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# *The Community and Voluntary Pillar in Irish social partnership – Analysis and Prospects*

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Presentation to Irish Social Policy  
Association 22 April 2015

# Presentation draws on

*Asymmetric Engagement: The Community and Voluntary Pillar in Irish social partnership* by Joe Larragy, Manchester University Press 2014

# Social Partnership in Ireland: context and origins

- Collapse centralised wage agreements (1970-81) into decentralised bargaining 1981-87
- Scenario in 1980s - ongoing political instability, FG/Lab coalition 1982-87
- Worsening situation in 1980s – ongoing fiscal crisis
- Rising unemployment, poverty, emigration,
  - Lure of Thatcherism – PDs
  - Fear of Thatcherism – Trade unions
- European possibilities
- FDI potential impact

# Social Partnership in Ireland: context and origins

- Political response to perceived threats
- Irresolute *demos*:
- 1987 election FF (Haughey) minority gov.
- FG Tallaght strategy
- NESC (1986), *A Strategy for Development*, provided underpinnings for a new type of social pact: *Programme for National Recovery (PNR)* 1987-90

# New Social Pacts in Ireland 1987-2009

- **Tripartism:** State-employers-unions (plus farmers)
- *new social pacts* were to be competitive, supply-side, state-directed, aimed at reducing national deficits and debt, eventually stimulating growth and jobs.
- *Unlike societal corporatism* of post war decades based on full employment, with a social wage and welfare state expansion,
- The *union focus was on take-home pay* – restraining wage demands for (later) reduced taxes, as growth, revenue and employment improved. The “social wage” effect was very limited, and a low priority, as spending cuts were inflicted in health, housing and other areas
- The landscape of *unemployment, poverty, marginalisation* and other social challenges

# Community organisations emerged in the 1980s

- Apart from the trade unions, several NGOs emerged in the 1980s, including the CWC, CORI Justice, the INOU, NWCI and others
- They represented the unemployed, spoke out on poverty, marginalisation of local areas, and gender equality
- They developed their analysis and critique, lobbied and protested, often linking up with Combat Poverty in putting forward new approaches to local community development and income maintenance
- They looked to European Social Fund, European policies and new thinking and became knowledge holders on social inclusion.

# 1990 Local development partnership

- **1990-92:** *Programme for Economic and Social Progress* announced proposal for 12 local development partnership bodies to tackle social marginalisation through new means
- National oversight and funding through Area Development Management (ADM - later Pobail)
- Context included European support for local development & government credibility on poverty and unemployment front]
- **1993-6:** *Programme for Competitiveness and Work (PCW)* extended local partnership idea to over 30 areas and much of country
- Distinct from and only loosely connected to Social Partnership but a stepping stone for community sector

# 1993 National Economic and Social Forum

- **1993:** National Economic and Social Forum established,
- included politicians, unions, employers and, critically,
- a “third strand” representing women, unemployed, ‘poverty’ sectors – e.g., INOU, CORI Justice, CWC, NWCI, and several others
- The Third Strand used NESF for policy entrepreneurship in the areas of poverty, unemployment, social welfare & inequality

# 1996 Community & Voluntary Pillar in Social Partnership

- **1996:** new Community and Voluntary Pillar (**CVP**)  
Provided structure for regulated entry of community and voluntary sectors to participate in social partnership talks and NESC
- CVP focused on social inclusion, social welfare, unemployment, equality issues
- This translated into *Partnership 2000 – A programme for inclusion, employment and competitiveness 1997-99*
- CVP won significant concessions in this programme for the first time.

# What was the significance of innovative features?

- In conventional neo-corporatism , actors other than elected government get involved in and make commitments towards policy making...
- ...and government plays a part in the settlement of wage bargaining between labour market actors.
- The primary *modality is bargaining* or political exchange.
- But the new partners were different. There were fears and suspicions from within the tripartite structure but the Department of the Taoiseach was supportive.

# Critics of the Pillar

## – left right and centre

- **Left** : are the Community sector being incorporated and confined to purely moral critique with no power?
- **Right** : could bring social partnership back to the 1970s scenario of bureaucracy & excessive demands on state, employers & fiscal pressure?
- **Centre** : are community sector being allowed punch above their weight, without any accountability, undermining representative democracy?
- **Practical:** would they muddy the waters by over-widening the agenda?

# New partners – new analysis

- Apart from these critiques, which derived from sources that were often sceptical of social partnership anyway,
- *New interpretations* of the significance of the Community Pillar came from people *more sympathetic* with a close interest in neocorporatism.
- In particular, O'Donnell, Roche, Hardiman.

# Significance of CVP: Deliberation?

- O'Donnell (NESF 1997) put forward an innovative theory about a ***new type of social partnership*** with new type of social partner, with:
  - A shift from a bargaining modality to deliberation
  - New type of social partners *and* new ways of thinking for existing social partners
  - *Transcending* bargaining, forming a common strategic approach
  - *Partners with more fluid positions and identities*, not governed by rational actor theory,



# Flexible network governance



- CVP not bargaining or in deliberative mode but part of a new modality of “*network governance*”

...but the state is in the driving seat and  
“*politics trumps partnership!*”  
*(Hardiman 2006)*



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# Significance of CVP: Extended bargaining / political exchange?

- Roche: the CVP not indicative of a new modality (deliberation)
- CVP complements the unions by pursuing the social wage element, social inclusion
- CVP junior partners in an *extended political exchange*, bargaining continued to be the main modality.



# A wider theoretical compass

- Limitations of corporatism as frame of reference for small organisations unlike unions and employer associations
- Associations and civil society, more widely and historically
- Social movements and policy entrepreneurship
- Governance – representative and mediated
- Power and legitimacy and the demos

# Community Pillar in Social Partnership

- My study was to establish empirically what is going on with the CVP, as there was no detailed research on the Pillar.
- It asked whether
  - the CVP relied on moral persuasion only and was doomed to fail and to be incorporated,
  - or whether politics always trumps partnership,
  - or was it able to bargain,
  - or was it part of a new higher level modality, of deliberation and problem-solving for the shared public good?
- And it asked whether the CVP made any tangible gains.

# The mischief of factio

- US tradition strong on keeping factions out of government but is flooded by lobbyists
- Exclude or include factions?
- Real Utopias – Joshua Cohen et al (1995) considered inclusive approach
  - ...to include less powerful rather than try to keep out the powerful
- Theoretically this looks something like what Ireland had with the (untheorised)CVP

# The case study

- Using documentary and interview sources, I studied the origins, and course of existence of the CVP over 20 years, focusing on four key member organisations.
- There are chapters on the CVP as a whole and on each of the following:
  - Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOU)
  - Community Workers Co-operative (CWC)
  - Conference of Religious in Ireland Justice Commission (CORI Justice)
  - National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI)

# Findings pointed to an account different from previous ones

- Each organisation achieved some progress but also suffered setbacks.
- C&V organisations can succeed but in limited ways, in limited circumstances and based on a different logic
- The CVP organisations are unlike other social partners (e.g. Unions) which engage in “symmetrical forms” of engagement – i.e., bargaining
- Cannot afford to allow identity to be fluid. They need to be strong in principle and have strong analysis and clear medium and long term goals.

# Findings pointed to a different account

- The CVP organisations could benefit from the shifts in public and electoral sentiment at key moments to win some concessions, e.g. 1996 and 2004.
- They could also be ejected from social partnership e.g., after rejecting the Sustaining Progress pact in 2002.
- Though small and lacking in bargaining power or resources, could gain from shift in the *demos* when government credibility was on the wane.

# Asymmetric Engagement

- A different way of grasping the logic of the CVP
- Stresses the difference between small organisations and “traditional social partners” using bargaining
- crucially, vulnerability to government but have a tacit connection with the *demos*
- capable of addressing important political questions of the common good, justice, equality
- Not “rational actors” as in game theory but advocates for causes
- Can be destroyed or seriously damaged in the course of operations

# Asymmetric Engagement

- The concept of Asymmetric engagement has parallels with warfare.
- The term Asymmetric warfare is used to describe small, mobile guerrilla organisations engaging the more powerful standing army of a state.
- Asymmetric engagement in social partnership – or perhaps in a wider set of civil contexts – involves small principled organisations engaging the more powerful groups of state, employers and unions.
- Analogy with forms of warfare apt. Small forces can be dismissed or “wiped out” by the state in either case.
- **One key is whether the small organisations have tacit support in the demos. At critical junctures this can prove decisive.**

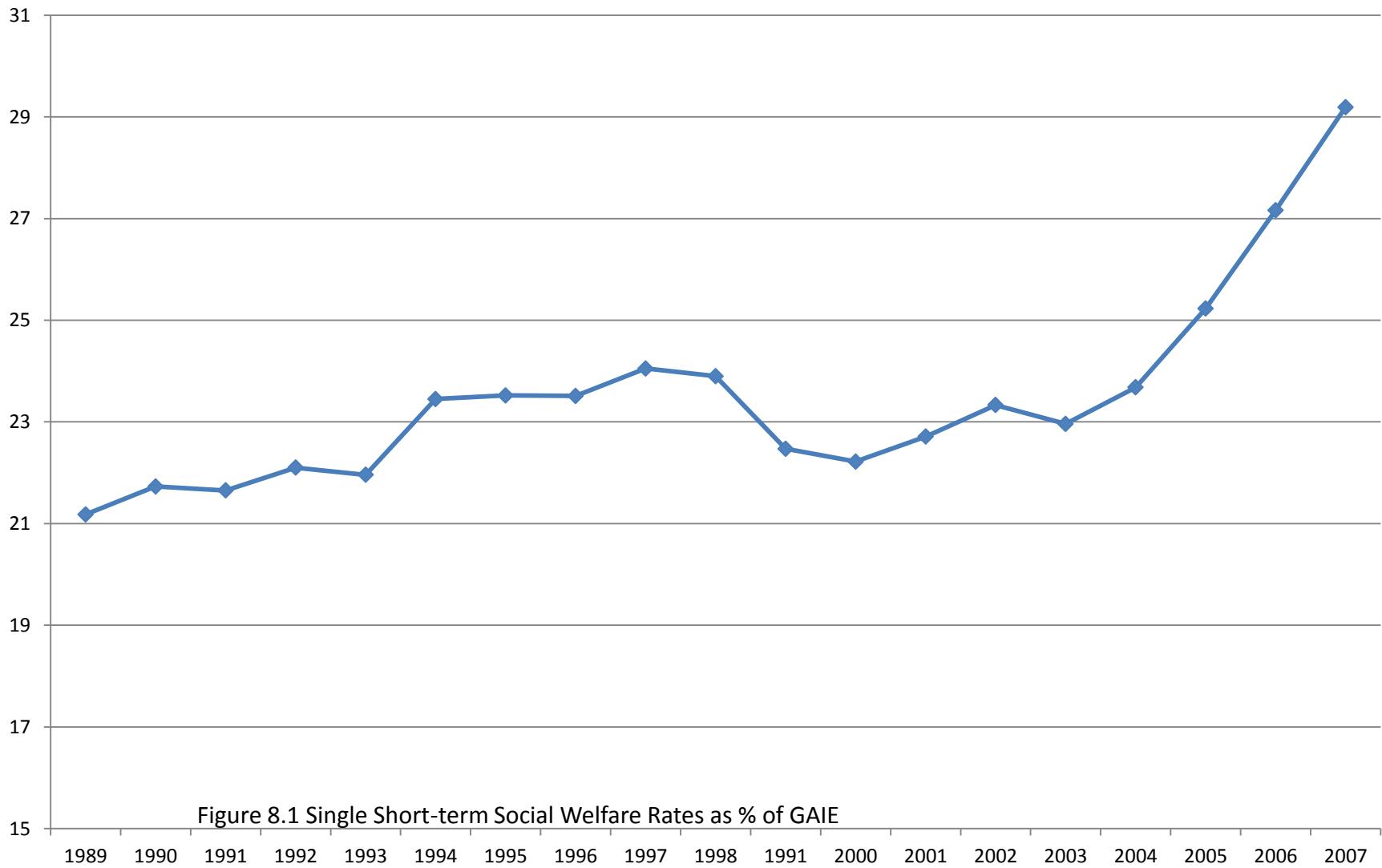
# Asymmetric Engagement

- Small organisations may be effective if they
    - operate as policy entrepreneurs with a determined focus on certain clear goals
    - have a long-term focus on achieving goals and objectives
    - Seek to benefit from shifts in the *demos* amid changing economic circumstances and political cycles
- The locus of legitimacy shifts and the balance of power shifts momentarily
- Have good timing, and some luck, can help a lot

# Asymmetric Engagement

- due to fluctuations in the economy, fluctuations in the political cycle, and interactions between these
- *Windows of opportunity* appear
  - E.g. **1989-90** on the draw-down of structural funds for local development, passed over by Dept. of Finance, triggered steps to area based partnership local development and link to Social Partnership for CWC
  - E.g. **1996-7** on the Commission on Social Welfare recommendations – a moment for INOU because of the timing ahead of a critical election
  - E.g. the “social turn” of Ahern **post 2004** local elections – a moment for CORI – see next slide
  - E.g. similarly, NWCI opposition to taxing of CB in 1996, and promotion of child care strategy and free child care during the “social turn”
- Politics does trump partnership but sometimes the demos (electorate) trumps politicians
- This creates periods of greater receptivity and potential for success

# Social Welfare as % GAIE 1989-2007



# Lasting consequences, gains and losses

- Social partnership is not really responsible for the financial collapse to any great degree
- Some of the gains made by the CVP on social welfare protected welfare dependent population after 2008
- The austerity that followed the global financial crisis resulted in the Troika bailout and an electoral landslide for FG./Labour in 2011
- Post GFC politics has been “coercive” up to the present:
  - major cuts, new charges and taxes on labour, abandonment of institutions of social partnership, dismantling or consolidation of local development into local government
- Run-up to general election opens the prospect of some concessions, even talk of wage co-ordination again

# Asymmetric engagement

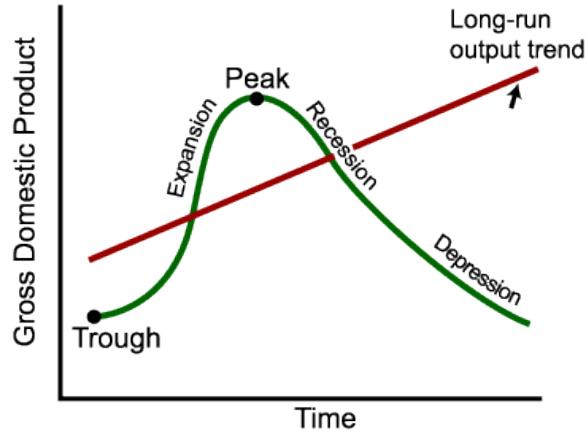


**Asymmetric power can  
seem daunting**

*Shifts in the demos  
and points in the  
political cycle*



# Asymmetric engagement



**Economic fluctuations,  
political cycles and  
shifts in the demos...**



<http://fromthetower.thig.com/your-window-of-opportunity/>