Neo-Colonial Ireland

Introduction

Occasionally one comes across, especially in the speeches of Leinster House politicians, phrases like '…. since we won our independence…' or '…the freedom that we now enjoy..' and so on. Nearly a century ago, James Connolly foresaw the situation that exists here today, when he warned that unless the basic issue of the ownership of Ireland was resolved then it would be a useless exercise to raise the Tricolour over Dublin Castle and paint the post-boxes green, because England would still be in control.

For the purposes of this study we will be making comparisons between developments in Ireland since 1920 and the experiences of the three Baltic Republics: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The question we will ask is this: how is it that these three small states, similar to Ireland in area, population and resources, could by the time of the Soviet invasion in 1940 be approaching Scandinavian levels of prosperity while the two post-partition Irish statelets had made almost no progress at all?

In the six-county case, of course, the area is a direct colonial possession and has the typical features of a colonial economy and society. The twenty-six county entity also has many typical features of a colony but it is in theory not a colony but a completely independent sovereign state.

This peculiar situation is termed neo-colonialism, and comprises a situation where colonial exploitation is carried out by indirect rather than direct means.

The Ascendancy and the Baltic Barons

Some readers may be aware of the photographic archive of Fr Francis Browne, discovered after his death in 1960. That talented amateur photographer left behind about 42,000 snapshots of life in Ireland over the first 40 years of 'independence'. Several collections of them have now been published, and anybody looking at them today cannot but be struck by how shabby everything was: threadbare clothes, battered shoes, bare feet, dilapidated buildings and litter.

But, when Fr Browne moves into the abodes of the gentry, what a contrast!

Here are spacious rooms, elegant clothes, sparkling glassware and porcelain, the latest motor cars and all the trappings of an idle and frivolous lifestyle. Here we see plenty of

evidence that the gap between rich and poor in Ireland is nothing new: it has been here ‘since the state was founded’ and indeed for a long time before.

In the early Middle Ages Ireland was invaded from England by bands of landless knights who attempted to conquer the country and impose feudalism on it. In this they finally succeeded, though it took many centuries. An English-derived ruling class emerged, whose first loyalty was always to England: for the most part despising the Irish and ruthlessly exploiting them. These became known collectively as the Ascendancy.

In the Baltic area too armed bands of knights, mostly from Germany, invaded and gradually conquered the native people, killed off their rulers and imposed a feudal structure with themselves in control. The entire East Baltic area passed under the control of Denmark for a period, then of Sweden and finally of the Russian Tsars. However the German-speaking feudal rulers, the ‘Baltic Barons’ remained in control throughout all these changes. Landlord-and-tenant relationships were roughly the same as in Ireland.

During the First World War the entire area of the Baltic States was conquered by Germany. The Germans hoped to used the area as a place to settle war veterans after a German victory. However in fact Germany lost the war and had to withdraw. For a number of years the area was a battleground fought over by various factions: Russian Bolsheviks, Russian ‘Whites’, German freebooters, and Poles, until each of the three small nations was able to create a national army, expel all foreign forces and establish independence.

What did those states then do about the Baltic Barons? The simple answer is: they ran them out!

In Estonia the landlords were dispossessed of all their estates but allowed to keep their mansions. They were paid compensation for arable land at 3 per cent of the value but nothing for forests or other types of holding. A law of 1926 fixed the maximum size of a holding at 50 hectares, with a preferred minimum of 20 hectares; the national average settled at 34 hectares.

In Latvia there was a similar reform but no compensation at all was paid, and here also the maximum holding was fixed at 50 hectares.

In Lithuania the maximum holding was fixed at 75 hectares, with compensation paid on a sliding scale up to 150 hectares, above which no compensation was payable. The land reform in Lithuania will be the subject of a separate article later in the series.

In all three countries, volunteers of the War of Liberation were given first option on land taken into the Land Bank. Because a farmer starting out needed tools, seed and stock; all three states set up government-sponsored credit unions to assist them.

Comparative Statistics

Country	Area (Square Km)	Population (in 1938)
Estonia	47,500	1,125,000
Latvia	55,700	1,950,000
Lithuania	65,800	2,400,000
Saorstat Eireann (26 Counties)	70,000	2,960,000

Saorstát Éireann had the most land and the largest population, and also had many other advantages: a better climate, fine coasts teeming with fish, adequate energy resources, some mineral deposits. Only in reserves of natural forest did the Baltic states have an advantage. They had no energy resources apart from peat bogs and in Estonia some shale-oil deposits. Yet they had twenty years of steady progress while Ireland north and south experienced little but poverty, backwardness and decay.

The reason was that the Baltic States made far better use of the resources they had, and understood that their people were their best resource. Unlike Saorstát Éireann, no other country was allowed to meddle in their affairs. Their resources were not expended in the payment of feudal rents and spurious debts, their cultures were prized and cherished, their leaders were men of ability and decency.

The Democratic Programme of the First (32-County) Dáil could have been the blueprint for each of these countries, while here in Ireland it was scorned and repudiated by those in power.

The origins of Saorstát Éireann

The insurrection of 1916, though itself a failure, began an armed struggle for freedom that by the early part of 1921 was well on the way to success. The government of England had lost

control of large parts of the country, Republican courts and a Republican police were functioning and the features of an independent state were beginning to emerge in Ireland.

The London government was not going to give in that easily: when they realised they would not be able to maintain the total control they once had they devised a fall-back position hoping to give away as little as possible. In 1920 they brought in a 'Government of Ireland Act' under which Ireland would be divided into two states, both under British control.

The six north-eastern counties would comprise one state to be called Northern Ireland and would have a Protestant majority and would continue to be run the way the whole of Ireland previously had been.

The remaining twenty-six counties would be lumped into a state called Southern Ireland and would have a measure of self-government a bit like Canada and Australia then had but would be tightly bound to Britain and ruled ultimately by the British monarch.

Republicans were unable to prevent the British setting up a puppet parliament in the north-east, where they were weakest, but the attempt to establish one in Dublin was a flop and the war went on.

The Truce and the Treaty

In the summer of 1921 the British requested a truce and in return promised to negotiate. The truce came into effect on Monday, July 11th, at noon.

The British offered a treaty, but it contained merely a rehash of their previous 'Dominion Status' proposals. 'Southern Ireland' would be governed the same way as Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand: the king of England would be head of state and would be represented by a 'Governor General', usually an English aristocrat, who would be the supreme authority in the land and could nominate and dismiss ministers, call elections, pardon convicts and veto legislation and overturn the decisions of courts.

All public representatives would have to swear allegiance to the monarch, as would soldiers, police and civil servants. The British government could conclude treaties and declare war on behalf of a dominion without consultation.

The Irish situation differed from that of the existing 'dominions' in two very important respects.

Firstly Ireland is small and very close to Britain while the others are large and far away.

Secondly the overwhelming majority of the Irish people did not want to be ruled by England at all. In the then existing dominions the majority of the population had strong ethnic and emotional ties to England: it is true that they had minorities who did not want to be ruled from London (Quebecois, Boers, Maoris) but these had been cowed by defeats and remained docile.

The proposed treaty was rejected by the Second Dáil on 16th August 1921 without a single dissenting vote.

A delegation was then sent to London to negotiate terms for a complete British withdrawal. In London the discussions dragged on and on without any solution being reached. Then the British pulled a master stroke: on the 5th December they engaged the delegates in a lengthy and acrimonious negotiating session that dragged on into the early hours of the following morning, then they suddenly produced the original rejected treaty and told the delegates that orders had been passed to the Home Fleet to put to sea from Scapa Flow and sail for Irish waters and that if the delegates did not sign at once there would be 'immediate and terrible war'. It was a bluff, but it worked: the dog-tired delegation panicked and signed.

The Civil War

The treaty was and remains totally worthless and invalid in International Law: both because it was signed under duress and because the delegates had no right to sign it anyway: their only function was to negotiate an agreement and then initial it to confirm that the text was correct. However the British at once announced that a treaty had been concluded and the matter was now closed.

In Ireland nobody wanted the treaty, but the country divided on what to do about it. Some Republicans urged De Valera to arrest the delegates and arraign them for treason, but Dev was basically too timid a man to take such a radical step. Those who had been active in the previous war rejected the treaty almost to a man and woman, but powerful elements came out in support of it.

The Catholic Church threw its considerable weight behind the treaty, and so did the newspapers and various commercial interests. There was a large number of former British soldiers discharged after the European war and organised into a well-funded pro-monarchist society called the British Legion and there were the survivors of the old Irish Parliamentary

Party, who had kept their heads well down during the previous struggle but who now emerged to back the treaty.

In the Dáil debates about the treaty went on and on, while the country divided into two camps. Then in the summer of 1922 the pro-treaty elements, under pressure from London, launched an armed coup against their opponents. A year-long civil war followed, one in which the Republican side was defeated.

Saorstát Éireann

The new 26-county State was officially called the Irish Free State – Saorstát Éireann. This name had been imposed in the treaty and was a compromise: though the British continued to use their original first choice of Southern Ireland.

The debates on the treaty in the Second Dáil had centred mainly on the oath of allegiance to the English monarch, this being something that would impact the TDs immediately, but there was a lot more to the treaty than the oath. Under the treaty the British government would have the right to maintain naval bases in various places, notably Cobh and Lough Swilly.

The Saorstát would have to either continue the employment of all British State employees in the 26 counties, from judges to janitors, or else pension them off. However the actual pensions would be assessed and paid by the British, who would annually bill the Dublin government for the amount paid out.

Full compensation would be paid to Britain for all losses incurred during the recent hostilities and for certain expenses allegedly incurred over the later years of British administration. On top of that, Unionists living in the Saorstát would be paid compensation for losses they incurred due to Republican activities while Britain would pay for damage done by the Black and Tans: the assessments would be made by a judge sent over from Britain.

Finally, the Saorstát would accept partition, but a joint ‘Boundary Commission’ under a British chairman would fix the actual border.

The original founders of the Saorstát, Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith, were dead within a year. The men replacing them were persons of limited ability, and also persons whose contribution to the preceding struggle had been at best very minor. Before long Kevin O’Higgins, a former Redmondite politician who had converted to Republicanism once it became obvious that the old Irish Parliamentary Party was a spent force, emerged as the brains behind the new government.

It was pressure from him that led to the baneful policy of executing captured Republican prisoners during the Civil War, a policy that made him widely hated and which brought disgrace upon the infant Saorstát. A devious and secretive snob with very few friends, he was like most snobs by inclination a monarchist. He was the 'Gray Eminence' of the early years of the Saorstát.

Otherwise, the early rulers of the Saorstát were a pretty sorry lot. The leader of the government, William T. Cosgrave, was a Dublin saloon-keeper of mediocre talents. The first 'governor-general' was Timothy Healy, an old survivor from the Irish Parliamentary Party, despised for his betrayal of Parnell, and an uncle of O'Higgins.

Compensation

Under the terms of the treaty the British sent Lord Justice Shaw over to Dublin to preside at a tribunal that would assess the compensation due to each side because of the actions of the other.

The British Government came up with massive claims against the Saorstát. Apart from the Land Annuities, a tax on land allegedly to compensate England for the cost of trifling 19th century land reforms, there was a demand for repayment of government moneys invested in the railways, payment for damage to government property in both Ireland and Britain, and a curious claim for the cost of resettling 'refugees': this turned out to be the expenses incurred in relocating informers who had been unmasked – the British declined to supply any names.

Apart from this, members of the gentry put in heavy claims: Cosgrave himself complained about 'Lord A and Lord B and Lord C and Lord D' queuing up with their largely fanciful lists of grievances.

Where Lord Shaw's tribunal was concerned, when a claim was made against the Irish side the attitude was "Well, prove you didn't do it" while claims relating to the actions of the Black and Tans were greeted with "Well, prove they did do it" and there was a lot of evidence offered of the sort: "I give you my word as a British Officer that . . ."

In the end the Saorstát had to raise a loan in order to meet the payments awarded. By 1932 the Compensation Fund was still taking up about 7 per cent of the revenue of the Saorstát.

Originally the treaty had required the Saorstát to assume a portion of England's National Debt, but this particular claim was not proceeded with. Not of course out of any feeling of

sympathy towards the Irish but rather because the British realised that even the best of cows can only deliver so much milk.

Some Comparisons

The 1921 treaty has sometimes been called the 'Treaty of Surrender' by Republicans, because it gave so much away.

The only similar previous treaty was the so-called Treaty of Vereeninging, by which the Boer War came to an end in 1902. This was not a treaty at all, it was a set of terms of capitulation made with the British by certain Boer leaders, notably General Smuts. But the old President Kruger was not a party to it, he fled to Germany and never resigned his office. The recent agreement between Yasser Arafat and the State of Israel is similar in nature.

Looking at the Baltic States, none of them signed any sort of treaty like the Irish one, nor were they under pressure to do so from any quarter.

However a quite similar situation to the Irish one of 1921 did arise 80 years later when those States began to break away from the dissolving Soviet Union. Their economies had been integrated with the rest of the USSR during the long period of Soviet occupation, they depended on other parts of the USSR for both supplies and markets.

When a Lithuanian told Mikhail Gorbachev that his country would be better off as an independent State, Gorbachev's sneering reply was: "Yes, and who will buy your exploding television sets?"

When the Lithuanians did break away, Gorbachev cut off their fuel supplies and in negotiations with President Landsbergis he demanded that Lithuania pay Russia 60 billion US dollars as compensation for Soviet property in Lithuania.

As it happened, Gorbachev fell from power soon afterwards and his successor Boris Yeltsin readily agreed to withdraw from the Baltic States.

The political structure of the Free State

The pro-treaty elements in Sinn Féin broke away and formed their own political party; Cumann na nGaedheal. This party set up a 26-county parliament assembling in Leinster House, with an oath of loyalty to the king of England a requirement of entry, and formed a government. The Irish Labour Party, which then as now couldn't decide if it was monarchist or Republican, soon joined in.

A constitution was cobbled together, a compromise document that attempted to be democratic enough to satisfy the Irish and at the same time containing enough references to the king to keep London happy. The constitution was passed at Westminster as the Irish Free State Constitution Act 1922.

One feature was the introduction of proportional representation in elections. This was done because the British insisted on it, not because it was fair but because they hoped the rump Unionist community would thus be able to obtain a few seats, and indeed there was for many years a few Unionists in Leinster House.

When compared with the three Baltic States the general structure was about the same: all four had a figurehead head-of-State and a parliament elected by proportional representation, but in the Baltic States the head-of-State was elected too. Saorstát Éireann also had a 'Senate', a talking shop into which the government invited members of the Ascendancy in the hope that this would buy their support.

All four derived ultimately from the French Third Republic. In each of the three Baltic States great difficulty was experienced due to the large number of political parties coupled with the lack of political experience, ultimately leading to the adoption of a more authoritarian form of government with an executive president rather on the American model. (The French themselves eventually adopted this model too). In the Saorstát when de Valera came to power the 'single strong leader' model also evolved de facto, but was never formalised.

Clientism

The Saorstát, therefore, had the structure of a 'Bourgeois Democracy'. This form of government, which evolved in France during the 19th century, is by many people assumed to be the only proper way to run a country. A bourgeois democracy is a State run by and for a particular social class: the bourgeoisie or middle class.

The problem was that the Saorstát had only a very small middle class: too thinly spread to be able to develop as a ruling political entity. Whenever an attempt is made to create a bourgeois democracy without a bourgeoisie, clientism appears.

Under a clientist system people vote for a politician not out of enthusiasm for his or her political programme but to do the person the favour of helping them to get a very well-paid job. In return the politician is expected to do favours for the voter. Thence emerged that unique Irish institution: the politician's clinic.

Some bizarre situations have resulted. For many years a Mr Byrne sat in Leinster House as an independent deputy for County Clare. He rarely took part in debates and was in politics purely to get the large salary and eventual pension all deputies received.

Byrne was a 'bone-setter', a kind of unlicensed chiropractor, who provided his services free: his only requirement being that the patient vote for him in the next election.

The favours-for-votes system has led to the evolution of political dynasties ('Da looked afther yez, so will I!') and also has enabled politicians to shift party allegiance while carrying their vote with them (the Progressive Democrat party could not have emerged otherwise).

Clientist political systems have evolved in Greece and in the south of Italy. In Naples for many years the politically insignificant Monarchist Party controlled the city, because a week before each election they would distribute thousands of left-foot children's shoes free. If they won, then the right shoes would be distributed a week later.

Clientism, which the PR electoral system greatly assists, is inseparable from corruption. This has led many Irish people to despise politicians and to assume they are basically crooks. Thus the situation already observed in ancient times by Aristotle and Cicero arose: decent people decline to get involved in public affairs and the scoundrels get a clear run.

As soon as the Saorstát was up and running, all sorts of left-overs from the old Irish Party at Westminster began to crawl out of their holes and become politically active. These brought with them another baneful tradition.

The old Irish Party had been a small minority at Westminster, with little influence, and had developed a tradition of making long bombastic speeches full of exaggerated statements expressed in convoluted language. The speeches of Irish politicians were a standard butt of England's humorists, and it didn't really matter what they said because they were insignificant players in the Westminster political game.

But they carried this tradition of parliamentary windbaggery into Leinster House, with an excessive faith in the power of words and a dedication to speeches for the sake of speeches and an assumption that rhetoric is an end in itself. James Dillon, an old survivor from the Parliamentary Party who was for many years leader of Fine Gael was perhaps the most notable example.

'Stepping Stones?'

Almost nobody in Ireland had wanted the treaty. Various arguments were used to get people to accept it. The threat of war certainly convinced many. Others argued along the lines that it had been signed and nothing could be done about it. It was argued that it would provide a ‘stepping stone’ to the Republic. To some it was a ‘damn good bargain’.

Unfortunately quite a few decent but misguided Irish patriots were taken in by one or other of these arguments.

Also, some military people were deceived into believing that as soon as the Civil War was over preparations would be made to make a complete break with England and also to recover the Six Counties.

However, when the Civil War ended a large scale demobilisation of troops began: England’s work was now done and they were not needed. Some senior officers, realising they had been hoodwinked, began a conspiracy to overthrow the Leinster House cabal. Before they could make a move they were dismissed on the orders of Kevin O’Higgins and the whole plot, rather grandly called the Army Mutiny by historians, collapsed in a ridiculous fashion.

The regime was so short of support that it was obliged to take on nearly any careerist, place-hunter or chancer that came along. From this there built up an element enormously enamoured of the treaty (‘The Treaty’) which had enabled them to get positions and careers in no way merited by their abilities.

The treaty became something sacred: Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith were Great Men because they had Signed the Treaty, and so on.

On the other side of the coin, the persecution of Republicans continued unabated after the end of the Civil War and great numbers of them emigrated, mostly to the United States. Because the Republican Movement had drawn to it the best elements in Irish society the country lot a great deal of talent in this way.

Ireland’s loss was America’s gain. Many of them prospered, and did not forget their native land or their Republican principles. Paradoxically, the economy of the Saorstát later became heavily dependant on money sent back to Ireland by these political exiles to assist impoverished relatives at home.

The Rise of Fianna Fáil

From the beginning, Republicans boycotted Leinster House and refused to recognise the legitimacy of the Saorstát. Sinn Féin candidates stood in elections but as abstentionists. The Second Dáil, the last one voted in an all-Ireland election, remained the lawful government of Ireland.

But the Saorstát was firmly in control. While most people would have preferred to have an Irish Republic free of London domination the realities of everyday life under neo-colonialism compelled them to compromise and make the best of the situation as it was: that or emigrate.

Within the Republican movement a personality cult developed around Éamon de Valera. De Valera himself had already begun to prevaricate on Republican principles, as can be seen from his pre-treaty 'Document No 2.' He began within Sinn Féin to shift his ground, taking the position that the only Republican objection to the Saorstát was the oath to the English king, and if it was removed they would enter Leinster House. Of course the fact that the oath was keeping Republicans out of the picture made Cosgrave and his associates even more determined to keep it.

It was not much of a step from there to proposing that Sinn Féin enter Leinster House, taking the oath to do so, in order to be able to abolish the oath once inside.

Unable to get his line accepted, de Valera left Sinn Féin in 1926 with all his admirers and set up Fianna Fáil as a political party reflecting his own views.

Jinksed!

In 1927 Kevin O'Higgins was shot dead in mysterious circumstances in a Dublin street and the Cumann na nGaedheal regime lost its strong man: some would say its evil genius.

Later that year there was an election, in which Fianna Fáil got a considerable number of seats but not a majority. After some theatrical posturing de Valera and his associates went to Leinster House and took the oath to be loyal to His Imperial Majesty King George the Fifth and His Heirs and Successors.

A curious and farcical debacle was to follow. De Valera had secured the support of a small party called the National League, which was actually the still-surviving rump of the old Irish Parliamentary Party, but which had decided that de Valera was the coming man and it would be prudent to be on his side. With it he would be able to form a coalition having a majority of one.

One of the National League deputies was an Alderman John Jinks of Sligo Town. On the day of the crucial vote in Leinster House, Jinks was approached by the head of the British Legion in Sligo, Major Cooper, and warned that if he were to vote for de Valera the Legion would order a boycott of his ironmongery business. Cooper then took Jinks to a nearby bar, where the editor of the Irish Times, Bertie Smyllie, kept him drinking until the vote was over.

Thanks to this intervention a lame-duck Cumann na nGaedheal administration managed to survive until 1932, when de Valera, in alliance with Labour, came to power. In an election the following year, Fianna Fáil gained an absolute majority.

De Valera Supreme

The coming to power of Fianna Fáil in 1932 was generally welcomed by Republicans. There were immediate improvements: some Republicans were released from prison and the persecution of Republicans by the authorities for a time ceased entirely. The new government also had many positive features: it began to build up native industries and to introduce much-needed social reforms.

The oath to the king was abolished at once and the British, who had other worries, did not object. The governor-general was disposed of in this way: de Valera named an obscure person to the post and took over the ceremonial aspects of the office himself.

When the last incumbent died he never appointed a replacement.

An important element of the Fianna Fáil platform had been the abolition of the Land Annuities. The new government continued to collect the annuities but stopped paying them over to London. Thus began the Economic War: basically a British blockade, which was to drag on for years and cause much hardship. Eventually it was settled by having the Saorstát paying off the British with a lump sum.

De Valera's victory caused the collapse of the Cumann na nGaedheal party. Soon, an organisation made up of persons who had fought on the anti-Republican side in the Civil War, the Army Comrades Association, became the main centre of opposition. This body evolved into an openly fascistic group: the Blueshirts. Combating the activities of the Blueshirts largely devolved to Republicans because the Gardaí were more or less sympathetic to them; the leader of the Blueshirts, O'Duffy, being former Garda Commissioner. After a few years the Blueshirts collapsed and the remnants formed a new right-wing political party; Fine Gael.

The New Constitution

In 1937 de Valera proposed a new Constitution. When the text was published the author proudly stated that there was no mention of a king. Nor was there, but keen eyes soon picked out His Majesty lurking behind various euphemistic phrases. The relationship with the British Empire was in fact defined in another document, the External Relations Act. The Constitution did not specifically say that the state was a republic either, and Dev tried to assure the Irish that it was and the British that it wasn't. The British themselves had other things on their minds: the Anglican church had just forced the abdication of the monarch.

Asked in Leinster House if the Constitution meant the treaty was repudiated, Dev admitted that the treaty still stood.

Since then, enough hot air has been expended on the subject of the 1937 Constitution to launch a fleet of Zeppelins. Perhaps the best comment came from the writer Seán O Faoláin, who said that it was obviously drawn up by a mathematician because each clause contained a statement followed by a cancelling statement; with the whole adding up to zero.

It was passed in a referendum by a narrow majority. The public was not given an opportunity to vote on a genuine Republican constitution, they were only allowed to choose between what was on offer and what had gone before.

The Constitution was a set of compromises between incompatibles: between monarchy and republicanism, between democracy and theocracy, between elitist and populist. There was provision for a president to take over the functions previously performed by the governor-general. An agreed compromise candidate for this office was found in the aged, non-political, Gaelic scholar Douglas Hyde, who was elected unopposed.

The humorous writer 'The Pope' O'Mahoney commented that all that was needed now was a compromise National Anthem. He suggested:

God save our gracious Hyde!

God save our noble Hyde!

God save our Hyde!

When Dev and Cosgrave clash

He will do nothing rash,

God bless his old mustache

God save our Hyde!

The Baltic Experience

In the three Baltic States, politics bogged down due to the large number of political parties. In the Latvian Saeima for example there were 22 parties, rising to 24 due to splits. In all three countries there emerged powerful right-wing organisations made up of ex-soldiers of the War of Liberation. In each of them a single strong leader who had general popular support was to emerge: Antanas Smetona in Lithuania, Karlis Ulmanis in Latvia and Konstantin Päts in Estonia.

In Lithuania the Sauliu Sajunga (Rifle Association), a kind of semi-official reservists organisation, developed fascistic tendencies and got out of control. It was disbanded in 1938 and some of the leaders were convicted of treason and shot.

In Latvia the Aizsergi (Insurrection) society had a roughly similar history. In Estonia the Vabadussojalaste Liit (League of Fighters for Freedom) had to be disbanded in March 1934 when it attempted to organise a march on the capital to overthrow the government.

In Finland there were similar developments, leading to the emergence of Mannheim as national political leader.

The financial structure of the Free State

When Saorstát Éireann was established in 1922 it had about 21,000 British civil servants on its territory. Under the terms of the 1921 treaty all of these had to be offered either continuity of employment or full pensions. Less than a thousand took the pension option, the remainder opted to remain on: they brought with them total security of employment, guaranteed pay increases based on length of service and the right to a generous pension.

Most of the lower-grade civil servants were Irish, drawn mainly from the ‘Castle Catholic’ element in the population. Going up in the ranks, however, a larger and larger proportion of them tended to be English. It was natural enough that the English would look after their own, and membership of a Masonic lodge was also rumoured to be necessary if one sought rapid promotion.

The Department of Finance

The most influential civil service institution in the Saorstát was the new Department of

Finance, which virtually ran the state for the first half-century of its existence.

There had been in Dublin Castle a 'Treasury Branch' which looked after the finances of the administration and which, as might have been expected, operated on the principle that as little money as possible should be wasted on the lazy and ungrateful Irish. The civil servants employed there took over the new Department of Finance when it was set up.

The head of the department from its establishment until he retired in 1944 was Arthur Codling, an Englishmen who had worked in Dublin Castle since 1900. The bulk of his senior staff were also natives of England: TSC Dagg, CS Almond, JL Lynd and CJ Gregg. The only Irishman to occupy a senior post was Joseph Brennan: Brennan had also worked in the Castle, had opted for a pension and had then got himself the plumb job of Comptroller-General, while retaining his pension.

Birds of a feather flock together. The men who ran the Department of Finance of course gave preference to those subordinates whose views were closest to their own, and to some extent the golf course replaced the Masonic coven as the place where preferments were negotiated.

So there was created a powerful. non-accountable, self-perpetuating bureaucracy that rolled on and on doing what it did: the inherited British obsession with secrecy made sure that very few people knew what in fact it was doing. (Even the price of a bun in the staff canteen was a state secret.)

Looking at the history of the early years of the Department, or as much of it as is in the public domain, at first glance one might be forgiven for concluding that the leaders of it regarded the economic sabotaging of the Saorstát as a kind of patriotic duty.

Closer inspection reveals a more complex situation. While they could barely conceal their contempt for the Saorstát and those who ran it, to them it was still better than the alternative. Rather, their behaviour is consistent with a determination to do the best they could to ensure that England's interests were not jeopardised. They were more like London civil servants sent to run the finances of some remote British county council: they would try to make a good job of it but their prime concern was to protect the interests of the British Empire as a whole.

Apart from that, such ideas about trade and economics and banking and financial matters in general as they had were always about fifty years out of date.

The Sterling Link

One point the Department of Finance was adamant on was that British currency should continue to be used in the Saorstát, and that if a separate 'Irish' currency were introduced then it should be a one-to-one duplicate of sterling and sterling should continue to circulate freely. The usual arguments were trotted out: Britain is our biggest trading partner, thousands of tills and cash registers would have to be altered, an independent currency would quickly collapse and so on.

Apart from laziness and nostalgia, there were two practical reasons why a break with sterling was opposed. Firstly, if a new Irish currency had been introduced then all the sterling in circulation would have been withdrawn and Britain asked to honour it in bullion: treasury notes being in theory IOUs issued by the British government against gold held by the Bank of England. Of course the Bank of England did not wish to part with any gold.

A second reason was that the Saorstát, unique in the sterling area, had a significant portion of its native-born population living in the United States and these emigrants regularly sent home money to relatives in Ireland and often eventually retired to Ireland with their savings and pensions. This actually brought a very significant sum of money into the sterling area (about twenty million dollars a year) and this money eventually found its way to the Bank of England and made a useful contribution to England's balance of payments: the more so because it was in effect 'free money': nothing had to be exported in exchange. Also a very unfavourable exchange rate was in operation: five dollars to the pound sterling.

Sterling was a grossly overvalued unit of currency. This was done partly for prestige purposes but also because England was a major international creditor. Third World debt is nothing new: many South American countries were massively in debt to England at high interest rates. Some European counties also owed huge sums, notably Greece and Portugal. Germany was paying large war damages.

Even within the British Empire heavy payments in sterling were going to London, notably from India. The Saorstát too was handing over large amounts of money each year to the London government under various pretexts, while about as much again was going as private payments for such things as ground rents. It made sense to keep the exchange rate high.

The use of the artificially high sterling currency was one of the main factors inhibiting the economy of the Saorstát. It meant that the price of Irish goods on world markets were prohibitively high. Only Britain could afford Irish exports, and on the British market they had to compete with similar goods from countries outside the sterling area.

So, almost all exports went to Britain. For the most part this consisted of food, and especially of cattle on the hoof. In Britain itself the government was subsidising food production as a means of holding down the cost of living, depressing wages and thus subsidising exports. This too was to the disadvantage of the Irish producers.

The Note Fund

The Cumann na nGaedheal government was determined to produce their own ‘national’ coinage and currency notes. The Department of Finance reluctantly agreed, but insisted that it be on the basis of a token issue for sterling. Certain Irish banks, notably the Bank of Ireland, already issued their own notes on this basis.

A new coinage was introduced in 1925. Copper and silver coins were minted at the Royal Mint in London and were struck from the same blanks as the equivalent English coins. They had the motif of various familiar animals; as did the coins of the other ‘Dominions’. From about 1942 the British began to withdraw the silver coins, using the Irish banks, and replace them with ones made of cupro-nickel: the silver being needed for other purposes.

In 1927 currency notes began to be issued. Probably due to pressure from the British, for each note issued an equivalent amount in sterling was lodged with the Bank of England, so as to guarantee the sterling equivalence of the notes.

It also guaranteed that sterling withdrawn from circulation would be returned to the originator, the Bank of England, and not encashed. This so-called ‘Note Fund’, which eventually exceeded a billion pounds, actually constituted a colossal loan from one of the poorest countries in the world to one of the richest and was basically a gigantic swindle.

The Saorstát, like most governments of the time, kept what were called ‘external assets’. These assets consisted of amounts of ready money held in various world centres of banking to enable rapid settlement of international payments. Most countries kept their external assets in gold. The Saorstál;t was unique in that it kept all its external assets in Bank of England notes. The experts of the Department of Finance insisted that the value of gold might fall, but that sterling was, well, as safe as the Bank of England and would never, never be devalued. They were mistaken.

For many years Saorstát Éireann had the highest per capita external assets in the world.

The Banking Commission

In 1934 the new Fianna Fáil regime set up a ‘Banking Commission’ to investigate the Saorstát’s finances and make recommendations. It was the usual sort of mixed bag: an elderly professor from Trinity and another from UCD, a few bankers, some businessmen and a bishop.

A report was submitted in 1938 which more or less said, well, it’s not very nice but there’s nothing to be done so carry on as before. The only change they suggested was greater restriction on investment in semi-state bodies like the ESB.

However two members submitted a dissenting minority report. They were Professor Alfred O’Rahilly and Seán Campbell, president of the Irish Congress of Trades Unions.

This report recommended a break with sterling, the repatriation of the Note Fund, greater availability of credit and more government intervention in and regulation of the state’s finances. To this minority report the Department of Finance, without the permission or even knowledge of the signatories, appended a 136-page addendum, worded in the most insulting and intemperate language, dismissing the minority report as utter and complete nonsense.

De Valera and his associates accepted the majority report and things went on under Fianna Fáil much as they had under Cumann na nGaedheal.

Agriculture and land in the Free State

After partition the 26-county state was left with almost no industry and was nearly entirely agricultural, the economy being heavily dependent on one source of income: the export of live cattle.

At the beginning of the ninteenth century the territory of Ireland was divided up among landlords who rented land to tenant farmers. In the towns too landlords owned the land underneath the buildings and the residents had to pay ‘ground rent’ to them. Rural agitation throughout the late 1800s had forced the government to restrict the power of the landlords and eventually to bring in a scheme under which tenant farmers could purchase their holdings on a state-managed installment scheme. However the process was a slow and expensive one and there remained great inequalities in the ownership of land.

The Land Bank

During the Tan War, in the parts of the country over which the British had lost control, land-hunger caused people to begin taking over and dividing up the estates of the gentry. The Dáil however was opposed to anarchic land-seizure, which was seen to be likely to cause as many problems as it solved, and even put guards on some demesnes to prevent take-over. Instead, Land Courts were set up to deal with redistribution issues, and the Dáil also established a body called the Land Bank.

The Land Bank was given £200,000 starting capital and was intended to facilitate the purchase of land from members of the Ascendancy; who now often saw no future for themselves and were anxious to sell up and get out while they still could. The Land Bank would advance money to any co-op having at least seven members, none of whom was to be an employer of paid labour, to buy land coming on the market. Prior to the Civil War £365,000 was loaned to rural co-ops for this purpose.

The Bank was an independent institution headed by a respected academic, Professor Arthur Cleary. After the Civil War the Leinster House government took it over, closed it down and sold its assets for a nominal sum to the Bank of Ireland.

Agriculture in the Saorstát

Over the first sixty years of the Saorstát, visiting expert after visiting expert was to express amazement that a land so potentially rich could be producing so little. Many Irish people agreed. Why was this so?

Suppose one were to have a map of, for example, County Roscommon in 1932: ten years after the Saorstát was established, and on that map had a dot for every resident. Looking at

it one would assume that the west and south of the county were relatively arable and prosperous while the north and east were poor and unable to support a large population.

In fact the exact opposite was true. West and south Roscommon, where the bulk of the population lived, contained mostly relatively inferior land: stony and bleak with much bog and scrub and with people scratching a living off tiny holdings of a few hectares each.

The north and east had much better land, but it consisted of very large holdings, usually hundreds of hectares in extent. However the owners did not consider themselves farmers or ranchers but squires. They had no interest in the land they owned except that it should provide the funds to pay for their usually prodigal lifestyle. Estate management would be left largely in the hands of backward labourers whose notions about agriculture did not extend much beyond letting bullocks eat the grass. This was the world described by David Thompson in his famous account Woodbrook.

These estates functioned by buying young cattle produced on the small farms of the west and south of the county and fattening them for export. This grotesque set-up had evolved over time because the landlords had expelled the population from the best land to create ranches while leaving tenants with the poorer land and squeezing them for rent. [In Scotland the landlords went a stage further, they evicted the inhabitants of the poorer lands too, to make way for sheep.]

County Roscommon has been selected as a random example: the story was exactly the same for the rest of the country, the worst land was cultivated and the best given over to grazing.

The ranches contributed little to the economy. The small farmers could have fattened the cattle they produced themselves if they had more land. Also the ranches were mostly over-grazed and neglected. But the Saorstát was reluctant to bring in any large-scale reform. These squireens had influence: they showed up at the Dublin Horse Show and hob-nobbed with visiting notables and cheered the British team. Also, in the wisdom of the time: Big was Beautiful.

Land reform

Towards the end of the 19th century the British began to carry out certain minor land reforms, as part of the policy of ‘killing Home Rule by kindness’.

Landlords had always bitterly opposed the selling of land to tenants, who in any case usually barely had enough money to pay their rent let alone buy their holdings. A bankrupt landlord who had to dispose of his assets was expected to sell to another landlord; thus confining the ownership of land within the Ascendency class. Failing that, they preferred to sell to foreigners.

In 1891 the British established the Congested Districts Board with a view to reducing the number of very small uneconomic holdings especially on the western seaboard. This was to be done partly by encouraging emigration, partly by consolidation of holdings and partly by the encouragement of alternative means of livelihood such as fishing and cottage industries. The work of the board was concentrated in County Mayo where agrarian unrest was greatest. The work of the CDB was on the whole enlightened and beneficial. Among other things they did buy out bankrupt landlords and redistribute their estates. The whole of Clare Island was bought from the landlord and given to his tenants.

Later the Land Commission was established with the purpose of buying up land and selling it on long-term hire-purchase to suitable farmers. It was set up as a sop to the Irish Party but was run by a committee of landlords, the class it was supposed to eliminate, and it made very slow progress.

At the beginning of the present century the Wyndham Acts enabled tenants farmers to buy out their landlords. The value of the land would be assessed by a judge, a person who could be expected to have strong class identity with the landlord, and the landlord would be given British government bonds to that amount.

The farmer would then pay the Land Commission an annual sum rather like interest on a loan. The farmer received deeds to the land and in theory owned it, though all that had really happened was that he had had a change of landlords.

The landlords continued to own the residue of their estates: woods, bogs, waste land, lakes and rivers. For example people had, and usually still have, to pay a fee to be allowed to cut turf.

Post-Treaty developments

The early rulers of the Saorstát had little interest in matters agricultural. However they did make sporadic attempts to improve matters: the Land Commission and the Congested Districts Board were amalgamated. A Land Act of 1923 enabled tenants to purchace their holdings through the Land Commission by annual payments over 68 years, at a rate usually

about half of what they had been paying in rent. To improve cattle stocks a system of licensing of bulls was introduced.

On the other hand there was no attempt to limit the maximum size of holdings, the cornerstone of land policy in each of the Baltic states, and no changes to the essentially feudal property laws. The Land Commission itself had little interest in breaking up large estates: the Dublin-based civil servants who ran it were concerned first and foremost with their own careers and pensions and were reluctant to make extra work for themselves and took action only when political pressure made it impossible to avoid doing so. The politicians, despite occasional outbursts of rhetoric, were content to let things slide. Nevertheless, the number of civil servants employed in the Land Commission rose steadily year after year, a fine example of the Parkinson effect.

When de Valera came to power there was a short burst of land redistribution: not unconnected with the patronage and rewards system, but the advent of the Economic War put agriculture up in such a heap that few people were interested in taking up farming anyway. The Rath Cairn experiment, where farmers from Connamara were resettled on ranchland in County Meath, remains an example of what could and should have been done all over the country, but it was to be only a half-hearted pilot project that was not expanded on.

Wartime experience

The submarine blockade of 1914-1918 had given Irish agriculture a monopoly access to markets in Britain and trade in live cattle boomed and dealers and middle-men prospered. Afterwards export of live cattle to Britain became the economic mainstay of the Saorstát, bringing in about £20M a year.

However, all was not as it seems: the Saorstát also spent about half that sum on the importation of cattlefeed: the overvaluation of sterling made feed cheaper to import than to grow at home. Curiously, export and import of pork were about the same at £2M each: export of live pigs to Britain was balanced by importation of cheap ‘shop’ bacon produced in England from pigs fed on swill.

During the Second World War there was another submarine blockade but this time the British had their act together. Realising that the Saorstát was cut off from external markets by lack of ships, they imposed fixed, very low, prices on Irish food exports to Britain. In the Saorstát itself the cutting off of cheap third-party sources of food compelled the government to introduce compulsory tilling of the land. It should be noted that cultivation of wheat and

sugar beet, mostly on large farms, was subsidised while growing of oats and potatoes, mostly on small farms, was not.

After the war the London government continued the wartime policy of pegging the price paid for Irish food at an uneconomic level, compelling the Saorstát to introduce export subsidies. This situation continued until the advent of the Common Market, under which agriculture has been pushed in a different – though equally misguided – direction.

In the next issue there will be a description, for comparison purposes, of the land reform programme in Lithuania in the years of independence.

The land reform of Father Krupavicius

(In this article we give an overview of the land policy pursued in Lithuania during the period of independence 1918-1940.)

When the Baltic States achieved independence after the First World War they were faced with massive problems. Their territories had been fought over and looted by rival armies, the only currencies in circulation were worthless scrip, they faced threats from powerful neighbours.

The Lithuanians had additional problems. The boundary between the German and Russian empires had passed through their country and both parties had deliberately left the area backward and underdeveloped, so that should the other side invade they would be hampered by poor roads, etc. Almost all the people lived by farming, using very primitive methods.

The country did not inherit a unified legal system. The region of Klaipeda had belonged to Germany and used German law. The region of Uznemune had been administered by the Tsars as part of Poland and used Polish law. The region of Palanga used Baltic law, which was of Swedish origin. The rest of the country used a Russian legal code: the Svod Zemstvo. Thus there were four different legal systems, written in four different languages, and each had a unique set of rules regarding land, property and inheritance.

This was reflected in a large variety of land-tenure systems. Most of the country used the Russian Mir which resembled the pre-Famine ‘Clachan-and-rundale’ arrangement in parts of Ireland. Under it the fields in a townland were reallocated each year in a lottery. This meant that as a family only had a field for a year they tried to get the most out of it while putting the least in. There was great reluctance to abandon this uneconomic practice because people saw it as ‘fair’.

When the Russian prime minister Stolypin tried to replace it with consolidation of holdings in 1911 he was promptly assassinated. In other areas there was a patchwork of tiny fields scattered higgledy-piggledy like the Congested Districts of the west of Ireland. In others there was strip-farming: with fields divided into narrow strips, each hardly wide enough for a potato ridge, The whole lot had over it landlords of German, Polish or Russian extraction.

In 1910 some priests set up an organisation called Artojas ('The Ploughboy') to buy out bankrupt landlords and redistribute their holdings. By the outbreak of war in 1914 about 5,000 hectares had been transferred.

The early post-independence years

All the Baltic states experienced massive destruction during the First World War and the subsequent War of Liberation. Their sovereignty finally gained acceptance under the Treaty of Riga in 1921.

In Lithuania the 'Founding Seimas' faced enormous tasks: the need to draw up a constitution, to establish a police and civil service, to organise a school system and so on. Land reform was but one task among many. About 2,500 landowners held between them half the land, while at the other end of the scale there were 40,000 families living on tiny holdings and about 60,000 landless rural families.

There was no consensus on what should be done. Some right-wing parties opposed any reform, claiming that large estates were more efficient. The urban-based Social Democrats advocated the nationalisation of all land and the creation of large state-owned agribusinesses. The Minister for Agriculture, Jonas Aleksa, started a rather cautious land redistribution program, involving about 8,000 hectares a year.

Father Krupavicius

In June 1923 Father Mykolas Krupavicius became Minister for Agriculture and he immediately put into operation a more radical programme that he had already proposed several years before.

A Land Agency was established to broker land redistribution. It took control of all government lands and also all forests, swamps, peat-bogs, sand-dunes, rivers, lakes, beaches and uncultivated lands. The Land Agency confiscated certain private holdings:

[1] Lands belonging to persons who had enlisted in the armed forces of other states.

[2] Lands granted by the Tsar as a reward for helping in the suppression of the 1863 uprising.
Foreign nationals were not permitted to own land. All foreigners had within three years to take out citizenship or dispose of their holdings. An exception was made in the case of certain Swedish nationals who had bought farms in Lithuania in Tsarist times: it was recognised that these had made a valuable contribution by introducing modern farming practices, organising co-operatives and so on. (The man who was to take Lithuania out of the USSR, Professor Landsbergis, is of Swedish ancestry.)

The maximum amount of land one person could own was set at 75 hectares: a figure variously denounced as too big or too small. Where a holding exceeded 75 hectares the owner was allowed to select what part to retain and the Land Agency took over the rest. Compensation was paid for the first 75 hectares taken over on the basis of what Artojas would have paid for it before the war, no compensation was paid for any surplus above that.

Land was to be allocated in parcels of 8 to 20 hectares, depending on quality. Volunteers of the War of Liberation, and the families of dead volunteers, and families whose land had been confiscated under the Tsars for political reasons, were given first option and received their land free. Other recipients had to pay for their land over a 36-year period starting nine years after receiving it, and during that period land could not be sold or rented out. There was a scheme whereby civil servants could receive one hectare in certain isolated areas on condition they built themselves a holiday home and planted and maintained an orchard.

The Minister insisted that the largest estates be broken up first: he was of the opinion that the largest landowners were the least loyal to the Republic and the most inclined to conspire with her enemies.

Under Fr. Krupavicius the pace of land reform speeded up very much, to about 150,000 hectares a year, the main limiting factor being shortage of surveyors. Of course the gentry did not take this without protest: some Catholic ones denounced the minister to the Vatican as a Communist while some Protestant ones brought a case to the League of Nations alleging religious persecution.

Whenever an estate was broken up, former employees of it were allocated parcels of land, and land was often handed over to adjacent small holdings to bring them up to an economic size. Religious institutions such as convents were allowed to own up to 8 hectares and parishes could own up to that amount for use as church grounds, graveyards and the like.

Subsequent developments

In December 1926 the Lithuanian government was overthrown in a coup and Antanas Smetona was made president with executive powers. The move was generally welcomed, because people had become sick of political wrangling and instability. Fr. Krupavicius resigned and withdrew from politics and Jonas Aleksa became Minister for Agriculture again. The pace of land redistribution slowed down considerably, to about a third of what it had been. In 1929 the law was amended to double the maximum size of holding, to 150 hectares.

However, land reform activity continued up until the Soviet invasion of 1940.

Credit Unions and Co-Operatives

Agricultural policy in Lithuania had three main elements. The first was land redistribution. The second was improvement of methods through education, with an Academy of Agriculture being established at Dotnuva. The third was the establishment of a widespread network of government-sponsored co-operatives and credit unions.

There was already a tradition of neighbourly co-operation in the performing of certain tasks, such as ploughing and harvesting, and also the bulk purchase of certain commodities such as seed and fertiliser. This was known as talka and was practised throughout the country, and it was relatively easy to formalise this tradition.

Many different types of co-operatives were formed. There were consumer co-operatives (‘Rochdale’ principle) whose members received dividends based on the amount of goods purchased. There were credit unions (‘Raiffeisen’ banks) for which the State put up the starting capital. A third type was the producer co-operative, which engaged in marketing.

The union of dairy farmer co-operatives, Pienocentras, organised the export of milk products and eggs. Linas, the union of flax-grower co-operatives, ran linen mills and marketed the produce. All these bodies combined under the umbrella of Lietukis, the Union of Rural Co-operatives. All sorts of other co-ops also existed: the Union of Teachers had one that produced school supplies, the Students Union ran canteens and college shops.

Courses in co-operative management were available at Dotnuva and at the University of Kaunas.

The co-operative movement allowed farmers to get optimum value both when they bought and when they sold, through the elimination of middle-men and profiteering.

When the Soviets occupied Lithuania in the summer of 1940 they were astonished to discover that agricultural output exceeded that of the Ukraine. Molotov, talking to the last premier Vincas Kreve, expressed amazement that ‘everything goes like clockwork’ yet nobody seemed to be in charge or giving orders.

A golden age

There are prices to be paid for all social advances. With the consolidation of holdings farmers switched to homesteading and built houses on their own land and the immemorial village life, with its complex web of custom and mutual interaction, began to break down. None the less, the period of the First Republic (1918-1940) was looked back on as a golden age.

The Polish poet and Nobel Prize winner Czeslaw Milosz, who lived for a few years in Lithuania as a boy, writes in his autobiography:

…when I arrived at the end of the journey I found an earthly paradise. […] Four years of German occupation had not changed anything in Lithuania. The days unfolded, just as they had for centuries, to the rhythm of work in the fields, Catholic feasts, solemn processions, and the rites of Christian-pagan magic. Except for relatively light shocks – one of these was the agricultural reforms, which affected the majority of landowners – the same rhythm persisted up until the Second World War. I entered into a stunning greenness, into choruses of birds, into orchards bent low with the weight of fruit, into the enchantment of my native river, so unlike the boundless dreary rivers of the eastern plains. Even today I feel grateful to the girls who took so much care twining garlands of leaves and flowers to decorate the church.

Czeslaw Milosz (born 1911): Native Realm, 1968.

The banking system

In the Middle Ages feudal knights, in England and in other countries, managed to reduce the power of their monarchs by restricting their right to raise taxes. By controlling taxation, feudal parliaments compelled the ruler to share power with the barons. This was achieved in England in the reign of King John.

But the feudal elite also thereby excluded the emerging class of successful merchants from influence. Towards the end of the 17th century the Stuart monarchy was overthrown and William of Orange became king of England.

Part of the deal that brought William to the throne was an agreement with some wealthy private persons that William would give them a charter to set up a bank that would have a large number of privileges, including the right to lend money to the state without parliamentary permission and the right to issue currency notes.

Thus the Bank of England was born and the monarch, and thence in effect the government, had a source of loans and the emerging capitalist class received a licence to print money.

The creation of the Bank of Ireland

Over the following century there were numerous attempts to create in Ireland an equivalent to the Bank of England but such moves were successfully opposed for many years by notable Protestants who appear to have been acting on genuinely patriotic grounds.

Dean Swift in particular was an outspoken opponent of the scheme, and of other similar attempts at monetary chicanery, while Bishop Berkeley said that if a Bank of Ireland were to be set up then it should be publicly and not privately owned.

Finally in 1783 the Bank of Ireland was established by 'Royal Charter'. It had the same function as the Bank of England had in England: to allow the government to borrow money without the consent of parliament. Among the shareholders were Robert Emmet's father, Wolfe Tone's grandfather and Lord Kilwarden.

As with the Bank of England, members of the Huguenot community were prominent in the running of the bank. All Bank of Ireland employees were required to take an oath denouncing the Roman Catholic religion as superstition, thus excluding Catholics. Irish Quakers, out of respect for their Catholic fellow-countrymen, also refused to take this oath and, as was said 'thus excluded themselves'. The oath was abolished in 1845 but until very recent times the Bank of Ireland did not employ Catholics other than in menial positions.

The Bank of Ireland was the official government bank, but after the Act of Union of 1800 it lost a lot of its official status. In 1803 the bank bought the old 'Irish Parliament' buildings at College Green and established its head office there.

Nineteenth Century developments

In 1825 a group of Catholic and Quaker businessmen founded the Hibernian Bank to break the Bank of Ireland's monopoly. Several more banks were founded soon afterwards (Ulster Bank, Royal Bank, National Bank, Provincial Bank, etc). The Bank of Ireland still remained the government's banker in Ireland and the country's most powerful financial institution.

In the late 19th century the Bank of Ireland began a policy of lending money at quite generous rates of interest to Catholic institutions. The motive appears to have been to make the church authorities indebted to the Unionist interests that owned the bank.The Irish Banks Standing Committee (IBSC) was organised, making banking in Ireland into a cartel. In practice the IBSC followed whatever lead was given by the Bank of Ireland.

The World War, the Tan War and the Civil War

During the First World War the British several times placed a bullion levy on the Irish banks. The bullion was needed to pay the Americans, who despite their outspoken commitment to the Cause of Democracy were demanding cash up front for munitions.

In the summer of 1920 Dublin Castle ordered the Irish banks, other than the Belfast-based Ulster and Northern Banks, to deliver all their bullion holdings into the custody of the Bank of Ireland's head office at College Green 'for safe-keeping'. On the night of the August 31, 1920 the whole lot was seized by the British government and shipped off to England under military escort.

This operation netted the British about seventeen tons of gold, and left the future Free State denuded of bullion. The next meeting of the governors of the Bank of Ireland voted the sum of five pounds to buy a round of drinks for the porters at the College Green branch, in recognition of their co-operation in the matter.

For many years Dublin Castle had been claiming that if ever Home Rule was introduced then the buildings at College Green would be taken over for use as a parliament again. No assurances by nationalists would convince the Governors that this was not so: they believed what the British told them. The Bank of Ireland actually had written into the 1920 Government of Ireland Act that the College Green buildings would not be requisitioned.

In March of 1923 the Saorstát approached the IBSC for an urgent loan of two million pounds. The reply was that where the IBSC was concerned the Saorstát was not the government, the real government was in London and the Saorstát was just another customer. A loan would be forthcoming only if underwritten by Westminster. The IBSC were then told that the money was needed because the Civil War was in stalemate, the Saorstát had no funds left to pay troops and purchase supplies and there was a real danger that the war would be lost. The IBSC paid up.

The following June Cosgrave sent J.J.McElligott to the banks to ask for a further £7 million. He was told to raise the money by floating a stock issue: he was reminded that the banks did

not own the money they held, it belonged to their depositors. The banks could hardly lend their depositors' money to the Saorstát without consulting them.

When McElligott reminded them that the banks lent money to the British government all the time without consulting their depositors there came the spluttering response that the British government's credit-worthiness was the highest in the world "…with the possible exception of the United States of America."

Next day Cosgrave himself came looking for the loan. He said that the Saorstát had no money left and if it couldn't pay the army and police then the armed guards on bank premises would have to be withdrawn. Also, the payment of compensation claims awarded by the Shaw Tribunal would have to be delayed indefinitely. No doubt Cosgrave was well aware that the chairman of the Bank of Ireland, Lord Henry Guinness, had just been awarded a large sum by Lord Shaw. After some haggling, the loan was forthcoming.

The inter-war years

From 1922 to 1939 banks and other financial institutions in the Saorstát pursued a policy of investing outside Ireland, and especially in British government stock. Within the Saorstát both agriculture and industry were held back by a chronic shortage of amortisable credit. The state did establish the Agricultural Credit Corporation and later the Industrial Credit Corporation as a way of alleviating the problem, but their contributions were of minor significance.

The bulk of the country's wealth was still being siphoned off to England. For example in 1929, a year in which the Saorstát reduced the already miserly old age pension, the Bank of Ireland reported holding over £100 million in British government stock: this would be like £100 billion today.

The Bank of Ireland Act of 1929 greatly enlarged the discretionary powers of that bank's governors regarding what they did with money entrusted to them.

The coming to power of de Valera made little difference except that the Bank of Ireland's immunity from Corporation Tax was withdrawn in 1932. Neither the new constitution nor the labours of the Banking Commission brought any significant change.

World War Two

Early in September of 1939 England declared war on Germany. A few days later every bank manager in the Saorstát received a letter marked 'For your eyes only, read and destroy'.

The letter informed the manager that the IBSC had agreed that any bank employee wishing to enlist in the British armed forces was to be granted unlimited leave-of-absence. If asked about this by ‘government officials’ the manager was instructed to admit that such a scheme existed but was to decline to give any further information on grounds of ‘confidentiality’.

In 1942 the chairman of the Bank of Ireland, Lord Glenavy, approached de Valera in search of some favour or other. Questioned about the scheme, Glenavy gave vague replies but admitted it existed. Asked why there was no similar scheme for bank employees wishing to join the Saorstát’s own defence forces, Glenavy huffily replied that it was intended only for persons ‘going on active service’.

In 1942 the Royal Mint ordered the withdrawal of all silver coins circulating in the Saorstát and their replacement with ones made of cupro-nickel, the silver bullion being needed to pay off oil-sheikhs. The Irish banks complied, and the mail-boats that carried poverty-stricken Irish workers over to Britain to work in factories and on farms also carried crates of coins for melting down.

In 1945 the war ended. The new Labour government in London began an ambitious programme of social reform and floated a loan for this purpose, one in which the Irish banks invested heavily. Dev’s finance minister, Frank Aiken, launched a similar loan at the same rate of interest and the banks ignored it. The infuriated Aiken called in the IBSC and threatened to nationalise the entire banking sector if the entire offer wasn’t taken up.

Recent developments

A ‘Central Bank’ was established in 1942 to take over the issuing of currency notes from the Bank of England, which had controlled it up to then. In the 1960s banks began to coalesce until there were only two major players: the Bank of Ireland group and Allied Irish Banks. Two secondary players, the Ulster Bank and the Northern Bank, are subsidiaries of English banks. All these banks continue the policy of investing most of their funds outside Ireland: predominantly in England but in recent years also in the United States. This lead is followed by other financial institutions in the Saorstát: building societies, insurance companies, pension funds and so on. An exception has been the New Ireland Assurance Company which has always invested within Ireland.It is widely believed that all Irish banks engage in ‘creative accountancy’: in plain language they falsify their returns. This is done for two reasons: firstly for tax evasion purposes and secondly to conceal from their depositors losses due to bad investment and swindles.

Throughout the history of the Saorstát the banking sector has operated outside the control of, and largely against the interests of, the country as a whole, and has been a mechanism for siphoning away the wealth of the country. A nationalisation of the banks might not have been that successful within the neo-colonial environment of the Saorstát: given the strongly pro-British outlook of the Department of Finance.

However, it was always within the power of the politicians, had they been interested, to have curbed the freedom of the banks to act against the national interest: for example by requiring them to invest at least as much within the country as overseas or by prohibiting the holding of more than a certain proportion of their assets in foreign government stock.

There was no Stock Exchange in Dublin until a branch office of the London Stock Exchange was opened in 1974. The link with London was officially broken in 1995, but seems to have continued on an informal basis.

The intellectuals and the journalists

In the early years of the Saorstát there evolved a peculiar hybrid called 'Anglo-Irish Literature', which consisted of a body of literature written in Ireland for publication in England, and primarily for circulation in that country.

Anglo-Irish literature was largely the creation of one man, an English literary agent called Edward Garnett. Before the days of television people read a lot more than they do nowadays, and in particular there were plenty of monthly and weekly magazines on sale, usually containing a few short stories as well as other material. Ireland's Own is the last surviving remnant of this once extensive fleet of publications.

There existed in England similar publications, which had of course much wider circulation and could pay more for contributions. Here is where Garnett came in: he talent-scouted Irish magazines and selected individual writers and secured them introductions to London publishers. It was natural that he preferred to promote individuals whose views he found sympathetic, and the writers he 'discovered' tended to share his own rather cynical outlook on life and were also, very often, womanisers.

The Literary Elite

In Ireland nobody could have made a living out of writing for Irish magazines, but it was possible to do so by writing for English ones. Thus there evolved a strange closed literary elite, mostly writers of short stories, who were the habitués of certain bars and restaurants in the Grafton Street area of Dublin.

They wrote mainly for London periodicals, in which they also reviewed each others' books and galloped their various hobby-horses.

There were two main streams in this elite. The first was of people of Protestant Ascendancy background, mostly only partially reconciled to the loss of status that the foundation of the Free State had caused them. The other consisted of persons who had grown up in police barracks. These too had been reared in hostile isolation from Irish society, and brought up to have a jaundiced view of everything Irish coupled with an admiration for the English; who always knew best and did things the right way.

Eventually this group founded their own magazine, The Bell, dedicated to narcissistic mutual admiration coupled with disdain for, and despair at, Irish society in general.

An intellegensia, it is said, is a nation's conscience. As far as that goes, the Anglo-Irish literary establishment was very much a one-tune band. The only issue within Ireland that they showed any interest in was the accusation, repeated ad nauseum, that the Saorstát, in alliance with the Catholic Church, was persecuting lechers.

One story, invented by Ms Honor Tracey and circulated thereafter by her associates, will suffice as a typical example of the sort of stuff they came out with. She asserted that throughout Ireland groups of Catholic priests regularly patrolled the country lanes armed with walking sticks, poking the hedgerows on search of courting couples.

Under the Saorstát of course one group alone were consistently persecuted from the day the State was founded: the Republicans. For them there were special laws, special courts, special prisons and indeed the Special Branch. But it was impossible to get a cheep out of the intellectuals about this: any approach on the matter tended to bring a furious response about the ban on Playboy magazine or some matter of similar significance.

The Journalists

There was a close connection between the literary elite and another group of people who made their living from words: the journalists. There was even a good deal of dual membership.

Journalists also ideally should act as a public conscience, but in the colonial situation their freedom of action tends to be curtailed.

A young person starting a career in journalism often would have the ambition of one day working for a London tabloid, where wages and benefits were sky-high compared with anything available in Ireland. An older journalist might have another concern; that one day he or she might be out of work and be obliged to emigrate to England and seek employment there.

Some also might wish to emulate the career of Fergal Keane, son of the actor Éamon Keane, who began work as a journalist on the Limerick Leader, moved on to the Irish Press, then to RTÉ and finally to the BBC and who recently received the Order of the British Empire. (Even Tony O'Reilly hasn't got one of those!)

So, journalists preferred to join the London-based journalists' union and also had to be careful what they wrote. An examination of old files of Irish national and provincial newspapers will reveal sports pages given over to masses of purple prose describing the activities of a usually underachieving local soccer team, with Gaelic games very much in second place. Reporting soccer was and is a marketable skill outside Ireland, reporting GAA is not. Also, journalists had to watch what they wrote about national questions, because of the existence of black lists.

When he was in charge of RTÉ, Conor Cruise O'Brien admitted keeping a black list of persons who had written things he thought anti-British, and when later on he was made editor of the London Observer he straight away fired Mary Holland, a columnist who had just written an article sympathetic towards the inhabitants of Bogside: whom he described as "…con-men and con-women."

More recently, the spectacle of some of the country's best-paid journalists scouring the jungles of South America in search of the absconded Bishop Casey illustrates what sort of thing the owners of our newspapers consider important.

The Reptile Fund

It is known that the British Secret Service maintains a special account, known as the Reptile Fund, used to suborn journalists. Corrupt journalists are identified and put on retainer: they are expected to plant articles and bogus 'Letters to the Editor' in periodicals in support of British policies, as well as false stories about England's enemies. They can also earn bonuses by handing over any interesting things they come across in their work; especially potential blackmail information.

The War Era

The period of the Second World War was to be remembered with horror by the Dublin intellegencia as a time when Ireland was “cut off from the world” and shut up in “Plato’s cave”. What actually happened was that the English had too much on their minds to be interested in reading about the defects of Irish society.

Several well-known writers actually went to England to concoct propaganda for the British ‘Ministry of Information’. The poet Patrick Kavanagh in desperation approached the British Embassy and offered his services as a spy: naively unaware that the British had all the spies they needed prepared to work for them for nothing.

After the war ended the old pattern of cultural dependency soon revived, and continues to this day albeit with signs of decline.

Any writer or journalist harbouring a grudge about Ireland and the Irish can readily find space to air grievances in London right-wing publications, whose editors seem to assume that hatred of Ireland implies love of England.

Though writers of fiction tend publicity-wise to hold the high ground among the intelligencia it is interesting to note that of the four Irish winners of the Nobel Prize for Literature two were dramatists and two were poets and no novelist is included.

The Historians

Parallel to Anglo-Irish fiction runs the stream of ‘revisionist’ historians who write books about Ireland’s past for English publishers. A random example of this kind of writing would be Ireland This Century written by Tony Gray, a former Irish Times journalist, and published by the London firm of Warner Books in 1994. The most interesting thing about this book is the index, and the number of references in it to various topics.

For example the Black and Tans get three references, the Gaelic Athletic Association gets two, the Guildford Four get three. But in contrast there is Divorce (15), Censorship (14), Contraception (17). Bobby Sands gets two entries while a Mr. Alan Paton, who was prosecuted for obscenity, merits three.

The Australian poet (and republican) Les Murray recently said: “The entire cultural elite in Australia is violently anti-Australian.” He added that they took nothing seriously unless it came from London or New York. One can well believe it: it is a typical example of the state of any culture under colonialism and neo-colonialism.

In India also Indian-born writers like VS Naipaul and Salman Rushdie are widely disliked as painting a false portrait of their native land. But those writers do not care: they do not depend on India for their livelihood, they write for the Anglo-American publishing market.

The Baltic States

In the three Baltic States the national languages were widely spoken but had been repressed under Tsarism and were undeveloped. The writers and intellectuals saw it as their duty to build up a national literature. They supported themselves mostly by journalism and by translation work. In each State efforts were made to make world literature available in the national language. In Estonia the government established the 'Looming Library', which organised the translation of foreign books into Estonian and which actually survived right through the Soviet era.

Intellectuals also took part in public life, especially as diplomats. The Lithuanian ambassador in Moscow from 1920 to 1938 was Jurgis Baltrusaitis who was a distinguished poet and the translator of Yeats and Wilde into Lithuanian. The last Lithuanian premier, Vincas Kreve, was a poet and dramatist and an expert on Caucasian languages.

In the Saorstát there has been only one example of an intellectual becoming active in public affairs: Conor Cruise O'Brien. The consequences are too well known to need repeating here: if he is typical of the rest, then we should be thankful they remained aloof.

Education in the Free State

Education in Ireland is a very ancient tradition, going back to pre-Christian times. Throughout the centuries there have always been schools of some kind in operation. Up until the early 19th century the education policy of England had been to suppress native schools and deny the Irish education. The semi-secret 'hedge-schools' were operated in defiance of that policy.

Then in 1831 the British government suddenly reversed its long-standing policy and established the system of 'National' schools, to provide universal free primary education. This was not done in England for another fifty years.

This remarkable initiative was not due to any new-found affection for the Irish, it arose from an upsurge of agrarian unrest, the so-called Tithe War, which had given the authorities a nasty fright. Assessing the Tithe War, they concluded that it was caused by an inbred Irish impulse to insubordination.(Many English visitors of the time had contrasted the insolent stares of the Irish peasantry with the submissive bows of their own tenants.)

The new National schools would give a very rudimentary training in the three R's but their hidden and principal function was to teach the Irish habits of obedience and grovelling. Teachers were required to enforce strict discipline with the aid of corporal punishment, and a system of inspectors was established to make sure they did.

An important second hidden agenda was the elimination of the Irish language and the conversion of the Irish into monoglot English speakers. When about the year 1880 some Protestant clergy objected to the expenditure of public funds on the education of Catholic children one member of the Board of Education, the economist Professor Cairnes, responded with a set of statistics showing the decline in the number of Irish speakers since the National School system was established.

The Murder Machine

In 1914 Pádraic Pearse published a devastating criticism of the education system in his pamphlet The Murder Machine. He was already running a school of his own based on the principle that if pupils are treated in a humane way they will study harder and will be better adults. It is also true that there were many good and decent teachers who were genuinely kind to their pupils, but the system as a whole worked against them and in favour of those teachers who were vicious and contrary.

Among the religious orders, who ran most of the secondary schools, there were also plenty of good teachers but here again the bad ones had free rein. Perversely, it was sometimes thought that to dislike children was actually spiritually beneficial because it gave teaching a penitential aspect.

Free State Education Policy

Educational reform had been seen as a priority task once the Republic was established. Following the Civil War, this was one of the many reforms not undertaken by the new Leinster House regime. The old system was let motor on as before, except that the schools were now given the additional task of restoring the Irish language: the regime's way of disposing of that particular hot potato.

The National Schools remained virtually unchanged until about thirty years ago. Corporal punishment, administered with various weapons, was the main educational aid. The aim of creating a standard product was maintained: children who were slow or clumsy were the target of continuous physical punishment and there was a particularly cruel and pointless persecution of children who were left-handed. It was only after about 1960 that the system began to soften a little: largely because of the odium it attracted internationally.

The situation was made worse by the fact that the retirement age for women teachers was seventy years, and that women teachers who married were required to resign. Because of this the primary system became clogged with a cohort of old spinsters waiting on their pensions. Younger teachers, who might have introduced improvements, tended to leave in frustration: getting out by marriage or falling to recruitment raids from education boards in Britain.

External Influences

After the Second World War the new Labour government in London launched an ambitious programme of educational reform. At the heart of this package was an institution called the 'Eleven-Plus'. At the age of eleven all schoolchildren were given a battery of tests and the ten percent adjudged to be the brightest were offered free secondary education. If they could subsequently jump the additional hurdles of 'O-levels' and 'A-levels' they could get free university places.

In the Six Counties the Stormont regime fought the reform tooth-and-nail because it meant they would have to allow equality of opportunity for Catholics and Protestants, but London forced it on them anyway. The Stormont education minister, Colonel Hall-Thompson, became the target of so much personal abuse from Protestant clergy and the Orange Order that he had to resign. In the Saorstát the Eleven-Plus was praised to the skies both by those journalists who specialised in applauding everything English and denigrating everything Irish and by whichever political party was in opposition.

In fact the Eleven-Plus had serious defects. Well-to-do parents sent their children to tutors to be taught how to get through the tests and thus obtain free the education their parents could well afford to pay for. Also there was the problem of the 90% who did not pass the Eleven-Plus. These were placed in what were called Secondary-Modern schools, in which classes were larger and teachers were paid less and which had a content-deficient curriculum. Their function was mainly to keep kids off the streets until they were old enough to start work. Eventually these schools developed such a bad name that they were renamed Comprehensive Schools and within them a system known as 'streaming' was introduced, under which the brighter pupils were isolated from the rest and coached to have a go at the O-level exams. This appears to have been partly a sop to teacher morale.

Though there were frequent calls to bring in the Eleven-Plus in the Saorstát, in practice there was no chance the politicians would agree. Pupils who got through would owe their success to an anonymous examiner, not to the local TD, while the parents of the 90% rejected would be pounding on the doors of the politicians' clinics.

The Great Lurch Forward

Up until about 1960 the Saorstát was run on monetarist principles every bit as strict as those of Ceausescu's Romania, and at a similar cost in social misery. This affected education as well as every other aspect of life; for example in 1956 the already miserly capitation grant to schools was reduced by ten percent.

Gradually, trust in the Department of Finance began to fade and Leinster House politicians were converted to Keynesian economic theory (a sure sign that it was out of date) and began spending money they didn't have like there was no tomorrow. At this point Donough O'Malley arrived on the scene.

Donough O'Malley controlled the Fianna Fáil party organization in Limerick and became a powerful player in the internal brokering that followed the retirement of de Valera and had to be rewarded or bought off with a portfolio. He was put in charge of education, a traditional "sleepwalker's corner" in the cabinet.

O'Malley developed a habit of getting up at functions while intoxicated and announcing new departures in education of which neither his department nor his cabinet colleagues had any prior knowledge. At one time he might have got away with this, but a new and powerful player had arrived on the Irish political scene: television. Each ministerial announcement would spawn an immediate round of live interviews, talk-show discussions and so on.

Some proposals came to nothing; for example an announcement that TCD and UCD were to be amalgamated. But in November 1966 O'Malley suddenly proclaimed that the State was going to introduce free secondary education for all. He was taken at his word by the media and the government was unable to back down. (O'Malley himself was transferred to the Department of Health, and perversely dropped dead soon afterwards.)

How to pay for it all? Traditionally the Saorstát had got what little secondary education there was cheaply through reliance on the religious orders, but this was more than the teaching orders – already beginning to decline – could cope with unaided. The government was obliged to go to the World Bank in search of a loan.

The World Bank is a body based in New York, loosely attached to the United Nations, that provides loans to governments. It is in theory independent of any particular State but raises funds on the New York money market and is basically American-run.

It was alleged that the World Bank had placed stringent conditions on the loan, giving it virtual control over education policy, and that the Saorstát had been directed to base the new secondary school system on Anglo-American models. This was vehemently denied, but it was noticed that some senior officials at the Department of Education went on protracted trips to the United States to study the school system there.

They picked a bad time. In the United States the school system had been all but destroyed by pressures brought by educational theorists, sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, sexologists and crackpots who between them had the schools doing everything but teaching. The whole set-up was devastatingly described by Rudolf Fleich in his book Why Johnny Can't Read.

Finding the blackboard jungles of America unsuitable, they turned instead to England, and decided to adopt the Comprehensive School system there as a model. But by this time that name had in turn developed odious connotations, so the term Community Schools was adopted instead.

Driven by the World Bank, the basic strategy was THINK BIG! The ideal school size, irrespective of level, was to be about 2,000 pupils. At the primary level about 1,000 rural schools were closed with the pupils being brought by bus into the nearest town. This had a devastating effect on rural areas, especially in the Gaeltacht, and did much to accelerate rural decline.

Blundering On

So, a ramshackle system of secondary education emerged. With the passage of time the structure has become more and more centralised and arbitrary.

It wasn't long before, as previously in Britain and America, the requirements of social engineering began to eclipse those of education. The beginning of the Northern troubles in 1969 left the Saorstát's political pundits and media gurus gasping for breath. How could the blame for all this be transferred to the Irish: leaving England without stain of guilt?

The answer they came up with was that the problem was due entirely to reading Wicked History Books. So, the schools must put things right. Children must be taught that Cromwell was really quite a decent old stick, the Penal Laws were fairly mild, the Famine had been grossly exaggerated and even the Black and Tans were Not All Bad. Schools were urged to introduce modules on 'Peace Studies' and the like.

Universities in the Free State

Third-level education in Ireland is an area in which British influence continues to be dominant. Indeed the actual structure of the university system is still much as it was set up by the British government in 1908.

Trinity College

Trinity College, which also confusingly sometimes calls itself 'The University of Dublin', was founded in 1592 under a charter from the English monarch. It was for long the only third-level educational institution in Ireland and it remained closely linked to the Anglican church and the British government. The provost, the head of the college, was almost always an Anglican clergyman as were most of the senior academic staff.

While it is true that a number of distinguished Irish patriots studied at Trinity (Wolfe Tone, Robert Emmet and Thomas Davis are examples, and Pádraic Pearse did a law degree there), Trinity has for the most part been a centre of hostility to Ireland and things Irish and a 'Little England' enclave.

Maynooth

Maynooth College was established in the late eighteenth century by the British government as a centre for training Catholic priests. Previously such priests went to continental Europe for their training and had begun to pick up radical ideas there: something neither the British nor the Catholic hierarchy were very pleased about. Until recently it functioned only as a seminary and all the courses were taught in Latin. All the staff had to take an oath of loyalty to the English monarchy, and Dublin Castle meddled constantly in college matters.

The Queen's Colleges and the evolution of the NUI

For the Catholic lay community there was a lack of access to higher education. The Catholic hierarchy campaigned for a state-subsidised Catholic university on the same lines as Trinity, but there was no progress due to stone-wall opposition by the Protestant churches. One Catholic bishop asked how Protestants would react if the only university in Ireland was run by the Catholic church, had a Catholic priest for provost, employed only Catholic professors, and Protestants were told that if they didn't like it that was too bad.

As a sort of half-way measure the British established the 'Queens Colleges' in Belfast, Cork and Galway. These were state funded, were not connected with any church, though at first they employed only Protestant lecturers. The Catholic hierarchy rejected these 'Godless Colleges' and forbade Catholics to attend them. Instead an attempt was made to set up a specifically Catholic university in Dublin using private funds. It was a small affair, struggling

on for many years: harassed by the authorities and constantly being sued by cranks – no doubt with semi- official encouragement. One section was left in peace: the Medical School in Cecelia Street. The British Empire was desperately short of doctors and medical training was very expensive and they were happy to see doctors being supplied from a privately-funded institution.

In 1908 the British established the National University of Ireland, which consisted of the old Queens Colleges in Cork and Galway plus the previous Catholic academy which was reconstituted as University College Dublin. It seems that with Home Rule looming on the horizon Dublin Castle was anxious to set up a self-perpetuating university body that would continue to look after British interests when direct interference would no longer be as easy. The NUI was not connected with any religion, the only concession being that in their lectures staff were not allowed to attack Catholic church doctrines.

The medical faculties were the largest and best-funded. A Trinity don commented that the Catholic bishops had gone after a glorified seminary and had ended up with a glorified medical school.

The Rising and After

When the 1916 Rising took place the universities were closed for the Easter holidays. A few Trinity students who were still in residence got hold of guns and took pot-shots at the insurgents. At the time Trinity was at a low ebb because so many of the staff and students had enlisted in the British armed forces.

The strong links between Trinity, Dublin Castle and the Anglican church continued. When in 1919 the provost (the Gael-baiting Mahaffey) died; the Protestant archbishop of Dublin, Dr. Bernard, became provost while the runner-up, Rev. Gregg, took over as archbishop. But while Gregg and Bernard were playing musical chairs, things were happening not too far away. Dáil Éireann assembled and the war of liberation began. In Trinity there was vehement hostility, and in all other institutions of higher learning staff mostly remained aloof, while trying to guess ‘which way the cat would jump.’ Many students, however, participated in the struggle and two UCD students were hanged in Mountjoy for Republican activities: Kevin Barry on 1st November 1920 and Frank Flood on 14th March 1921.

The senior staff at all the NUI colleges were largely drawn from the ‘Castle Catholic’ element and were at best indifferent to the struggle for independence, but as the independence movement gained strength they began to trim their sails to the new wind that was blowing. In November 1921, in the hiatus period between the ‘Truce’ and the ‘Treaty’, the NUI elected

Éamon De Valera as Chancellor: a post he retained for the rest of his long life. De Valera was a man of meagre academic achievement, and the electors of the NUI had little sympathy with his politics, but he was presumed to be the coming man and the NUI wanted to ingratiate themselves as quickly as possible. The following month when the treaty was unexpectedly signed the academics switched their support immediately from Republicanism to Neo-Colonialism.

Meanwhile, fearful of the future, in Galway the president of UCG had the massive stone lion-and-unicorn above the city courthouse removed and concealed in the garden of the president's residence, where it can still be seen sticking up among the shrubbery. In Cork the president of UCC had the college's statue of the Famine Queen secretly buried: it was recently exhumed and put up again 'as a tribute to her contribution to education', which somebody said was like putting up a statue of Hitler to honour his contribution to postcard design.

Universities in the Saorstát

Education in the Saorstát was starved of funds from the beginning: the begrudging policies of Dublin Castle were continued unaltered. It was only thanks to the efforts of the religious orders that there was even any second-level education available, and there was little enough of that. Third level education was let float inertly along as it had been left by the British and was hampered by shortage of funds and political meddling.

Trinity was the best-funded institution. It had substantial income from rents and ground-rents and previously the British government had given it a large annual grant. The 1920 'Government of Ireland Act' had required the government of 'Southern Ireland' to continue this grant, but in the 1921 treaty the matter was overlooked. Provost Bernard approached Cosgrave and got his grant readily enough, but the new Department of Finance insisted on an itemised annual report on how the grant had been spent. This was rather embarrassing because traditionally a portion of the grant had been used to restock the college's ample wine-cellar. Trinity remained a Unionist enclave, contemptuous of the Saorstát. The Union Jack was flown above the main gate, banquets began with a prayer for the British monarchy and ended with 'God Save the King'.

The NUI blundered on regardless. There continued to be an over-emphasis on medical training: producing far more doctors and dentists than the country could employ. Academic staff in a well-run university should spend about half their time teaching and the other half doing research. In both NUI and Trinity very little research was done: partly due to shortage of facilities and funding, partly because so many academics were up to their elbows in right-

wing politics and partly because frankly the general quality of the staff was by international standards fairly poor. Appointments and promotions were cursed by the clientelist system, under which no account was taken of ability or suitability.

De Valera in Power

The taking of power by Fianna Fáil in 1932 was greeted with horror in the NUI. The fear was expressed that De Valera would do something to annoy the British who would retaliate by withdrawing recognition of NUI degrees. It was pointed out that 80% of the NUI's medical graduates emigrated to Britain: what would they do if this source of employment was cut off? Nobody seemed to ask why it was that the poverty-stricken Saorstát was expending scarce resources to keep England supplied with doctors.

De Valera himself actually soon established friendly relations with Trinity. The NUI was packed with Cumann na nGaedheal nominees while Trinity had remained aloof from Free State politics and more or less had clean hands. In his 1937 Constitution de Valera allocated three seats in his 'Senate' to the NUI and another three to Trinity. The NUI senators were normally Fine Gaelers of embarrassing right-wingedness while the men of Trinity appear to have demonstrated their contempt for the Saorstát by nominating the three biggest jackasses they could find.

The Second World War caused a fall-off in student numbers, as many potential students enlisted either at home or abroad. By late 1940 the international situation looked so grim that in Trinity the dons began drinking their way through the college's stocks of vintage port and champagne for fear the Germans, or even worse the Irish, might lay their hands on it.

In 1945 following the collapse of Germany some Trinity students climbed onto the roof of the college and carried out a pro-British demonstration during which an Irish flag was burned. A major counter-demonstration assembled outside the college gates and stones were thrown and windows broken. Thereafter, Trinity began to abandon the more ostentatious aspects of its Unionist sympathies.

After the war the British government decided to set up a major public health service, and the Saorstát's universities were soon back at work contributing to the supply of medical personnel.

Later Developments

The only institute of post-graduate research was the Royal Irish Academy: a stick-in-the-mud institution of little value. In 1916 the RIA had, at the instigation of Archbishop Bernard,

expelled Professor Eoin MacNeill under the mistaken belief that he had participated in the Easter Rising. In 1936 the Academy wrote to the new king of England, Edward VIII, petitioning him to become patron of the RIA. That monarch, who had other things on his mind, never replied.

If a person wished to pursue research in Celtic philology, or Brehon Law, or ancient Irish literature, then the RAI was quite useless and the student had to go off to Paris or Munich or Oslo or some other foreign location. To put an end to this ridiculous situation De Valera established the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies. This was intended originally to concentrate on Celtic studies but the arrival in Ireland of high-calibre refugees enabled a more generalised institute to be established: with faculties of astronomy, cosmic physics and the like.

Several times there have been proposals to reform the third-level structure but nothing has ever been done and the structure remains much as it was inherited from the British. The only significant recent development came in 1988, when a polytechnic in Limerick City was elevated to university status. This was done purely for party political purposes in the run-up to an election, to quench local anger over the closure of a hospital.

The Present Situation

Access to third level education is still in practice only available to those who can afford it. Only about one percent of students are of working-class origin. Colleges have problems of overcrowding and poor facilities and the quality of teaching tends to be low. Students carry into third level the secondary school tradition of high-pressure cramming. If a lecturer asks: ‘Any questions?’ the usual response is ‘Will this be coming up in the exam?’

There is also the problem of the low level of research activity. Research is a vital component of university life, and without it a college degenerates into a diploma mill. There are strong connections with England at third level. In the academic careers area Ireland and Britain function as a single unit. Links with, and movement between, universities in different countries are of course desirable and useful: but the links with Britain are far too close and constitute something of a strangle-hold.

In some areas, especially legal and historical studies, the interconnections are very tight indeed. Also, almost all the text books set in Irish universities are the work of English academics.

The legal system in the Free State

The retention of the colonial legal system in continuity into the Saorstát, with only trifling minor changes, has been a major factor in maintaining British domination over the Saorstát.

Origins of the Legal System

The Romans developed a legal system the basic elements of which are at the origin of almost all the world's legal systems today. Roman law was codified by the emperor Justinian and this code, updated after the French Revolution as the Code Napoleon, is still used in almost all European countries.

England has been an exception. In the year 1066 England was invaded by Duke William of Normandy at the head of a ragtag army of landless barons, mercenaries and outlaws.

The ramshackle Anglo-Saxon kingdom collapsed at once and William and his Normans imposed themselves on the hapless Angles and Saxons as a military dictatorship.

William and his successors had no interest in high-sounding concepts like Justice, but they were very concerned with Order. They ran their kingdom in a manner that will be perfectly familiar to anybody who has studied the internal structure of the Mafia.

It was a ruthless top-down dictatorship: the king was boss and his authority unquestionable. The laws were, basically, the king's orders. The ultimate source of law, still enshrined in the preamble to every act passed at Westminster, was 'Quod placuit principi' ('What pleases the monarch').

However, kings had more on their minds than thinking up laws and they left decisions about legal matters largely in the hands of local barons who functioned as judges. Where some issue on which there was no established law came before a judge, then the judge decided what the law ought to be and from then on that was the law on that particular issue. Thus a hotch-potch of laws gradually accumulated, collectively known as English Common Law.

Brehon Law

In Ireland a very ancient code of law, generally called Brehon Law, was in use throughout the country. This law was administered by professional judges who had to undergo a seven-year training.

In Brehon Law civil matters were usually resolved by arbitration while in criminal matters victim compensation was the main focus. The brehons (judges) had in practice not only to know the law but to be skilled social workers.

The adoption of Christianity had made little impact on Brehon Law, which for example continued to permit divorce.

The Brehon Laws were written down around the seventh and eighth centuries and while in practice they evolved to meet changing situations, it was unfortunate that no process existed whereby the legal texts could be changed, so that they gradually became to seem out-dated. However, the Brehon Laws remained in force in Gaelic Ireland until the seventeenth century and the end of the Gaelic Order.

The evolution of the post-Conquest legal system

The Anglo-Norman invaders brought their own legal system with them from England. However in England the monarch was the chief judge, and it was not practical for this function to be extended into Ireland, so instead a 'justiciar' would be appointed to act in that capacity.

The invaders applied the legal system only to themselves. The native Irish were legal un-persons: they had no rights and could even be killed without penalty. When after the sixteenth century England became a major colonial power, this same attitude came to be applied to the native inhabitants of other lands invaded by England: in North America, the West Indies, Africa and so on.

When after the Reformation England became Protestant while Ireland remained Catholic, this developed a denominational aspect, but in fact the oppression and robbery of the Irish continued to be on a racial basis.

If we look at England's last three Tudor monarchs: Edward VI (1537-1553) was a fanatical Protestant, Mary I (1553-1558) was an equally fanatical Catholic while Elizabeth I (1558-1603) was more or less an agnostic, but all three applied the exact same genocidal policy towards the Irish.

The Anglo-Normans established their own 'Parliament' which began to pass various laws. In 1494 Poyning's Act extended English Common Law to Ireland.

In Ireland itself most people, Irish and foreigners, preferred to use the Brehon courts until these were finally suppressed after the Cromwellian war. The city of Galway, a great trading centre in the Middle Ages, used German law ('The Law of the Emperor') until the Cromwellian occupation. After the Act of Union (1800) laws passed at Westminster applied

automatically to Ireland. A ‘justice’ section in Dublin Castle looked after police, prisons, appointment of judges and the like.

The Republican Courts

During the Tan War, as large areas of the country were freed from British control, a system of Republican Courts was established and there soon evolved a system of legal practices resembling Brehon Law in outline.

These courts were immensely popular: even unrepentant Unionists did not hesitate to appear before them. Their popularity was due to their absolute fairness, to the absence of obfuscation in the proceedings and to the presence of true equality before the courts.

Republican courts continued to function until after the end of the Civil War. Under the Saorstát they were ruthlessly suppressed and all decisions of Republican courts were retrospectively declared invalid. The Saorstát never disowned the actions of the preceding British administration: so for example the condemnation and hanging of Kevin Barry remained and still remains endorsed.

The Courts in the Saorstát

Kevin O’Higgins was made ‘Justice Minister’ in Cosgrave’s government. Under him a Department of Justice was set up; made up of former Dublin Castle employees who continued their careers seamlessly into the new regime. This department was to become a mysterious, non-accountable force in the Saorstát, second in power only to the Department of Finance.

To retain in office the hanging judges inherited from the British was too much even for Cosgrave and company to swallow and these were pensioned off and either retired to England or else took judicial posts in other parts of the British Empire. New judges were appointed; almost entirely former Redmondites who had lain low during the previous struggle. There were also Protestant judges of more or less Unionist outlook.

The legal system carried on as before. The Saorstát tried to introduce a new judicial regalia, based on the robes of American and Continental judges, but this reform was rejected by the judges, who continued to wear the traditional cloak and horse-hair wig of an English judge.

Attempts ever since by the Saorstát to introduce reforms in that area, and other areas of court procedure, have been spurned and the authorities have been at a loss as to what to do about it. They can hardly sack a man for the way he chooses to dress! Judges also insist on

being addressed as ‘Your Lordship’ although they are no longer ‘Lords’ and they love their rituals: the bowings and back-steppings and the rigmaroles chanted in Latin or Norman French.

As regards the chain of command, the king of England was in theory ultimately in charge. Judges were appointed on his behalf by the Governor General, but only when nominated by Kevin O’Higgins on behalf of the Executive Council.

Continuity of Laws

Republicans had intended to create an entire new body of laws suited to Irish conditions and to popular ethics: to what people perceive to be right or wrong. The Saorstát rejected that idea and continued to use the previous body of inherited legislation. This consisted of

1) Laws passed by the ‘Parliament of Ireland’ (1310-1800)
2) Laws of England applied to Ireland under Poyning’s Act of 1495.
3) Laws of England under the Union (1800-1922)
4) Laws passed by Leinster House after 1922
Added to this was English Common Law, the accumulated decisions of English judges ‘from time immemorial’.

Laws passed in England after 1922 had no application within the Saorstát, but in practice carbon copies of most of them were put through Leinster House as a matter of course.

With regard to Common Law, decisions of English judges since 1922 have continued, on no known lawful authority, to be applied routinely in cases appearing before the Saorstát’s courts. For example Lord Denning’s famous ‘appalling vista’ judgement of March 1988, in which he declared that it was better to have innocent persons remain in prison than have the public lose confidence in the police and the judicial system, has since been used to decide cases appearing before Irish courts. In Britain the ultimate court of appeal is the House of Lords at Westminster. After 1922 right of appeal to the House of Lords was withdrawn and a Supreme Court was established in Dublin to fulfil the same function. However the Supreme Court in deciding cases almost always refers to some previous decision of the House of Lords.

The 1937 Constitution

De Valera’s constitution was supposed to be the fundamental basis of all laws, but no attempt was made to use it to create a new legal system. For many years it was simply ignored by the judiciary and lawyers in general seem to have regarded it as just so much

inconsequential blather. It was only with very great reluctance that the Supreme Court slowly began to look to the 1937 constitution, rather than the House of Lords, for solutions to problem cases brought before them.

It all came to a head in the late 1940's through a series of cases concerning the religious up-bringing of children. In 1908 the Roman Catholic church brought in a rule called Ne Temere under which, when a Protestant elected to marry a Catholic in a Catholic ceremony then he or she was required to sign a document agreeing that all children of the marriage should be brought up as Catholics. It was perhaps a bad rule, and it has been the subject of much criticism.

In the Saorstát the legal position was defined by the English 'Guardianship of Infants Act' of 1886, passed at the instigation of the Anglican church, under which the husband was declared to be the 'sole guardian' of all the children of a marriage. In England itself this Act was abolished in 1925; it seems that with the rising divorce rate fathers were no longer quite as anxious to be the sole guardians of their offspring, but it remained in force in the Saorstát.

There were three cases in which the conflicting claims of the 1886 Act and of Ne Temere came to court: the Frost case, the Isherwood case and the Tilson case. In all three a Protestant man married a Catholic wife, agreed to have their children brought up as Catholics and then changed his mind.

Mr. Frost had a falling out with his wife and left her, and took away their six children and placed them in a Protestant orphanage and then died. The widow sued the orphanage for the return of her children but was unsuccessful. The court ruled that though her husband was dead, he had handed over his sole guardianship to the orphanage when he was alive and the mother had no rights in the matter.

In the second case a young nurse went to England and there met and married a doctor called Isherwood. A child was born and another was on the way when the doctor fell under the influence of a relative who was an Anglican clergyman and who reproached him for agreeing to let his children be brought up Catholics. He therefore informed his wife that he had changed his mind and their children would be reared as Protestants.

The wife, who was of pious disposition, fled back to her home town in Ireland taking the child with her. She was pursued by the clergyman, who accosted her in the street and tried to snatch the child from her. A struggle ensued during which the woman was knocked to the ground.

The clergyman was prosecuted for assault but was merely ‘bound over’. He was also informed that his actions had been quite pointless because under ‘Irish’ law Dr. Isherwood was the sole guardian not only of the child but of the second child the mother was expecting.

In the Tilson case a father also took away his children and put them in a Protestant orphanage, and Mrs. Tilson sued for their return to her custody. Her lawyers attempted a variety of arguments: the one that won the case was that the 1886 Act was ‘repugnant to the constitution’ because that constitution stated that the ‘parents’ (plural) were the primary educators of their children and the mother could not be excluded.

The Supreme Court agreed and Mrs. Tilson got her children back. The judgement was greeted with howls of outrage from Protestant/Unionist circles, with claims that it had been made due to pressure from the Catholic church. (This accusation is still found in many texts).

What was really upsetting the protesters was that a law passed by the Westminster parliament and personally signed by the monarch had been invalidated by what they saw as an inferior or subordinate court.

It should be noted that the 1886 Act was overthrown not because it was manifestly cruel and unjust but through a fortuitous wording in the 1937 constitution.

Crown Immunity

One strange hangover from the imperial past was the concept of ‘Crown Immunity’. Under English law nobody may take legal action against any institution of the State as to do so is to by implication sue the monarch. The Saorstát claimed to have inherited the rights of the monarch including immunity.

In 1972 a Ms Byrne fell into a hole dug by the Electricity Supply Board and sued for compensation. The ESB claimed Crown Immunity but the Supreme Court declared that this had now expired.

However in a recent case (Geoghegan vs The Institute of Chartered Accountants) it was ruled that charters granted by the monarchy before 1922 are still in force.

The Current Situation

The Saorstát is administered using a rag-bag collection of laws of various origins, with the 1937 constitution floating detached above. Since joining the Common Market a multitude of legally-enforceable regulations have been imposed.

Many years ago a lawyer pleading before the American Supreme Court said something to the effect that the law means what it says. Chief Justice Douglass retorted: “No, the law means what I say it means!” Judges have discretion to ‘interpret’ the law, and inevitably tend do so in favour of their own political and class interests. One only needs to look at the way safeguards in the extradition laws have been rendered useless by anti-Republican judges.

The fact that the law is in a complete mess is rather advantageous to the legal profession, which makes a great deal of money out of it. Judges and barristers are organised, in the Bar Council and the Law Library, and have in effect one of the most powerful and successful trade unions in the country, if not in the entire world.

Policing the Free State

Under direct rule there were two police forces in Ireland. There was the Dublin Metropolitan Police (DMP) which operated only in Dublin city and was unarmed and there was the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC), often called the peelers after their originator Robert Peel, who policed the rest of the country.

RIC men were armed with revolvers and carbines and organised on military lines and lived in barracks. The ordinary members were recruited mainly from poor rural families while the senior ranks were mostly Protestants of middle class background. It was widely believed that the top posts were reserved for Freemasons.

As with many other institutions, the RIC was an experiment in colonial administration which was deemed successful and copied in many other British colonies.

The Republican Police

During the Tan War the RIC were part of the machinery of repression. They proved inadequate and were beefed up with the Auxiliaries and the Black-and-Tans, to whom they became subordinate. In Dublin the DMP more or less remained neutral, apart from one group, ‘G-Division’ based in Oriel House, Westland Row, which was an armed plain-clothes detective unit set up to combat Republicanism. These were the original ‘G-men’.

In areas freed from British control a Republican Police, made up of IRA members seconded to police work, operated fairly successfully.

The British tried to set up a rival force which they called the Civil Guard which they hoped to use to counter Republican activities. When first sent out on patrol, the local IRA fired a few

shots in the air and the Civil Guard threw their guns away and ran and no more was heard of them.

Origins of the Gardaí

Under the 1921 treaty the RIC was to be paid off at Saorstát expense and disbanded. In the Six Counties it was retained, renamed the RUC. Many former RIC men went off to join the colonial police services of other parts of the British Empire. The older ones were given early retirement on generous pensions, and for decades afterwards almost every parish in the Saorstát had a few retired peelers: often to be found sitting at a bar loudly praising everything English and sneering at everything Irish.

Though the Republican Police already existed, pro-treaty elements immediately began organising a separate police, to be known as Garda Síochána. This was formally established in February 1922 with Michael Staines as Commissioner and former RIC District Inspector Walsh as Deputy Commissioner. Other ex-RIC officers were appointed to various senior posts and recruitment of trainees began, mostly from IRA volunteers.

A training depot was opened in Kildare Town. The pay was good and there were plenty of applicants. But things did not go at all smoothly: resentment at the imposition of former peelers in all command positions was made worse by their arrogant behaviour and eventually a mutiny erupted. Staines and Walsh fled from the depot and were pursued through the streets of Kildare Town and had to take refuge in the house of the parish priest.

Soon afterwards the Civil War broke out and the bulk of the recruits defected to the Republican side after breaking into the old RIC arsenal in the depot and seizing the contents.

A new Garda Síochána was set up in August 1922 with Éoin O'Duffy as Commissioner. This time it was decided that the force would be modelled on the DMP and would be unarmed: Kevin O'Higgins was nervous about arming former IRA men, he felt it safer to have all guns securely locked away in armouries.

The force expanded rapidly and soon penetrated into all areas of the Saorstát. Even during the Civil War it was usually accepted in Republican areas as it was perceived to be a neutral body. That was to change before long!

Civil War Developments

Separate from the Gardaí, a Protection Officers Corps was set up to provide bodyguards for prominent treatyites. There was also a more secretive body called the Citizens Defence Force, responsible directly to Kevin O'Higgins and funded through the offices of Arthur Cox, a sinister lawyer who had been at school with O'Higgins. In charge of it was a Captain Henry Harrison, a Englishman who had been a meddler in Irish politics for many years. The exact function of this force remains unclear but it was probably responsible for the unsolved disappearance of a number of prominent Republicans at that time. The remains of one of them, Noel Lemass, was discovered by accident years afterwards; secretly buried in the Dublin Mountains.

Oriel House was taken over and became a much-feared interrogation centre. All three groups were made up entirely of 'ex-British officers', probably a euphemism for former Black-and-Tans. The Oriel House team, about 80-strong, was disbanded after the Civil War: supposedly because of squeamishness on the part of Kevin O'Higgins; but a core was retained as G-division of the DMP: the G-men, headed by ex-RIC Inspector David Neligan. In 1926, after the DMP had been amalgamated with the Gardaí, this unit was re-named the Special Branch in imitation of English nomenclature.

The Early Years

The lower ranks of the Gardaí had originally been recruited largely from Republican activists. During the Civil War many of these defected to the anti-treaty side, though there were those who were fooled and hung on. After the Civil War ex-soldiers of the Free State Army was the main source of recruits. The senior ranks continued to be filled by former RIC men.

There were many members who came to realise they had been fooled by O'Higgins and O'Duffy, that the rulers of the Saorstát had no intention of using any 'stepping stones' to an Irish Republic and indeed were all the time pushing the state back closer to England. One result of this was low morale, worsened by a series of pay reductions. But many members now had families to support and also were open to arbitrary victimisation by their superiors. There emerged a recognisable ex-Republican type of Garda; cynical, contrary and bitter. Alcoholism became a major problem. Éoin O'Duffy had been appointed Garda Commissioner largely because he was a member of the inner circle around O'Higgins. He was not suited to the job and was not particularly bright and the ex-RIC cabal found him easy to manipulate.

The Gardaí themselves as police go had things fairly easy. At the time there was very little crime, and most of what there was was fairly petty. Recruits had to be tall and fit but otherwise no great interest was taken in their capabilities and the general level of ability

tended to be low. There was even a schoolboy joke: “I tried for the Guards, but I passed the intelligence test”.

Fianna Fáil in Power

In 1933 de Valera fired O’Duffy and appointed Colonel Ned Broy as Garda Commissioner in his stead. Broy had been an RIC inspector but had been accused of passing information to Republicans and imprisoned. He had subsequently joined the Free State Army and rose to the rank of colonel. His part in the creation of the ‘Broy Harriers’ has been described previously.

The Department Of Justice

The Department of Justice ultimately controlled the Gardaí, the courts and the prisons, and was and is responsible for the drafting of most legislation. In the last function it appears that the photocopier is mightier than the pen, for almost all acts drawn up by it are reproductions of previous Westminster legislation.

The ‘Secretary’ (civil service head) of this department is one of the most powerful people in the State, and does not have to account to the electorate. It is clear that in some cases this power can be dangerous. Let us recall the strange case of Peter Berry, instigator of the 1970 ‘Arms Crisis’, who set up his own private special branch within the Special Branch and used it to spy on Leinster House politicians: including it appears his own minister.

A person with that sort of power would obviously be targeted by foreign intelligence services, either to obtain co-operation or to be fed with misinformation and propaganda. This was the source of the ‘Reds Under the Beds’ scares that periodically used to erupt. It was soon discovered that gombeen politicians, those of Fine Gael in particular, can easily be scared witless with horror stories about ‘subversion’ going on everywhere.

There was indeed subversion going on, but of a different sort. Most technical and other specialist training for the Gardaí was obtained by sending them to police colleges in England. It seems pretty certain that while undergoing training these would be evaluated by their hosts with a view to their recruitment as agents or informants.

Recent Developments

After about 1960 crime levels steadily rose. The response of the Gardaí, no doubt on the direction of the Department of Justice, was to concentrate on protecting the 5% of the population that owns three-quarters of the wealth and to ignore the problems of the rest

unless they actually started murdering each other. Apart from that, priority was given to the harassment and persecution of Republicans.

The rising incidence of crime was met not with better training and resources but rather with harsher laws and more brutal police methods. The worst period was probably the reign of the Cosgrave-Corish coalition (1973-1977), when the notorious 'heavy gang' was active. During that era, military intelligence became aware that a young Special Branch man called Patrick Crinnion was holding regular meetings with a mysterious stranger in the bar of a Dublin hotel: meetings at which bulky envelopes were seen to change hands. They gleefully pounced on the pair, who both drew firearms and had to be physically overpowered. The captors were sure they had netted some Republican big fish, but the stranger identified himself as a Mr. Wyman, an officer of the British Secret Service. A very low-key prosecution followed, both men were fined a small sum and Crinnion was dismissed from the Gardaí and vanished.

At the time it was assumed that Crinnion had been passing on information about Republicans: but on reflection this makes no sense as such information as the Gardaí could obtain was passed on on request. Nor would Crinnion, who was employed mostly as a driver, have had access to much secret material anyway.

When Fianna Fáil returned to power in 1977 the Garda Commissioner Edmund Garvey was immediately fired. He sued for wrongful dismissal and when the government failed to offer a reason for sacking him he got his job back, though he resigned the following year and died soon afterwards. Whatever Garvey had done, it was so embarrassing to the State that he was able to call the government's bluff: they did not dare reveal it. Since then it has been rumoured that Garvey had been using the facilities of the Special Branch to collect blackmail information on prominent public figures, and Crinnion had been his courier to Wyman.

The Judiciary

Judges in the Saorstát have always basically been political appointees. Sometimes genuinely decent men and women have been nominated to the bench, but the system is against this happening.

To try cases involving Republicans a Special Criminal Court was set up, presided over by three judges, in which normal rules of evidence and the inconvenience of a jury are dispensed with. The judges appointed to this court over the years have been a strange mixture: many have been old hacks at death's door who should have been pensioned off years ago. One appeared to be permanently intoxicated. One had a chronic bowel complaint

and had to have his chair fitted as a commode. Another habitually fell asleep in court after lunch. One of them dropped dead in the middle of a very expensive trial, which had to be started all over again.

Chief justices also tend to be political nominees. TF O'Higgins, a nephew of Kevin O'Higgins, was a career Fine Gael politician, became Minister for Defence in 1949 and Minister for Health in 1954. He stood against De Valera in the presidential election of 1966 and against Childers in 1973. He was appointed to the Supreme Court by the outgoing Cosgrave coalition, of which he was a member, though he had no previous judicial experience.

The Catholic church and colonialism in Ireland

If one opens a book or magazine and sees a heading such as Church and State in Modern Ireland then the natural tendency is to slam it shut with a groan and fling it to the furthest corner of the room. This reaction is understandable, given the way that the topic has been flogged to death by hack writers over the years.

The fact that so much bunkum has been written on the subject tends to obscure the fact that it is an issue of considerable importance. Whether or not the Catholic Church has contrived to infringe the rights of the randy within the Saorstát, the only matter that seems to interest the intellectuals and the journalists, is of very minor significance compared to the way the Church supports the colonial exploitation of Ireland.

One great issue sharply divides the Church's officialdom from the Catholic laity in Ireland, and this is the issue of English domination. The institutional Church maintains that England's involvement in Irish affairs is legitimate, and always has done. The great bulk of lay believers reject this outright.

Origins of the problem

When the Roman Empire finally collapsed and barbarian invaders over-ran western Europe the one institution that survived that deluge was the Catholic Church. The Church became the repository of the old skills and learning and in some ways began to resemble the former empire.

The bishop of Rome, traditional 'first among equals', gradually was elevated into a supreme authority, ruling the Church as the Roman emperors had once ruled the empire, with bishops resembling the old Roman provincial governors. The popes came to assume that they were

also the supreme political authority in Europe, could depose rulers and donate thrones to their favourites.

The Normans who conquered England in 1066 were an irreligious bunch, but they recognised that religion was a powerful political force. In the Middle Ages when a bishop died his successor was elected by the diocesan clergy.

The Normans introduced the Statute of Praemunire (still in force!) with the ruling that there would only be one candidate in such elections: the king's nominee.

The first Norman Primate of England, Archbishop Lanfranc, straight away began meddling in Irish affairs: he claimed jurisdiction over all the Scandinavian settlements in Ireland.

Over the following century Anglo-Norman rulers and bishops were regular visitors to Rome; telling horror stories about the terrible state of Ireland and offering to sort the place out if only the Pope would give the go-ahead. These were collectively known as 'Rome-runners' and their activities over the centuries were to do Ireland a great deal of harm.

Pope Adrian IV

Only one Englishman was ever elected Pope: Nicholas Breakspear who took the name Adrian the Fourth (1154-1159). He was persuaded to give Henry II, king of England, a letter of authority to take over Ireland and attach it to his other dominions.

All the bishops of Ireland accepted this grant of Ireland to the English monarch and when Henry visited Ireland they each in turn swore an oath of loyalty to him. Henry and his successors were not able to conquer the whole country. After the initial shock of the invasion the Irish began to get organised and to fight back and it was not until the Cromwellian war that the country was completely over-run.

The Anglo-Normans attempted to impose the Statutes of Praemunire in Ireland and nominate their own Primate, but in this matter the Irish ecclesiastics defied them and elected their own archbishop of Armagh. The dispute went to Rome and the Papacy resolved the problem by appointing a sequence of Germans and Italians to Armagh. These nominees however always acknowledged England's claim to over-lordship.

The Ó Néill Remonstrance

In the year 1315 a confederacy of Irish leaders invited Edward Bruce, brother of King Robert of Scotland, to become king of Ireland and help expel the invaders; and Donal Ó Néill

formally abdicated his family's claim to the High Kingship in favour of Edward. Donal also sent a remarkable letter to the Pope with a request that the Vatican withdraw Pope Adrian's grant, and giving a list of the cruelties inflicted on the Irish as a result of it. Among other things he claimed that an English bishop had taught that killing the Irish was not a sin and that he would kill an Irishman and go and say Mass straight thereafter.

The Pope forwarded the letter to the king of England (the debauched Edward II) who replied that it was all lies.

Edward Bruce was in fact defeated and killed at the Battle of Faughart and the scheme came to nothing, and the Popes continued to support English rule over Ireland.

In practice, in areas where the English were dominant Englishmen were imposed as bishops while elsewhere Irish bishops were elected. No love was lost between the two.

After the Reformation

In the sixteenth century England went over entirely to Lutheran Protestantism while Ireland remained predominantly Catholic. But the institutional church in Ireland still recognised the English monarch as the rightful ruler of Ireland. Even the martyred Archbishop Plunkett had no doubt that King Charles, who had him hanged, was his lawful temporal ruler.

For more than two hundred years the Catholic faith was cruelly persecuted by the English government, but towards the end of the 18th century this slowly slackened off.

Priests had been trained in seminaries in France, Belgium and Spain and with the decay of the old Gaelic society they became community leaders. Inevitably while living in continental Europe they picked up some of the radical ideas emerging there, and this so frightened both clerical and lay authorities in Ireland that a pact was made between the two to open in Ireland a seminary in which priests could be trained under close supervision, with any seen as potential trouble-makers weeded out.

Hence Maynooth was founded.

Daniel O'Connell

Early in the 19th century there emerged a Catholic political figure: Daniel O'Connell. O'Connell was a thoroughly modern type of politician in that he was prepared to use anything and everything to achieve his ends. (And like most politicians in a colonial context he was a liar and a crook.)

O’Connell made an alliance with the Catholic authorities: he would obtain ‘Catholic Emancipation’ and they would support his campaign for ‘Repeal’. Both campaigns were bogus: Catholic Emancipation merely allowed Catholics to sit in the Westminster parliament, where they were outnumbered and powerless: while Repeal if it had been obtained would have brought no benefit.

He deliberately set out to harness the sectarian division of Ireland, hitherto the tool of the government, to his own ends: and organised a political machine made up largely of Catholic priests. To finance his political activities he had the priests impose a levy on the laity; the ‘Catholic Rent’.

For the first half of the 19th century O’Connell dominated the political scene in Ireland and directed the political energies of the Irish people entirely in the pursuit of the will o’ the wisp of Repeal. O’Connell and his party at Westminster made no effort to bring in any kind of reform in the administration of Ireland: indeed at Westminster O’Connell joined with the most reactionary elements in opposing progress and reforms.

The end result of the life career of the ‘The Liberator’ was not Repeal but Famine.

After the Famine

The 19th century brought the development of greatly improved means of communication: the railways, the steamship, the telegraph and the Universal Postal Union. No organisation in the world welcomed these advances with more delight than the Vatican. Faster and safer communication enabled greater central control to be exercised, and Rome began to take a direct interest in the affairs of the Catholic Church in Ireland.

In mid-century there were two opposing strands of thought within the hierarchy in Ireland: and a bitter cold war between them. One, represented by Archbishop Murray of Dublin, sought accommodation with the administration and stoical acceptance of misrule. The other, championed by Archbishop MacHale of Tuam, tried to oppose and frustrate the colonial exploitation of Ireland. The disagreement was public knowledge and the Vatican was determined to do something about it, and when in 1850 the Archbishop of Armagh died, Paul Cullen was appointed his successor.

Cullen was a native of County Tipperary but had lived permanently in Italy from the age of twelve. He had been a professor of Hebrew and then the rector of the Irish College in Rome.

It seems clear that Cullen, who became the first ever Irish cardinal, was sent to bring the Irish to heel. As soon as he arrived he called a general synod, the first since the Norman invasion, and used it to make clear who was boss.

Cullen and nationalism

Paul Cullen was to be accused by nationalists of being a unionist and by unionists of not being unionist enough. In fact he did show some support for O'Connell-type nationalism though this may have been for fear of a worse alternative. After the Famine, land became a bigger issue than Repeal and the radical implications frightened him. In his mind nationalism was inseparable from Freemasonry: something that may well have been true of contemporary Italy but nonsense in Ireland. It is more than likely that Dublin Castle officials (for the most part Freemasons themselves) waved this particular red herring under his nose. (It is true that Cullen once intervened to save the life of a condemned Fenian: Thomas Burke.)

To the cardinal, the Church was everything. He simply had no interest in Ireland or its people except in so far as they could be useful to the Church. He even tried to turn the Irish Party at Westminster into a Catholic Church agency.

When Archbishop Murray died in 1852 Cullen resigned the See of Armagh and took over Dublin instead. This was a strange move; a self-demotion, but he knew what he was doing. Dublin was at the centre of things: the Castle and the Viceroy were there.

He publicly opposed priests getting involved in politics, but by this he meant party politics. He himself was involved in politics all the time.

Cullen came to Ireland after living in Italy for most of his life, and unlike the clergy in Ireland he was not afraid of either the government or the Protestants. The assumption he worked under was that the Catholic Church and the English Crown were in some way joint owners of Ireland: each with its own sphere of influence. The administration, for devious reasons of its own, played him along and this approach has been basic to the political stance of the Church in Ireland ever since.

The long rule of Cardinal Cullen (1850-1878) saw the Catholic Church in Ireland develop into a much more rigid and authoritarian organisation, and saw the laity reduced to a role of passive submission, with three functions only: to pray, to pay and to obey. The clergy withdrew into a narcissistic isolation, with the minimum of contact with the laity, over the communion rail and through the confession-box grille. In churches the clergy conducted

ceremonies in the sanctuary in bad Latin while the faithful knelt fingering rosary beads in the benches.

Barriers of distrust slowly built up. Issues like the Church condemnation of land agitation, the Plan of Campaign and the Fenian movement helped increase the isolation of the clergy from Irish society. Be civil and vague with the clergy ran an old saying.

Once priests were ordained, or religious took vows, they assumed that they had passed through a kind of invisible boundary, similar to the one that separates an adopted child from its natural parents, and that Ireland no longer had any claim on their loyalty.

This was the situation at the beginning of the struggle for independence, and it was to have tragic consequences.

In the next issue the part played by the Catholic Church in creating the Free State and in maintaining English domination over Ireland will be described.

The Catholic church and the Free State

At the beginning of the 20th century most of the parish clergy in Ireland had been trained at Maynooth, and the majority of the bishops had held professorships there. Thus most bishops took up their posts without the previous mellowing experience of parochial work.

Before leaving Maynooth, final year students held a lottery in which they drew for seniority and this lottery determined who would be first to get a parish, a deanery and so on. Hence, as in so many other walks of life in Ireland, promotion in the Church did not depend on ability.

Maynooth was a fee-paying institution and though bursaries did exist the bulk of the students came from families that could afford to pay for their training. Seminarians therefore tended to be the sons of the better-off classes: professional people, employees of the British administration, shopkeepers and the wealthier farmers.

For the sons of poorer families there were two possible routes into the priesthood, either join a missionary order or else take a bursary offered by a diocese in America or Australia, and after ordination serve there as a priest. This resulted in the element in the Irish priesthood most likely to have radical ideas being siphoned off abroad: indeed there were complaints from Australia about the number of troublesome priests arriving there from Ireland.

It became the custom to send newly-ordained priests to England for a few years to help out as parish dogsbodies. The effect of this on young men with little experience of the world was not good: they returned to Ireland influenced by the mind-set they had encountered there, in an insular and self-acclaiming society.

The First World War

When in August of 1914 England declared war on Germany, Protestant clergy of all denominations threw themselves into the war effort with fanatical zeal. The Catholic clergy were more reserved in their attitude: of the 'Central Powers' Austria-Hungary was strongly Catholic while in Germany Catholics had full equal rights with Protestants and the State treated the Catholic Church with deference.

In contrast the 'Western Allies': England, France, Belgium and later Portugal, Italy and USA, all had governments dominated by Freemasonic elements and all had given the Catholic Church a greater or lesser amount of trouble. So, though the Church endorsed John Redmond's ill-advised decision to place his Irish Party behind the war effort, there was no real enthusiasm, and Cardinal Logue even discouraged priests signing on as chaplains.

The Rising and after

The 1916 Rising was at first condemned by Church leaders, but in the aftermath their hostility began to soften. The courage and deportment of the Volunteers and the fact that they were almost all practicing Catholics made a deep impression, and the general wave of public sympathy for the insurgents affected the clergy.

Bishop O'Dwyer of Limerick, previously rather hostile towards nationalism, issued a supportive statement. Archbishop Walsh of Dublin intervened privately on behalf of Roger Casement.

But the hierarchy still opposed separatism. Though this opposition tended to be expressed in the form of moral syllogisms it is clear it was really based on the conclusion that England was too strong and the Republican cause had no chance of success. Cardinal Logue himself dismissed the Sinn Féin programme as '…an impossible dream which no man in his sober senses can hope to see realised.'

In the two years after the Rising Republican support slowly grew, and peaked when in 1918 the British government attempted to introduce conscription in Ireland. It was an issue on which the hierarchy could not sit on the fence: they were obliged to come down on the anti-conscription side, which was being spear-headed by Sinn Féin. The Anglican Archbishop of

Dublin, Dr. Bernard, cynically and accurately said that the Catholic bishops had decided to throw in their lot with Sinn Féin for fear of losing all their influence if they did not.

That it was an exercise in self-preservation was exposed by Fr Walter MacDonald, professor of Moral Theology at Maynooth, who published a book full of learned quotations in Latin showing that as far as the Catholic Church's teachings were concerned England's rule over Ireland was legitimate and the Irish had no case for independence.

In his memoirs MacDonald wrote: "I saw, with disgust, Irish bishops, both here and in the United States and elsewhere, use claptrap phrases about self-determination, rights of nations, government by consent, and other such . . . unworthy of men who are supposed to have mastered the science of ethics as taught in our schools . . . who must know that all through the Middle Ages, when Europe was ruled according to the mind of the Church, little heed was given to the consent of subject peoples!"

The Tan War

During the Tan War, the hierarchy tried simultaneously to hunt with the Imperialist hounds and run with the Republican hares: in the process earning the distrust of both parties. But they were divided on what their approach to the independence question should be.

An exacerbating element was the fact that during the previous war the Protestant Churches in Britain and Ireland had thrown all their energies into the war effort and by 1918 they had shot their collective bolt: nobody took them seriously any more. As a substitute for religion the British establishment cultivated a cult of loyalty to the monarchy, and this made Republicanism a dirty word.

Cardinal Logue repeatedly assured the British that apart from a very small number of 'extremists' the Catholics of Ireland were devoted to their royal overlord. The leaders of the Church were of course also against breaking the connection with England for fear this would hamper the missionary and other activities of the Church in other parts of the far-flung British Empire.

Republican successes resulted in falling Church hostility and even some supportive gestures, but there was no unified position even among the bishops. The bishops behaved no differently to the other members of the gombeen class from which they were exclusively drawn: they wanted above all to be on the winning side and when the Republicans looked like winners they were prepared to go along with them.

The Treaty

The unexpected signing of the 1921 Treaty was a God-send to the hierarchy: had they been asked to draft a treaty it would hardly have been much different. From the start they united behind the pro-treaty elements and when the Civil War erupted they did not hesitate to issue a general excommunication against those who took the anti-treaty side. Church support was probably the greatest single factor leading to the victory of the treatyites.

The Church in the Saorstát

The Catholic Church had played a key part in the establishment of the Saorstát and the clergy felt themselves to be, in some measure, part-owners of it. Seán Ó Faolain once said that they regarded the Saorstát as a 'goose for plucking' and so they did, but then so did everybody else. There was never any such thing as a Free State patriotism: people involved in the creation and running of it were there for what they could get out of it.

For more than 50 years, the Church was the single most important internal force in the Free State. The rulers of the Saorstát needed the Church: they needed all the support they could get. The leaders of the Church took the view that superior to the State's laws there is a moral law laid down by God, of which the bishops are the guardians and interpreters.

Bishops therefore frequently made pronouncements on issues of public interest and the State almost always took heed. The Saorstát began increasingly to take on the attributes of a theocracy.

Of course the early leaders of the Saorstát were such a despicable collection that prodding from the clergy in many cases did good rather than harm. Also, conflicts between Church and State and disagreements between them about ethical matters are as old as Christianity itself and are probably destined to last to the end of time. Church leaders have been severely criticised for speaking out on some matters, and reproached with equal venom for failing to speak out on others.

In the context of the Saorstát, they tended to intervene most often in two circumstances: firstly whenever they detected a threat to their powers and secondly relating to concerns arising from their excessive middle-class prudery.

An example will suffice. In 1943 the Saorstát's Department of Health bought an old manor house outside Galway City with the intention of converting it into a sanitorium. Nearby stood a large building, the novitiate of the Redemptorist Order. The prior objected strongly to the project, on the grounds that his novices would be distracted from their prayers by the sight of

nurses passing in front of the windows. The Chief Medical Officer thought this concern far-fetched, but offered to pay to have all the windows facing the hospital fitted with frosted glass, but this was rejected.

Unknown to most people, De Valera had a younger brother who was a Redemptorist priest in the USA. Though it was the middle of World War II, the prior arranged to have this man flown across the Atlantic to intervene personally with Dev, which he did and the scheme was cancelled and the building eventually became a factory. That episode was quite typical of the sort of mullarkey the clergy constantly got up to.

The plateau

From 1922 to about 1965 the Saorstát was stagnant. Though in theory independent it had all the features of a backward and neglected colony. For the Catholic Church the centre-point of this long plateau was the Eucharistic Congress of 1932, which was basically an exercise in triumphalism and a public display of the subservience of State to Church.

The Saorstát had to go along with it: Church support was vital to its survival. The nearest parallel situation arose in France under the Vichy regime. After the débâcle of 1940 France was reduced to a German puppet State and the French government had been completely discredited. It immediately began to grant all sorts of concessions to the Catholic Church, whose support it needed. In the long run this collaboration did the Church in France no good at all.

It has been a common mistake to assume that the Catholic Church in Ireland was a monolith. In fact even the hierarchy was rarely able to agree on anything. Individual bishops simply had too much power within their own dioceses. One Papal Numcio was to complain to Rome ". . . there are no bishops in Ireland. In Ireland I found 26 popes".

Looking at primates alone, there have been men with a wide variety of outlooks on colonialism. There have been ones with genuine patriotic leanings, like Cardinal Ó Fiaich and Cardinal MacRory, chancers like Cardinal Logue, supporters of the British like Cardinal Conway and 'messers' like Cardinal Daly.

The religious orders were independent of the hierarchy and pursued their own agendas.

Nevertheless it is permissible to make generalizations about the mind-set of the Catholic clergy, as formed predominantly in Maynooth. It is interesting in this connection to consider

the subsequent careers of two Maynooth students who left without taking ordination: Kevin O'Higgins and John Hume.

Jansenism or Calvinism?

The unique character of Irish Catholicism has often been commented on, mostly unfavourably. At one time it used to be asserted that this was due to the influence of the Jansenist heresy. While the Catholic Church in Ireland does indeed have a few features that can be traced back to the teachings of Bishop Jansen (for example the 'First Communion' is a Jansenist invention) the real misdirecting influence has been the result of centuries of competition with Protestant sects and of reaction to their accusations and criticisms. This has produced a religion focussed exclusively on sin, and suspecting anything happy or joyful or satisfying as probably sinful.

Vatican II and after

The Second Vatican Council was called by Pope John XXIII to carry out radical reform of the Catholic Church. Returning from the Council, Irish bishops declared that nothing had changed, but in fact a great deal had.

In the area of most immediate impact, that of 'liturgical reform' the Irish bishops let the English ones call the tune, and an insipid English-language liturgy was imposed.

And throughout Ireland, from St. Patrick's cathedral in Armagh to remote village churches, sanctuaries were gutted and superb stonework and metalwork smashed up and dumped, destroying the aesthetic unity of each building and leaving it a monument to the philistinism of the clergy.

The vandalization of Killarney cathedral was not the least of the sins of ex-bishop Casey. (It should be noted that churches controlled by religious orders have on the whole suffered less.)

The Northern Troubles

The eruption of the 'Northern Troubles' in 1969 revealed that the Catholic clergy had learnt nothing and forgotten nothing. The same tiresome old fulminations were trotted out again as if nothing had happened in the 100 years since the Fenians.

It must of course be recognised that for as long as England holds the six counties the hierarchy has a knife at the throat and its freedom of action is restricted. That said, there is

no doubt that the condemnations have mostly been sincere and indeed reflect the thinking of the social class from which the clergy is mostly drawn.

In recent years a string of scandals, coupled with developments in the world they find difficult to adjust to, has caused the Catholic clergy to flounder despondantly about, unable to make their minds up as to where they are going or what they are doing. Pride cometh before a fall! Pride and arrogance there was, and the fall came in due course.

Industry in the Free State

At the time of the treaty, most of Ireland's existing industries were located in the north-east corner of the country. Partition meant that the new Irish Free State was almost entirely rural and agricultural. The only industrial undertakings of any size consisted of a few breweries and distilleries, some corn mills and a couple of biscuit factories. These were owned by Unionist interests and run by managers hired from England and they provided a small amount of low-skill employment.

The first decade

Arthur Griffith had hoped to develop Irish industry through the imposition of protective tariffs but he died before he was in a position to organize a trade policy. His successors, on the advice of the strongly pro-British Department of Finance, rejected his policies and instead adopted a Free Trade approach, with the economy open to all comers. As a sop to its 'Sinn Féin' ancestry the government set up a Tariff Commission consisting of three part-time members to which an Irish manufacturer could apply to have a tariff applied against a foreign competitor. The process was an extremely lengthy one and in practice applications were successful only in the case of a few items of minor significance, such as musical instruments and rosary beads.

However, a tariff system inherited from the past was maintained: this was the so-called Imperial Preference under which when an item was available from a source within the British Empire and also from another outside it then an import duty was imposed on the latter.

The early rulers of the Saorstát had little interest in industry: their background was in commerce, being drawn largely from the gombeen class of traders, merchants, publicans, ranchers and dealers.

The second decade

When De Valera came to power in 1932 there was an immediate change in government attitudes towards industry. The dispute with London over Land Annuities evolved into the

Economic War and there was a mutual imposition of tariff barriers. A campaign of import substitution was begun, and the Industrial Credit Corporation was set up to circumvent the traditional reluctance of the Irish banks to invest in Irish industry. A Control of Manufactories Act was introduced under which all industrial undertakings had to be at least 51% owned by Irish residents, so as to prevent foreign firms setting up bogus re-packaging operations behind the tariff barrier.

At the same time the Great Depression reduced job opportunities abroad and so emigration declined and there was no shortage of people anxious to find work. But the Saorstát had no enterprise culture. The bright, the able, the ambitious, the people with ideas, had tended to leave out of frustration: indeed had been encouraged to leave by those in power, to whom persons of ability constituted a threat. So, the expected industrial revolution failed to materialise. The State compensated to some extent by establishing State-owned enterprises like Bord na Mona and the Irish Sugar Company.

The war period and after

Protectionism did help create a small base of new industries, engaged mostly in import replacement. The Economic War, followed by the Second World War, cut off external competition and should have given native industry time and opportunity to develop and expand. In fact nothing of the sort happened. Profits were quite large due to market monopoly position and low wages, but profits were not invested in growth. Rather, in imitation of the existing Ascendancy class, profits went on conspicuous consumption: on fur coats, motor cars and racehorses. Semi-state corporations did a bit better but were hampered by civil service conservatism and political meddling.

For over a century, England had been the world's foremost industrial power. After 1945 a strange lethargy began to affect British industry: and growth was at only about half that of the West European average. In the Saorstát, growth was at about half that of Britain.

By about 1960 it was obvious that native Irish capitalism had failed to deliver the goods and the politicians and pundits began to look elsewhere. Two possible panaceas were identified: foreign investment and the 'Common Market'.

Enter the multinationals

The multinational corporation is a recent development, and first appeared in the oil industry. Such corporations exist spread over many states, their ownership is often a mystery and their finances and strategies are kept secret. They operate like independent jurisdictions and are virtually treated as such by governments.

The first multinational entering the Saorstát was the Ford Motor Corporation, which set up a manufacturing plant in Cork: a county from which the grandfather of the founder of the company had gone to America as a famine emigrant. But after a few years the Ford company requested some changes in the Saorstát's labour laws and when this was turned down the company simply upped stakes and shifted the bulk of the operation to England. Around the same time Guiness's Brewery, the state's largest employer, moved its headquarters from Dublin to London.

The Industrial Development Authority, set up originally to try to get native industrialists to pull their socks up, was authorised to attract industry from abroad. The strategy was to persuade multinationals to set up manufacturing plants in the State, the attractions being government grants, tax holidays and cheap labour.

The strategy was successful; the multinationals did come in and jobs were created. Yet nothing seemed to change: unemployment remained endemic, native industry still stagnated, emigration continued as high as ever. A committee of investigation was set up and in February 1982 it finally published a report.

The Telesis Report

This report, known as the Telesis Report, contained information so devastating that publication was delayed for over a year. A few of the main points were:

Only about 30% of the jobs announced by the IDA ever actually materialised.

Jobs created by foreign industries at great public expense failed to make up for jobs being lost in traditional Irish industries, so that despite continued large-scale emigration unemployment continued to rise.

It had been expected that the multinationals would use Irish firms as suppliers and sub-contractors. This had not happened, in fact they imported their raw materials and exported their products and the country got only the rather low wages of their employees.

The foreign firms did not engage in research and development work in Ireland, despite inducements to do so.

The report was the subject of lengthy but inconclusive public debate. On item three, the multinationals made the reasonable response that they had found native Irish firms incapable of working to the standards required by a modern enterprise.

The Common Market

Joining the EEC was the other means whereby the Leinster House politicians hoped to save their bacon. Entry was negotiated in tandem with that of Britain; and Ireland, north and south, was perceived by the Eurocrats in Brussels as part of England's excess baggage, along with Scotland, the Isle of Man and so on.

To enter, the 1937 constitution needed to be amended and for this a referendum was necessary. All the main Leinster House parties endorsed entry, which was opposed only by Republicans and a few transitory groups. The basic selling point was that if England went in then the Saorstát had no alternative, it would have to join too or forfeit its only large market. Government advertisments opposing a NO vote showed hands pulling Ireland away from Britain. Another tactic was the promise of all sorts of grants and subsidies after entry. A few days before the referendum every voter in the State received a 'personal letter' from Jack Lynch pleading for a YES vote.

Entry to the EEC was duly passed and indeed some improvements in the economy were experienced for a while, but the beneficiaries were concentrated in certain areas: the larger farmers did particularly well. For the bulk of the population EEC membership made little difference to their lives.

One effect the Common Market did have was that grant money coming from Brussels did actually begin to produce tangible results: real roads were built, real drains dug, real power plants constructed. Previously grant money, once paid out, had tended to trickle away like water poured on sand, but the Eurocrats not only monitored how grant money was spent, they heavily fined misusers and defaulters.

Further developments

The foreign-owned industries had the problem that Ireland is a remote location, so that transport added significantly to their costs. This they compensated for by paying low wages. However a trend soon emerged to move low skill manufacturing to Third World locations, where wages were even lower and labour laws were lax.

One of the main inhibitors of private industry in Ireland was the habit of employing English managers. The background of most of them was upper class and they came from a tradition of the 'splendid amateur', they believed that if you went to boarding school and Oxbridge then you could do anything. To them management was basically an adversarial activity, and they also assumed the Irish to be lazy and stupid. Irish managers picked up similar ideas

through attending courses in England, and the State even set up an Irish Management Institute staffed by English ‘experts’.

The most successful of the foreign industries brought in were in the area of electronics. Electronics is a new field and most of the firms were run by young engineers, persons without racial or other hang-ups. They found that, contrary to what they had been told, Irish employees were hard-working, intelligent and reasonable and their Irish factories profitable. Of course, like other multinationals, these firms had no loyalty to Ireland. One of the most successful, Digital of Galway, suddenly upped stakes and moved to Britain: it is said because of the promise of a large government contract there if they would move.

Another computer company, Dell of Limerick, initiated a new departure that has brought many jobs to the country. Dell’s customers found that if they had a problem they could phone up the factory in Limerick and usually somebody would talk through it with them. The Dell company recognised that this informal service was an asset and set up a customer help-line service. Several other firms followed suit and in the Dublin area ‘teleservicing’ has become a major source of employment.

The Celtic Tiger

In recent years the high growth rate of the Saorstát’s economy has led to it being nicknamed the Celtic Tiger, in imitation of the prosperous Asian economies of South Korea and Taiwan. Closer inspection shows the analogy to be false. Up until 1945 Korea and Taiwan were Japanese colonies. After 1945 they broke completely with Japan: politically, economically and culturally, and set out on their roads. They had no neo-colonial phase.

Both countries rely on their own resources, not on foreign expertise or investment.

The real secret behind the Saorstát’s high growth rate is that the starting base was so low that there is plenty of room for improvement. Unemployment and emigration remain as high as ever, and the concentration of investment in areas like electronics, software, financial services and pharmaceuticals, which tend to produce a small number of high-pay jobs, has accelerated the trend towards creating a two-tier society.

The Baltic experience

Under the Tsars the East Baltic area had been left underdeveloped and backward. The only exception to this had been Estonia, where there was a flourishing textile industry originally established by immigrants from Scotland. During the First World War the entire area was devastated and thoroughly looted. The three Baltic States had to start out with no industry.

They also had almost no natural resources. In Estonia there were deposits of shale-oil and phosphate and these became the basis of successful industries but otherwise the only resources were peat-bogs and forests, which in all three States were nationalised without compensation.

Timber had been used mainly for firewood and building (most people lived in log cabins). A small amount was exported for use as pit-props. It was a wasteful use of a valuable resource. First of all peat briquette factories were established to provide an alternate fuel supply, and also brick works to supply building material. Sawmills were opened to process raw timber, firstly into planks but evolving to make furniture, plywood, cellulose and paper. This was so successful that a large export market developed and the mills began to import logs from Russia.

Rural co-ops set up flax mills and textile factories. In Lithuania the Union of Flax-growing Co-operatives (Linas) became a major supplier of men's shirts to the Co-operative Wholesale Society of Manchester. There were also co-operatively owned abbatoirs and tanneries, and meat-canneries, sausage factories and soap factories. Sugar beet was processed to make sugar and industrial alcohol was made from potatoes.

There were also factories producing such things as linseed oil, matches, tobacco products and pipes, condensed milk, railway carriages, artificial silk and other items.

Latvia became a major producer of glass and glass products and also manufactured radios and cameras. Latvian radios were of high quality and were sold all over Eastern Europe.

The economy of the Free State

We have asserted that the 26-county economy was and largely still is a neo-colonial economy. What is meant by this term?

A classic example of such an economy might be Central America when it was under Aztec domination, shortly before the Spanish invasion. The Aztecs made the other peoples of the area supply them with gold, slaves and other goods and gave them in return parrot feathers, toys, whistles and a kind of snailburger. Here we observe the two basic features of neo-colonial type economics: the exporting of wealth and the importing of rubbish.

The initial position

The economy of Ireland after 1800 became heavily dependent on the export of live cattle to Britain. The profitability of this slowly declined because ranching in other parts of the British Empire developed and the refrigerated ship was invented.

The submarine blockade of 1914-1918 had a beneficial effect on the Irish economy because it cut off much of the competition on the British market. By the time the Saorstát was established this advantage had vanished, competition was restored and a sharp drop in cattle prices resulted. It was not a good way to begin.

The economic policies of the Saorstát were devised by the new Department of Finance under the leadership of former Dublin Castle officials, many of whom were actually English. They were also people whose ideas about how an economy should be run dated from about 1870, any ideas appearing since the ‘Free Trade’ era of Gladstone being dismissed as fads.

The key element that was to lock the Saorstát into a neo-colonial relationship with Britain was the continued use of sterling as the currency. Because sterling was overvalued it was virtually impossible to sell into any market other than the British market, and even on the home market the Irish producer was disadvantaged: for example with the exchange rate fixed at five dollars to the pound then porridge oats could be imported from Minnesota cheaper than it could be milled in Donegal.

On the British market itself Irish produce had to compete with both lower-priced products from third countries and subsidised local goods.

A second element stunting the economic growth of the Saorstát was the chronic shortage of credit. The Irish banks invested almost entirely in British government bonds: payers of very low interest but ‘secure’. On December 31, 1929 the Bank of Ireland alone reported holding over a hundred million pounds worth of British government stock: almost their entire assets. Insurance companies and financial institutions in general followed the same trend: in fact the proportion of assets held in securities was by far the highest in the world. Private individuals with money tended it invest it via London stockbrokers.

One mysterious item appearing in the accounts of the Saorstát was ‘invisible imports’. This item, usually about 20% of total imports, actually accounted for money sent abroad for which nothing was received in return. About half of this consisted of payments to the British government under various pretexts, the other half being rents paid to landlords living in Britain.

Early developments

The early Cumann na nGaedheal regime, despite its Sinn Féin ancestry, had little time for the Sinn Féin policy of self-sufficiency. Also, quite understandably, it had many expenditures and little revenue.

One idea that was suggested was to introduce import duties as a means of raising more revenue. In the situation of the time this would have meant taxing British goods and the Department of Finance strongly opposed it. They asserted that such a move would have disasterous consequences: prices would rise, the cost of living would rise, leading to Wage Demands!! How well they knew how to strike terror into the hearts of the gombeen politicians of Leinster House, most of whom were small employers.

The civil service opposed almost every single advance or reform proposed on grounds of cost. Their hopelessly outdated Victorian economic ideas told them that, while the State had to pay for a few things like schools and prisons, public expenditure and thus taxation had to be kept to a minimum. The single achievement of the early Saorstát, the Shannon Hydroelectric Dam, they fought against to the bitter end.

In the case of a proposal to fix a minimum wage for agricultural workers they objected that this would bankrupt the country's biggest farmers and would also drive thousands of Protestants out of the country. Protestants, of course, mostly voted Cumann na nGaedheal.

The Fianna Fáil era

When Fianna Fáil came to power the civil service was regarded at first with a certain amount of suspicion, being the creation of the previous regime, and its advice was not always taken. Certain organizations, notably the ESB, were removed from civil service control.

About 1938 De Valera began to suspect that a major war might break out in the near future. With this in mind he asked the various government departments to formulate a plan of action. He may have assumed they would sit down and draw up a list of critical materials that should be stockpiled and so on.

The civil servants did nothing of the sort, instead they did what they had always done: they went to the British and asked their advice. The British replied that in the event of a war there was a danger that Britain and the Saorstát would be in competition for commodities and for ships to carry them in and that this would put up prices. How the small requirements of the Saorstát could make any difference to prices compared with the needs of the British Empire was apparently not queried. The British suggested that resources be pooled: that things like

tea, sugar, tobacco, petrol and the like be bought by Britain and the Saorstát's requirements be obtained at the same time and passed on. Shipping resources would also be pooled.

It was a trap, and they walked straight into it.

Learning a harsh lesson

When the Second World War broke out in September 1939 the entire merchant fleet of the Saorstát, consisting of about fifty vessels and including seven newly-acquired oil tankers, was handed over to the British in accordance with the 'pooling' agreement.

The Saorstát did reasonably well for supplies for the first year of the war, but in the autumn of 1940 the British, at the instigation of the Ulster Unionists, began to put economic sanctions in place to try to extract concessions regarding naval bases and similar matters. Shipments of fertiliser and animal feed were cut off completely and supplies of petrol, coal, tea and many other commodities were drastically reduced, inflicting very great hardship on the ordinary people.

The Saorstát had to try to build up another merchant fleet. A few ships belonging to the Baltic States, which had just been over-run by Russia, were obtained by means that are to this day clouded in mystery.

One or two old Spanish Civil War blockade-runners were rescued from breaker's yards and patched up. Thus Irish Shipping Limited was created. Whenever a ship came on the market in South America or wherever, it could only be bought with British permission because the Saorstát's entire external reserves were held in sterling in London.

The British would release funds only if it was agreed that half of each cargo carried would be war material for Britain. Had the Germans found out, they could have justifiably sunk every single one of them. The courage of the Irish sailors ranging dangerous waters in assorted old tubs to bring vital supplies into the State is one of the few praiseworthy aspects of the whole sorry episode. Pleas to the British at least to return one of the oil tankers fell on deaf ears.

The politicians learned at last not to believe everything the bureaucrats told them: but it was a very costly lesson.

Public health in Ireland

Ancient Irish society had a professional class of trained medical men, drawn mostly from certain families, and every local chief had a doctor among his retinue.

Almost nothing is known about these early practitioners. It is true that some medical books have survived but they are disappointing: they are merely translations of standard Latin or Greek texts.

In the 17th century ancient Irish medical knowledge was swept away with the rest of the old civilization and for a hundred years or more most of the population had no access to any kind of professional medical attention.

Gradually this changed. People went to medical schools abroad and a few medical schools were opened in Ireland. Medicine was one of the few professions open to Catholics and in fact before long Ireland was oversupplied with doctors.

Hospitals too began to be founded. There were ‘county infirmaries’ which were funded out of the rates and controlled by County Grand Juries (effectively by the big landlords). There were private hospitals established by charitable bequests: in theory non-denominational but in practice usually controlled by self-perpetuating boards exclusively Protestant in composition, and employing only Protestants. Finally there were hospitals run by Catholic religious orders.

There were a few lunatic asylums, though most insane persons were cared for by relatives.

The post-Famine era

It was only after the Famine that the State began to take an interest in health matters. The workhouses had internal sick-bays headed by a Matron (usually just the wife of the Master) and a few untrained nurses who were inmates ordered to take up nursing duties. The workhouses frequently treated out-patients free of charge: though the services they provided must have been of very low standard.

Poor relief

The 1851 Poor Relief Act established a system of dispensaries at which the ‘deserving poor’ could obtain treatment free if they had a ‘red ticket’ supplied by the Poor Law Guardians. The dispensary doctors, about 800 in total, were over-worked and poorly paid and often had to try to make extra income from private practice on the side; and they also engaged in everything from journalism to horse-dealing. There was a high incidence of alcoholism among them. For their part the doctors complained that the red tickets were thrown around

like confetti, especially before elections. A doctor was paid the same no matter how many people he was expected to treat.

Dispensary doctors were despised by their colleagues and regarded as the dregs of the profession, forced to work for a salary through inability to secure enough wealthy patients to make a living.

There were County Medical Officers who were in overall charge of the health services in a county. This was a political appointment in which professional ability was not an issue.

From 1863 the dispensary doctors were responsible for the registration of births and deaths. In 1911 the Liberal government at Westminster proposed a Health Insurance Act similar to the ones already in operation in many European countries. Under this act there would be compulsory health insurance of all workers based on a small weekly levy divided between employer and employee; who would pay four old pence each. Doctors would be employed by the scheme on a similar basis to medical officers in the armed forces.

The reaction in Ireland was a forewarning of things to come. The wealthier doctors campaigned against it as it would obviously reduce the pool of fee-paying patients. They were able to get the support of the Catholic hierarchy, and they put pressure on the Irish Party to oppose it. They claimed that the additional cost would put many firms out of business and increase unemployment and that when Home Rule came it would bankrupt the Irish economy. Thanks to their efforts Ireland was excluded from most parts of the scheme.

The Republican era

During the Tan War the Republican government took over responsibility for public health in the parts of Ireland freed from British rule.

The problem of the workhouses was of immediate concern. These old institutions still survived all over the country; the inmates being mostly elderly domestic servants who had been thrown out in the street when they became unable to work hard enough. It was decided to phase out the workhouses as quickly as possible.

Straight away, the degrading workhouse uniform was abolished and inmates allowed to wear their own clothes. Rations were improved. Arrangements were made to board out inmates with relatives or other persons prepared to receive them. Workhouses were gradually shut down apart from a few that would look after the hard core of residual inmates.

Among the merchant class there was ferocious opposition to this policy. These institutions were valuable money-spinners, providing contracts to supply food, uniforms, fuel and the like: with the associated opportunities for fraud.

During the Civil War the Republican side resorted to the more drastic policy of burning down the workhouses.

In matters of public health there were other problems: the epidemic known as Spanish Influenza swept through Ireland and had a deadly effect on a population predominantly undernourished. And the end of the European war resulted in large numbers of men being discharged from the British armed forces and these brought back with them another unwelcome problem: an upsurge in venereal disease.

Enter Saorstát Éireann

When the Irish Free State was set up it continued the ramshackle health services of the previous regime. There had been a small public health section in Dublin Castle, which was taken over and attached to the Department of Local Government. It was made up entirely of retired members of the Royal Army Medical Corps, whose main concern seems to have been to prevent the outbreak of epidemics, which might spread to the large British garrison. These gentlemen, all patronage appointments, kept a low profile, drew their salaries and did not rock the boat and were able to coast along unnoticed for the first two decades of the Saorsát.

The new State had several major public health problems, which it tried hard to ignore. The principal ones were:

High rates of tuberculosis, alcoholism and schizophrenia: all far in excess of the European norm. These are known as ‘the diseases of the dispossessed’. They were and are also found among the Laplanders, the American Indians, the native Hawaiians, the Maoris, the Tahitians and the Ainu minority in Japan. All these had been warrior societies defeated and marginalised by invaders, with their culture and language repressed and despised.

Poor diet. People in the towns lived largely on bread made from imported flour of doubtful paternity, adulterated with everything from chalk to powdered bone. (Only about 2,000 acres of wheat were sown each year in the 26 Counties.)

Old periodicals from that era carry many advertisments for patent medicines to treat digestive complaints. There were high rates of throat cancer, stomach cancer and bowel

cancer. Country people grew their own food, which was plentiful but plain and badly cooked. Due to folk memories of famine and fear of tuberculosis thin people were objects of pity and fat people much admired, while fat children were a particular source of family pride.

It was not unusual to see an adult standing over a child with a rod, forcing it to eat. Already as a young curate in County Sligo the Republican priest Fr. Michael O'Flanagan had noticed the appearance of tooth decay among school-children, previously quite unknown, and he was able to correlate this with the consumption of the new breakfast cereals. Junk food had arrived, with the usual side effects.

High infant and maternal mortality, due in part to the activities of ignorant untrained midwives, but more to general malnutrition.

The generally poor level of public hygene, with contaminated water supplies a particular problem. There was also the filthy habit of constant spitting, picked up from British soldiers by louts who thought it gave them a 'tough guy' image.

The bulk of the population lived in grinding poverty, with the associated low resistance to disease.

The new state began with the second-lowest public health status in Europe (after Albania). In the next issue, how things developed from there will be described.

Health and welfare in the Saorstát

The founding fathers of the Irish Free State displayed a complete lack of interest in public health, something they were content to leave to the local authorities. The English civil servants who ran the Department of Finance were obsessed with reducing state expenditure, and in a few years they were able to bring income tax down from 25% to 15% per annum.

The hospitals in particular began to feel the pinch and eventually one of them petitioned the government to be allowed to run a sweepstake to raise funds. The idea was adopted, but control of the sweep was given to a private company, the Irish Hospitals' Sweepstake, headed by a Cumann na nGaedheal politician who was to die a very wealthy man. The Sweep proved immensely popular in Irish communities abroad, where people believed that by investing in tickets they were genuinely helping Ireland and not lining the pockets of the likes of Cosgrave, Fitzgerald and O'Higgins. A lot more money than expected came in, and

while funds were not distributed as fairly as they might have been, the private hospitals did benefit and so eventually did the public at large.

The country continued to produce far more doctors than it could employ and the bulk of medical graduates went abroad. The British Colonial Medical Service employed enormous numbers of them. In the Saorstát there was an upper echelon of practitioners of Protestant-Unionist origin who had a tight grip on the medical profession, controlling bodies like the Royal College of Surgeons. There were a few wealthy medicos like Oliver St. John Gogarty but the medical elite was impossible to break into unless one had private resources. The general public depended on the overworked and professionally despised dispensary doctors. And of course the medical establishment tried to rip off the Saorstát just as did other mutual-interest groups. When Dr. James Deeny took over as state Chief Medical Officer in 1944 he found that plans for a new children's hospital at Cherry Orchard included the provision of a nine-hole golf course for the exclusive use of the consultants.

Once De Valera came to power improvements in public health were expected. Having little interest in the matter he did what politicians always do when they want to put something on the long finger: he set up a committee. The committee, chaired by Bishop Dignam of Clonfert, eventually reported in 1944. It proposed a scheme for general health insurance based on that of New Zealand, then recognised as the best in the world. The scheme, though carefully worked out and shown to be viable, was at once shot down by the Department of Finance: as usual on the grounds of cost.

External influences

The inadequate nature of the state's health services were exposed particularly during the Second World War, The money from the Sweepstake dried up, there was a chronic shortage of medicines and the diet of the population became even worse than before. The former Royal Army Medical Corps men who ran the state's tiny service had more important things on their minds than tuberculosis or infant mortality. Among them a theory developed that workers emigrating to England might bring typhus-infected lice there and cause an epidemic. Because of this fear, all persons embarking to England were required to go through a compulsory de-lousing and the Iveagh Baths in Dublin were taken over for this purpose. At the time it was not unusual for states to require a disinfection of persons entering their territory, but the Saorstát must surely have been unique in requiring it for persons leaving its territory.

In Britain itself meanwhile there was concern among the authorities at the very poor physical condition of recruits and it was soon realised that this was due to childhood malnutrition in

the inter-war years. The influential Beveridge Report, which was to be regarded for decades as the last word on the subject in both Britain and Ireland, called for greater state involvement in health and welfare; including school meals, free medical and dental treatment for schoolchildren and regular body-building exercises in school – the hated 'physical jerks'.

The green years

By the time the war ended the old RAMC men had mostly retired and younger replacements had taken over. They were persons more open to new ideas and less hostile to change.

In Britain the Labour government decided, against fierce opposition from the medical profession, to nationalise the entire health sector and turn all doctors and dentists into civil servants, with all medical treatment provided free. It turned out to be an overambitious and ruinously expensive exercise but it was the subject of much praise in the Saorstát, and there were frequent calls for a similar service. Of course there was no chance that the impoverished Saorstát could replicate that, but there was an impetus to make some improvement. A separate Department of Health was set up, and the Sweepstake money started to come in again.

There were also new problems to deal with. Post-war mobility facilitated the spread of dangerous diseases; notably whooping cough and polio. The arrival of large numbers of men discharged from the British armed forces caused an epidemic of venereal disease which the establishment, either through prudishness or for fear of offending the British, chose to nothing about.

Fianna Fáil had been in power since 1932 and had won an election in 1944, but was running out of ideas. The appearance of Clann na Poblachta, which attracted diverse elements and was drawing off Fianna Fáil support, frightened De Valera into calling an election a year early. As he intended, Clann na Poblachta was caught on the hop: it was still evolving as a political entity and did not have much in the way of funds. A search began for candidates who could put up the £50 deposit out of their own resources. One of those recruited was a young TB specialist working in a sanatorium in the Wicklow mountains. So, Dr. Noel Browne joined Clann na Poblachta and six weeks later he was Minister for Health.

The Browne years

Dr. Browne's ministerial career has been described many times: not least in his own splenetic memoirs. Clann na Poblachta joined a cobbled-up coalition with Fine Gael, Labour and a short-lived rural party Clann na Talmhan. In the share-out of portfolios Clann na

Poblachta was awarded ‘Health’ and Browne, the only medical deputy the party had, was made minister.

For a while things went very well. Browne set to work with great energy and enthusiasm to modernise public health. Every few days an initiative would be announced: a new sanatorium here, a hundred extra beds there, a campaign on this, a programme for that. Because funds were available from the Sweep, the minister unlike his cabinet colleagues did not have to keep going cap-in-hand to the Department of Finance. The minister himself toured the country, met patients, spoke on radio. His determination to do something about the scourge of TB made him widely popular. He was a rising star on the political horizon. Then suddenly everything came unstuck.

James MacPolin was County Medical Officer for Limerick: a post he had obtained through the patronage system, most likely because he had contacts in the Catholic hierarchy. Limerick became such a public health black spot that even the lethargic Department of Health had twice tried to have him removed. MacPolin also was strongly opposed to Browne’s innovations: he had his own crank theories about how public health should be run. He became a focus of opposition to Browne: he convinced the Irish Medical Association that Browne’s schemes would reduce doctors’ freedom, status and income. To the hierarchy he hinted that Browne’s schemes were ‘communistic’.

MacPolin soon won over the Archbishop of Dublin, Charles McQuaid, whose own father had been a dispensary doctor. McQuaid was and remains an enigmatic figure. He was not a Maynooth graduate, but had been a member of a religious order and before becoming Archbishop in 1940 had been the headmaster of a boarding school. His appointment was thought to have been due to the fact that he was friendly with De Valera, who had been a teacher at the same school. He proved a vigorous and hard-working prelate who reformed and revitalised the Catholic Church in Dublin. He was not without decency but he had a cold and forbidding personality and he never outgrew the instincts and attitudes of a fossilised schoolmaster. He also had an obsession with ‘hidden agendas’, and not entirely without reason.

Things came to a head in 1951 over the ‘Mother and Child Scheme’ which was a measure drawn up under the previous Fianna Fáil regime and revived by Browne. The dispute itself was trivial, it was the clash of wills that mattered: the irresistable force meeting the immovable object. Browne came off second best and had to resign.

What went wrong?

Politics is the art of the possible. And it is an art, and like any art requires skills that have to be learnt. The best way of achieving progress in politics is to obtain the agreement of all interested parties, whether their interest is legitimate or not. Second-best is to out-manoeuvre opponents. As a last resort one can steam-roller over them.

Noel Browne was a political dyslexic. At first he was able to crash his way through all sorts of obstacles because he didn't realise they were there. You can get away with that for a while, but you make enemies. Had he ever worked as a general practicioner, or had McQuaid ever been a parish priest, then they might each have developed a sensitivity towards the views of others, but hospital specialists do not negotiate with their patients, nor do headmasters negotiate with their pupils. Browne was to linger on in Leinster House for many years but he never achieved anything else and eventually became a sort of monument raised to himself. As often happens with a person of deprived background who has had too many lucky breaks, he entered politics with a distorted perception of reality which he was never able to escape from.

The State Chief Medical Officer at the time, James Deeny, wrote long afterwards: "Between the lot of them, they made a right mess of the Mother and Child scheme. The real tragedy of the debacle was that it set back public health in the country for years and opened up the way to the centralised, bureaucratic, politicised and authoritarian government which we now enjoy."

Later developments

Healthcare in the Saorstát has always been hampered by various impediments. First of all, chronic shortage of funds. The Sweep helped of course, but Noel Browne borrowed heavily against future income in order to build sanatoria, which soon became obsolete because of the discovery of streptomycin, and eventually the Sweep petered out. Sporadic injections of Lotto money are a current substitute. Then there is meddling by politicians and media-persons with agendas of their own. There are pressures to replicate every latest departure in Britain. Other, wealthier, countries lure away medical staff and, not having to meet the cost of their training, can pay them more, thus forcing up rates here.

Money is wasted in all sorts of ways. At the height of the AIDS scare some journalists were declaring that Dublin was '. . . the AIDS capital of Europe…' and claiming that Irish AIDS victims were flooding into England and putting a strain on that country's wonderful health service, and was this an English solution to an Irish problem? The pathetic Fitzgerald coalition was persuaded to fund a special AIDS clinic in London to which English hospitals

could refer any Irish patients that came to them. It ran for seven years, cost well over a million sterling, and never had more than a handful of patients attending.

There remain many serious health problems. A great many derive from unhealthy lifestyle and diet, constantly promoted by reckless advertising campaigns.

To be fair, there have been achievements too. The Saorstát was the first to use the Salk polio vaccine. It has achieved very low levels of maternal and infant mortality. Also, of course, there can never be a total health service. Practically, there isn't enough money in the world, nor enough trained personnel, to meet every need that exists.

The Protestants in the Free State

When the Irish Free State was set up, Protestants made up only a small proportion of the population. The withdrawal of the British military and naval garrisons further reduced that percentage.

However the Protestant minority exercised considerable social and economic power: Protestants owned half the land and almost all the industry, they were dominant in banking, in the legal and medical professions, and in many other areas.

Historical background

In England the Tudor dynasty had been able to impose a version of Lutheran Protestantism upon a mostly hostile population. It was not done out of any great conviction but out of political expediency. Due largely to political turbulence in Ireland, attempts to impose Protestantism on the Irish were a failure.

Under the Stuarts the policy of 'plantation' was introduced, under which the native population was to be expelled from whole areas and replaced by colonists from Britain. It was a success only in parts of Ulster, where viable Protestant communities of Scottish origin were created. Elsewhere in Ireland the colonists evolved into a ruling class.

Thus the bulk of the native Irish remained stubbornly Catholic but were ruled by a Protestant elite that felt itself to belong to a superior English society. It is true that every generation of Protestants has produced important Irish patriots, but these have been very exceptional. The vast majority felt no loyalty to Ireland: they were in Ireland for what they could take.

There were all sorts of inducements held out, particularly to wealthier Catholics, to persuade persons to go over to the Protestant camp. For example a younger son could disinherit his older brothers by converting. This proved to be a double-edged sword: all sorts of miscreants took this step and there built up a degenerate element among the landed gentry. A bishop is said to have complained: “We only get what the Pope throws over the wall!”

As in England, the Anglican church was the official state church and was funded by the tithe, a tax on crops. In the early 19th century there was so much unrest over the tithe that it was changed into a levy on the landlords. Later the Anglican church was formally ‘disestablished’ and the tithe abolished; though by then it had largely been converted into ground rents and investments.

The 19th century developments in transport made travel to England easier. Wealthy Protestants now sent their children to boarding schools there and travelled to London for ‘the season’ and the connection between them and the ruling elite in England became tighter, and Irish (and Scottish) landed gentry were an important component of the English aristocracy. Karl Marx came to the conclusion that the Irish Protestant Ascendancy was the key element of the British ruling class.

The landed gentry and the wealthier Protestants were mostly Anglicans. The descendants of the Scottish colonists, found mostly in Ulster, were Presbyterians. In Britain numerous other Protestant sects emerged over the centuries and these each produced an Irish offshoot: all competing for members.

There was no indigenous Irish Protestant sect, each looked to a parent church in Britain. The Anglicans were top dogs, and were for long the only ones entitled to call themselves ‘Protestants’, the others were officially known as ‘Dissenters’ and were looked down on. At first Dissenters could not join the Orange Order. With the passage of time the Anglicans adopted the Dissenters as a sort of subaltern class: not on the same level as Anglicans but superior to the Catholics.

The situation before the rising

Though formally disestablished, the Anglican ‘Church of Ireland’ had considerable status: especially through being the official faith of the British monarch. It also had significant unofficial political and other power.

Irish Protestants felt themselves to be superior beings because of their loyalty to the monarchy. Catholics were a lower species because it was felt that they would obey their

priests and the Pope rather than the monarch and his government. It was constantly thundered from pulpits that Catholics were “DIS-LOYAL!!”

The Protestant churches threw themselves into the recruitment campaign when war broke out in 1914. Protestants enlisted in large numbers. Despite the efforts of John Redmond and the Irish Party, enlistment by Catholics fell short of what was desired, much to the annoyance of the authorities, and Protestants felt that their reservations about the Catholic Church had been justified by events.

The Rising and after

The Protestant churches greeted the 1916 Rising with horror, describing it as a ‘stab in the back’ carried out for ‘German gold’. The Anglican Archbishop of Dublin, Dr Bernard, called for massive reprisals and criticised the British government for its ‘leniency’.

Most Protestants sided with the British in the subsequent struggle and gave them assistance and encouragement. For their part the British attempted to portray the freedom struggle as a sectarian campaign directed against Protestants.

The establishment of the Saorstát was accepted by the bulk of Protestants with some reluctance, but they recognised that from their point of view things could have been much worse. For their part the leaders of the Saorstát courted the Protestant community both because they needed all the support they could get and because Protestants owned much of the land and resources.

The Protestants diverged into two camps. The landed gentry, once they were satisfied that their status and incomes were secure, began more or less to ignore the Saorstát and to continue on as if it had never been created. The brewers and distillers and the like had less freedom of action and had to keep on the right side of those now in power, who for their part solicited their support and gave them all sorts of concessions in the mistaken belief that their loyalty could be bought.

In the early years of the Saorstát Protestants enjoyed power out of proportion to their numbers. In the fields of law, medicine and the professions generally they were well entrenched and well organised through their secretive Masonic Order. They worked ceaselessly not so much against the interests of the Saorstát as in the interests of England.

In their scheme of things, God was in overall charge of the world as a sort of absentee landlord, with the day-to-day running deputised to the king of England and from him to the

Westminster government, the British Empire, and especially the British armed forces. To criticise any of these institutions was therefore by implication to criticise God. Archbishop Gregg, primate for the first 30 years or so of the Saorstát, was once asked if the British government could ever do wrong and he answered with a horrified “NO!!”

Protestant services included prayers for the monarchy and concluded with the singing of the British national anthem. Churches themselves became so filled with imperialistic flags and insignia that they came to resemble militarist shrines.

Developments

There existed in the Saorstát a number of entities that were in theory ‘non-sectarian’ but were in practice under exclusive Protestant control. An example was the official Baden-Powell Boy Scout movement, which was run entirely by Protestants and in which the scoutmasters were exclusively former British officers who normally wore their medal ribbons on their uniforms. About 1925 the Catholic Church set up a rival scout organisation. Another youth body, the Boys’ Brigade, remained exclusively Protestant. Both bodies regarded themselves more or less as junior branches of the British armed forces.

Many hospitals were Protestant-controlled and employed only Protestant staff. A strange situation arose when the Sweepstake was banned by the British government. Several hospitals were pressured into refusing to accept Sweep money on the grounds it was in some way tainted. At the same time thousands of pounds every week went from the Saorstát to England to various football pools: which were run for private profit and not for charity, but since these were legal in England they were therefore not immoral.

Also, around that time the nominal head of the Protestant Ascendancy, the young Duke of Leinster, lost £11 million in a massive gambling spree at Monte Carlo. But nobody raised any objection: this was his money and he could do what he liked with it. The duke was the country’s biggest landlord and most of his income came from people who hadn’t enough to eat and couldn’t afford shoes for their children.

In the medical profession a great many general practitioners and hospital specialists were Protestants, while most Catholic medical graduates had to emigrate. However, the Second World War created a curious situation: many Protestant doctors went off to England to participate in the war and also the emigration routes for Catholic doctors became closed off. So many Catholic doctors became ‘locums’, standing in for Protestant ones. When the war ended these returned and took their jobs back and there was a lot of resentment generated.

There was also the curious situation of the Grammar Schools. Many of the larger Irish towns had a secondary school known as the Erasmus Smith School or the Grammar School, funded by a levy on businesses in the town. These schools were in theory non-denominational but in practice were Anglican-run and the headmaster was almost always a retired British officer and was quite often also a native of England. Such schools gradually faded out as the value of the levy, which was fixed, ceased to be sufficient to support them.

Eugenics

Around the beginning of the 20th century an English doctor called Galton combined the theories of Malthus with those of Darwin to create the pseudo-science of 'eugenics'. Eugenic theory held that character and intelligence are inherited in the same way as eye-colour and baldness.

It also held that those of lower intelligence tend to have more children who in turn are of low intelligence and become a burden on society through their inability to provide for themselves. Therefore it was incumbent upon society, and upon doctors in particular, to try to prevent inferior people producing children.

In the version of eugenics popular in England, to which many Protestants in Ireland subscribed, the Irish were high on the list of those the world would probably be a better place without. Among the poorer classes of Protestant north of the border, this tied in with their favourite Bible chapter: Chapter 15 of the First Book of Samuel, in which God commands King Saul to massacre the Amalekites (Palestinians) 'man and woman, child and suckling', a passage frequently alluded to by half-demented preachers with hints that it constituted a licence to kill Catholics.

Eugenic theory ceased to be pushed as an entity after it was adopted by Hitler, who took it to its logical conclusion, but it remains an influence under various disguises. Queen's University Belfast has always had a eugenicist or two on the faculty, usually disguised under some bland job-title such as Population Scientist.

In the Saorstát too doctors, and Protestant ones especially, were influenced by such ideas, and occasionally leading Protestants expressed concern about what they claimed was overpopulation of the state due to there being too high a birth rate. This has now almost disappeared: the last significant advocates, Dean Victor Griffin and Sir Basil Goulding, faded from the scene about 20 years ago.

Later developments

Archbishop Gregg, himself a native of England, played his cards well. Although his only loyalty was to England he was prepared to work with Leinster House when it was to the advantage of the community he headed and he was careful to stay on good terms with those in power.

He always claimed that the wording of Article 41 of de Valera's 1937 constitution — later the subject of a lengthy bogus controversy — had been suggested by him.

In 1949 Gregg ordered the ending of the more ostentatious displays of loyalty to England in church services in the Saorstát, but the Anglican church continued to conduct annual 'Poppy Day' ceremonies and so on.

Protestants in the Saorstát began to heap praise on themselves on account of their liberalism, pluralism and whatever. It would be more accurate to say that they liked to pose as liberals in matters they considered to be of small consequence. It was only necessary to look north of the border to see what the whole of Ireland would presumably be like if they still had control over it.

The Orange State

There is no need here to go over the dismal history of the six-county statelet. The dominant force was the Orange Order, to which all Protestant males were admissible. The Order was the basic layer of a multi-level ruling structure. The bulk of the ordinary membership was working class, and membership brought with it advantages in employment and preference.

The better off members, the landed gentry and the employers, were also members of Masonic lodges through which they manipulated the Order to their advantage. At a level above this lay the less formal country-house set of baronets and squires who actually ran the whole thing.

For 50 years it worked well. The Brookboroughs and the Chichester-Clarks and the rest of them were able to manipulate things so that they could go on playing the 'White Settler' indefinitely: while sniggering behind their elegant gloved hands at the fools in hard hats and sashes.

It is said that a greyhound has to be allowed to catch and kill a hare occasionally or it will lose interest in running after them. In the same way, there is not much point belonging to a Master Race if you can't bash the natives around.

The Stormont junta was well aware of this and knew that it had to allow the occasional pogrom to retain the support of the ill-educated rabble making up the bulk of Unionists.

Only when the present troubles began did the Ascendancy decide it needed to broaden its base by bringing in the mercantile class, and Brian Faulkner came to power. He was to be the last Stormont premier: the London government abolished the Stormont parliament and commenced direct rule. This marked the end of the line for the landed gentry: they lost control of their political machine to the psychopaths they had previously nurtured.

The Anglican squirearchy who ran Stormont for half a century carry a far greater burden of guilt than do the ignorant preachers who eventually displaced them, because unlike the latter they knew better: they had had the benefit of a civilised upbringing and a decent education and they knew exactly what they were doing.

Overview and conclusions

The Protestant minority in the Saorstát remains in a position of privilege. Even today a Protestant child is 20 times as likely to receive a third-level education as a Catholic one. With scant exception Protestants give their entire loyalty to England. Their spokespersons and their periodicals have endorsed and defended every crime England has committed against the Irish people.

Energy policy in the Free State

Energy is one of the few fields in which the Saorstát emerges with a certain amount of credit: though as will be seen this was due more to luck than good management.

Under direct rule Dublin Castle paid scant attention to energy matters: everything was left to private initiative: the main interest being where possible to stimulate the use of English coal. As in England itself, coal-gas was preferred to electricity for public lighting and domestic use and privately-owned gas monopolies were established in Dublin and other cities. A coal-fired electricity generator was opened at the Pigeon House in Dublin in 1903.

Republican initiatives

The First Dáil showed an interest in energy matters. It was realised that countries like Sweden and Switzerland owed their prosperity in great measure to cheap hydro-electric power. A committee under Hugh Ryan was set up, with a Swiss expert, Professor Buchi, as consultant. It proposed hydro dams on the Shannon, Erne and Bann rivers, each of which had large lake areas to provide natural header reservoirs. A dam on the Liffey at Poulaphuca with an artificial lake was also recommended as a later development.

Professor McLaughlin

There was a shortage of engineers in Ireland. (At the time Ireland was supposed to supply the British Empire with doctors, Scotland was to provide the engineers.)

Thomas McLaughlin had studied theoretical physics at UCD and had subsequently gone to Germany and joined the Siemens company and there trained as an electrical engineer. He was a strong supporter of the 1921 treaty and also knew personally many of the leaders of the new Free State, including the Minister for Industry and Commerce Patrick McGilligan.

In December 1923 McLaughlin approached Cosgrave with plans for a state-run generator plant on the river Shannon. He was turned down. A month later he approached again, accompanied by representatives of the Siemens company and with a well-prepared proposal.

After much lobbying the authorities set up a committee with two Swiss and two Swedish professors as advisers. They found the Shannon ideal because of a 30-metre drop over a short distance just above Limerick City and the presence of Lough Derg to act as a natural reservoir. The Erne and Bann schemes were now impractical because of Partition. The Liffey scheme was viable but costlier and should be put off until the Shannon had been fully utilised.

In answer to complaints that state construction of dams was ‘socialistic’ it was pointed out that the world’s greatest capitalist country, the United States, had no reservations about employing Army engineers to build dams on the Colorado and Tennessee rivers and that the main mover behind this was Herbert Hoover, who could hardly be called a socialist.

Finally, the committee recommended that the bid put in by Siemens be accepted. The Department of Finance would have preferred to see the job given to a British firm but it had been discovered that the British had a very poor reputation internationally as contractors. New Zealand, despite strong emotional attachment to England, had entrusted the development of its hydro-electric resources to a Swedish company.

The Shannon Scheme

On 13th August 1925 the Saorstát signed a contract with Siemens AG of Berlin for the construction of a hydro-electric plant at Ardnacrusha on the Shannon at a cost £5.2 Million, with three and a half years to completion.

The price was a give-away. German devaluation after the war may explain why it was so low. Possibly also Siemens hoped to open a market for their electrical goods and regarded it as a long-term market investment.

There was furious opposition from many quarters. The two main daily newspapers, the Irish Independent and the Irish Times, both fumed at the employment of ‘Huns’ and revived wartime British propaganda about the supposed treacherous nature of Germans. In Leinster House Sir John Keane and Major Bryan Cooper, who formed a Unionist rump, railed against it. In England there were bellows of rage from the press and from all shades of political opinion.

The Electricity Supply Board was set up in 1927 to manage the electrification of the State. Various private generating stations were taken over: full compensation was paid to the (mostly Unionist) owners but there was bitter resentment at the loss of status involved. The Department of Finance bureaucrats were opposed of course. To keep them quiet they were given complete control over the ESB: a grave mistake.

The Department of Finance had no idea how to run an enterprise of any kind. Former British and Free State Army officers were appointed to most management positions on the grounds that they were ‘accustomed to giving orders’. Professor McLaughlin, who had done so much work to get it all going, was elbowed out and went to live in Spain and never set foot in Ireland again.

Fred Weckler

The Shannon scheme did catch popular imagination. Regular excursion trains were run from Dublin so that the public could view the construction site. The artist Seán Keating made several fine paintings of the work in progress. The dam was completed in October 1929.

Among those working for Siemens on the project was Freidrich Weckler, an accountant and a native of the Rhineland. He fell in love with Ireland and when the contract was finished he decided to stay on: taking out citizenship and accepting a much-reduced salary.

After De Valera came to power the ESB was removed from civil service control and established as a semi-state corporation. Fred Weckler took over the general running of the ESB under a politically-appointed chairman.

Weckler proved an able administrator who soon got the organization running efficiently, and his methods influenced the development of Bórd na Móna, CIE, the Sugar Company and

many other semi-state bodies, and were admired and imitated abroad. To give but one example, Weckler insisted that the ESB use the metric system of measurements where possible, thereby greatly enhancing efficiency.

The ex-officer managers were shunted aside and persons of ability promoted, given precise objectives and set to work.

During the Second World War, Weckler suddenly found himself the target of personal abuse from certain quarters because of his German origins. He found these insults, coming from persons he had thought to be his friends, deeply disturbing. His health broke down as a result and in 1943 he died.

Attention turns to turf

The Pigeon House station in Dublin was closed down, but the demand for electricity rose so rapidly that after a couple of years it was reopened.

Meanwhile, Fianna Fáil had insisted that the Curragh Camp, which used imported coal, convert to turf. Use of turf as a fuel was urged on all government departments. This brought employment to rural areas and votes for Fianna Fáil: the coal importers who lost out had been mostly associated with the previous regime.

Private research into the utilisation of peat bogs was already going on. There was a wealthy engineer of Welsh origin, Sir John Purser-Griffith, who had retired to Ireland and had become interested in the possibilities of using turf as an energy source. He bought a bog at Turraun, County Offaly, and began the large-scale production of turf using machines imported from Germany. The turf was shipped to Dublin on the Grand Canal and found a ready market. He also produced peat-moss and began work on the design of an electricity generator. In 1936 Sir John, now over 90 years old, offered the entire undertaking to the State as a gift. The Department of Finance howled, saying it was a white elephant, but the offer was accepted and B7#243;rd na Móna was the eventual outcome.

The wartime energy crisis

In 1940 the British government suddenly cut off all coal supplies to the Saorstát. The towns mostly depended on gas made from imported coal for lighting, heating and cooking, and in towns coal rather than turf was used as domestic fuel.

The State was fortunate to have Ardnacrusha and the beginnings of a turf industry. In the teeth of civil service obstruction, Bórd na Móna was expanded until it was producing

sufficient fuel to keep the country going: and also incidentally providing much-needed employment. Trains were run successfully on turf and firewood. Professor Drumm of UCD devised a gigantic electric battery that was able to power a regular train service between Limerick and Dublin.

There was also during the war period a shortage of engineering materials which inhibited development work.

Post-war developments

Wartime conditions continued until the Costello coalition came to power in 1948. Energy policy immediately switched to reliance on imported coal. Bórd na Móna's activities were drastically curtailed and thousands of workers sacked: most of them going off to England to do post-war reconstruction work. Development work on the battery train, which had attracted international interest, was terminated.

The government had assumed that England would be able and willing to supply the Saorstát's coal requirements. In fact because of problems associated with the nationalisation of the mines, plus the demands caused by a series of exceptionally bad winters, England had no coal to spare. The only coal available on world markets was low-grade American 'steam coal' which turned out to be pretty nearly unburnable.

The outbreak of the Korean war in 1950 caused a minor fuel crisis due to shortage of shipping. In the 1950's the Arigna power station, using native anthracite, and an oil-fired station at the North Wall were opened.

Nuclear power?

Demand for electricity continued to grow, and the ESB became heavily dependent on cheap oil. Wasteful use of electricity was actually encouraged. The Arab-Israeli war of 1973 led to a sharp rise in oil prices and dealt the world economy a severe blow. The Saorstát was badly caught as it now relied on cheap oil not only for electricity generation but also to fuel trains, heat schools and hospitals, produce fertiliser and for many other purposes.

The discovery of natural gas off Kinsale helped ease matters, and after 1975 oil prices began to fall off. But the overthrow of the Shah of Iran in 1979 sparked another crisis: this time exacerbated by a rise in the value of the American dollar, in which oil is traded internationally.

A proposal was made that a nuclear power plant be constructed, and a site was even purchased at Carnsore Point. Certain politicians embraced the proposal at a suspicious level of enthusiasm, and it was assumed that the plant would be built by British contractors. Nuclear plants were known to be tricky and unreliable and potentially very dangerous and there was serious public concern.

Nuclear power stations are only economic if built on a very large scale, and a single plant would have exceeded the entire requirements of the Saorstát. Enthusiasts said that it would supply the six counties as well, and export the surplus to Britain. Already in Britain there were several such plants, mostly in Scotland and Wales, but there were strong 'not in my back yard' objections to the construction of any more and it became suspected that the Carnsore Point proposal was an attempt by the British to build another nuclear plant: on Irish soil at Irish expense.

Eventually the proposal was scrapped. Instead efforts were concentrated on improving efficiency of energy use, reversing the wasteful policies of the past. Attention turned again to native resources, and to such potential sources as wind power.

In most countries there is a patriotic core element in politics and the civil service. In a neo-colonial society this core is excluded. One result is an absence of long-term planning in matters of national interest. In the Saorstát a consequence of much chopping and changing and mismanagement and the tendency to install permanent solutions to temporary problems is that the ESB does have a large variety of generating plants and has built up considerable skill resources which have in recent years been marketed abroad with some success. The lesson that it is a mistake to let the State become totally dependent on any single external source of energy is slowly sinking in.

The Baltic experience

In 1918 the three Baltic states began with no generation capacity because of war damage and looting. Potential hydro-electric resources were small because all three countries are low and flat, and in any event all rivers there are frozen for four months of the year.

The main raw energy resource was bog peat and peat-fired power stations were constructed. In Estonia by 1940 there was a generating capacity of 200 Megawatts provided by three turf-fired stations, one hydroelectric plant and one station fired by native shale oil. The electrification of the railway network was begun. A peat briquette factory was built to provide an alternative to timber as domestic fuel.

Under Soviet rule (1940-1990) energy policy was centralised in Moscow and the three states integrated with Russia. When Lithuania broke away in 1991, Gorbachev cut off supplies of oil to that country. However the city of Leningrad (now St. Petersburg again) defied the embargo and shipped oil to Lithuania.

At the present moment Lithuania has a massive energy headache: it depends for electricity on a single Chernobyl-era nuclear plant manned entirely by Russian technicians – whole town of them. It also still relies on Russia for all hydro-carbon fuels.

Television in the Free State

In the early years of the Saorstát a government radio station, called TWO-RN was established in Dublin. Like so many state bodies at the time it was controlled by the Department of Finance and was starved of funds. Also, because only the wealthier elements in society could afford radios, content of transmissions were geared to their tastes and tended to be distanced from the interests and concerns of most people.

From this base Radio Éireann evolved. Apart from the news and weather forecasts very little of importance was broadcast. Long dreary plays written by the Abbey Theatre element were a constant feature. For many years there was a vocal pressure group calling for the establishment of a symphony orchestra by the station and bewailing the lack of it as a sign of cultural backwardness.

Radio was heavily censored and the station did not dare offend the British in any way. During the 1939-1945 war censorship was increased dramatically. Archbishop McQuaid was not allowed to broadcast an appeal for funds to support the families of those interned by Stormont, and announcers covering sporting events were strictly forbidden to make any mention of the state of the weather or the direction of the wind or anything like that in case it would supply weather information to the Germans. After the war ended, tight government control was maintained.

The advent of television

In 1947 the Department of Posts and Telegraphs (P+T) and the members of the European Broadcasting Union held a meeting in Copenhagen to share out television band-space. The Saorstát did not even bother to attend and the British took up the channels that had been reserved for it. Television transmissions began in Britain soon afterwards and by about 1950 most parts of Britain were covered, as was the six counties. British stations radiated into the territory of the Saorstát: not, as many Republicans thought for propaganda reasons, but rather to maximise the sale of television sets. Since the Saorstát's population is

concentrated along the east coast, about half the population of the State soon had access to British television broadcasts.

Before long a demand arose that the Saorstát have a television service of its own. The chief impetus came from the retailers, who had discovered that the sale of television equipment could be very profitable, and it was largely prodding from commercial interests that led to the establishment of RTÉ.

Technical difficulties

About half the territory of the Saorstát was covered by signal from various British transmitters. The channels used were thus not available to RTÉ. On top of this, there were other British stations which did not transmit a signal strong enough to provide a service but which through sporadic interference made a channel unusable. The planning and allocation of transmission channels became a major technical headache.

There was a further complication. There were two picture standards in use in different areas of Britain, '405-line' and '625-line', and in Ireland some of the receiving sets used one standard and some used the other. Rather than adopt one standard and leave dealers stuck with unsaleable sets tuned to the other, it was decided to cover the entire state with broadcasts on both standards: thus doubling the cost of setting up the service. It was a classic example of the way being a neo-colonial entity wastes resources: the Saorstát got one television service for the price of two.

The Missionaries

When RTÉ was set up, native expertise in television was of course lacking and so needed to be imported. Naturally enough it was decided to recruit, where possible, Irish people who had been successful in the field elsewhere. In practice this meant seeking out persons who had gone to Britain and got into the medium there.

With RTÉ unable to offer the salaries and opportunities available in Britain, it turned out that there were only two types of person interested. Firstly there were those whose careers had not progressed as well as they thought merited by their abilities, and secondly there were those who saw in RTÉ an opportunity to re-model Irish society in some way.

Of the latter, there were two waves. The First Wave consisted mainly of persons of impoverished background who had gone to England and had there happened to get into television and made moderately successful careers for themselves. They were mostly

presenters, so their faces were familiar to the public, which tended to attach importance to their utterances and opinions.

The first chairman of the RTÉ Authority, Mr. Éamon Andrews, was a notable example while the indestructible Mr Gay Byrne is a lone survivor. This group naturally enough felt that Ireland would be a better place if it were more like England, but the England that was their model was England as it had been when they left it in the late 1950's in the calm autumn of an already fading Empire: the country of Royal Occasions, Poppy Day, the aristocracy, the Boat Race, and the rest.

The Second Wave was made up mostly of people involved in the production side of television. They tended to be better educated and many had been through the UCD history department in the era of the Dudleys and the Edwardses. They too wanted to make Ireland resemble England more closely, but their model was England as it had been in the 1960s when they left it. They looked back to the London of the 'swinging sixties', of Carnaby Street and the Beatles, of the 'permissive society' and The Pill and a porn-shop on the corner.

Thus there were two pressure groups in RTÉ from the beginning: both ambitious to use television to change Irish society, but with quite different end-products in mind. What they were agreed on was that they disliked all those features of Irish society that had not originated in Britain. The main targets were: Catholicism, the Irish language, the 1937 Constitution, the GAA and Fianna Fáil. (At the time the Republican movement had been rendered ineffectual by Stalinist meddlers and was not taken seriously.)

The RTÉ studios at Montrose became the focal point of a new and powerful force within the Saorstát. Leinster House had hoped to use television as a tool to promote its own policies, but was soon outflanked and lost control. However, since those calling the tune at Montrose were basically not interested in the internal politics of the Saorstát, clashes were rare. The British Embassy carefully monitored RTÉ though it seems their main concern was that no disparaging remarks about the British monarchy be permitted. In the foyer of Montrose itself there stood a kiosk manned by the Special Branch from which all comings and goings were monitored.

The Irish language was the first target attacked. When Éamon Andrews, first chairman of the RTÉ Authority, resigned in 1966 in order to resume his career in Britain he gave the excessive number of Irish-language programmes being broadcast as the formal reason for his leaving. This excuse was greeted with derision: there were almost no programmes in Irish on RTÉ.

Around that time a well-funded organisation called the Language Freedom Movement appeared on the scene, dedicated to the complete banishment of Irish from the airwaves, the schools and the country at large. Though its membership is believed never to have exceeded 20 people it was allowed almost unlimited broadcast time to propagate its views and it soon emerged that it had a secondary agenda: to promote loyalty to England and in particular to the British monarchy. On one occasion RTÉ broadcast an Italian film with Irish sub-titles and the LFM kicked up such a fuss that the experiment was never repeated.

Labour takes a hit

Neither wave was originally much interested in Leinster House politics, which they found difficult to comprehend in terms of the domestic politics of England; with which they were familiar.

Members of the First Wave tended to identify with Fine Gael, many of whose leading lights were closet monarchists, but did not move directly into politics. The attention of the Second Wave eventually lighted on the moribund Labour Party. Labour had degenerated into a neo-colonial offshoot of the British Labour Party, which was in and out of power at the time, and was in some degree comprehensible to the Second Wave people; who however for the most part had little interest in Socialism.

(The fact that the party received regular funding through a compulsory levy on trades union members may also have been an attraction.) Offers to stand as candidates for the party were eagerly accepted. It didn't quite work out as expected: after the next Leinster House election (1969) Labour actually was down four seats.

Within Labour the leadership was soon elbowed aside by the newcomers, who diverted the party to pursuit of their own agendas. In their favourite metaphor they were going "…to drag Ireland kicking and screaming into the 20th century!"

The colour television fiasco

By the mid 1960's television broadcasting in colour became technically feasible and a variety of schemes were proposed. The European Broadcasting Union arranged a conference of all the West European P+T bodies as to which a standard colour television technology would be adopted.

There were two main proposals on the table. The French SECAM, which had the support of Belgium, Italy, Spain and Portugal and the German PAL, supported by the Dutch and the Scandinavian countries. (It was noted that the division was between the Catholic countries

and the Protestant ones.) The British put up a system of their own called NTSC. It was widely accepted that SECAM was the best of the three, with PAL a close second. The British NTSC was rated a very poor third (it was an engineers' joke that NTSC meant Never Twice the Same Colour) but the British were convinced that because they were proposing it, it would win. Of course the real objective of the conference was not to select the best system: it was more to do with patents and licensing and grubby matters like that.

In practice only the Saorstát backed the British proposal and it looked like the French would win. So, London and Dublin switched support to the German PAL, which was adopted. The British did this purely to spite the French who were blocking their entry to the Common Market.

It is said that RTÉ had already invested heavily in NTSC technology, and Irish retailers had warehouses full of NTSC sets.

The third wave

In the late 1960's a Third Wave hit RTÉ, and was to prove the most influential, enduring and harmful of the three because unlike the previous two it was organised and disciplined and had well-chosen objectives. This wave was made up of Stalinists. They too had returned from England filled with missionary zeal and crackpot ideas. At first they infiltrated trade unions, various voluntary bodies and the Republican Movement: in all cases doing immense damage. Then they indentified RTÉ as a potential power source and pushed their way in. They targeted the 'Current Affairs' aspect of RTÉ, seized control of it and used it to propagate their agendas for Ireland, and that aspect of RTÉ has been controlled by them, or at least by persons groomed by them, ever since.

The three waves had little in common with each other as to what they were for, but they were in agreement as to what they were against. In programme after programme the defects of Irish society were exposed in sombre colours and tut-tutted over and then compared with the parallel situation in England: always shown in the best possible light and discussed with suitable reverence.

The Great Divide

RTÉ passed under the control of an insolent elite, based in the area around the studios at Montrose: the Dublin 4 suburb. An elite which considers the mass of the Irish people to be debased almost beyond redemption but which nevertheless must, through payment of the television licence, support the elite that despises it. This has been equated with the pre-1869 situation, when the entire population had to pay a tithe to the Anglican church.

The political and social eruption in the six counties took the pundits of RTÉ completely by surprise. In theory it just could not happen: under Stormont the minority community was supposed to be perfectly happy, enjoying the benefits of England's welfare state generosity: the envy the rest of the country.

The dividing line came on 30th January 1972: Bloody Sunday. With the British Embassy in Dublin attacked and burned by an infuriated crowd, the penny finally dropped that open praise of England and defence of England's policies were no longer practical and it was time to fall back to damage limitation.

So, RTÉ cameramen were forbidden to cross the border: in future all material from within the Six Counties was to be taken from London. Severe censorship was imposed at Montrose: nobody opposed to British policies towards Ireland could be quoted or interviewed. In contrast pro-British elements were allowed free rein.

Over-exposure on RTÉ probably did those elements more harm than good. Supercilious upper-crust English politicians and officers were unable to conceal their contempt for the Irish, while most Unionists came across as raving lunatics. The SDLP, itself largely a media invention, was allowed unlimited air-time and emerged from a virtual reality propelled by nothing but wind-power. Then people were to witness a mad-eyed Margaret Thatcher imperiously calling Saorstát politicians to heel.

In current affairs programmes, England ceased to be held up as an example. Instead some third country in which practices happened to be similar to those current in Britain (usually either Holland or Denmark) would be mentioned as a place where things were done 'properly'.

Leinster House retained overall control of RTÉ but did not interfere much as long as hatred of Republicanism was at the top of the agenda. On one occasion the entire RTÉ Authority was dismissed by the government, because a programme judged to be pro-Republican was screened. The lowest point was reached during the rule of the Cosgrave coalition, when Conor Cruise O'Brien was in charge of broadcasting.

The situation now

RTÉ has become a major factor in the evolution of neo-colonialism in the Saorstát. For example almost all the recent amendments to the 1937 Constitution were engineered from Montrose. Efforts to use RTÉ to modify Irish society have varied from the obscene to the ridiculous. At one end of the scale there was a campaign to get Irish children to call their

mothers ‘Mummy’ rather than ‘Mammy’. At another level, the RTÉ Guide was the first non-frivolous publication in the State to have an astrology page, and now runs an astrology help-line, and the stage has been reached where astrologers are seriously consulted on television on matters like the outcome of elections. In the wider society this trend has been reflected by the appearance throughout the State of shops selling Tarot cards, ‘magic stones’ and similar garbage.

In the Dublin 4 environment original objectives have faded into the past. The British monarchy has long been a laughing-stock, Swinging London crumbled under Thatcherism and the Soviet Union is gone and discredited. The only thing that remains to prop up ageing egos is the feeling of still being superior to the rest of the citizenship. Increasingly attention is being turned towards the black-and-white world of the 1950’s, setting of innumerable RTÉ plays and documentares: a time when England was still powerful and confident and the Saorstát backward and supine.

Producers in RTÉ constantly trawl through the past, hunting for evidence of Irish sins, for anti-Semitism, or racism or sexual misdemeanours.

Hatred of Republicanism remains a prime motivator, even to the extent of re-transmitting British anti-Republican propaganda manufactured for home consumption often produced in total ignorance of Ireland and Irish conditions.

Women in the Free State

Women have always played a very significant part in Ireland’s struggle for freedom, their contribution often being afterwards played down or ignored. By the beginning of the present century women in Ireland were frequently better educated than men and were in a better position to contribute than ever before.

The first specifically nationalist women’s organisation, Inghinidhe na hÉireann, was founded in 1900. The more enduring Cumann na mBan followed in 1914. The Gaelic League and Sinn Féin accepted both men and women on a basis of equality.

Women were not recruited into the Irish Volunteers, but Cumann na mBan functioned as a kind of autonomous auxiliary. The Irish Citizens Army did have female members and even had two women officers: Dr. Kathleen Lynn, who was Chief Medical Officer, and Countess Markievicz.

The Easter Rising

Women took part in the Easter Rising as members of the Citizens' Army, and the nurses Elizabeth O'Farrell and Julia Grenan were instrumental in negotiating the final capitulation. Members of Cumann na mBan also participated in the rising, though as non-combatants.

In the subsequent struggle women took part in various capacities. Women were put up as election candidates, but almost always unfortunately because they were related to male heroes who had been killed. Thus Mary MacSwiney probably owed her prominence in Republican politics to the fact that she was the sister of Terence MacSwiney; even though she was herself a person of real ability.

The Civil War

When, in the summer of 1922, a right-wing coup engineered by the British led to a civil war in Ireland, the women activists for the most part supported the Republican side, the losing side as things turned out.

By the middle of 1923 a reactionary neo-colonial regime was firmly in control in the 26-counties. There were some unusual features: a new army and a new unarmed police force, but other-wise the regime was largely a continuation of the colonial past.

The legal system remained unchanged, the currency was under Bank of England control and there was no land redistribution or any major reform of that sort. The defeated Republican element refused to accept the legitimacy of the new 'Irish Free State' and would not participate in its politics.

After a few years de Valera, then the undisputed leader of Irish Republicanism, broke away and founded Fianna Fáil with the intention of taking the oath to the monarch and entering Leinster House. About two thirds of the men in Sinn Féin followed him but only about a third of the women. Cumann na mBan rejected the departure outright.

Republican women activists

In 1929 of twenty-seven members of the Sinn Féin Ard-Chomhairle, five were women, they were:

Mary MacSwiney (Vice-President)

Mrs Cathal Brugha

Dr Kathleen Lynn

Gobnait Ní Bhruadair

Máire Comerford

But there were many other women Republican activists: James Connolly's daughter Nora, Maud Gonne, Dr Ada English of Ballinasloe, Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington and others. (Countess Markievicz had gone into Fianna Fáil, but had died soon afterwards.)

In 1932 Nora Connolly-O'Brien published an article "Women in Ireland. Their Part in the Revolutionary Struggle" (In An Phoblacht on 25th June 1932) Much of the article is given over to an account of her father's efforts to involve women in various progressive activities, followed by some comments on the role of women in 1916 and afterwards. She then continues:

"There is no townland that has not its tale to tell, nor a city that has not a hundred tales of girls dropping their everyday tasks and setting on a deed of high endeavour, recking nothing of its dangers, accomplishing it, and calmly returning once more to their everyday tasks.

"It is regrettable that Irishwomen should have that ability to return to the everyday task [in] that having won the right to share in the dangers of war, they should have relinquished their right to share in the dangers of peace.

"Progressive and revolutionary women have no voice in the council of the revolutionary movement. Revolutionary women are to-day showing once more that "damnable patience" and are content to be the drudges of the movement."

The 1922 Irish Free State Constitution had given men and women 'equal rights', but this was soon amended to read 'equal political rights'. Under the British legislation inherited by the state women did not have equal rights with men in ordinary life. For example under the Guardianship of Infants Act of 1886 a husband was the sole guardian of the children of a marriage, and could leave his wife at any time and take their children with him. There was no principle of equal pay for equal work: women were always paid less, and often very much less, than men.

Women disadvantaged

Women continued to be disadvantaged by new legislation: for example women were required to resign from teaching and nursing posts when they married. [This ruling actually met with general approval when first introduced: jobs were in short supply and women in

public service normally married men who also had incomes and in small communities two wage-packets going into the one house could be a cause of much begrudgery.]

The 1937 Constitution contains guarantees of gender equality but also clearly visualises women as home-minders rather than wage-earners. It contains a lot of high-sounding stuff like “The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home.” Of course the State never showed the slightest intention of ‘endeavouring to ensure’ anything of the sort: even the Children’s Allowance was paid to the husband.

There was always a small number of women active in politics at the local or national level; usually the widows, sisters or daughters of deceased male politicians.

Woman President of Sinn Féin

Women continued to be prominent in Sinn Féin, and Margaret Buckley was President of Sinn Féin for many years. Where women have become active in Leinster House parties it has always been as members of political dynasties, the fact that they bear a name familiar to the electorate, rather than on their own merits.

A lot of personal criticism has been directed at de Valera over the treatment of women by the Saorstát. While it seems clear that Dev, who was abandoned by his own mother as an infant, was firmly of the opinion that a woman’s place was in the home it must also be said that most of the legislation disadvantageous to women was either imposed by Britain under direct rule or else was imitated from legislation introduced in Britain after 1922.

Women in Latin America

The overall sociology of Latin America resembles that of Ireland half a century ago. The bulk of the population is rural and very poor, the best land tends to be taken up into large estates, the economies are geared to foreign interests and governments are run by corrupt and incompetent oligarchies.

In a few of these countries there have been revolutions led by people of a more or less Marxist way of thinking, and most the others have experienced uprisings of one sort or another.

Information on the status of women in Latin American countries tends to be elusive and contradictory: what is available is all second hand, having been processed by European or North American feminists who undoubtedly have axes of their own to grind.

It is clear that in the two countries in which there have been successful armed revolutions, Cuba and Nicaragua, women played a notable part in struggle but were not given any more than a token role in the post-revolutionary regime and the interests of women were not given much priority. As in Ireland, the few women that remained in public life have been mostly the widows or sisters of revolutionary martyrs. In some parts of Latin America the mothers of persons murdered by dictatorships have emerged as a significant political force.

However, it is in general clear that once the revolution has been accomplished then for the women it is ‘back to the washing-board’.

Women in the world at large

There are in the world today only two important philosophies of gender: the Christian and the Islamic. There can be little doubt about which is the better of the two where women are concerned. Attitudes towards women find their expression in laws. The Christian stance derives not from Christianity’s rootstock in Judaism, which is closer to the Islamic position, but was taken on from Roman civilisation during the early centuries of the Christian religion.

The Roman attitude towards women, while not being perfect by any means, was and remains very much superior to that of any other type of society. In the Roman system women have rights and a degree of equality: elsewhere universally women are property.

In both Latin America and Ireland the Roman tradition is the basis for the status of women in society, but it can be argued that it both cases this is an overlay on a previous structure that has not entirely disappeared.

Both Old Irish and Amerindian societies were what anthropologists call Homeric. In Homeric societies men hunt, fish and fight while women work. Women are owned: they are either traded for or abducted and polygamy is practised. Children too are property: boys become men through some initiation process and their name changes. This type of society survived in Ireland up until the seventeenth century and only very slowly died away: aspects of it still survive in a debased form in the itinerant community.

In both Ireland and Latin America the old warrior societies were defeated and disarmed, and decayed into a tenant peasantry under often cruel exploitation by their conquerors.

In such societies a type of gender equality tends to develop through the division of labour: normally everything inside the house is under the woman’s control, everything outside (crops, animals) under the man’s. However the man is always boss. Urbanisation in such

societies is actually to the disadvantage of women, the male is the wage-earner and controls the family finances and the women becomes, as James Connolly memorably put it “the slave of the slave”.

The following case was recorded in Guatemala. In the remote Maya-speaking district of San Antonio Polop missionaries introduced pedal-looms and taught the women to use them and also helped set up a weaving co-operative to market the cloth they produced. This proved a run-away success and brought the families much-needed income. But what happened next was that the men took over the weaving work and the co-op, using the profits to buy themselves watches, radios, Hondas and whatever. The women were sent back to the kitchen and casual labour from other areas hired to do the farm work.

General Conclusions

Women in Ireland have made, and continue to make, a very great contribution to the cause of freedom.

The Proclamation of 1916 was addressed to ‘Irishmen and Irishwomen’ and the Democratic Programme at least implicitly promised gender equality. In the First Dáil Countess Markievicz was Minister for Labour, only the second female government minister in the world. The counter-revolution of 1922 of course largely negated the gains made since 1916, but not entirely. For example Tom Clarke’s widow Kathleen became Mayor of Dublin over half a century ago.

Of course, it is also true that in recent years two women have achieved the 26-county presidency. However this is an indication of the low esteem in which that post – traditionally used as a retirement post for elderly politicians – is held, rather than an indication of an improvement in the status of women.

It is sometimes asserted that women would have done better under continued British rule. Fortunately there is no need to speculate as in a part of Ireland British rule did continue. There, women were virtually excluded from public affairs: though perhaps rather they should be given the benefit of the doubt and assumed to have remained aloof, as in the rest of Ireland. Whatever the reason, women have taken almost no part in the politics of the Orange State.

Ireland today and tomorrow

Over the past two years we have examined, from a large variety of aspects, the evolution of the Saorstát as a neo-colonial entity. We now conclude this series with an overview.

Colony or 'Dominion'?

The Saorstát was originally established as a 'British Dominion' with, in theory, the same status within the British Empire as Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand then had. But it was very much the odd one out. The other four were much larger and much further away, and all had strong ties with England: ethnic, religious, strategic and emotional. The Saorstát's only tie with England was economic, in as much as the economy was tightly controlled by forces working in England's interest.

Otherwise, it resembled more closely the Egypt of King Farouk and Nahas Pasha, and the Iraq of King Feisal and Nuri as-Said. England bullied Egypt into client status in order to control the Suez Canal, and Iraq so as to exploit the Mosul oil-fields. Those countries resented English domination but were obliged to submit to it, and to allow semi-colonial exploitation of their economies and the establishment of military bases on their territories. In both countries there were elements that co-operated with the British to their own sectional advantage and other elements basically rebellious but still having to dance to England's tune. So it was in the Saorstát, where Fianna Fáil collaborated with London unwillingly and most of the other parties willingly: but in the end all collaborated.

Colonial status perpetuated

The failure to break with the colonial past is illustrated by the State's habit of imitating British practices and conventions. The names and structures of government agencies are copied direct from England: the 'Special Branch', the 'Director of Public Prosecutions', the 'Ombudsman' and so on. Even the forms used in tax assessment are direct copies of those used in Britain. (Originally the Department of Finance wanted to call itself 'The Treasury' but this was vetoed by Westminster: there could only be one Treasury and it wasn't in Dublin!)

It is reflected too in uniforms: the uniforms worn by military personnel, by Civil Defence, even by traffic wardens. As for the police force, it is nominally unarmed but about 25% of it is plain-clothes and armed with Uzis. The Uzi is an Ingram-type machine pistol manufactured in Israel, probably out of re-cycled sardine cans or the like: it is a scatter-fire weapon favoured by security forces in countries where if a few by-standers are mown down then it is of no consequence. The Gardai also have stocks of CS-gas and plastic bullets, though these have only rarely been deployed.

It is often claimed that the State originates in the 1916 Rising and subsequent struggle for freedom. This is of course nonsense. The Free State destroyed and replaced the Republic declared in 1916 and is a continuation of the previous colonial regime by other means. It was established by an act passed at Westminster and it inherited the administrative machinery

(and most of the personnel) of Dublin Castle. The State has continued to be ruled by a system of laws devised for a totally different society. British war memorials and the graves of Black-and-Tans are maintained by the Office of Public Works: Republican graves and memorials at private expense.

The end of empire

Leinster House politicians are conditioned to what might be called a knee-jerk reaction, in as much as when England growls at them they fall on their knees. Defiance of demands made on them by England has been very rare, and usually only a small amount of pressure has been required for them to cave in in a ridiculous manner.

Between about 1955 and 1965 the British Empire simply melted away. The enormity of this loss was concealed from the Irish public, was never mentioned in the media, and as far as possible the scalar relationship between the Saorstát and England was regarded as unchanged. This was a situation that the rulers of the Saorstát were familiar with and in which they had made a comfortable niche for themselves, and they were unwilling to adjust to the way things had changed.

"Europe"

Meanwhile the world outside continued to change. About 1955 some politicial figures in the territories of Alsace and Lorraine (which had been under alternate French and German control for centuries) evolved a proposal for a loose federation between France and Germany. The first step was an agreement to pool mineral resources, especially iron and coal.

Then the economist Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber published his influential Le Défi Américaine ('The Threat From America') in which he claimed that the United States, because of its vast resources and large internal market, was in a position to dominate the world's economy and with the ending of the colonial era the only hope Europe's former imperial powers had was to pool their residual resources.

The eventual result was the Treaty of Rome, under which France, West Germany, the Benelux countries and Italy agreed to merge their economies gradually. Italy, riddled with corruption and slowly sinking towards Third World status, was at first the main beneficiary of this 'Common Market'. England, still clinging to the fiction of the 'British Commonwealth' (which by this time was made up largely of contemptible neo-colonial kleptocracies) tried to set up a rival organization, the 'European Free Trade Area'. This was a failure and Westminster's politicians had to swallow their pride and apply to join the Common Market.

They told their electorate they were going to join so that they could take over and show those Continentals how to run things. De Gaulle vetoed their application and for as long as he was in power in France they were left whimpering on the doorstep, with the Saorstát half-hidden behind. De Gaulle called, even offered to admit the Saorstát separately: this was of course declined.

The Common Market is intended to evolve into a super-power, strong enough to compete economically and militarily with the biggest in the world. At each stage of development the name changed (European Coal and Iron Community, Common Market, European Economic Community, currently European Community) and the rules too changed.

There is a 'European Parliament' that sits in Strasbourg but it is a talking-shop. The real power is vested in a gigantic non-accountable bureaucracy based in Brussels. This bureaucracy is evolving in accordance with Parkinson's Second Law (Work expands to fill the time available) and is beavering away devising 'the Regulations of the European Commission' which consist of rules governing every aspect of life in the member states, which are legally enforcable and which now occupy more than 80 metres of shelf space. Buried in there are rules about how far apart leeks are to be planted and how wide chicken runs are to be and what temperature cheese is to be stored at and so on ad infinutum.

The only result of such elephantiasis of regulations is that the rules are blatantly flouted and cheating the system is a Europe-wide activity.

The 'Common Agricultural Policy' has had the most impact on life in the Saorstát. The ultimate objective of the CAP is to eliminate all small farms as 'uneconomic' and develop gigantic agribusinesses employing very few people. The original author of the CAP (Mansholt) has recently spoken out from retirement regretting his part in the destruction of so many rural communities and admitting that he was mistaken: but he created a juggernaut that cannot be controlled now.

To the Eurocrats the Saorstát is a liability, and taking it on was part of the price they have had to pay to expand their empire. There are reasons for thinking that it is viewed as a possible source of cannon fodder for the resource-wars of the coming century: this would explain the current adulation of those who served in the British armed forces, taking part in acts of war against third parties with whom Ireland had no quarrel. A further indicator is the recent decision of the Department of Defence to purchace Armoured Personnel Carriers. The APC, deployed first (with little success) in Vietnam and Afganistan, is purely a weapon of colonial warfare.

The great divide

The year 1970 marks a dividing line in the history of the Saorstát, for two reasons. Firstly the revolt that was to bring down Stormont got under way, and secondly Dana won the Eurovision Song Contest. The latter is important, it was the beginning of the end for the national inferiority complex, which had been an important element in neo-colonial domination. When, four years earlier, Nelson's Pillar was blown up the media seriously asserted that it had been done by professional saboteurs brought over from France — because no Irish person could have done the job without making a mess of it. Dana was the first of a long list of individuals who were successful internationally in sport, music, cinema, literature and other fields. The self-confidence of ordinary people was boosted as a result.

But old habits die hard. Leinster House politicians continue their supine relationship with London. In recent years the annual 'Poppy Day' ceremonies have been given media prominence in order to glorify the British Army, and grovelling to British 'royals' is becoming more frequent and blatant. There has been very heavy pressure on the GAA to admit RUC and British Army members. A type of neo-unionism has begun to emerge among the Dublin intelligensia, and is making increasingly impudent demands.

In a bizarre incident, in 1995 An Post brought out a set of postage stamps commemorating the 'Wild Geese', the Irish soldiers-of-fortune who enlisted abroad to escape the Penal Laws. The then head of government, John Bruton, ordered An Post to bring out another stamp honouring the British Army's Royal Dublin Fusileers: a regiment recruited largely from the Dublin criminal underworld.

As always happens when there is a Republican uprising, since 1970 emigration declined and people began to return from abroad: often bringing useful skills. As a result, the economy has begun to grow. Yet it remains a typical neo-colonial economy in a typical neo-colonial society. The Saorstát is unique in Europe (if one excludes such micro-states as Monaco and Luxemburg) in that if one goes into a newsagents or bookshop or library the the vast majority of the publications on display will have been published outside the state. In the media the state's currency is daily described as having 'risen against sterling' or 'fallen against sterling' while in fact it is sterling that fluctuates in value while the Saortat's currency, linked to the German mark, is stable.

Another feature is the 'top-to-bottom ratio'. This is the ratio of the average incomes of the richest 10% and poorest 10% of the population. In a developed country this is usually of the order of three to one. In the Saorstát it is about five to one: more typical of a colonial economy.

Tragedy or farce?

Comparing the French Revolution, the emergence of Napoleon and Waterloo with the French Second Republic, the emergence of Napoleon III and Sedan, Karl Marx said: History always repeats itself: first as tragedy, then as farce.

In Irish history the sequence of tragedy then farce is frequently observable, and is more noticable because there is often even a physical resemblance between the individuals involved: O'Connell then O'Duffy, de Valera then Mac Giolla, Redmond then Hume. In the stagnant closed world of neo-colonial politics tragedy and farce alternate in perpetuity. As the philosopher Santayana said: Those who will not learn from the past are condemned to repeat it.

A century ago, commenting on the 'Home Rule' campaign, James Connolly foresaw where that road led, and gave an accurate picture of a neo-colonial Irish state that has actually come about pretty much as he predicted. He said that if the Irish Party got its wish to hoist an Irish flag over Dublin Castle and paint the pillar-boxes green then unless they set about re-structuring society England would still be able to rule at second hand.

And indeed the pillar-boxes in the Saorstát are painted green: but often they bear the monogram of an English monarch, and the green paint is only a layer over the red paint underneath. A very suitable symbol for a neo-colonial state.

(Concluded)