and labourers meant that there were profound problems to be faced on this score. This, perhaps, was the kernel of the problem – the agricultural sector was, in reality, diverse rather than homogeneous. Norton's scheme, as we will see, was, in many ways, an admirable attempt to walk this tightrope.

On taking office, Norton was faced with answering the questions which had so far been posed, but not resolved. A memo posed the question 'of whether the immediate scope should be confined to those working for an employer only, leaving the self-employed and others to be absorbed, if feasible, at a later date?'⁶⁶ The draft scheme put forward by Norton did not, however, include farmers. A memo on this notes: 'The question of extending the scope of insurance outside the employed classes is found to be, by and large, a question of whether the farming class should be incorporated, and it has been reluctantly decided that, for the time being at least, it is not practicable, all things considered, to take this course'. The draft states that the problem is, however, being kept in view and, if there is a general desire for it, every effort will be made to overcome the administrative and other difficulties involved when the new scheme is underway. Very early on in his term of office, then, Norton took the decision to limit insurance to the employed class and, at this moment, a 'comprehensive' social insurance scheme no longer existed, with all the implications this involves for risk spreading and distribution.

On one level, his decision is entirely understandable: the ILO and a number of internal memos had indicated 'insuperable' difficulties in collecting contributions from a large subsistence class. Faced with a government representing diverse views, a pragmatic individual like Norton might be expected to cut his losses on this point, at least in the short term, and concentrate on winning what he could for his core constituency of employees. The decision to exclude

⁶⁵ 1163 ITUC (part 1), 6001.

⁶⁶ Memo signed W.A.H. (Honohan), dated 12 June 1948, Norton papers, box 7:108.

farmers did not, in any sense, end the policy debate. Rather, it gave it a new focus. Two issues were responsible for it continuing to be a key issue. The first was that exclusion was read as privileging urban over rural interests. The second was that excluding farmers did not mean excluding all agrarian groups. As outlined above, there remained a relatively large group of agricultural workers, constituting around a quarter of the agricultural workforce. They were particularly important in Norton's own constituency. Where were they to stand in the new scheme? These inter-related issues were to be to the fore of public, if not private, debate.⁶⁷

Norton was keenly alert to the distributive consequences of social insurance along a number of dimensions. His White Paper defends the decision to exclude the self-employed:

It may be that, all things considered, the best solution of this problem is not to attempt to include such persons in the compulsory insurance scheme, but to retain for them the assistance schemes relieved, as far as possible, of any objectionable features. If that be so, it should be recognised that all the advantages do not lie with those who are in the insurance scheme. The insured person may, with some justification, feel that a more equitable spreading of risks would be secured if all classes were included and that he is obliged through taxation to contribute on equal terms towards assistance schemes from which he may expect little in return, whereas the non-insured person makes no special sacrifice for the assistance schemes corresponding to the insured persons contributions.

He also attempted to balance his awareness of the way insurance works with an attempt to meet the needs of the agrarian sector. This was in relation to agricultural labourers. As noted above, prior to this, neither agricultural nor private domestic workers were insured for unemployment benefit. Were they to count as employees under the terms of the scheme? This presented problems on two fronts. On the one hand, the tripartite nature of financing meant that farmers would be called upon to make contributions. Secondly, there were concerns that the contributions required from agricultural labourers would have implications for agricultural wages in an era when this was a matter of occasionally violent unrest. As the White Paper noted: 'The rate of wages payable generally in these classes have nearly always been lower than in most other occupations, and it is undeniable that a heavy rate of contribution would represent a real hardship and frequently a real difficulty, as in many cases remuneration take the form largely of board and residence.' Norton attempted to retain distributive equity and meet the demands of both labourers and farmers by creating a 'low-wage' group with lower

⁶⁷ While the Dáil debate focused on broad-brush conflicts between 'privileged trade unionists' and impoverished small farmers, the internal debate within the inter-party government focused more on the issue of privilege within the employed class.

contributions and, crucially, lower benefits. He hoped that having a low-waged group (rather than an agricultural labourers' group) avoided the creation of different classes based on differences in types of employment or, indeed, residence. There was some precedent for this. The Widows' and Orphans' Pension Act of 1935 had allowed for lower rates of contribution and benefit; contributions for this group were half the rate while benefits were four-fifths the normal rate. The scheme was sent to all departments on 8 April 1949 and a range of responses was received. Two main sources took up cudgels on behalf of farmers: Agriculture and Finance. It is probably most useful to begin with Agriculture, the preserve of James Dillon.

The situation, as Agriculture outlined it, was clear.⁶⁸ According to the 1936 census, there were 1,300,000 persons 'at work'. Of these, approximately 700,000 were employees – 'largely trade unionists in protected occupations'. Over 500,000 were farmers and members of their families assisting them on the land. The majority of these, claimed Agriculture, were working on small farms of up to 30 or 40 acres and the livelihood of practically all of them depended on selling their produce in a competitive export market:

The White Paper proposals are, in essence, that about £15 million a year should be paid in various benefits to the 700,000 employees (largely trade unionists) ... of which sum considerably over one-half would be provided by the 600,000 non trade unionists, who are merely small farmers and their families, whose average income per head is less than that of the beneficiaries under the Social Security scheme and who will themselves receive no benefit.

Agriculture argued that:

an attempt to put the White Paper proposals into operation would cause a social upheaval. Farmers are slow to take any extreme measures but the manifest injustice of the proposals would give rise to insuperable opposition among the farmers, and it would be expecting too much of human nature to think that they would not attempt to take any retaliatory measures. Farmers also are capable of using the Strike weapon by resort to subsistence farming, as they clearly began to do towards the end of the Economic War.

The proposals, continued the memo, were clearly not worked out in relation to Ireland, but were inspired by what is being done in other countries:

The Beveridge Plan was framed to suit conditions in a highly industrial community and pronouncements by Lord Beveridge and his associates indicate that they would be

⁶⁸ D/Taoiseach, S13384B.

the last to describe the Plan as one for export. Indeed if Beveridge were asked to draw up a Social Security Scheme for Ireland, there cannot be the slightest doubt that he would produce something quite different from the White Paper proposals and from what is being attempted in Great Britain.

The minister's criticisms of the draft White Paper did not imply that he was not in favour of social-service reform. It meant that reforms should be strictly related to Irish conditions. An example of 'standing solidly on the economic and social realities of our economy' was given: small farmers should be able to qualify for the old-age pension without having to go through the formality of conveying the farm to the sons 'in pursuit of a family arrangement'. Any valid conveyance should suffice. This, plus a pension at sixty-five, would deal with the problem of farmers who 'hang-on' until extreme old age to the demoralisation of the eldest son who is middle-aged or elderly before he gets the farm and can marry.

The memo also briefly mentioned the question of agricultural labourers: 'Such questions as the effect of large deductions for contribution from the wages of agricultural workers on their ability to meet their day to day needs and the effect of an expensive contributory social insurance scheme on employment in agriculture should also be carefully considered.' The memo concluded by remarking:

We should not delude ourselves with the idea that social security plans are more than a palliative. In this country the fundamental method of improving the economic condition of all classes is to increase agricultural productivity and to secure remunerative export markets. In a sense the Land Rehabilitation Project is the best social service that has ever been introduced into this country, because it is designed to increase everybody's real income, without attempting to regulate the method or purposes for which the earner shall direct its outlay.⁶⁹

In defence of Agriculture's position, the department's submission looked at the funding of the scheme, arguing essentially that much of the state subvention would, in fact, be collected from the farming community. 'What would the Government say if the Department of Agriculture proposed to relieve agricultural land from the onerous burden of rates by means of a levy on trade unionists without any corresponding benefit to the latter, on the ground that as they have no land to relieve, it is not practicable to bring them within the scope of the proposals?'

⁶⁹ Dillon's commitment to the land rehabilitation project is clear. He appears to have fought a minor turf war to ensure that it would be run by the Department of Agriculture rather than a proposed land-development authority. He launched the scheme in the same hotel used to launch the Land League in 1879, and unveiled a commemorative plaque linking the two events. By 1969, 1.75 million acres had been reclaimed at a cost of £30 million. Dillon had estimated in 1949 that 4 million acres could be reclaimed in ten–twelve years (Daly, 2002, pp. 282–86).

Two months later, a second memo was presented – throughout his term Norton was deluged with memos on the scheme, as Noel Browne has commented on.⁷⁰ It begins by again drawing attention to the large number of farmers and their families. Looking at the benefits offered by the scheme, it remarks, ‘In our special circumstances where so large a section of the population are not wage-earning employees, it appears to me that the benefits of Old Age Pensions, Widows Pensions, Orphans Benefit, are excellent and susceptible of material development.’ Again, the memo makes the point about qualifying for the old-age pension without an inquisition into the reasons for passing on the land. It also makes an interesting point regarding the extent to which the scheme can be thought of as an insurance scheme: ‘The introduction of the insurance element into the whole proposal appears to me to be illusory, because on examination it is really an abuse of the word “insurance” to describe a scheme under which the beneficiary contributes one-fifth of the total cost of the benefits. If it desirable to provide for substantial transfers of income, then I think we should do it, but not on a basis of concealing our true purpose.’ The memo concludes that an excellent White Paper can be prepared setting out the ultimate levels at which services will be established, accompanied by an estimate of the period of time over which their realisation will have to be extended. This, it suggests, would provide a framework for successive governments to fill bit by bit.

On this road, real and valuable progress can be made; on the road of segregating our population into warring factions of 500,000 working farmers on the one hand, and 700,000 employed persons on the other, nothing but disaster lies ahead, and in the recurring conflicts which must eventuate, not only shall we fail to make progress, but the national income out of which all our plans must be financed, will proceed to melt away, as the farmers revert slowly to subsistence farming rather than producing the maximum surplus of which they are capable, because they feel that an undue share of the surplus will be taken from them in the form of imposts designed to provide benefits in which they can never hope to share.

As discussed in more detail in the next chapter, the response of the Department of Finance to the draft White Paper was also overwhelmingly negative. Among a wide range of objections were those that rested on the position of the rural community. Finance argued that the proposed scheme failed to take into account differences between conditions in Britain and Ireland:

⁷⁰ D/Taoiseach, S13384B.

agriculture is relatively ten times as important in the Irish economy as it is in Britain; there, only 5% of the working population is engaged in agriculture as against 50% here and agriculture yields less than 3% on the national income as compared with our figure of over 30%. Our dependence on agricultural exports for the maintenance of our standard of living makes it essential not merely to avoid raising production costs but to secure a lowering of them to the utmost extent.⁷¹

Particular problems were foreseen with the inclusion of agricultural labourers, given the seasonal nature of their employment. Neither farmers nor their workers would appreciate the necessity for paying contributions, which 'would be a serious imposition on the agricultural labourer ... and would doubtless result in pressure for a further increase in agricultural wages which in turn would bear heavily on the small farmer and tend to upset the rural economy.'

Norton commented on the problems of responding to such a range of objections, but did submit rebuttals of the points in the memo. On agricultural labourers, he commented that:

This matter has received very careful consideration. The Minister considers that no class will better appreciate the new scheme than agricultural labourers. Insofar as the seasonal feature of their work is a necessity, it is essential to provide unemployment insurance and so help to stem rural depopulation. In the view of the Minister for Social Welfare, agricultural workers ought not to be treated in this matter as inferior to industrial and other workers.

He commented in some detail on Agriculture's memo.⁷² He begins by summarising Agriculture's argument that it was inequitable that, as taxpayers, farmers contribute to a scheme from which they themselves would not benefit. Norton replied: 'The Minister for Social Welfare desires to point out that the only way any class can secure the benefits of the scheme is by including it within the scope of the scheme. He gathers from the absence of any comment or suggestion on this point that the Department of Agriculture do not wish to recommend the inclusion of farmers in the compulsory scheme.' Given that farmers are not included, the key question is, then, to what extent the farmer is to be reasonably treated in regard to what he pays in general taxation and what he receives from the general revenue of the state. On this, Norton argues that he cannot agree with the Department of Agriculture's view that the main burden of the redistribution of national income, which the scheme will involve, will be shouldered by the agricultural community. He makes two further points. The first is that in terms of the burden of contributions, only a small number of farmers are

⁷¹ D/Taoiseach, S13384B.

⁷² D/Taoiseach, S13384B.

employers and, of these, it must be presumed that they are in a position to pay contributions. Secondly, it needs to be remembered that, whatever their respective incomes or standards of living may be in normal times, the employee has, in adversity, nothing to correspond with the farmer's land and its potential for providing the means of subsistence. 'It is with conditions of adversity for the employee that the scheme is mainly concerned and not with relative standards of living.'

Despite these and other objections, the bill was given the go-ahead by cabinet in December 1950. This approval was subject to two amendments, both of which related to farmers. The first was to allow those who were members of co-operative societies to insure themselves through their societies. This allowed for retention of tripartite funding, with co-operatives, farmers and the state all contributing. Secondly, another concession was that a farmer whose valuation was £30 or less could draw an old-age pension on reaching seventy without deduction if he transferred his holding to a son or daughter. In 1937, approximately 278,006 holdings, or 73 per cent of the total, were below £30 in valuation (Central Statistics Office, 1960).

In this shape, the bill finally reached the Dáil, where the exclusion of farmers was central to the debate. The *Irish Times*, in a largely favourable review of the scheme, made particular mention of these amendments.⁷³ The amendments went some way towards correcting the weakness of the White Paper in neglecting farmers, but did not go far enough. For one thing, it was 'doubtful whether half the farmers in the country belong to co-operative societies, and those who do so belong are apt to be the wealthier of their kind.' The old-age-pension provision was useful in discouraging the traditional practice of 'hanging on to the holding'. But it seemed unlikely that the concessions would obviate the farmers' widespread distrust of social insurance. 'Those of them who employ farm labourers complain loudly enough – though, seemingly, with little reason – about the present wage-scales, and do not relish the thought of an insurance scheme that will take 3s. 6d. *per week per man* out of their pockets.' The article went on to comment that poorer farmers may resent exclusion, and farmers' sons in particular ('possibly the second largest group in the country – outside of housewives – outside its scope') will be even more dissatisfied.

⁷³ *Irish Times*, 11 Dec. 1950.

The *Irish Times* was correct. A large number of co-operative and other farmers' organisations wrote expressing their opposition. All were hostile and made similar points: these were that, on the one hand, farmers would get no benefit from the scheme but, on the other, would have to contribute both in taxes and in contributions. This would also have the effect of driving up agricultural wages. For example, the Knockavaragh Co-operative Creamery Society wrote that the scheme would lead to malingering by agricultural workers. In fact, it would make small farmers sell their holdings, become agricultural labourers and thereby be eligible for benefits under the scheme.⁷⁴ A district conference of farmers from Co. Tipperary in the IAOS (Irish Agricultural Organisation Society) resolved that the scheme would impose grave burdens on employing farmers, but confer no corresponding benefit. Also, it would lead to unwillingness to work at wages which the agricultural industry would bear.⁷⁵

A flavour of the most oppositional responses can be gauged from the criticisms of P.D. Lehane, nominally a supporter of the government in that he was elected as a Clann na Talmhan representative. Lehane, a representative of the Cork Farmers' Association, cited Dignan's argument that the proposals violated distributive justice in imposing burdensome taxation on the whole community to pay benefits to a new, privileged class of wage earners.⁷⁶ He was critical of the perspective that the bill staved off communism.

I believe the way to counter communism is to give property to as many people as possible. Anyone who has something to own will not be so keen on dividing it with someone else. This Bill unfortunately, puts the person who owns anything in a worse position than the person working for someone else. At the same time, it puts an imposition on the self-employer and gives him absolutely no benefit. Take, for instance, the lads round the street selling papers, the unfortunate woman in Moore Street or the Coal Quay in Cork selling her fish, the shopkeeper in a village, the rural blacksmith, the man with the small plot of land. All these people are self-employed and are completely excluded from benefit but they will be called upon to pay considerable sums in general taxation for benefits to bank managers, directors of the Electricity Supply Board and so on, who will be included for benefit under the Bill.

He reiterated the standard argument that 'the only wealth we have must come from the soil'. In response, one deputy remarked that 'Deputy Lehane is a member of an association which is

⁷⁴ Norton papers, box 7: 114.

⁷⁵ Norton papers, box 7: 114.

⁷⁶ DD, vol. 124, 2 Mar. 1951, col. 1131.

more or less confined to the superior type of farmer in Cork – they call them, I think, “gentlemen farmers”⁷⁷.

In the Dáil debate, Norton defended the scheme on many grounds. Among them was the key point that the small farmer was still eligible for benefit under the old-age-pensions legislation. ‘When it is realised that 75% of the £7,000,000 paid each year in old age pensions is drawn in rural areas it will be seen that the old age pensions are of more value to the agricultural community than to townspeople.’⁷⁸ Outside the Dáil, he continued to defend the exclusion of the self-employed, as reported in the *Irish Independent*:

People who complain ... that farmers are not included in the scheme say the whole scheme is bad and yet they want the farmers included in that bad scheme. What is the position with respect to the farmer? So far as the farmer is concerned he has got an agricultural factory in his farm. He owns the land and he can never be idle once he attends to that land because there is always work to be done on the land. Unemployment is not a problem with him. If he has not got sufficient land to keep him fully occupied and he works on another job then he is covered for the purpose of this Bill, but so long as he is a farmer with an agricultural factory at his disposal he can never be unemployed. If he happens to be sick he is not obliged to suffer loss of wages like the factory or road or shop worker, because, unlike them, he is not expected to give personal attention to his farm and that can be done in a variety of ways.⁷⁹

Norton also pointed to some wider financial implications. He pointed to the Land Rehabilitation Scheme as a ‘free grant’ to the farming community, and to the relief of rates on agricultural dwellings. But in the event, despite his long battles to bring the scheme to fruition, the divisions in his government condemned it to death. Ultimately, it fell to Fianna Fáil to arrive at a solution to the conflicting needs of urban and rural Irish society, and it is to this that I now turn.

Fianna Fáil: from subsistence agriculture to subsidising agriculture

On attaining office, Fianna Fáil was in the situation of having to live up to its comments on Norton’s bill. It had certainly opposed Norton’s bill, but was careful, in doing so, to avoid any indications that it was thereby opposed to improved social security. Lemass, in particular, was clear about this. Clarifying that Fianna Fáil was in agreement that a comprehensive scheme

⁷⁷ DD, vol. 125, 4 Apr. 1951, col. 83.

⁷⁸ DD, vol. 124, 2 Mar. 1951, col. 1080.

⁷⁹ *Irish Independent*, 5 Feb. 1951.

was needed, he remarked that ‘This Bill has created a problem for us.’⁸⁰ The dilemma was whether Fianna Fáil should accept what was good in it, or reject it and leave the way clear for a better scheme. ‘On the whole, it seems to us that the defective character of this Bill justifies the Dáil in rejecting it, but on the understanding that its rejection would be accepted by the government as an indication that a better Bill was desired and desired promptly.’⁸¹ However, he went on to comment: ‘As one of those who had, perhaps, more individual responsibility than any other for pushing ahead various schemes of this kind, and had always looked forward to the day on which we could claim to have here as satisfactory a system of social security as any other country enjoyed, I am anxious that we should do nothing to arouse public hostility to the idea.’⁸² His wider public attempts to balance opposition to the scheme with promises of better Fianna Fáil schemes attracted acerbic comment from the *Irish Times* columnist, Aknefton, in his comments on a speech made by Lemass at the Synge Street Past Pupils’ forum. Lemass was ‘the man who would allow nobody to be more revolutionary than himself’ and made proposals which were ‘far and away beyond what the most left of the leftists would have dared to suggest as practicable.’⁸³ Somewhat tongue in cheek, the columnist remarked that he must be prepared to answer some pertinent questions:

Statistical evidence proves beyond doubt that the degree of direct taxation contributed by the farming community is relatively negligible. Presumably, Mr. Lemass, in accordance with the tenets of strict social justice, has some plan whereby the farming community will contribute to his plan in exact proportion to the benefits it hopes to receive. It would be interesting to learn the details of Mr Lemass’s proposals in this respect. Is he thinking, for instance, of a capital levy on the farming community?

Fianna Fáil’s main opposition spokesman on social welfare, Jim Ryan, was more specific about what could be expected from Fianna Fáil. Ryan had been minister for agriculture for fifteen years until he became minister for social welfare in 1947, when the new department was created. He did not argue the point about the exclusion of the self-employed to any great degree. He agreed that the ILO’s position – that a scheme should cover all employed persons including the self-employed – ‘cannot be done in this country anyway and I suppose it would apply to any other country too.’⁸⁴ He continued:

⁸⁰ DD, vol. 125, 4 Apr. 1951, col. 61.

⁸¹ DD, vol. 125, 4 Apr. 1951, col. 61–2.

⁸² DD, vol. 125, 4 Apr. 1951, col. 77.

⁸³ *Irish Times*, 7 Oct. 1950.

⁸⁴ DD, vol. 124, 2 Mar. 1951, col. 1099.

The self-employed small farmer was mentioned by the Minister. He may enjoy a fair standard of living. Many deputies who know conditions in rural areas know that if you happen to enter a small farmer's house when he is having a meal that it is a good meal, just as good probably as the meal of what he would consider a highly-paid artisan in the City of Dublin. He is reasonably well dressed and pays his way so his standard of living is not so bad. But one of the great difficulties the small farmer has is the want of ready cash.⁸⁵

Although shopkeepers might be a bit easier there were still problems with collections. 'Every Party then is agreed I think that we shall not look for contributions from the self-employed.'⁸⁶ But he did have some alternative suggestions. These were that 'wherever a scheme is applicable to practically the whole population, the only fair way to finance it is through taxation and that, wherever it is applicable to a certain class, we should try to get that scheme financed through a particular scheme applicable only to that class.'⁸⁷ He went on to say that old-age pensions and widows' and orphans' pensions were needed by all classes, except, of course, the very wealthy.

Consequently, on becoming the new minister for social welfare in 1951, Ryan attempted to use this as the basis for a new approach to social security. In doing so, Ryan felt he had signalled these changes in his response to Norton. A memo on 28 December outlined the new scheme.⁸⁸ The essential point was that the basic division between contributory and non-contributory schemes ought to be retained, but a different basis for considering which was appropriate should be arrived at. As outlined above, the distinction surrounding inclusion or exclusion had centred on the ability to pay or collect contributions, reflecting policy-makers' perceptions that self-employed groups were problematic in both of these respects. Ryan proposed something very different: differing *needs* for a service would be the basis of whether a scheme should be contributory or non-contributory. The basic principle he suggested was that, where a service was mainly needed by employed persons, it should continue to be on a contributory basis, but that, where it was needed equally badly by employed and self-employed persons, it should be on a non-contributory basis financed entirely by taxation. He cites as examples of the latter, widows' and orphans' pensions and old-age pensions, and proposes abolishing the contributory widows' and orphans' pension as a step in this direction. It is clear, I think, that the main impetus behind this proposed change was that it seemed to

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ DD, vol. 124, 2 Mar. 1951, col. 1100.

⁸⁷ DD, vol. 124, 2 Mar. 1951, col. 1107.

⁸⁸ D/Taoiseach, S13384D.

offer the prospect of solving the conundrum of providing enhanced social security for workers, without being seen to do so by excluding farmers. Workers could pay contributions for schemes they alone needed, farmers could be covered by non-contributory tax-financed schemes.

However, it would still not solve the problem of agricultural labourers. Ryan addresses this problem with elegant simplicity. He drops Norton's 'low-waged' groups. Male agricultural and domestic workers would still pay lower contributions, but would receive the same benefits as other contributors (female workers would not be insured). Finally, there would be a means test for the non-contributory schemes, but two main classes would be exempt from this: insured workers and persons with agricultural holdings of valuation under £25.

In this memo, Ryan noted that 'the full implications of these non-contributory proposals have not yet been worked out.' The 'working out' of the proposals was to be more difficult than he had envisioned. Departmental officials and fellow government members had many objections. One key objection was to his proposals for agricultural and domestic workers, which involved a subsidisation of agriculture. Ryan himself had been clear about this in his memo:

The justification for this distinction, involving a larger State subsidy for the special classes, rests on two arguments: first, that these classes are not at present insurable for unemployment benefit and it would involve too great an increase to raise their contributions to the general level, and, secondly, that the employers in those classes are not in the advantageous position of ordinary or commercial employers for profit who can – even by way of individual action – normally pass on additional charges of this sort to the consumer in the price of goods sold or services rendered.

Departmental officials saw problems with these proposals, notably the proposal to abolish contributory widows' and orphans' pensions.⁸⁹ Here, a key question was what would be done with civil servants, and those employed by local and other public authorities, who were insured for these pensions only; this is discussed in more detail in the next chapter. The old-age-pension proposal was problematic, too. The proposal about farmers was also the target of criticism: 'With regard to the proposal that farmers should be relieved of all or some of their liability to pay contributions, I do not think the farmers are quite so bad as they are made out to be, and that they would meet their obligations like the rest of the community if so much attention were not paid to their needs and necessities.' This comment previews a shift in the

⁸⁹ D/ Social Welfare, 1A/1G series 170/53.

response of other departments. Under Norton, most of the criticism focused on the way in which the scheme omitted farmers. Now, it is the subsidisation of farming which is the problem, and a range of responses argue that farmers can, in fact, well afford to pay insurance contributions.

Finance, now under Seán MacEntee, was not impressed. The general principle about the distinction between contributory and non-contributory schemes was invalid. 'This novel principle appears to be based on the assumptions that all the classes concerned pay appropriate amounts in taxes and that general taxation is a proper and fairer method of finance than special contributions. These assumptions are, however, invalid.'⁹⁰ One reason was that foodstuffs were not taxed but were heavily subsidised, and indirect taxes could often be avoided and were often arbitrary and uneven; 'if, therefore, the widespread benefits envisaged by the Minister for Social Welfare are to be provided out of taxation, it would be necessary to cut the subsidies on, say, tea and sugar, reduce the agricultural grant, and perhaps even impose a tax on the ownership and occupation of land or property.' On top of this rather radical suggestion, Finance continued, rather surprisingly, by approvingly quoting the ILO on the superiority of insurance schemes as a means of improving social welfare.

The proposed treatment of agricultural labourers and domestic servants by Social Welfare met with equal criticism. The suggestion that lower contributions should earn equal benefits was 'entirely objectionable'. Finance pointed to the inequity involved. The best course might be continued exclusion. Failing that, they should either pay lower contributions and get lower benefits, or pay the same rates of contribution for the same benefits. 'There is no justification for asking taxpayers in general to shoulder extra and unwarranted burdens for the benefit of agricultural and domestic workers and their employers.' Farmers were reasonably prosperous, and those who employ agricultural labourers should be able to pay the contributions payable by ordinary employers. Moreover, farmers were virtually free from income tax and enjoyed substantial remissions of rates. In this analysis, farmers emerge in a new light – no longer the subsistence farmers excluded from benefits but forced to pay destructive contributions that would weigh heavily on the rural economy. Rather, they are suddenly a prosperous group who are already favoured by public policy generally, and who should receive no further

⁹⁰ D/Taoiseach, S13384F.

subsidisation. This shift, however, probably merely indicates that the department was adept at finding grounds to criticise any proposals for spending public funds.

Finance also commented on the old-age-pension proposals. On this, there were a number of objections: £25 was too high a limit, Poor Law valuation was faulty and, in many cases, those on a farm of £25 valuation had other means. Finance contrasted the position with that in the 1951 Act, where farmers had to divest themselves of their property in order to qualify. Industry and Commerce, too, took a sanguine view of farmers' finances, arguing that the arguments in favour of lower contributions for agricultural and domestic workers were unconvincing:⁹¹ 'In present circumstances it could be argued that both farmers and agricultural labourers can afford to pay full contributions'. It was also doubtful whether farms having a valuation under £25 were uneconomic and 'accordingly there is no clear case for exempting the owners of such farms from the Means test'. (As an aside, the memo was also critical of the proposals to give unemployment benefit to domestic servants. 'If such a scheme is in operation it is going to be even more difficult for anyone to get domestic help.')

Under the weight of the combined objections from his own officials and fellow government ministers, Ryan caved in on some key points, notably the idea that tax-financed schemes for common risks should be the way ahead. The outcome was that the new bill was along familiar lines. But among the significant differences between his and Norton's bill was the retention of the suggestion that only male employees in agriculture be insured, and that this group would pay lower contributions while receiving the same benefit as other groups. Finance continued to disapprove and described the proposal as 'entirely objectionable'.⁹² Again, Finance took the view that the agricultural sector generally could afford higher rates. With regard to agricultural workers, it noted: 'The extra cost per week to the individual worker ... could scarcely be regarded as prohibitive since it represents little more than the tax on 20 cigarettes.' Likewise, farmers, too, could afford it. Finance argued that the agricultural price index, which indicated increases in prices for wheat and beet, shows 'that farmers are reasonably prosperous and that those who employ agricultural workers should be able to pay the contributions payable by ordinary employers. Moreover farmers are virtually free from income tax and enjoy substantial remissions of rates.' It concluded: 'There is no justification for asking taxpayers in general to shoulder extra and unwarranted burdens for the benefit of

⁹¹ D/Taoiseach, S13384F.

⁹² D/Taoiseach, S13384F.

agricultural and domestic workers and their employers.’ Finance was also critical of the proposal to allow the maximum pension of 20/- a week to persons with agricultural holdings of valuation not exceeding £25. The memo was critical of Poor Law valuations (echoing trade union sentiments), suggesting that farmers, in many cases, were in possession of other means, and felt that a money limit was much fairer and a more reliable criterion.

Ryan defended his proposal in the Dáil. He was clear about the level of state subsidy involved. It would mean the state contributing four-fifths as against the farmer’s one-sixth and the male agricultural worker’s one-sixth. ‘This course, I admit, gives a marked bias in favour of agriculture, but the party on these benches will face the criticism on that issue. Agricultural workers, and farmers, are less well organised than their industrial and urban counterparts, and they cannot so readily shed increased charges or win compensation in the way of higher wages.’⁹³ He also referred to the fact that widows’ and orphans’ pensions were on a contributory basis.

Some Deputies will remember that on the Second Reading debate on Mr Norton’s Bill, I advocated that Widows’ Pensions should be financed entirely by the exchequer and not by contributions. I stated my reasons, which for the moment are immaterial, but I also mentioned that no Minister for Finance will readily agree to impose taxation in lieu of an existing source of revenue, even in deference to a colleague’s wishes. The present income from contribution for Widows’ and Orphans’ Pensions is about £1,000,000. I was right. The Minister for Finance did object, and I must add that my own officials were very relieved when I capitulated to that Minister, because they were at their wits end to deal with the position that would arise for those who had contributed for some time towards a Widows’ Pension.

The outcome, then, was the exclusion of the self-employed, or farmers. At the same time, smaller farmers would be eligible for tax-funded assistance and agricultural employees would receive a state subsidy indicating a ‘marked bias’ in favour of agriculture. This bias becomes clearer when we move on to look at the debate about higher-paid workers in the next chapter.

Conclusion

The previous chapter drew heavily on institutional perspectives in accounting for the absence of corporatism in Irish social insurance. Among other factors, it pointed to distinctive patterns of industrialisation and state formation, which implied that the doctrine of subsidiarity was less relevant in Ireland than in other European states. This chapter has examined some of

⁹³ DD, vol. 130, 27 Mar. 1952, col. 632.

those distinctive patterns in more detail by focusing specifically on agrarianism. The legacies of the interlinked struggles for land and independence in Ireland were embedded in the social and economic structure, and in the party system. Commenting on the long-term effects of this on the wider social structure, Hannan and Commins (1992, p. 100) remark: ‘State policy “favouritism” towards the small-farm sector derives from the institutional and cultural context of Irish politics, and from the small-farm and generally petty bourgeois base, of the dominant political party.’ The persistence of this class, they argue, constitutes a crucial respect in which the Irish case deviates from the pattern of social development that would be envisioned under the liberal model of industrialisation (p. 104). The centrality of agrarianism in a modern political context demonstrates the distinction which needs to be made between modernisation and industrialisation, touched on in chapter two (Goldthorpe, 1992).

The social-insurance case study examined in detail here makes some of these points clearer. With a few exceptions (discussed above), welfare state theorists – even those stressing politics – have focused on the impact of industrialisation and the concomitant creation of an urban, industrial class as the key to understanding the emergence and development of welfare states. The extent to which this class is organised into or out of power is said to be the crucial factor shaping different welfare regimes. The Irish case suggests that differing patterns of industrialisation and state formation may mean that agrarian social classes can also be crucial in shaping welfare outcomes. What exactly those outcomes are depends on both the structure of the agricultural sector, and how its (possibly diverse) interests are represented politically.

It is clear, I hope, that the interests of the agricultural sector, broadly interpreted, took centre stage in the policy process. Yet farmers themselves were not the key representatives of agricultural interests. There was no overarching farmers’ organisation that acted as the focus for agrarian demands. Nor can we clearly contrast parties that were ‘for’ agriculture with those that were ‘for’ industrial workers, though we can point to some differences of emphasis. How, then, did agrarian interests translate into policy outcomes? To understand this, we need to consider ‘the relationship among social classes, state structures, and public policies’ (Gilbert and Howe, 1991, p. 204). One key point is that institution-building and state-formation in Ireland meant that, in some important respects, policy-making took place in an agrarian paradigm – farmers’ interests did not have to be ‘brought’ centre stage, but appeared there as of right in long-established administrative venues. The centrality of ‘policy paradigms’ has been pointed to by Hall (1993).

In addition, policy-makers were constrained by the logic imposed by earlier policy choices, as the previous chapter, and Ryan's problems outlined above, make clear. Yet we can overstate institutionalist perspectives and underestimate the impact of the manner in which class conflicts were expressed politically in Ireland. Policy outcomes in social insurance represent the attempts of politicians to devise solutions to distributive conflicts in a way that maximised electoral outcomes for them, or met the needs of their respective constituents. Hence, both Fianna Fáil and the inter-party government represented 'cross-class' agrarian constituencies, and sought 'cross-class' outcomes. Both Norton and Ryan's plans tried to placate employing farmers, small farmers and agricultural labourers. They were not identical in the way they mediated social-class interests, but they did share an emphasis on compromise rather than solidarity. The outcomes discussed above represent complex interactions between institutional legacies and class compromises, or between state and society. The next chapter examines these interactions in more detail by focusing on the debate over insuring civil servants, which was another factor shaping distinctive outcomes in Irish social insurance.

Chapter Five: Institutions and the Politics of Redistribution: Solidarity or Discriminatory Taxation?

Introduction

*'The case for general compulsory insurance rests largely on the idea that the more fortunate members of the employed class should stand in with the less fortunate in a common scheme.'*⁹⁴

This argument for comprehensiveness, put forward by Norton in 1950, raises a number of issues around the themes of solidarity and redistribution. Although the redistributive implications of risk-pooling were implicit in discussions of how best to deal with the agrarian sector, they did not feature explicitly in debates. As we have seen, administrative concerns, the financial impact for employing farmers and the diversity of the agrarian sector were the key issues. The decision to exclude the self-employed and confine the scheme to the employed class might have been thought to end debates over inclusion and exclusion. But instead, a wide-ranging debate about *which* workers should be included was initiated. As I discuss below in more detail, the battle was between Norton's arguments for a scheme which pooled risks between the more and less fortunate, and those who argued that compulsory inclusion of the more fortunate was essentially discriminatory taxation. Partisan differences are central to explaining outcomes, but so, too, are institutional structures that mediated and structured these differences. In particular, the interaction of the 'rules of the game' with the cleavage structure of Irish politics created a pattern of party competition with a distinctive attitude to distributional issues: one which combined a non-programmatic approach to social and economic issues with a necessarily cross-class appeal. This chapter endorses Cousin's (1995, p. 40) suggestion that the social-welfare system 'would seem to support a class-coalition approach', and examines in detail the institutional and political context shaping these outcomes. To clarify what is meant by a 'coalitional' approach, we need to begin with a clearer account of the concepts of risk, solidarity and redistribution in social insurance.

As Baldwin (1990) argues, a central concept in grasping the solidaristic implications of debates about social insurance is the concept of risk. Insurance, generally, is a collective pooling of risk through contributions to a fund from which individuals are reimbursed for

⁹⁴ D/Taoiseach, S13384F.

harm suffered (Schmid et al., 1992, p. 59). However, social insurance can be differentiated from private insurance schemes in a number of ways. A fundamental difference is that it generally involves 'a pooling of risk without differentiating contributions according to exposure to risk' (Erskine and Clasen, 1997, p. 241). Alongside this, social-insurance schemes are usually compulsory; compulsion is necessary in order to avoid the problem of adverse selection. As the previous chapter mentioned briefly, adverse selection implies the greater likelihood of 'bad risks' voluntarily opting to enter social-insurance schemes.⁹⁵ In general, then, social insurance involves a *compulsory pooling of risk* in a given society, with benefits payable as of right.

As we have already clarified, policy legacies in Ireland meant that post-war policy-makers began with an inherited approach to insurance-based income-maintenance schemes. In 1949, the *White Paper on Social Security* looked back at the 1911 National Insurance Act as follows: 'This introduced the principle of spreading risks over large classes of the population and of financing the costs of benefits by contributions from general taxation and from the prospective beneficiaries and their employers' (Department of Social Welfare, 1949). As chapter three mentioned, there was hostility initially from trade-union members because of the risk-pooling elements of the Act, and Hecló (1974) argues that the state contribution is, in part, a response to this hostility. Despite this union hostility, though, it is, in fact, the redistributive elements inherent in compulsory risk-pooling which largely account for the claims about solidarity frequently made for social insurance. The Department of Social Welfare in Ireland, for example, had this to say about social insurance in 1996: 'It is an important vehicle of income redistribution and solidarity between generations and between those in work and those who have been, but are not currently, in work' (Department of Social Welfare, 1996, p. 1).

Collective pooling of risks can be seen to combine solidarity (between the young and the old, the working and the currently unemployed) with redistribution. In general, the redistributive

⁹⁵ The concept of adverse selection was clear to policy-makers. Commenting on the second stage of the Norton Bill, Ryan remarked that the problem with voluntary contributors was that 'it is the least desirable from the financial point of view who will come in. In other words, you will have men coming in who are fairly delicate and believe they will have sickness which they would like to have covered. You will have men coming in who are afraid perhaps they may leave a widow behind them in the near future. You cannot run an insurance scheme on bad lives or on lives which are bad on the average. After all, a social insurance scheme can only be run on the assumption that you are getting every category of people in, good and bad, by compulsion.' DD, vol. 124, 2 Mar. 1952, col. 1100.

element arises from the fact that, though all may be united in the same scheme, not all are, in fact, equally at risk of the contingencies for which social insurance offers protection. All may contribute, but some, by virtue of greater risk-proneness, benefit more than others. As Baldwin (1994) argues, much of the mythological aspects of the Beveridgean social-insurance scheme owe their origins to the ‘universal’ approach which Beveridge claimed to take. All, regardless of their actual risk-proneness, were to belong. ‘Beveridge in this way heralded the fulfilment of the solidaristic potential of social insurance. The quarantining of certain groups within their own risk pools, the excusing of the wealthy and fortunate from sharing burdens with the harder pressed: these characteristics of the old style of social insurance were now to be superseded’ (ibid., p. 44). That this interpretation of the Beveridgean model is flawed, as Baldwin notes, is perhaps less important than the fact that there was a perception that comprehensiveness and solidarity were linked. This perception has been weakened by contemporary realisations that it is, at best, a solidarity of contributors rather than the universal solidarity of citizens heralded by Marshall (Pateman, 1988; Baldwin, 1990 and 1994). Yet it remains true that, within these confines, the degree of risk-pooling profoundly affects the extent to which social-insurance schemes are solidaristic.

The principle of solidarity means in effect that there is not a proportional link between contributions paid by individual insured persons to finance Social Insurance and the vulnerability of the persons covered related to knowledge of differences among them in the likely incidence of unemployment, sickness, occupational accidents and diseases, permanent incapacity for work and longevity. (Department of Social Welfare, 1996, p. 22)

However, in the debate on the extension and development of social insurance in Ireland, ‘knowledge of differences’ in the likely incidences or, in other words, risks between different groups provided for one of the bitterest lines of division among the inter-party government, and ultimately led to the emergence of a scheme where key groups of workers were excluded. As other authors have noted, arguments that there was no ‘justice or necessity for the inclusion of classes that can never benefit’ won the day⁹⁶ (Cousins, 1995, p. 20). As discussed below, the debates about inclusion and exclusion focused on a range of workers, but this chapter looks in particular at the decisions taken in relation to civil servants and, to a lesser extent, other public-sector workers. The outcomes had long-term effects: until 1995, civil servants and certain other public-sector workers, such as the gardaí, army officers, etc., were the major group of employees who were not covered for full benefits under the social-

⁹⁶ Minister for social welfare, Jim Ryan, on the 1952 Social Welfare Act, DD, vol. 130, col. 633.

insurance system. This group, amounting to about 160,800 employees in 1994–95, paid reduced contributions and qualified for a reduced set of benefits (Department of Social Welfare, 1996). Differential treatment for public-sector workers is not uncommon, but has been most associated with corporatist/conservative welfare states.

Hence, Esping-Andersen's (1990) typology rests in places on the treatment of civil servants. In outlining his corporatist cluster, he argues that, in order to identify etatism, 'the simplest approach is to identify the relative privileges accorded to civil servants' (1990, p. 69). Hence, 'etatist paternalism' can be seen in the tradition of 'endowing civil servants with extraordinarily lavish welfare provisions' in countries such as Austria, Germany and France (1990, p. 59). Furthermore, he comments that, given that the results are strong status barriers between public servants and other groups, there are close affinities between etatism and the legacy of corporatism.

Either because of state recognition of particular status privileges, or because organised groups refused to be part of a more status-inclusive legislation, there emerged the tradition of constructing a myriad of status-differentiated social-insurance schemes – each with its peculiar rules, finances and benefit structure: each tailored to exhibit its clientele's relative status position. (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p. 60)

Certainly, there are grounds for arguing that partial inclusion did result in generous provision for civil servants in Ireland. Commenting on the civil servants' super-annuation scheme, Hughes remarks: 'The civil service pension scheme has been the envy of less favoured workers in the private sector because of its high coverage rate and the generosity of the benefits which it provides' (1988, p. 2). Cousins, too, remarks that their partial inclusion was, to some extent, due to 'the *étatist* policy of the Irish state in providing generous welfare benefits to its civil servants' (1995, p. 20). The existence of differentiated and preferential treatment for civil servants may superficially appear 'corporatist'. However, in reality, as Korpi (1992) noted and as chapter three examined in some detail, Ireland generally lacks corporatist structures in social insurance. Civil servants, together with the self-employed, comprise separate classes *within* a social-insurance fund administered by the state, rather than the administratively separate funds characteristic of corporatist insurance systems. Hence, the treatment of civil servants in Ireland cannot realistically be said to comprise part of a 'myriad of status-differentiated social insurance schemes'. Esping-Andersen's (1990) etatist conservatism is strongly associated with absolutism and Catholicism and, for reasons I have already outlined, these influences were minimal in Ireland. What, then, does account for an

exclusion which took Ireland further away from the Beveridgean model, but did not clearly place it within a conservative family of nations?

This chapter looks in detail at the policy conflicts that surrounded the decision not to fully adhere to the Beveridgean model in Ireland. By now, the three main phases of the policy-making process should be clear: an initial agenda-setting period in the immediate post-war era under Fianna Fáil, a more-focused approach on details under the inter-party government, and a period where a final synthesis was arrived at by Fianna Fáil. This chapter differs slightly from the previous two, in that it begins at a later point in time with the work of the inter-party government. Focused debates about particular categories of workers only occurred at this point. As we will see, the key point is that clear and strong preferences for an explicitly solidaristic social-insurance scheme were put forward by William Norton, the Labour leader, *tánaiste* and minister for social welfare. Equally clear preferences for excluding 'the more fortunate' were put forward by Fine Gael in particular. The outcome of negotiations were that this government laid down a formula, carried over into later legislation, which allowed for modifications to be made in relation to certain groups.

In tandem with earlier choices, and with choices across a range of other issues by the Fianna Fáil government which followed, it can be argued that much of the 'hybrid' aspects of Irish social insurance were shaped by the distinctive nature of the Irish party system. To an extent, the (partial) exclusion of civil servants reflects the way in which class interests are expressed and this, in turn, reflects the emergence of particular patterns of party competition over time. This party system can only be understood in an institutional context, which both helped to shape it and to structure the choices of partisan governments. Before turning to look at the policy debates about 'less fortunate and more fortunate workers', I draw together general arguments about the interaction of politics and institutions in explaining welfare outcomes. I begin by considering the question of *combining* political and institutional perspectives, and move on to look in some detail at political parties both as institutions and as political actors. I conclude this section by considering the Irish party system from this 'political-institutional' perspective.

The state in society: the interaction of politics and institutions

In her seminal introduction to *Bringing the State Back In*, Skocpol contrasted the emergence of state-centred research with ‘society-centred ways of explaining politics and governmental activities’ (1985, p. 4). Although Skocpol was not suggesting that the two were in competition, there is a sense in which statist or institutionalist perspectives have been seen as a counterweight to political or society-centred accounts. As a result, as both chapters one and two suggested, one of the central criticisms made of the institutionalist perspective is that it pays insufficient attention to the structure of the society in which states are located. Yet it can be argued that political and institutionalist perspectives can provide complementary rather than competing accounts. As we have seen, Gilbert and Howe (1991) suggest that, rather than focusing on whether state structures or class forces have greater effects, it is how the two interact which is central. Huber and Stephens (2001), too, feel free to place partisan politics in the context of state structures in explaining welfare outcomes. And Amenta (1998) also makes a case for considering politics and institutions in tandem. Amenta’s chief focus is on re-evaluating traditional suggestions that the US ‘is exceptionally sluggish and spotty, stingy and divided’ (p. 3). Amenta argues that this perspective is flawed. A central argument is that to understand the American welfare state, we need to look away from a social-insurance-based interpretation. US reformers sought ‘an entirely different form of modern social provision – a work and relief state’ (p. 8). This work-and-relief policy needs to be placed in the context of public-spending policies that were erratic and not always laggardly – in fact, Amenta argues that the US became a world leader in public social spending during the Depression. In explaining outcomes in the US, Amenta suggests a middle-range ‘institutional politics theory’. In effect, he argues that ‘some theses of both the institutional and the political theories are valuable and indeed complementary’ (p. 19).

The precise features of Amenta’s theory tend to reflect the specifics of US politics, but his approach is of interest for two main reasons. The first is simply for his suggestion that an ‘institutional politics’ approach is possible. The second is that he points to the adaptive possibilities of core theories. Considering his points about political parties clarifies this. Amenta deals concisely with comparative theory, pointing out the dominance of the social-democratic thesis and noting that the key actors (centralised unions and a social-democratic party) are absent in the US. However, this absence does not lead him to reject a political approach. He suggests that ‘other political actors matter in struggles over social policy –

including other political parties and non-class-based proponents and opponents of social policy' (p. 19). More specifically, he argues that a 'reform-oriented regime' is most likely to promote social policy. The details of his theory are US-centred: his reform-oriented regime is predicated on a presidential system, his focus on the degree of democratisation of the polity reflects the relatively late democratisation in the southern US, and his account of patronage-oriented political parties builds on the nature of American political parties. Yet the basis of his theory is drawn from wider welfare state theory.

Amenta usefully demonstrates how insights from theories predicated on the experiences of European politics can be adapted to explain outcomes in the very different US. The implication for this thesis is that, while the political theories outlined in chapters one and two do not fully capture the nature of Irish political life, it is nevertheless possible to extract core insights and adapt them to the significantly different Irish experiences. The core insight of political theories is that partisan politics shape outcomes – this thesis uses this perspective to argue that Irish welfare outcomes have been shaped by the nature of the Irish party system. However, *both* the nature of the Irish party system *and* the extent to which we can say that politics shape policies are dependent on institutional structures. To fully understand this point, it is necessary to view political parties as exemplifying the interaction between political and institutional perspectives. Hence, Maioni argues that political parties 'serve an intermediary function between state and society in democratic political systems' (Maioni, 1997, p. 412). In doing so, they partake partially of the attributes of political actors and partially of the attributes of institutions. We can see this by considering how each of the two perspectives conceives of political parties.

It is clear that parties are central to perspectives that argue that 'politics matters'. As Myles and Quadagno suggest in their overview, society-centred approaches 'emphasize the role of elections and parties aggregating interests from below' (2002, p. 38). Perspectives vary, depending on whether class, religion or, to a lesser extent, agrarianism is the source of the pressure from below. But there is general agreement that the role of parties lies at the heart of the perspective. Political parties are, in a very real sense, the standard bearers of the 'politics matters' perspective: to the extent that 'politics create policies', it is via the ability of parties to take control of the policy-making process and implement policy from above. Hence, Huber and Stephens' (2001) conclusion that the partisan composition of government is a central, if not *the* central, explanatory variable explaining cross-national variation.

But political parties can also be thought of from an institutional perspective. In fact, switching towards an institutional perspective directs our attention towards two distinct approaches. First of all, there is an important sense in which parties, and party systems in particular, are in themselves institutional structures. Thelen and Steinmo, for example, regard party systems as 'intermediate level institutions' (Thelen and Steinmo, 1992, p. 11). Mair (1999), arguing that 'political institutions consist of recognised structures and accepted norms of behaviour', also suggests that party systems clearly constitute institutions. Drawing on Sartori (1976), he remarks that the idea of a party system 'implies a patterned set of interactions which becomes stabilised over time' (p. 145). Rothstein (1996) includes party systems in his list of institutional variations, reproduced in chapter two. One very important aspect of the way in which parties shape outcomes is the particular set of 'patterns and interactions' shaping the actions of political actors. There is an important sense, then, in which parties can be both actors and institutions – we can see this clearly if we visualise individual parties acting within the context of particular party systems. The way in which class interests are expressed politically might, then, be shaped by the nature of the party system.

Finally, there is a third point to be made about the way in which political parties might personify the interaction between state and society, or between political and institutional perspectives. This is that, whether we conceive of parties as actors or as institutions, they need to be located in a broader framework which clarifies how 'different institutional configurations' shape partisan politics (Maioni, 1997). Political parties are located in political systems which are governed by constitutional 'rules of the game'; the most obvious examples would be the impact of different electoral systems, or of parliamentary, presidential, federal or unitary states. In effect, thinking about political parties alerts us to the potentially vast range of institutional variation signposted in table 2.1 in chapter two.

This suggests such complexity that it can be difficult to know where to start in considering the interaction of politics and institutions. It is possible to gain a foothold by reviewing briefly how other theorists have applied the ideas above. In particular, the insights into outcomes in the US are especially useful since, for reasons outlined in earlier chapters, Ireland shares with the US the necessity to adapt theoretical perspectives. Hence, Mair (1999), commenting on the apparent peculiarities of the Irish party system, remarked that 'if one were to search elsewhere for echoes of the Irish experience, then the closest parallel might well be found in

the United States, where the modern party system also grew out of civil war and political conflict, and where the major protagonists are also often regarded as idiosyncratic and non-comparable' (Mair, 1999, p. 131).

One important parallel is that there are clear problems in applying a 'social-democratic' perspective. As chapter one pointed out, Skocpol suggested that political class-struggle theories were built on assumptions about 'parliamentary parties dedicated to pursuing policy programs in the name of entire classes or other broad, nation-spanning collectivities' (1995, p. 19). The US does not have programmatic parliamentary parties in this sense. Skocpol comments that, though the absence of a social-democratic party helped explain why the US did not develop a Scandinavian-style state, it was not helpful at all in explaining 'the phases and specific patterns of US social policy' (p. 18). Amenta (1998) has made similar points, outlined above. However, neither Amenta nor Skocpol have suggested that parties are irrelevant in explaining outcomes in the US – rather, their work suggests that what needs to be incorporated into any explanation of welfare outcomes is the specific nature of US parties, the factors which have shaped them, and the institutional context within which they are embedded.

An example of this perspective is Maioni's (1997) explanation for the differing approaches to health insurance taken in the US and Canada. She suggests that the key explanatory variable is the way formal institutions shaped party structures in both countries, allowing for the emergence of a social-democratic third party in Canada, but not in the US. The key institutional differences were the existence of parliamentary government and a more decentralised federalism in Canada than in the US. As suggested above, she argues that the 'different institutional attributes of their political systems' and the way these configurations shaped partisan politics was the central reason behind divergent outcomes (Maioni, 1997, p. 425). This chapter takes a similar perspective: the 'institutional configurations' shaping the Irish party system are a central explanatory variable when accounting for 'the phases and specific patterns' of Irish social policy. Distinctive outcomes can only be explained by the interaction of the political and the institutional. I turn now to consider briefly what some of the key institutional attributes are, before moving on to look at the example of the place of civil servants in social insurance so as to examine the specifics of these interactions.

A perspective that has already informed previous chapters is that early modernisation and late industrialisation, interacting with the struggles over land and nationalism, have together led to a party system that has sometimes been said to be *sui generis* (Whyte, 1974). The key cleavages on which so much welfare state theory is based are seemingly absent in Ireland. One important result is that, as Sinnott has commented, Irish parties have a 'pattern of programmatic flexibility' around the issues of the Church–state cleavage, the agrarian–industrial cleavage and the left–right cleavage (1995, p. 285). Sinnott argues that their origins (around what he sees as a centre-periphery cleavage) means that 'they are not historically and institutionally committed to entrenched positions' on these divisions, allowing them to respond pragmatically or opportunistically (p. 284). On agrarianism, for example, Sinnott notes that, for a long time, 'the interests of the agrarian economy were seen as the interests of the state'. However, when economic circumstances required a shift to facilitate industrial development, this was done with remarkable ease. One important aspect of Irish party politics, then, is that their origins do not commit them to particular distributive outcomes: they lack the social-democratic push to egalitarianism or, equally, the Christian-democratic push to status maintenance. They are, in this sense, non-programmatic.

Although there may be an important sense in which Irish parties are non-programmatic, they do have to compete with each other in an environment shaped by a particular type of party system. As outlined above, we need to consider the Irish party system as an institution in itself, and as being subject, in turn, to other political institutions. Considering the party system in this light adds to our understanding of why, despite the centrality of legacies from the UK, a Beveridge model did not emerge in Ireland. Having inherited an embryonic welfare system and a mode of government from the UK, some institutionalist perspectives might seem to struggle to explain why Ireland, then, diverged very considerably. Where is the impact of path dependency and why did inherited policies not 'make politics' in the period? A central point is that, along with inherited institutions, Ireland was given different 'rules of the game' which interacted with the cleavage structure outlined above to produce a very different form of party competition. Given the homogeneity of Irish society and the centrality of one key line of division in the body politic, it might have been expected that Ireland would have developed a two-party system along British lines; this would have facilitated the inherited majoritarian ideas inherent in the Westminster model which, we have already seen, were extremely

influential among policy-makers. That this did not happen is due partially to the distinctive electoral system of PR – STV.⁹⁷

The electoral system facilitated the emergence of coalition government in Ireland. Although it can be argued that party systems are remarkably static, nevertheless, they do vary overtime. One source of variation in Irish political life has been alternation between a multi-party format and a 'two-and-a-half party' format (Sinnott, 1995). This variation has contributed to a particular pattern of party competition. Mair (1999) has suggested that the Irish party system at the end of the millennium was formed, not just by its origins in intra-nationalist conflict, but by three crucial watersheds: the entry into politics of Fianna Fáil in 1927, the creation of the inter-party government in 1948 and Fianna Fáil's entry into coalition in 1989. Chapter two has already outlined how the 1948 government has been seen as a crucial election which copper fastened the weakness of the left. Mair (1992) argues that the decline in Fianna Fáil's vote in the 1948 election, together with the mobilisation of Clann na Talmhan and Clann na Poblachta, opened up the possibility of a realignment in Irish politics.⁹⁸ However, Labour choices meant that this realignment did not occur. 'Labour entered government as part of a wide-ranging inter-party coalition which, given its overall breadth of representation and given its combined social basis, effectively mirrored the inter-party coalition of Fianna Fáil, and as such, while providing an alternative government, proved wholly unable to persuade an alternative politics' (p. 408).

Other authors have concurred in seeing 1948 as marking a turning point. Dunphy remarks that 'the period from 1948 to 1957 can be regarded as a transition phase between two distinct eras in Irish politics' (1995, p. 25). Breen et al. also point to the period as one where 'intensification of competition for electoral support changed the axis for Irish politics'. The search for votes shifted from focusing on issues related to the Treaty and became more focused on promises of economic and social progress (1990, p. 34). The period, then, is one which sees the *beginnings* of a long-standing pattern of cross-class politics, or of 'Fianna Fáil against all the rest' (Mair, 1992 and 1999). As the previous chapter made clear, it is, then, a period of intensified competition. Partially as a result, it is also a period of political and institutional dynamism, as changing patterns of party competition led to changing modes of

⁹⁷ Proportional representation by means of the single transferable vote.

⁹⁸ Clann na Poblachta (Party/Children of the Republic') was founded in July 1946. Led by Seán McBride, it provided a challenge to Fianna Fáil on both republicanism and social policy. It was seriously damaged by the repercussions of the Mother and Child Scheme.

government when the first coalition government took power. The next section looks in some detail at the way in which this first experiment in coalition government tackled distributional conflict. It begins by placing the position of civil servants in a historical and institutional context.

A conservative revolution: old institutions in a new state

The Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 provided for the transfer to the new state of the civil servants who had been responsible for the Irish administration. The existence of an Irish administration reflects the crucial fact that the 'union of legislatures was not mirrored by a union of executives' (Fanning, 1978, p. 1). On independence, the state inherited some 21,000 UK civil servants, out of a total of around 28,000 (Ó Cearbhaill, 1983). The oft-cited Brennan Commission, set up in 1932 to examine the civil service, remarked that:

The passing of the State services into the control of a native government, however revolutionary it may have been as a step in the political development of the nation, entailed, broadly speaking, no immediate disturbance of any fundamental kind in the daily work of the average Civil Servant. Under changed masters the same main tasks of administration continued to be performed by the same staffs on the same general lines of organisation and procedure ... The control previously exercised by the Treasury was maintained with unbroken continuity by the Minister for Finance. (cited in Stapleton, 1991, pp. 306–7)

There was some reform on independence: as previously noted, the Irish administration consisted of 'branches of UK departments, specifically Irish departments, and a multiplicity of quasi-autonomous boards, offices and commissions' (Stapleton, 1991, p. 306). The core legislation governing Irish public administration is the Ministers and Secretaries Act 1924. As Chubb (1992) comments, this Act did two main things: first of all, 'it provided the legal basis for the structure and organization of the central administration by designating the extent of ministerial authority in respect of the performance of public functions' (1992, p. 227). This established the minister as a 'corporation sole', who is responsible for everything done by the department. Chapter three argued in some detail that the mode of government laid down by this Act was an important part of the explanation for the lack of corporatism in Irish social insurance. The second outcome of the 1924 Act was the establishment of departments of state and the allocation of public business between them. It responded to the multiplicity of bodies outlined above by centralising the work of government under eleven ministerial departments

and a limited number of independent boards or commissions (O'Halpin, 1991; Stapleton, 1991).

In trying to understand the nature of the key institutions of state, it is possible to identify elements of both continuity and change. It is probably true to say that, until relatively recently, most commentators have tended to stress continuity. Farrell (1988) points to the remarkable conservatism of Irish Constitution-makers. 'When it came to the issue of framing institutional arrangements for government and providing safeguards for citizens, the rhetoric of political platforms and ritual denunciation of centuries of British persecution was quickly dropped' (p. 20). As he points out, Constitution-makers were not adventurous in setting up new structures, and adopted the model they knew best, which was, in most essentials, a replica of the British parliamentary-based cabinet system of government. This model had repercussions for the type of civil service adapted by the new state.

As with other institutional features, there is cross-national variation in the structure, culture and organisation of national civil services. Hence, Gallagher, Laver and Mair (2001) suggest two broad types of European bureaucracies. On the one hand, the 'generalist' UK model inherited by Ireland and, on the other, the more 'technocratic' model of France and Germany. As well as inheriting a generalist model, Ireland has been said to have inherited an 'official civil service culture which is strenuously nonpartisan' (p. 140). Hence, Chubb (1992) remarks that the British inheritance means that 'it was only natural that the Civil Service should remain an incorruptible, non-partisan, and usually anonymous corps whose members, secure in their employment, considered themselves the servants of the legitimate government, whoever they might be. It was also natural that they should tend to conservative austerity with regard to the functions of the state and to their role in public business' (1992, p. 236).

However, O'Halpin (1991) has noted 'a rather more complex process of transition than has generally been recognised' (p. 293). In particular, he contrasts the apolitical ethos of the independent administration with the 'politics-ridden central bureaucracy of pre-independent Ireland' where the development of the bureaucracy had been influenced by the political and religious circumstances of the country (p. 299). He remarks that post-independence Ireland saw less a continuance than an introduction of apolitical values. A central element of the reforms initiated by the new state was the creation of the Civil Service Commission in 1923, to ensure meritocratic recruitment, as contrasted with what was seen as the 'personal and

political patronage' that was a frequent feature of the old regime. Other authors, while noting the centrality of a model that was broadly based on UK lines, have also stressed the modification of the model to reflect the different Irish social structure and experiences.

So, for example, one difference that has been noted was in the background of civil servants. While university education was the norm in the UK, the higher civil service in Ireland was dominated by those who had entered with secondary-level education (Chubb, 1992, p. 237). A survey in 1956 found that 75 per cent of personnel in the departments surveyed had received their education from the Christian Brothers (O Mathúna, 1956). As Chubb notes, the late introduction of free secondary education implies that 'the children of the poorest, especially the poorest country people, tended to have a Civil Service career barred to them' (Chubb, 1992, p. 237).⁹⁹ On the other hand, the policy of recruiting from secondary schools rather than universities meant that Ireland did not share the 'distinctively upper-class tradition' exhibited by the higher ranks of the British civil service (p. 236). This had obvious implications for the culture and ethos of the civil service. Chubb argues that it shared the 'bourgeois and republican' ethos of the newly independent community (1992, p. 237). Breen et al. (1990) note that, by the 1950s, the Irish civil service had developed its own ethos which was 'meritocratic in recruitment but strongly nationalist in cultural affinities' (p. 37). They point to parallels between the civil service and Fianna Fáil, arguing that, by the 1950s, they shared a 'basic contradiction' between traditional nationalism and modernisation. Finally, they claim that, by the end of the 1950s, through a redefinition of Irish nationalism begun in the 1940s, a modernising élite within this civil service 'provided the real momentum' for the processes of economic modernisation. One interesting question, then, is whether, in this earlier period, there is any evidence of an embryonic 'modernising mission' among civil servants. As we will see, this is a much easier question to ask than to answer.

Before moving on to consider this question, it is useful to conclude by looking briefly at the specific issue of the place of civil servants in the social-insurance scheme. As with so many aspects of the Irish social-security system, the origins of the debate over the inclusion of civil servants lie partially with the policy legacies inherited by the Irish state on independence, as Hughes (1988) outlines. When the state inherited a central administration under the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, it also inherited pension law and regulations. One of the impacts of the

⁹⁹ Free secondary education was introduced in 1967, not 1976 as it appears in Chubb (1992).

transfer was a reduction in the salary grades of general service and departmental grades because of the different economic conditions in the new state, but the pension law and regulations governing the UK civil service continued to be applied to the Irish civil service. Commenting on the superannuation scheme in the Irish civil service, Hughes remarks: ‘The system of occupational pension provision which we now have dates from a number of different arrangements in the 18th century for providing for the needs of British civil servants in their old age’(Hughes, 1988, p. 104). These obligations were accepted by the government of the Irish Free State, and article 73 of the Irish Free State Constitution formally recognised the legal status of the superannuation Acts passed by the British government since 1810. Broadly, these provided for a pension in return for implicit contributions – that is, pay scales were theoretically below the level they would be at if the scheme did not exist (ch. 1).

In addition to the pension rights inherited from the British administration, permanent and pensionable employees of the government and local authorities also had relatively generous sick-leave privileges (Farley, 1964). The nature of their employment meant that they were not subject to the risk of unemployment on the same level as other employees, and unemployment benefit was not a central issue. As the Brennan Commission noted, ‘it is well understood that the civil service makes its appeal to the well-educated youth of the country by holding out prospects of a safe career with considerable opportunity for advancement, reasonable emoluments according to standards immune from the extreme fluctuations, whether favourable or unfavourable, of the commercial world and ultimate pension’ (cited in Hughes, 1988, p. 115). Consequently, civil servants were not included in the 1911 National Insurance Act. However, there was no provision for widows’ pensions. When a contributory widows’ and orphans’ pension was introduced in 1935 for employees who were insured under the National Health Insurance Acts, civil servants were included for this scheme only.

Among other provisions, the Beveridge report envisioned abolishing exceptions in social insurance, including those in particular occupations such as ‘the civil service, local government service, police, nursing, railways and other pensionable employments’ (Beveridge, 1942, p. 63). Perhaps the first explicit mention of civil-service inclusion in the Irish social-insurance scheme came with the Dignan report. Discussing the membership of the NHIS as it then stood, Dignan (1944) commented that only about 20 per cent of the total population were members, while his scheme envisioned an extended membership that ‘constitutes a truly national scheme as 90 per cent (approx.) of the whole population would

benefit by it' (p. 27). In the new society, all employees are included. 'No class will be excluded: Civil Servants, Teachers, etc., all will become members' (p. 27). In the event, the position of civil servants in the social-insurance scheme became one of the most divisive issues for the inter-party government, and I turn to consider the policy debate in some detail now.

A government divided: the inter-party government and the question of scope

The inter-party government which took office in 1948 was, as we have noted, an experiment in Irish political history. A key element of the Westminster model is a stress on majoritarian government. However, this was not always easy to achieve under a PR electoral system; so, for example, Fianna Fáil's first exercise in government in 1932 was a minority one which depended on the support of the Labour Party. Nevertheless, this was the first time a clear division of executive power was attempted. In a number of ways, it put strain on a system which, until now, had been accustomed to single-party government. 'There were significant tensions in the Cabinet, with ideological dividing lines being drawn between parties (or more particularly, between Fine Gael and the rest)' (McCullagh, 1998, p. 430). Some of the tensions were simply 'ideological'. As McCullagh notes, standard coalition theory tends to stress that coalition parties should be adjacent on a policy scale; this was clearly not the case with the inter-party government. Some tensions, though, were undoubtedly due to the unfamiliarity of coalition government to the participants, as well as to the wider political system. In terms of institutional perspectives, we might say that the 'rules of the game' were unclear.

One indication of the unfamiliarity and suspicion of the incoming government was in its approach to the civil service. As we have noted, the theory of Irish government owed much to the British model, which assumed 'a tradition of political impartiality' (Murray, 1990). Civil servants are expected to be politically neutral and to serve incoming governments impartially – most observers point to the transition in 1932 as a defining moment. However, the incoming government in 1948 was suspicious of a civil service that had served Fianna Fáil for sixteen years and, infamously, opted to exclude the secretary of the Department of the Taoiseach from cabinet meetings. Chapter three touched on this in discussing confusion over a governmental decision on the question of abolition of the NHIS. A second, related issue, was the problems in observing the doctrine of 'collective responsibility'. McCullagh (1998) notes multiple

examples where this was breached. This indicates that, while all the parties agreed to form a coalition government, the extent to which they all recognised the necessity for compromise inherent in this is debatable. As we will see, the government began life accepting the need for a 'comprehensive' social-security scheme, but it took virtually the whole life of the government to arrive at a working definition of what that would mean in practice. The key issue concerned scope.

As the last chapter discussed, the question of scope was considered as part of the wide-ranging discussions on social-service reform in Ireland that occurred from around 1943 onwards, particularly within the Department of Local Government and Public Health. Following the decision to establish separate departments for health and social welfare, a memo on a Ministry for Social Welfare explicitly tackles a range of issues relating to social insurance, stressing that a possible line of policy 'is to proceed by way of an extension of the tripartite compulsory method into the existing assistance fields with the aim of a final unification in (a) comprehensive scheme.' As we have already seen though, initially, the central concern lay with the question of the inclusion or exclusion of 'independent workers'. Hence, the question of the scope of a reformed social-insurance scheme was, in this memo and elsewhere, considered at length by the post-war Fianna Fáil government, but the central focus of attention was the extent to which the different social and economic conditions in Ireland necessitated excluding the self-employed.

It was not until the drafting of the 1949 White Paper was underway that the question of which workers should be included began to be addressed in detail. At this point, the question of scope had come to refer to the employed class only – that is, were all employees to be included or should social insurance be limited to certain types of employees only? The question of a comprehensive social-insurance scheme had been raised by the labour movement in a variety of ways before the inter-party government took office. Norton had tabled a series of questions in the Dáil, as had Deputies Everett and Pattison of the National Labour Party. The ITUC had indicated its general support for the Dignan scheme and, indeed, there had even been a suggestion that it should be issued as a joint pamphlet between the Labour Party and Dignan. It was not, then, surprising that Norton would, in addition to his role as tánaiste, be given the position of minister for social welfare. The ten points of policy for government released by the inter-party government included a commitment to the introduction 'of a comprehensive social security plan to provide insurance against old age,

illness, blindness, widowhood, unemployment, etc.’ McCullagh argues that the introduction of a comprehensive insurance scheme was Labour’s main priority in government and, unless ‘it could make progress on the issue, the coalition experiment would prove of doubtful value to the party’ (1998, p. 181).

In his detailed account of the scheme, McCullagh notes that it was to be one of the clearest lines of division within the coalition government. In attempting to implement the agreed commitment to a comprehensive scheme, Norton was to encounter an enormous range of objections from his cabinet colleagues:

I noticed a number of queries, counterqueries, objections, tendering of memoranda on ideological grounds, which accumulated around Norton’s proposals with each successive cabinet meeting. One of the last memories of cabinet meetings which I have is of seeing the quarter-inch thick brief with which Norton had earlier introduced his proposals become inches thicker until the final brief was nearly nine inches high ... This is one of the not-so subtle ways in which the conservative majority party in a coalition can ‘legitimately’ frustrate radical proposals submitted by the ‘minority’ parties. One wonders to what extent Norton had collaborated in the delay. (Browne, 1986, p. 191)

This delay meant that, by the time the inter-party government collapsed, the bill had only reached its second reading and, consequently, its proposals collapsed with the government. McCullagh (1998) argues that this indicates the ‘limits to what could be achieved when in power with a conservative partner’ and that left-wing critics of Labour’s participation in coalition would argue that this first experience set the pattern for the rest (p. 197). This conclusion is largely (though not entirely) valid. What is particularly interesting about the debate over the social-welfare bill is the *clarity* with which party-based differences over issues of solidarity and redistributive issues were enunciated. Equally interesting, as I discuss below, is that these issues appear in quite a different guise in the scheme that actually emerges under Fianna Fáil in 1952. The way in which class interests are expressed in the Irish party system have found their expression in policy outcomes, though these may initially be obscure. Nor are they accidental outcomes that were not clear to policy-makers at the time. What can appear minor and technical matters – small variations between groups in contributions and benefits – were, in fact, the standard-bearers for very wide divergences over the aims of welfare, and the question of the place of civil servants in Irish social-insurance illustrates this general point well.

Although there was general opposition to the proposed social-insurance scheme, the ten-point programme of the inter-party government had accepted that a 'comprehensive' scheme would be introduced. This general principle was reluctantly accepted by even the most trenchant critic of the scheme, Fine Gael's minister for finance, Patrick McGilligan.¹⁰⁰ What would prove to be the ground on which points of principle were fought out was the question of what exactly constituted a *comprehensive* scheme. As the previous chapter has demonstrated, there was little serious consideration of the inclusion of farmers and, hence, virtually from its inception, the scheme had narrowed the issue of comprehensiveness from any claims to the universalism of the Beveridge scheme. The question of the inclusion of civil servants was not a technical question, but one that raised some central points of principle. A Department of Social Welfare memo on the scope of a bill based on the White Paper makes this clear. It comments: 'however, by limiting the scheme to the employed class the question of justifying the inclusion of sub-classes like the Guards and the Civil Service is made more difficult: contributions in these cases are to a great extent a tax on particular sections of the community; a tax it is true that is intended for the benefit of their less fortunate brothers but still not a general tax.'¹⁰¹

The extended battle over the inclusion of civil servants was, to use Baldwin's words, a battle between a vision which attempted to embrace the solidaristic potential of social insurance, and one which attempted to excuse the wealthy and the fortunate from sharing burdens with the harder pressed. As a closer examination of the debate reveals, this battle was not merely implicit, but was addressed explicitly and clearly at multiple points between early 1949 and the final collapse of the inter-party government. Because the battle over the degree of inclusiveness of the social-insurance scheme continued for so long, it is useful to subdivide consideration into two main periods: the drafting of the White Paper and the attempt to translate this into legislative outcomes. Norton fought battles at both points and, indeed, was still responding to objections when the inter-party government collapsed.

The 1949 White Paper

Norton's first sortie into the field was his argument for the inclusion of all employees in the draft White Paper circulated to all departments on 8 April 1949. Paragraph 57 of the draft

¹⁰⁰ A memo from Finance on the Draft Heads of a Bill based on the White Paper begins: 'Accepting that a Social Security Bill is to be introduced', D/Taoiseach, S13384D.

¹⁰¹ D/Social Welfare, 1A/1G series 170/53.

scheme recognised that, historically, exceptions and exemptions had been recognised for certain groups on a variety of grounds, but argued that these exceptions ought not to continue in the new scheme.

In a compulsory scheme, it is felt that such privileged exceptions should no longer be retained, and that all members of a particular class – such as all those who derive their living from service to an employer – should stand together and together bear the burden of risks which can be regarded as common to the class as a whole. It is, therefore, proposed to form a single class for employees (i.e. persons working under a contract of service or apprenticeship) to be insured for all benefits, irrespective of the historical privileges of particular sections. This will, for instance, involve the complete abolition of the wage ceiling as well as the inclusion for the first time of agricultural labourers and domestic servants for unemployment benefit, and certain civil servants and employees of local authorities and statutory companies for unemployment and sickness benefits.¹⁰²

As noted above, the circulation of the draft sparked off the exchange of an extensive range of memos between Social Welfare and other departments. As might have been expected, Finance (under the Fine Gael minister, Patrick McGilligan) objected to virtually every aspect of the scheme – the cost, the growing bureaucracy, the impact on agriculture, the effect on individual initiative, the marriage grant, the death benefit, the old-age proposals and so on. The range of objections is impressive in its scope.¹⁰³ In any event, in forwarding the comments of Finance on the draft White Paper to the government, Norton comments ‘in view of the general tenor of the enclosed minute, he feels it would be quite wasteful of time for his Department to endeavour to reach agreement with the Department beforehand.’¹⁰⁴

Finance’s specific objections to the inclusion of all employees usefully summarises what were to be the key issues in the long-running debate that followed. Perhaps the central point of Social Welfare’s appeal for comprehensiveness was that employees should stand together ‘to bear the burden of risk which can be regarded as common to the class as a whole’. As Finance points out, however, this ignored the fact that risks were not common. Three main reasons were given to argue that these risks were not common: workers already had benefits that protected them from these risks, the risk (of unemployment, for example) was essentially not present and workers had adequate income to provide against the risks themselves. Hence,

¹⁰² D/Taoiseach, S13384B.

¹⁰³ For example: ‘It is observed that the proposed scheme makes no distinction between single men and single women, on the grounds that both have to provide for similar needs. An official pronouncement to that effect might be taken as a pronouncement on the controversial issue of equal pay for equal work and should, therefore, be avoided.’

¹⁰⁴ D/Taoiseach, S13384B.

insuring those who fell into any of these three categories was a form of ‘discriminatory taxation’ since others would benefit more than they. A range of problems arose from the three core points above. For example, those who (like civil servants and certain groups of private employees) already had benefits corresponding to or surpassing those in the White Paper would, in effect, receive ‘double benefit’ arising out of inclusion. And the taxpayer would, correspondingly, be paying on the double. Dealing with this raised several difficulties. In regard to civil servants in particular, adjustments to encompass this might be seen as effectively worsening pay and conditions, and raise claims difficult to resist before the Arbitration Board.

Other departments raised similar points, though they tended to do so by pointing to particular groups in their domain who fell into the above categories, rather than by drawing out the general point with Finance’s clarity and insight. For example, the Department of Justice urged that the Garda Síochána be completely excluded. Education raised objections in relation to teachers, lay and religious. Defence was concerned about the implications for the defence forces, Posts and Telegraphs referred explicitly to civil servants, and there were also a variety of references to particular groups of employees, such as Guinness workers, whose employees had well-developed occupational schemes, and employees of Coras Iompair Éireann (CIE) and the Electricity Supply Board (ESB) also.¹⁰⁵ ‘Messrs Guinness’ was regularly referred to in order to highlight the implications for well-developed occupational pension schemes – the questionable implication is that Guinness was merely an example of a wide variety of similar schemes. Ultimately, the debate was to be narrowed – in what might be seen as a limited success for Norton – to the question of civil servants and certain other public employees. Initially, however, a range of groups who fell into the categories outlined above was used to attack the principle of comprehensiveness.

Objections to comprehensiveness then, either explicitly or implicitly, rested on the key point that risks were not, in fact, common to employees as a whole and, consequently, not all employees ought to be asked to contribute to a general scheme that insured all workers against these risks. The defence of a comprehensive scheme, therefore, had to rest on grounds which defended inclusion even for those who, for varied reasons, were either not at risk or were

¹⁰⁵ D/Social Welfare, 1A/1G series 132/53. CIE was the state transport body.

protected against risk, and it is, I think, a fair summary to argue that broadly solidaristic arguments were tendered in defence.

This is made clear by an examination of an extended defence of the issue of comprehensiveness by the Department of Social Welfare. On 8 October, Social Welfare forwarded a note prepared in the department to the secretary of the Department of Finance, McElligott, 'on the possibility of excepting Civil Servants, Army, Teachers, Guards, firms like Messrs Guinness etc from the social insurance schemes.'¹⁰⁶ The note argues strongly for an all-inclusive scheme: 'It is therefore, essential to say in the White Paper that all will be brought in, even though some partial exemptions or modifications are permitted' (emphasis in original).

A range of arguments is put forward to defend this view. All employees should stand together and together bear the burden of their common risk – the risks are common though the provision to meet them may vary. The exception to this may be civil servants, but 'the very existence of this virtual immunity imposes a moral obligation on those privileged to stand in with their less fortunate colleagues.' It goes on to say:

Exception is regarded as a privilege inasmuch as the element of taxation (by contribution) is thereby escaped by employers and employed. What is often overlooked, however, is that the benefits of the State scheme are subsidised and the excepted person loses the advantage of securing these subsidised benefits. The established Civil Servant and some others may claim that they may expect to derive virtually no benefit from their contributions to Unemployment Insurance, but in reply to this it must be pointed out that they are well compensated for this in the other benefits and that they do not in any case pay for more than they receive (actuarially).

The paper discusses exemption under three grounds:

(a) the absence or smallness of the risk to be covered:

The central response to this is outlined above, but the note makes the further point that this principle 'would involve the segregation of classes according to the severity of risks.' This feature had applied in the original national health scheme, allowing some to take advantage of their relative freedom from illness to secure valuable additional benefit, but this privilege was later withdrawn on the grounds that the scheme should be 'national'.

¹⁰⁶ D/Social Welfare, 1A/1G series 137/53.

(b) the existence of alternative provision:

Here, the central argument is the issue of administrative complexity, given that different groups receive different kinds of provision, e.g. Messrs Guinness and the Munster and Leinster Bank give different benefits and on different grounds. 'This opens an appalling prospect for administration of different rates of contributions, a multiplicity of stamps and a complexity almost beyond imagining.'

(c) adequacy of income so that those who enjoyed it were regarded as being in a position to look after themselves:

The note argues that, broadly, this attitude could be criticised on the grounds that the better off are not playing their part.

The memo concluded that all the arguments emphasised the wisdom of an all-embracing scheme. It did, however, concede that there may be some justification in the argument that the exchequer would contribute on the double in some cases and 'an intimation might be given in the White Paper that the scheme may be modified in application to certain classes such as these.'

Another indication that the central argument concerned 'the better off playing their part', as well as an indication of Norton's personal commitment, comes from an exchange of letters between Norton and James Everett, the National Labour leader and minister for posts and telegraphs. On 30 May (that is, following the circulation of the draft White Paper), the Department of Posts and Telegraphs wrote to Social Welfare on the question of whether civil servants should get the full benefit of the provisions in the draft scheme. 'If they are not permitted to do so it would seem inequitable to exact full contributions from them; while on the other hand if they are to receive Disability Benefit in addition to full pay when ill, the temptation to malingering would be serious.'¹⁰⁷ Norton writes to Everett:

If you have not already seen the enclosed letter I should be glad if you would kindly read it and see whether it represents your views on the subject of social security as applied to Civil Servants. I should like to mention that Civil Servants in Great Britain and in the Six Counties are included in the social security schemes there, and I know of no reason why Civil Servants should be regarded as a class apart from the community which they serve and whose employees they are. I do not mind non-Labour people not holding these views, but I thought our own view was that Civil

¹⁰⁷ William Norton papers, box 8:116.

Servants should be included in the scheme, not merely because of its advantages to them but because they should not be exempt from national legislation which affects all other employed sections of the community.

Everett replies that he is in favour and will vote accordingly – ‘I feel that the strong should help the weak.’¹⁰⁸ Equally, a Social Welfare memo summarising the response of various departments to the draft White Paper, and referring particularly to arguments that private occupational schemes ought to be encouraged, comments: ‘The Minister is averse to the continuation of any privileges or to the creation of new ones ... The existence of specially-favoured groups among employees is not conducive to healthy social relations and any special provisions – the implications of which could be very far reaching – would tend to weaken the moral force of a compulsory scheme and unnecessarily complicate administration.’¹⁰⁹

These arguments for solidarity did not convince other departments. Finance replied in some detail to Social Welfare’s memo defending inclusiveness, and the central conclusion is directly opposed to the claims for comprehensiveness. ‘The Department of Finance agree that the scheme should be confined to the employee class, but consider that non-manual workers earning more than £500 a year should be excluded, and that the scheme, in its several parts, be limited in application to those at risk, as is the practice under the existing scheme.’¹¹⁰ Firstly, Finance disagreed that the risks enumerated in the White Paper were common to all employees. The ‘private collective endeavour’ of some means that they can no longer be regarded as at risk and, accordingly, the extent to which the scheme is to apply to a particular employment should be conditioned by the terms of that employment. Furthermore, ‘the suggestion that workers are morally obliged to contribute because they are not exposed to risk is fantastic and at complete variance with the principles of insurance.’ Broadly, Finance pointed to the duplication of benefit for some, the problem of double payments by the exchequer and the overall cost of the scheme. It argued that those with an adequate income should provide for themselves and disagreed that the administrative problems in determining the range of exemptions were insuperable. In fact, the examination of private schemes to decide exemptions should prove of advantage to the community ‘since, in general, every exemption would mean a corresponding saving to the Exchequer.’ (A handwritten annotation by W. A. Honohan, one of the civil servants most closely associated with the scheme,

¹⁰⁸ William Norton papers, box 8:116.

¹⁰⁹ D/Taoiseach, S13384B.

¹¹⁰ D/Social Welfare, 1 A/1G series 137/53.

comments: ‘This is the whole case in a nutshell.’) Furthermore, ‘a point which should not be overlooked if exemption is granted is that excepted classes should be treated as if they were in receipt of contributory benefits under the scheme so that they would not be entitled, for instance, to draw non-contributory Old Age Pensions.’

McCullagh (1998) has described in some detail the torturous route of the government consideration of the White Paper, which was beset with continuing delays. A cabinet sub-committee was set up to examine it in July 1949, but its meetings were continually delayed and it failed to resolve key areas of disagreement. On 11 October, general agreement was given to the publication of the White Paper, but the final text was to be considered by a cabinet committee comprising Norton and the taoiseach, as well as the ministers for finance and defence. Although there is no explicit statement of what the key issue before this committee was, the discussion above and a comparison of the draft and final White Paper make it clear that it was the question of comprehensiveness that was the sticking point.

It is worth considering the personnel of the committee in some detail. In terms of the inter-party government in general, there was widespread opposition to the draft White Paper – probably only the Labour deputies, and perhaps Browne, might have been said to be supportive. McBride (External Affairs) submitted a memo, clearly not the work of his civil servants, which was poorly related to the issues under discussion. This was broadly supportive of enhanced social security, but suggested a combination of policies for full employment with a general tax-financed scheme. His ideas were far outside the terms of reference of the debate and do not seem to have been considered by any of the other ministers involved (though it is worth noting some parallels with Fianna Fáil suggestions, discussed below). However, the opposition from Agriculture (Dillon) and Industry and Commerce (Morrissey) was more considered. Their opposition, however, was generally to much broader aspects of the plan than are being considered here, though Industry and Commerce did have specific concerns about CIE and ESB workers. Given that the ten-point programme for government had, in effect, accepted that a comprehensive social-insurance scheme would be drafted, it may not be surprising that their general opposition did not carry the day – as noted above, the draft White Paper was accepted in principle with the exception of the question of civil servants and other groups.

The two ministers whose opposition to a comprehensive scheme was clearest (as I discuss in more detail below) were McGilligan (Finance) and Higgins (Defence) – that is, the two who were, thus, on the cabinet committee to resolve the issue. Both were Fine Gael ministers. In terms of describing the debate in party-political terms, an argument could be made that resistance emanating from the Department of Finance reflected traditional Finance opposition to the spending of public money, and that the key figure here was not McGilligan but the secretary of the department, J.J. McElligott. There is almost certainly some truth to this – inter-departmental memos indicating Finance’s objections, and signed by McElligott, support this perspective (*see* the exchange discussed above).

However, it can also be argued that there was a happy overlap of interests between Finance’s minister and its secretary. In a speech in March 1949, McGilligan spoke openly of the dangers implicit in social security, which could contribute to people losing their sense of independence, and other examples of his generalised resistance have been cited elsewhere. For example, he has attracted infamy for his remarks in a debate on unemployment in 1924 that ‘There are some limited funds at our disposal. People may have to die in this country and may have to die through starvation’ (cited in McCullagh, 1998, p. 49).¹¹¹ His ‘dislike’ of social security was noted on a number of occasions in the *Irish Times*. For example, in late 1950 Aknefton notes: ‘Critics of Mr Norton cite his silence in the face of the McGilligan onslaught: admirers point to the fact that, in spite of the open displeasure of the Minister for Finance, the Social Security Bill forges ahead.’¹¹² There are strong grounds for arguing that McGilligan was personally hostile to an extended social-security scheme.

Cabinet procedures mean that the content of the committee discussions is unavailable, but the resultant amendment of the draft White Paper indicates that the outcome can best be described as a stalemate. The issue would continue to be examined. The White Paper stated that:

In a compulsory scheme, it is felt that all those who derive their living from service to an employer should stand together and together bear the burden of risks which can be regarded as common to the class as a whole ... The position of Civil Servants, Teachers, Gardai, members of the Defence Forces and perhaps certain employees of local authorities is receiving further consideration. The problem is being examined to see whether, having regard to the existing schemes of welfare which apply to these

¹¹¹ McCullagh argues that in terms of the full debate, McGilligan was not as heartless as the quote on its own makes him appear.

¹¹² *Irish Times*, 7 Oct. 1950.

classes, they should be included in the scheme or whether it might be advisable to exclude them.¹¹³

This ends what, in effect, was round one of the battle. Following the publication of the White Paper, the second round commenced with the drafting of a bill based on this. At this point, Norton returns to the issue and a detailed debate between a variety of departments ensues.

Social Welfare (Insurance) Bill 1950

Following the publication of the White Paper, preparations began in the Department of Social Welfare for the drafting of a bill to implement its proposals. One of the first issues to be considered was that which had been left undecided in the White Paper; that is, the question of modification of the scheme. Information on this was requested from the British Ministry of National Insurance on 19 November:

in our recent White Paper we have had to announce that the question of including Civil Servants, members of the Defence Forces, Civic Guards, teachers and certain employees of local authorities had not yet been settled. My Minister is now anxious to obtain, at first hand, information as to how you have dealt with the problem of including classes (not private groups) which had already adequate welfare schemes for at least some of the benefits.¹¹⁴

The ministry's reply was clear. It acknowledged that in the past, some (such as civil servants, police and some local-government and railway employees) had been exempted because the conditions of their service meant they were adequately protected against sickness and old age, and they were substantially free of the risk of unemployment. 'But it is an essential part of the principle of universality ... that notwithstanding their privileged position in these respects they shall pay the same contributions as other employed persons.' Consequently, the National Insurance Act adhered to the principle of universality and made no provision for the special classes to be excluded wholly or in part from participation in the scheme on the same basis as other employed persons.¹¹⁵ Perhaps the only (partial) exception was 'members of His Majesty's Forces'. They *were* included as employees, but the Act allowed for 'wide powers of modification' in a range of areas. Civil servants, on the other hand, paid full contributions and were entitled to the full range of benefits. The modifications that were made were essentially to the conditions of service, which avoided 'double benefit' in a variety of ways, and a

¹¹³ D/Social Welfare, 1949.

¹¹⁴ D/Social Welfare 1A/1G series, 132/53.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

number of examples in relation to sickness and retirement were given. It seems clear that the technical and administrative barriers to inclusion in the Irish case were not insurmountable, since the situation of Irish civil servants broadly mirrored the situation in Britain. An important point, then, is that the issue of civil servants was quite different from the other key issue of scope – that of farmers – since the arguments based on radically different Irish conditions did not, in this case, apply.

On 12 May 1950, the general scheme of a bill based on the White Paper was circulated to all departments, and Norton returned forcefully to the question of comprehensiveness:

The Minister has now re-examined this question and wishes to reaffirm his conviction that there should be no departure from the principle of comprehensiveness in relation to the employee class. He is satisfied that the uniform application of the scheme to this whole class is the most desirable course, and he is sustained in this view not alone by considerations of social equity but also by the need to conform to the limits of administrative practicality.¹¹⁶

A range of arguments is put forward to support this conclusion. For one thing, none of the classes for which modification is being considered are covered by a scheme that is equal to the proposed scheme as regards both comprehensiveness and benefit level. Excluding these groups would be a retrograde step, ignoring forty years of insurance experience; when sickness and insurance schemes were first adopted, they provided for a range of modifications but later widows'-and-orphans'-pension schemes included many people previously excepted. If civil servants and others were excluded, it would be impossible to resist pressure from others for a similar exclusion, a process which would rob the scheme of all claims to comprehensiveness. It was, therefore, worth restating the general case against exclusion:

The case for general compulsory insurance rests largely on the idea that the more fortunate members of the employed class should stand in with the less fortunate in a common scheme. Unless this idea is accepted, the scheme should logically involve contributions varying for each individual with the type and degree of risk covered. This completely alien feature, so far as our insurances are concerned, is not in the scheme and it is not proposed to include it.¹¹⁷

A variety of departments responded, and Norton submitted a memo to government on 27 June summarising these and outlining the response of the Department of Social Welfare.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ D/Taoiseach, S13384F.

¹¹⁷ D/Taoiseach, S13384F.

¹¹⁸ D/Taoiseach, S13384F.

Generally, as with the responses to the White Paper, the responses concerned the groups that each department felt required either modification of the scheme or exclusion. Hence, for example, the Department of Education expressed some concerns about teachers, especially in relation to disability benefit, since teachers normally received full pay during illness. The Department of Justice expressed concerns about the Garda Síochána. This group already enjoyed substantial benefits, there would be no advantage to them to be included, and they should therefore be excluded. In defence of Social Welfare's case for comprehensiveness, Norton submitted the arguments above (which had been circulated with the general scheme of the bill on 12 May) as an appendix to the memo responding to these points. Generally speaking, the central argument was that, while some modifications might be made in relation to the defence forces, for example, consultations on this should not occur before the general principle of comprehensiveness had been accepted by the government. The key issue, then, was the general principle – modifications would be considered only once this had been decided.

The objections put forward by the Departments of Finance and Defence were especially trenchant, and both submitted separate memos to the government two days later. Defence argued that its separate submission was necessary on the grounds that there was inadequate consultation with it, and because Social Welfare's summary of the minister's views was inadequate. In general terms, the memo argued that the majority of arguments advanced in favour of comprehensiveness 'have weight only if it is accepted, as a principle, that there should not be exception or modification for any class.'¹¹⁹ Familiar arguments concerning the absence of risk or existing coverage were repeated. Referring to Norton's arguments defending comprehensiveness on the grounds of social equity and administrative practicality, the memo notes:

It is not in accordance with [the Minister's] concept of equity that an officer of the Forces holding a permanent commission, for instance, should be compelled to participate in an insurance scheme from the main risks covered by which he is already safeguarded, or that a soldier who, during his service, will have no need to avail of Unemployment or Disability benefit, should, if insured, be compelled to pay the full contribution. Neither is the Minister convinced that a scheme cannot be devised which would be practicable of administration and, at the same time, have regard to the realities of the situation.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ D/Taoiseach, S13384F.

¹²⁰ D/Taoiseach, S13384F.

In its submission, Finance comments that the Department of Social Welfare ‘press very strongly for a comprehensive scheme and have steadily resisted the exclusion of any groups from the scheme. If this principle is accepted by the Government it will, so far as Established Civil Servants are concerned, give rise to a number of difficulties.’ Again, arguments regarding ‘double benefit’, lack of risk and so on are rallied, leading Finance to conclude that there should be total exemption for established civil servants earning over £500 per annum. Other groups Finance suggested might be exempt included permanent commissioned officers in the army, whole-time army chaplains, judges and district judges, ministers and parliamentary secretaries, National teachers and secondary teachers. Should the decision be taken to approve of a comprehensive scheme, then, a range of modifications was suggested, such as insuring only for widows’ and orphans’ pensions. Finance also suggested that consultation with staff associations would be necessary.

At this point, it is worth noting that the issue had become one that a variety of civil-service bodies had begun to consider. One reason for noting this is that other concerned groups (such as trade unions generally, or farmers’ associations) did not have similar access to the policy process. As a result, it is relatively easy to comment on the perspective of civil servants, whose structural location in the state provided them with the institutional position to clarify their views. In July, the staff side of the conciliation and arbitration machinery for civil servants indicated that they had set up a sub-committee examining the question of participation in the scheme.¹²¹ Between September and November, three bodies who, ‘between them speak for the entire Civil Service’, made their views known to the Department of Finance.¹²² As noted above, Finance was the central department concerned with the staffing and regulation of the civil service, a role inherited from the treasury. Finance comments that there was considerable divergence of opinion between the different bodies. While, in one sense, this is true, in another, a common thread runs through the civil-service position. This was a recognition of the arguments about risk, drawn out above – where the groups differed was on their assessment of the optimum response to this.

The most detailed consideration came from the general council staff panel. In September, it wrote to Finance stating that its view was that civil servants should be included in the proposed scheme on the same basis as other classes – that is, they should receive full benefits

¹²¹ D/Taoiseach, S13384D.

¹²² D/Taoiseach, S13384D.

in return for full contributions. Should they be included without eligibility for all benefits, then they should correspondingly pay reduced contributions.¹²³ In November, a more detailed memo was submitted to broadly the same effect, adding that, rather than paying reduced contributions if they were ineligible for some benefits, they would consider full contributions with enhanced benefits in certain areas, e.g. widows' and orphans' pensions. The remainder of the memo concerns the position of unestablished and female civil servants.

The Institute of Professional Civil Servants also wrote to the Department of Finance in October. This organisation represented officers engaged in professional, scientific and technical work who did not come within the scope of the conciliation-and-arbitration scheme. The letter stated that its members were not disposed to recommend they be brought within the scope of the scheme until the question of establishment for temporary and unestablished offices was decided, and until the reckonability of pensions for these groups was likewise decided. In November, it wrote again to say that it was not seeking the application of the scheme to members above the remuneration ceiling for the Conciliation and Arbitration Board. It remarked: 'this Institute is not opposed to the application of the proposed Social Security scheme to Civil Servants. It does not however, wish to be taken as seeking application of the Scheme to any of its members.'

Finally, the Association of Higher Civil Servants wrote in November. This group did not seek exclusion, arguing that, for reasons of administrative convenience, it may well be decided that exclusion was impracticable. However, since they would have no occasion to claim certain benefits, the state would, consequently, make a substantial saving. The association suggest a variety of approaches to take this into account. One would be a special civil-service widows'-and-orphans' scheme. Otherwise, civil servants should be able to claim all of the benefits or pay lower contributions. It was assumed, the letter notes, that retired civil servants would be eligible for the pension provided under the scheme in addition to the civil-service pension.

An article in the *Civil Service Review*, summarising the content of a deputation to the taoiseach from the Conference of Professional and Service Associations, echoes broadly the same points. This conference included representatives of INTO, the Assurance Representatives' Organisation, the Civil Service Alliance, the Irish Bank Officials'

¹²³ Ibid.

Association and the Railway Clerks' Association. Among the comments made was that by the conference spokesman who remarked: 'It was unjust to request people to ensure against a risk which was extremely remote and on that basis exception was taken by the Conference to being included in a scheme where they would be compelled to ensure against unemployment which was for them a very remote risk.'¹²⁴ A speaker on behalf of the Civil Service Alliance said that his organisation was 'perturbed lest regulations which had been applied in Great Britain in consequence of the introduction of the National Health Scheme would be applied to civil servants in this country.'

In summary, then, two broadly opposed arguments were clearly drawn out. On the one hand, Norton's arguments for a comprehensive insurance scheme, where the more fortunate stand in with the less fortunate; opposed to this, on the other hand, stood Fine Gael and civil-servant associations arguing broadly that the criteria for inclusion should essentially be based on an assessment of risk. The latter argument, in effect, called for a scheme that continued the 'privileged exemptions' of the 1911 and subsequent Acts, and explicitly rejected the (limited) redistribution involved in risk-spreading. These points were not 'technical' aspects, but ones in which the financial implications were clear to all concerned and, hence, the decisions taken reflected clear ideological perspectives on issues of solidarity and redistribution. The extent of the objections that hindered Norton had obviously begun to leak into the public domain. On 11 November, Aknefton commented on the possibility of internal governmental opposition, remarking that it was possible that some might decide to vote against the bill or might refrain from voting. Some days later, Cosgrave, in a speech at a Young Fine Gael rally, declared his desire to 'categorically deny' rumours that Fine Gael was opposed to the principle of social security. 'Some form of social security was essential, and he looked on it as a bulwark against the rising tide of Communism, which depended to a large extent on its appeal to those who were in want and distress.'¹²⁵ The government had a comprehensive social-security scheme under consideration, he remarked, but it took time to plan a scheme of that magnitude. In fact, as we have seen, much of the delay was due to the range and number of memos that Fine Gael ministers had submitted objecting to diverse aspects of the bill.

The Social Welfare (Insurance) (no. 2) Bill received its second reading in March, but behind-the-scenes negotiations continued. Industry and Commerce continued to press for the

¹²⁴ *Civil Service Review*, Oct. 1950.

¹²⁵ *Irish Independent*, 15 Nov. 1950.

exclusion of some grades in CIE and the ESB, but Social Welfare was firm in its refusal to allow for modification: 'The Minister for Social Welfare could not be more strongly opposed than he is to the proposals of the Minister for Industry and Commerce regarding employees of Coras Iompair Éireann and the Electricity Supply Board. The effect of these proposals would be to throw the door wide open again to exemptions and exceptions.'¹²⁶ As regards civil servants, employment in the service of the government was made insurable. However, power was being taken in section 14 to modify the provisions of the bill in the case of civil servants, members of the defence forces, the Garda Síochána, employees of local and other public authorities, teachers in National or secondary schools and members of the Army Nursing Service.

What these modifications may have been in practice is, unfortunately, not known, since the government collapsed in May before the bill had progressed further. During the debate on the second stage, Norton had denied that he had taken a decision to exclude those groups. 'The position is that the Bill includes everybody but there is provision by which the position of certain people may be reviewed and, if the Government thinks fit, they may be exempted, either in whole or in part. But no decisions on that matter have been taken.'¹²⁷ However, a later memo in the Department of Social Welfare remarks: 'Mr Norton's intentions with regard to modifying the provision of the Bill under Section 14 ... had not been finally declared when the last government went out of office. The Minister had, however, tentatively expressed the opinion with regard to Civil Servants that they should be either excluded completely or insured for Widows' and Orphans' Pensions only.'¹²⁸ A key question concerns the extent to which this outcome amounted to a defeat for Norton. McCullagh argues that the failure to implement the bill, which in effect arose from the duration of the debate, did amount to a defeat, and that this episode can consequently be read as an account of the limits to this Labour Party – and Labour parties in general – in coalition governments in Ireland. It is undeniable that this account points to the implications of the weakness of the Irish left. Resistance from Fine Gael both delayed the bill (and, hence, doomed it) and forced Norton to concede key points of principle – though the extent of this concession can only be deduced (that is – what 'modifications' the bill would have allowed for is unknown).

¹²⁶ D/Taoiseach, S13384F.

¹²⁷ DD vol. 125, 4 Apr. 1951, col. 90.

¹²⁸ D/Social Welfare 1A/1G series 170/53.

However, it is worth noting that Norton did not concede a salary limit, did not exclude groups with well-developed occupational-pension schemes, limited modifications to what was a relatively small group numerically and, it might be argued, was still on his feet and fighting when the final bell went. The attempt to bring in a comprehensive insurance scheme can be read as a manifesto for what a stronger left might have achieved. That, in retrospect, the 'Beveridgean' model which Norton aspired to has not proved to lead to a solidaristic welfare state is less important than the fact that, to contemporary observers, its 'universalism' did appear to promise a solidarity of the more fortunate with the less fortunate.

Norton's credentials as a 'champion of the left' have been questioned, probably most famously and scathingly by Noel Browne. 'Norton was a man of many talents, all dedicated exclusively to his own betterment in society. He was persuasively articulate, and could simulate sincerity and pretended concern with impressive and misleading conviction. He could feel deeply only about his own special needs' (Browne, 1986, p. 189). Browne also argued that Norton had 'willingly allowed himself to be used by the conservative Fine Gael cabinet, while neglecting the welfare or best interest of the working people' (p. 189). His pragmatism within the inter-party government was noted by contemporary observers and, placed in a wider context, his defence of comprehensiveness was far from radical. He conceded, apparently immediately, any claims to universalism by excluding farmers, despite trade-union interest in including farmers in issues of redistribution. Having said this, it can be argued that Norton accepted (as Browne, perhaps, did not) the 'political realities' which the socio-economic structure and electoral context dictated, and fought his battles accordingly. His commitment can, perhaps, best be observed by contrasting his bill with the very different outcomes under the next government.

Social Welfare (Insurance) Act 1952

The 1952 Social Welfare Act brought in by the Fianna Fáil government included provisions for the partial exclusion of civil servants and other groups, and included a salary limit of £600. Together with the absence of a contributory old-age pension and the narrowing of the terms for the inclusion of female domestic and agricultural workers, one conclusion might be that the defence of the privileged exhibited by Fine Gael was, hence, displayed by Fianna Fáil. However, what seems more likely to be the case was that the issues of principle represented by the battle over civil servants were not the issues of central concern to Fianna Fáil. Instead,

the tight relationship between contributions and benefits, and the associated redistributive logic of social insurance, shackled attempts to express a different model of solidarity than that envisioned by Norton. Fianna Fáil's response was conditioned partially by the logic of party competition and partially by the logic of the institutional legacies that faced them.

The previous chapter has already implicitly suggested some of this when it remarked that the incoming government were tied to promises they had given in the debate on Norton's bill. As we have seen, opposition to the bill was spearheaded in the Dáil by Lemass, who criticised its lack of comprehensiveness (in excluding farmers), the low level of benefits and (importantly) the tripartite financing of the scheme. As the last chapter noted, Aknefton in the *Irish Times* had commented wryly on Lemass' criticisms and expressed some cynicism about how his proposals might be financed. Among other jibes, he remarked that it put Norton in the position of defending 'Inter-party policy as against Labour policy enunciated by Lemass.'¹²⁹ This is reminiscent of the general argument that the weakness of the left in Ireland can be accounted for by Fianna Fáil filling the 'traditional' position of the left (for a review, see Mair, 1992 and 1999; Sinnott, 1995, *inter alia*). It is far from clear that Fianna Fáil's attitude to social security was 'leftist': certainly, not if we accept the Scandinavian model as an exemplar of a solidaristic approach characteristic of social democracy. However, its approach certainly differed from the generalised hostility clear in Fine Gael, and Fianna Fáil was at pains to indicate this, as Aknefton's comments indicate. Fianna Fáil's response then would need to differentiate it both from Labour and from Fine Gael, and would need to help it regain some of the ground lost to Clann na Talmhan and Clann na Poblachta.

Fianna Fáil's initial approach moved far outside the terms of the debate that had divided the inter-party government and, indeed, away from the Beveridgean model which policy-makers so far had clearly operated within. I have already looked at the essentials in the previous chapter, but I review the key proposals briefly here. The new minister for social welfare, Jim Ryan, outlined a view of social welfare that envisioned a move away from further development of contributory schemes and towards an expansion of tax-financed schemes. Again, the concept of risk was employed to draw lines between and among groups but, in this case, what would be attempted was to identify risks that were common across the whole population and to attempt to cover these risks by non-contributory schemes. Hence, social-

¹²⁹ *Irish Times*, 7 Oct. 1950.

welfare schemes should continue to be of two classes – contributory and non-contributory. However, in the development of social-welfare schemes:

... the principle should be followed that where a service (such as unemployment or disability benefit) is mainly needed by employed persons it should continue to be on a contributory basis, but that there should be no extension of the contributory scheme outside that class and that, in fact, where a service (such as widows' and orphans' pensions or old age pensions) is needed equally badly by employed persons, self-employed persons and others it should be on a non-contributory basis financed entirely by taxation ...¹³⁰

This, as has been argued, was a clear attempt to tackle the thorny problems of a diverse agrarian sector while meeting the demands of the industrial working class, which Fianna Fáil also aspired to represent (Dunphy, 1995; Mair, 1992; Allen, 1997).

This approach, which, in the context of policy legacies involved a sharp turn from existing practice, had two main implications. As I discuss below, it was the unforeseen administrative implications that were to be a fundamental factor in dooming the plan. Firstly, Ryan envisioned substituting a means-tested, non-contributory widows'-and-orphans' pension for the contributory pension, which would be abolished. However, as we have seen, two groups would be exempt from means testing – persons insured under the proposed contributory insurance scheme and persons with agricultural holdings of valuations not exceeding £25. Secondly, there would be an old-age pension from age seventy as part of the new, non-contributory scheme, with the same means-test arrangements. (Insured workers, though, would receive higher pensions on the grounds that they tended to be more dependent on cash income than non-insured workers, and were more likely to live in urban areas.) There would, hence, be no contributory old-age pension, as Norton had envisioned, but the requirements for receiving unemployment benefit would be relaxed from age sixty-five for men and age sixty for women. The proposals, therefore, moved away from the concept of risk-pooling in social insurance and envisioned joining the employed, self-employed and others in a national, tax-financed scheme for several key risks.

Ryan's proposals to abolish the contributory widows'-and-orphans' pension were short-lived. They were put forward on 28 December 1951 and were conceded by 17 January 1952, in the face of opposition from Finance and a recognition of administrative complications, some of

¹³⁰ D/Taoiseach, S13384D.

which involved the position of civil servants. Ryan was clearly aware of some of the potential pitfalls of his plan. Reviewing the origins and development of the contributory scheme for widows' and orphans' pensions, he remarks: 'It could be argued that there is no need to upset an arrangement which the ordinary person has grown accustomed to and has come to take for granted.' Abandoning it had financial implications: the loss of contributions that made the contributory section self-supporting would involve a loss of about £1 million per annum. He also recognised that those insured (some 700,000) had acquired rights, and 'means must be found for preserving them'. Ryan also referred specifically to 'the excepted classes', which included over 30,000 persons, 'who were not covered for health insurance or unemployment insurance, but who were brought into compulsory insurance for widows' and orphans' pensions.' Ryan suggested that those 'so circumstanced' would continue, as at present, but those who entered those classes in future would not be compulsorily insured and would be entitled to the widows'-and-orphans' pension only subject to the means test.

Finance returned a memo that was largely devoted to outlining the economic problems facing the country.¹³¹ This focused on inflationary pressures, a hugely unfavourable trade balance and a large budget deficit: 'No responsible Minister for Finance could in existing circumstances be expected to take on the Exchequer additional burdens of the magnitude contemplated by the Minister for Social Welfare.' The memo continued with some severe reflections on Ryan's suggestions about shifting from a contributory to a taxation-based approach for some risks (these have been outlined in the previous chapter). The essence of Finance's argument was that the cost of improvements in social welfare, if introduced, should be met by 'raising the contributions payable by the persons who will be eligible to benefit from the scheme'. Insurance-based schemes safeguard the respect of the beneficiary and have advantages over assistance schemes that are financed out of general taxation and so depend 'entirely on possibly uncertain budgetary provisions'. There are grounds for arguing that the Fianna Fáil response was partially shaped by a growing realisation of the harsh economic realities that the country faced (Cousins, 2003).

Before moving to consider the administrative problems, two final criticisms made by Finance are worth noting. The first concerns the position of domestic workers. Ryan had intended treating these in the same manner as agricultural workers in that they would receive the same

¹³¹ D/Taoiseach, S13384F.

benefits as other workers in return for lower contributions. Finance pointed to a key problem. 'No case founded on social justice can be made for subsidising the cost of domestic service for the better-off classes at the expense of those who cannot afford servants at all.' A second problem was the possibility of abuse. 'The relation between employer and employee in this class is peculiarly personal and employment often terminates for very slight causes including personal idiosyncrasies of both employer and employee. The existence of unemployment benefit might tempt workers to leave their present employment when they might otherwise continue to work.' Hence, either exclusion or lower benefits was the desirable outcome. Finance also had doubts about the provision relaxing the conditions for the receipt of unemployment benefits. A memo a few months later remarked that the provision for relaxing conditions for receipt of employment benefit 'is, in effect, a substitute form of retirement pension for insured persons at the age of 65. It goes way beyond what might reasonably be expected by way of relaxing the condition for receipt of unemployment benefit and might be regarded as the first step towards providing pensions for all at 65 years.'¹³²

There were other problems, too, which an internal social-welfare memo noted in detail.¹³³ 'Difficulties would ... be created by the Minister's proposals in the case of persons excepted under the National Health Insurance Acts who are insured for Widows' and Orphans' Pensions only.' This category amounted to about 17,500 men and 12,500 women, essentially those employed in the civil service, by local and other public authorities, and by statutory companies. The memo first pointed out that, as noted above, Norton had 'tentatively' expressed the opinion that civil servants should be excluded completely or insured for widows' and orphans' pensions only. It also made another point. It began by quoting the White Paper's justification that all those who earned a living from an employer should stand together and bear the burden of common risks. 'Whatever reasons, academic or otherwise, there were for the complete inclusion of Civil Servants in the old scheme, those reasons no longer hold.' With regard to the old-age-pension provisions, outlined above, the memo noted 'It would be unthinkable to give without a means test an old age pension to a former established Civil Servant on the mere strength of an insurance qualification which is not related by contributions to the pension, particularly as such a person would be already drawing a Service pension.' Ryan's scheme, then, had implications which had probably not been foreseen: it is one thing to include civil servants in a contributory scheme, quite another

¹³² D/Taoiseach, S13384F.

¹³³ D/Social Welfare, 1A/1G series 170/53.

to include them in a tax-financed scheme with a non-means-tested pension. The memo argued that there was ‘a great deal to be said’ in favour of continuing to offer limited widows’ and orphans’ pensions in the new proposals to those who were in that category at present. ‘If it were considered necessary to grant the privilege in 1935, the like provision is still necessary.’

The memo points out the implications of this for Ryan’s plans. ‘Logically this would mean a change in the Minister’s proposals, but there does not seem to be any more reason for the general discontinuance of insurance for contributory Widows’ and Orphans’ Pensions than there would be for the discontinuance of National Health or Unemployment Insurance; it does not seem possible to have a contributory Widows’ and Orphans’ Pension on a limited scale.’ The memo makes one final, rather interesting point as regards the income limit. It remarks that ‘So far as numbers are concerned there does not seem to be much point in having a salary limit for insurability. When the ceiling was raised from £250 to £500 per annum in 1947 the number of insured persons under the National Health Insurance acts increased only by about 11,500 to 667, 000.’ However, it makes no further comment on this; unfortunately, I have been unable to find any other records which would cast light on the final decision.

A second issue to be resolved was that of the position of workers in the ESB and CIE. As I mentioned above, even while Norton’s scheme was going through the second stage in the Dáil, Industry and Commerce was continuing to press for exclusion. In May, as Ryan’s scheme was coming to fruition, a memo from the Department of Industry and Commerce was sent to the government.¹³⁴ In an interesting reference to policy continuity across governments, the memo begins: ‘The Department of Industry and Commerce has had correspondence extending over some years with the Department of Social Welfare concerning the various proposals for social welfare legislation.’ The memo returned to earlier arguments – essentially that the salaried and supervisory grades of CIE and all of the ESB employees should be excluded from the scope of the Social Welfare Bill. Initially, Social Welfare was unenthusiastic. Following a government meeting on 27 May, however, the two departments met on 30 May and hammered out a compromise. With regard to the ESB, permanent and pensionable employees were insured only for widows’ and orphans’ pensions. This required no amendment because the bill had already allowed for modification under employment by a public authority, building on provisions first introduced by Norton. With regard to CIE,

¹³⁴ D/Taoiseach, S13384G.

salaried and supervisory staff were dealt with as above; this required a minor amendment allowing for modification for persons employed under ‘any statutory transport undertaking’.

At this point, it is useful to draw together some of the key points from the previous chapters to clarify outcomes and, in particular, to clarify how those outcomes were quite different from what had been envisioned by the inter-party government. Table 5.1, below, presents a summary of the 1952 Act and the preceding, failed bill.

Table 5.1: Differences Between Norton and Ryan Bills

Norton Bill	1952 Social Welfare Act
No salary limit.	£600 limit.
All employees in agriculture/domestic service insured for unemployment benefit.	Only male employees so insured.
Power to modify in respect of civil servants, local-authority employees and gardaí.	Power to modify in respect of civil servants, local-authority employees and gardaí. Partial exclusion of civil servants and others.
Low-waged group (£3.10.0s) with lower contributions and benefits.	Agricultural workers only, lower contribution from employees and employers, but the same benefits as other workers.
Old-age pension. Provision for farmer to convey land.	No pension. Over 65/60 can draw unemployment benefit without limit.
Death grant.	No death grant.
In general, contributions and benefits higher..	Lower contribution and benefits.

A starting point is to note that Norton’s bill was the product of compromises. While he accepted the necessity for excluding the self-employed, he did so with some reluctance in that Labour clearly felt that the farming sector was under-taxed. But the political and socio-economic realities of Ireland dictated that a ‘full’ Beveridge-type scheme was unattainable in Ireland. Secondly, the exact form the final scheme would have taken is unclear. As a result of the long-running and seemingly unending battle with his cabinet colleagues, Norton had conceded the possibility of modification; this concession continued into the succeeding legislation. Ó Cinnéide (1999) stresses compromise, too:

The White Paper, like all others, represented a compromise between, firstly, the commitment of a minister with a personal and party agenda; secondly the professional judgement and preferences of the experts, the civil servants in the Department of Social Welfare; and thirdly, a host of other interests, some selfish and some unselfish, and all of them mediated through the other departments and ministers represented in the Government (p. 26).

The extent and degree of the battle that Norton faced reflects the newness of coalition government in Ireland; it was, in this period, an untried experiment where the accepted rules of collective responsibility were stretched close to breaking point (McCullagh, 1998).

The final point to make on the Norton bill is that it was clearly Beveridgean; there is quite a lot of truth in Ryan's comment that Norton had done little more than put in the Beveridge scheme and 'take off 2/- all round'.¹³⁵ The experiences of the inter-party government raise tantalising questions about what a more influential left might have achieved. A tentative argument might be made that, had Ireland a strong left, its welfare state might have resembled the British model more closely. Paradoxically, this implies that a strong Irish left, steeped in the British perspective, might not have created a classic social-democratic state any more than the British left (relatively strong in comparative terms) did in the UK. However, we need to focus not on 'what if' but on what did in fact occur.

Turning to look at the 1952 Act, we can see both *quantitative* and *qualitative* differences between the two plans. Certainly, it is in some fundamental respects 'less' than Norton's plan – but it is different, too, in its redistributive implications. What best explains these outcomes? Bearing in mind the policy progression across governments and across multiple 'decision points' in terms of scope, a strong argument can be made for 'political institutionalism'. Fianna Fáil's choices are partially the outcome of an emerging pattern of party competition: in 1951, a 'new' party system was emerging. Fianna Fáil had to design a scheme that met the demands of the diverse groups it was now beginning to appeal to, and had to do so in a way which differentiated it from a coalition of parties whose support base roughly mirrored its own. But its attempts to tackle distributive issues in a way that appealed simultaneously to farmers, agricultural labourers, urban industrial workers, and higher-paid workers by moving sharply away from Beveridge proved impossible. The eventual outcomes were the result of Fianna Fáil's own compromise with administrative legacies, economic realities and patterns of party competition. It was, in effect, an attempt to appeal to the diverse groups listed above within the confines of inherited policy legacies.

¹³⁵ DD, vol. 124, 2 Mar.1961, col. 1123.

Conclusion

The path by which the Irish social-insurance scheme developed some of its complexities in terms of differential inclusion of groups can be partially explained by the various insights of institutional perspectives. Clearly, institutional accounts that stress policy feedbacks and path dependencies offer useful insights. We can only understand Ryan's failure to devise a social-security scheme more clearly in line with Fianna Fáil's image of Irish society by recognising that this would have involved a fundamental shift in the institutional structure of Irish social security. The position of civil servants and others, both in terms of social welfare and in the wider political system, reflects previous political choices, whether these were made in 1933, with the widows'-and-orphans' pension, or in 1924, in outlining a particular model of the civil service. Clearly, 'policies, once enacted, restructure subsequent political processes' (Skocpol, 1992, p. 58).

This perspective clearly accords a key role to the central bureaucracy, and echoes Heclo's (1974) comment on the way in which 'the bureaucracies of Britain and Sweden loom predominant in the policies studied' (p. 301). Establishing the precise degree of influence is difficult. The ethos of government established by the Ministers and Secretaries Act 1924 and the subsequent convention that all acts of a department are the acts of the minister means that most documentation is framed as if it emanated from the minister, though this, as was clear in the events above, is certainly not the case. Perhaps the central influence is in the 'incremental, continuous nature of policy-making' (Connolly and O'Halpin, 1999, p. 263). The 'persistence of influence' of the central administration (as illustrated by Industry and Commerce's persistence on the issue of CIE and ESB workers) suggests a central role for civil servants (Heclo, 1974, p. 301). Hall (1993) has suggested that this influence is strongest where 'policy paradigms are likely to become intertwined with firmly established operating procedures and departmental routines' (p. 291). He cites the British civil service as the 'acme' of such settings – it is clear that broadly similar points can be made about the Irish civil service.

However, there are some important qualifications to be made around the issue of the role of bureaucrats. One interpretation of the centrality of bureaucrats in the policy-making process is that it suggests the autonomy of the state. 'In democratic and capitalist societies, states can be considered autonomous when they create strategies of action independently of capitalists and organised business groups, political parties, interest groups, movement organisations, and

public opinion' (Amenta et al., 2001, p. 220). Hall argues that this perspective, which he terms 'state-centric', differs from what he calls a 'state-structural' perspective, which gives 'interest groups, political parties and other actors outside the state an important role in the policy process' (p. 276). The events described above, and in the previous chapters, suggest a key role for party politicians, albeit one mediated by institutional structures and policy legacies.

The suggestion that we need to allow for a role for 'society' or for actors transmitting pressure from groups and classes into the policy process sheds light on the issue of policy change. From an institutionalist perspective, change can be hard to account for. As Thelen and Steinmo (1992) note, institutionalist analyses walk a thin line between 'institutional constraints and institutional determinism' (p. 15). A key problem is a tendency to offer explanations of continuity rather than change. Hence, Rothstein (1996) notes that the question of institutions and change 'is the weakest and most difficult point in political institutionalist analysis' (p. 153). Having said that, more recent institutionalist work has focused on institutional dynamism and towards attempting to account for institutional change. In this thesis, a central argument is that the impact of politics on institutions means that we need to focus on 'gradual institutional evolution and change, often emerging as unintended consequences of political battles fought over other issues' (p. 21). The period under discussion is one where institutional continuity co-exists with institutional change, and politics is a central part of the explanation of change.

There is a very important sense, then, in which politics and institutions *require* to be thought of in tandem. The outcomes in the 1952 Act were shaped by political parties attempting to speak to their constituencies. These constituencies were partially created by the emergence of patterns of party competition that reflected the nature of the wider society, but also reflected the institutional context that mediated this competition. A distinctive party system with an unusual pattern of competition was the result: neither 'solidarity' nor 'status-maintenance' provided the ideological bases of competition, and the atypical and rather peculiar outcomes reflect atypical patterns of party competition. In turn, this pattern of political competition created institutional innovation and change. Neither a logic of politics nor a logic of institutions can successfully explain outcomes alone.

Conclusion

'The modern welfare state is a European invention – in the same way as the nation state, mass democracy, and industrial capitalism. It was born as an answer to problems created by capitalist industrialisation; it was driven by the democratic mass struggle; and it followed in the footsteps of the nation state.' (Flora, 1986, p. xii)

Flora's comments on the common origins of the European welfare state ought to have resonance for Ireland which, though geographically peripheral, is undoubtedly a European nation. And, indeed, Irish welfare experience is superficially in the mainstream: we can trace the roots of income maintenance through an early Poor Law period to its modern birth in the early decades of the twentieth century, and onto a fuller expression in the post-war period. Yet the theoretical perspectives that speak most strongly to the Irish experience are not those predicated on the experiences of European states, all of which have tended to assume that fundamental transformations follow set paths and generate similar outcomes. In Ireland, the core processes of industrialisation, democratisation and state formation, so fundamental in shaping welfare state outcomes, were all shaped by the intersection between colonialism and indigenous features. This intersection, and its diffuse, complex and tangential outcomes, are crucial for understanding the atypical nature of social and economic development in Ireland and, consequently, for understanding atypical welfare outcomes. This thesis argues that closer attention to the impact of this intersection has implications both for wider theoretical perspectives on the determinants of social insurance and for more specifically focused research on the Irish welfare state.

One of the central contributions this research makes is to both clarify and account for the negligible impact of Catholicism on income-maintenance outcomes in the period. This runs counter to many standard accounts of welfare development in Ireland, and it also raises questions for wider perspectives on welfare states in general. For one thing, it underscores suggestions in the retrenchment literature that there may be a need to consider how the dynamics within particular policy sectors may differ fundamentally (Green-Pedersen and Haverland, 2002). That the influence of the Irish Catholic Church was considerably weaker in

the field of income maintenance than in health or education suggests that theoretical perspectives might vary in their explanatory potential across policy sectors.

Secondly, the relative inactivity of the Church in the field of income maintenance – noted but not fully explained by some authors – raises some question marks over generally accepted explanations of its activism in other fields (Peillon, 1996; Fahey, 1998a). The bulk of accounts of welfare development in Ireland have cited the influence of Catholic social teaching as the central motivating factor impelling the Church to cross swords with the state in the 1940s and 1950s (Whyte, 1980; McLaughlin, 1993; Breen et al., 1990). Yet it is clear that, as O’Leary (2000) argues, the Church was not, in fact, fundamentally committed to key elements of Catholic social thought, an argument that this research underlines. This clearly implies that we need new explanations for Church hostility to state activism in the period. In turn, this raises questions for theories that suggest a link between Catholicism and corporatist structures in social insurance generally (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Castles, 1994; van Kersbergen, 1995). Outcomes in Irish social insurance suggest that the impact of Catholicism is clearly contingent on wider processes of state formation, industrialisation and democratisation, and that the extent to which Catholicism ‘makes a difference’ can vary substantially across countries.

If the role of the Church has sometimes been overestimated, agrarian actors have been generally underestimated (Fahey, 2002). The focus among Irish social scientists on the weakness of the left has distracted attention from the importance of an agrarian paradigm fundamentally influencing distributive outcomes. In addition, wider theoretical perspectives on the welfare state have also prioritised industrial workers. This case study has argued that once it is accepted that there may be variation in how fundamental transformations are experienced, it is also clear that the actors and interests shaping welfare outcomes can also vary. This point, about varied actors and interests, applies within the agrarian sector, too. The structure of the agrarian sector in Ireland reflects its particular history and, consequently, the precise outcomes described here may reflect specific Irish circumstances and, perhaps, the particular policy sector studied. Having said this, the thesis goes some way towards identifying potentially important features of agrarianism. Amongst other features, patterns of land ownership, the nature of employment relationships in agriculture, and the way in which agrarian interests are mediated politically and institutionally need to be encompassed in any account of how agrarianism might influence welfare states. In this thesis, accounting for the

mediation of diverse interests, agrarian and other, required that attention be paid to the distinctive character of the Irish party system.

It is clear that explaining outcomes in the 1952 Social Welfare Act requires insights from different theoretical perspectives. In particular, both political explanations and institutionalist perspectives provide useful insights, especially when utilised in tandem. Statist or institutionalist accounts, in particular, have an immense appeal for the Irish case because they address dilemmas that exist so strongly in Ireland. This reflects the fact that American theorists, more than any others, have struggled in applying Euro-centric theories to a state whose political and historical experiences cannot be captured by standard views of politics and the state (Amenta et al., 2001). This thesis, then, has drawn on a number of institutionalist themes to explain outcomes: the legacies of distinctive patterns of state formation, the impact of particular modes of government and the continuing effect of past policy choices. In combination, these institutionalist insights provide admirable tools for understanding outcomes shaped by the interaction of two societies and two political systems.

On their own, however, institutionalist perspectives lack sufficient explanatory power. Institutions are essentially arenas and, as such, require actors to place in those arenas. Bureaucrats certainly constitute one important set of actors from an institutionalist perspective but, on their own, are unconvincing actors to bear the weight of the conflicts and battles of over a century of distributive conflict. The conflicting interests of different social classes and groups, and the clash of these interests in political arenas, rightly belongs *alongside* political institutions, rather than being conceptualised as institutions in themselves (Thelen and Steinmo, 1992). In terms of the 1952 Act, the centrality of distributive clashes within the agrarian sector, between rural and urban Ireland, and within the employed class requires macro-level concepts that are foreign to institutionalist perspectives. The political organisation of class interests, mediated institutionally, was central to explaining outcomes.

The necessity for combining different kinds of explanations might seem to have its origins in the distinctiveness of Irish social and political history, but this is not the case. Increasingly, contemporary welfare theory has had to juggle convergence and divergence in a manner that has pointed to the value of combining explanations (Huber, Ragin and Stephens, 1993; Amenta, 1998; Huber and Stephens, 2001; Amenta et al., 2001; Myles and Quadagno, 2002). The enthusiasm with which the insights of institutionalists have been taken up reflects the fact

that issues of difference have become central to contemporary theory. Regime theory, for example, has been struggling under the weight of competing claims that there are other worlds, unique cases, hybrid states, or neglected dimensions (Lewis, 1992; Castles and Mitchell, 1992; Ferrera, 1996; Esping-Andersen, 1997). These tensions apply, too, to what has been termed 'neo-convergence', where the retrenchment literature increasingly points to different responses to similar economic pressures (Pierson, 1994 and 2001). Institutional insights are central, but have not displaced explanations predicated on politics. Hence, Myles and Quadagno (2002) point to a multi-faceted explanation of the development of income-security schemes in affluent democracies: 'Cross-national differences in class-based organizations and parties as well as the electoral and administrative institutions that structure and mediate the democratic class struggle were especially crucial' (p. 51). The shift in focus towards combining mid-range theories reflects struggles to defuse the tensions between convergence and divergence. The consequence is a declining enthusiasm for the claims of 'grand theory'; the most recent contender, globalisation, has been shown to promise rather more than it delivered in terms of generalisability.

While much of this thesis has grappled with the problematic aspects of contemporary theory, it nevertheless suggests that 'additional one-of-a-kind interpretations' are not necessary (Amenta et al., 2001, p. 228). Instead, it argues that the Irish case points to the value of theoretical eclecticism, echoing wider concerns within contemporary welfare state theory. A central conclusion, then, is that while no *one* grand theory seems to easily fit the Irish case, this is a problem for welfare state theory in general, rather than reflecting unique aspects of Irish experiences. There is certainly a sense in which this questions the ability of theory to say anything meaningful on a large scale about the central determinants of welfare states. In his article assessing claims that the Japanese welfare state was a hybrid case, Esping-Andersen (1997) comments: 'The point of generalisation is economy of explanation – to be able to see the forest rather than myriad unique trees. The danger is that the resulting forest bears little if any resemblance to reality' (p. 179). And, as he clearly intended to convey, the opposite is also true. The Irish case suggests that the periphery may be brought into the centre, but that this may be at some cost to our ability to see the wood rather than the trees.

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University College Dublin Archives: MacEntee Papers.

Irish Labour History Museum and Archives: Norton Papers.

Archive of the Diocese of Clonfert: Dignan Papers.

Dublin Diocesan Archives: McQuaid Papers.

Newspapers and Periodicals

Irish Times

Irish Independent

Irish Press

Other Unpublished Sources

Dáil Éireann: Public Debates.

Notes on primary sources

The primary material for this thesis is drawn from a variety of sources. Central amongst them are Irish government departmental files, in particular those of the Department of the Taoiseach, referred to as D/Taoiseach, and the files of the Department of Social Welfare, referred to as D/Social Welfare. These are an invaluable resource for examining official proposals and counter proposals, through the lenses of drafts of bills, government memos, reports of departmental committees and sub-committees, costings of proposals and so on. The key problems in using these resources are the inevitable lacunae (in the shape of missing files, for example) and problems in assigning authorship to specific individuals.

Usefully, the existence of collections of the private papers of some key individuals allowed for these official sources to be fleshed out. University College Dublin Archives contains an extensive collection of Sean MacEntee's papers, representing his long political career in Fianna Fáil which spanned diverse ministries such as Finance, Industry and Commerce, and Local Government and Public Health. This thesis drew in particular on papers from the latter period, 1941-1948. Some of the material from the Department of Social Welfare is replicated in the MacEntee papers, which contains a substantial amount of departmental material. It also contains texts of speeches, correspondence, press cuttings, and drafts of letters and speeches. It provides a very useful insight into his range of interests and political style. The papers of William Norton, (trade unionist, Labour leader, Tánaiste and minister in two Inter-party Governments), are lodged in the Irish Labour History Museum and Archives. As well as a collection of constituency letters, the papers contain a draft of the 1949 *White Paper on Social Security*, correspondence with other ministers and trade unionists, and press cuttings on various topics related to social welfare. They are less extensive than the MacEntee papers (on this period at least), but are useful in providing some background on a rather unexamined figure, and some insight into thinking in Labour circles.

The thesis drew to a lesser extent on two other archival sources. The first is the papers of John Charles McQuaid, Archbishop of Dublin, which are in the Dublin Diocesan Archives. While these are clearly extensive, they are sparse in the area of social welfare, something which is in itself interesting. Finally, the papers of the Most Rev. Dr. Dignan, Bishop of Clonfert are available in the archives of the Diocese of Clonfert. These are unfortunately very slight. More problematically, they include hand-written material which is difficult to decipher and interpret, but which deserves some attention. Where appropriate, these problems have been highlighted in the course of discussing this material.

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