

Social Security in Independent Ireland, 1922-52

by

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Epic

I have lived in important places, times
When great events were decided, who owned
That half a rood of rock, a no-man's land
Surrounded by our pitchfork-armed claims.
I heard the Duffys shouting 'Damn your soul'
And old McCabe stripped to the waist, seen
Step the plot defying blue cast-steel -
'Here is the march along these iron stones'.
That was the year of the Munich bother. Which
Was more important? I inclined
To lose my faith in Ballyrush and Gortin
Till Homer's ghost came whispering to my
mind.
He said: I made the Iliad from such
A local row. Gods make their own importance.

Patrick Kavanagh

INTRODUCTION

The *raison d'être* of this work is to provide an historical analysis of the rise and subsequent co-ordination and consolidation of the Irish welfare state by focusing on income maintenance legislation in independent Ireland up to 1952. Originally undertaken as a project in social history, the completed work is a synthesis of social, economic, political and administrative history, discussion of all these areas being necessary to understand fully the timing, pace and extent of social welfare legislation.

This introductory chapter will outline the structure of the work, and will analyse the historiography of the theme in Ireland. Before moving to these issues, however, it is necessary to define the terms 'welfare state', 'social welfare' and 'social security'. In the broadest sense, 'welfare' implies 'well-being', the welfare state being concerned with the social and therefore the economic well-being of its citizens. From this 'basic requisite'¹ comes a vast array of definitions and categories of welfare state. This diversity has its origins in the impetuses behind and influences on the rise of a set of policies which allowed the term 'welfare state' to be applied to any given political system. Its development was 'essentially a process of compromise and adjustment',² a point clearly illustrated by the development of the Irish welfare state.

Nordic social scientists and historians, who more than any other group of academics have examined the philosophical, theoretical and practical aspects of the welfare state, agree that there can be no one trans-national or trans-cultural definition: it is 'a multi-dimensional

¹ Nicholas Rescher, *Welfare: the social issues in philosophical perspective* (Pittsburgh, 1972), p. 4.

² Joan Higgins, *The poverty business: Britain and America* (London, 1978), p. 19.

phenomenon composed of several dimensions of values'.³ Its content 'varies with time and space'.⁴ The term is also culture-bound: the concept of what constitutes welfare in Catholic west European countries varies from that of the Lutheran north European countries, welfare being 'dependent on the values of a particular society'.⁵ There are 'fashions'⁶ in welfare legislation both trans-nationally and within individual states: the concept is an organic one which, historically, is more often than not in a state of flux. It 'does not designate a definite system'.⁷

Despite this complexity associated with defining the term 'welfare state', there are a number of basic ingredients and a generally accepted historical genesis. The Bismarckian reforms of the 1880s and the societal transformation which necessitated them are considered as the beginning of the 'present state in the development of the welfare state'.⁸ The German reforms heralded a period of direct, national, state intervention in the economic lives of citizens through the introduction of insurance schemes for all employees. By 1889 this included insurance against sickness, accident, old age and invalidity. As is discussed in the comparative analysis of the present work, these reforms were predated by committees of investigation in other countries, established for the purpose of investigating the possibility of introducing similar reforms. In Britain the German legislation was mirrored by

³ Erik Allardt, *About dimensions of welfare: an explanatory analysis of a comparative Scandinavian survey* (Helsinki, n.d. [1970s]), p. 1.

⁴ Erik Allardt, et al., *Nordic democracy: ideas, issues and institutions in politics, economy, education, social and cultural affairs of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden* (Copenhagen, 1981), p. 399.

⁵ Peter Flora (ed.), *Growth to limits: the western European welfare states since World War II* (Berlin, 1986), p. xii, vol. 2.

⁶ Joan Higgins, *The poverty business: Britain and America*, p. 3.

⁷ William A. Robson, *Welfare state and welfare society: illusion and reality* (England, 1976), p. 13.

⁸ Stein Kuhnle, 'The beginning of the Nordic welfare states: similarities and differences', *Acta Sociologica: Congress Issues: The Nordic Welfare States*, vol. 21 (1978) Supplement, p. 12.

reforms in 1908 and 1911, as the following chapter of the present work outlines.

Discussed in Germany and the Nordic countries under the title '*die arbeiterfrage*', 'the worker question',⁹ it was a half century after the Bismarckian reforms before the term 'welfare state' was coined, it being used firstly in Norway in 1939, 'partly as a description of the society at the time and partly as a description of a future goal'.¹⁰ Indeed the word 'welfare' comes from the Old Norse word '*velferd*'. It is interesting to note, however, that the term 'welfare state' was rarely used in Scandinavia:

In Denmark, there was hardly any comprehensive slogan and in Sweden, Per Albin Hansson spoke of '*det goda folkhemmet*', the good home for the people.¹¹

In English, its first usage is generally attributed to the Archbishop of York, Sir William Temple, who used the term in a publication of 1941. Temple viewed the 'welfare state' as the strongest opposition to what he termed the 'power state' of Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union.¹² The term was subsequently listed in the *New York Times Index* in 1949. In 1955 it appeared for the first time in the *Oxford English Dictionary* which defined it as 'a polity so organised that every worker of the community is assured of his due maintenance, with the most advantageous conditions for all'. This definition, although idealistic, may be taken as expressing the basic requisites of the welfare state. The basic means of ensuring 'the most advantageous conditions for all' included the provision of old age pensions,

⁹ Erik Allardt, et al., *Nordic democracy*, p. 400.

¹⁰ Byron J. Nordstrom (ed.), *Dictionary of Scandinavian history* (London, 1986), p. 625.

¹¹ Gunnar Heckscher, *The welfare state and beyond: success and problems in Scandinavia* (Minneapolis, 1984), p. ix.

¹² See Stein Kuhnle, 'National equality and local decision making: values in conflict in the development of the Norwegian welfare state', *Acta Sociologica*, vol. 23 (1980), no. 2-3, p. 98.

unemployment insurance, unemployment assistance, widows' and orphans' pensions, and children's allowances.

It is clear therefore that the welfare state is a twentieth century phenomenon with its genesis lying in the final decades of the nineteenth century. As the twentieth century progressed the authoritative definitions of the welfare state became more all-embracing. Maurice Bruce, perhaps one of the most important commentators on the welfare state, defined the concept in 1961 as:

the sum of efforts over many years to remedy the practical social difficulties and evils of a modern system of economic organisation.¹³

Implying a structural functionalist approach to the rise of the welfare state, Gunnar Heckscher seems to be in agreement with Bruce when she talks about the welfare state as being 'a compromise between capitalism and socialism'.¹⁴

Retrospective definitions do agree on the basic elements which constitute the welfare state, namely equality of opportunity, income maintenance and income distribution. The centrality of these two latter elements is agreed upon by most writers:

As different aspects of life chances may gain or lose in significance, the boundaries of the welfare state can also shift, but its historical core - the system of income maintenance...is very unlikely to change substantially.¹⁵

It is this 'historical core' of income maintenance, described by another writer as one of 'the principal characteristics when defining the concept of "welfare state"',¹⁶ which is examined in detail in the present work.

¹³ Maurice Bruce, *The coming of the welfare state* (London, 1961), p. 30.

¹⁴ Gunnar Heckscher, *The welfare state and beyond: success and problems in Scandinavia*, p. ix.

¹⁵ Peter Flora (ed.), *Growth to limits: the western European welfare state since World War II* (Berlin, 1986), vol. 2 p. xvi.

¹⁶ Tapani Paavonen, *Welfare state and political forces in Finland in the twentieth century* (Turku, 1991), p. 22.

The terms used to describe income maintenance are 'social security', 'social assistance', 'social insurance' and 'social welfare'. The first of these terms appears in the title of the present work and is an amalgam of 'economic security' and 'social insurance', first used in the title of a United States Federal Bill of 1935.¹⁷ Described as the 'institutional backbone of present social policies',¹⁸ 'social security' was defined by Sir William Beveridge, the main architect of the British welfare state, as 'income security',¹⁹ the term covering both social insurance and social assistance. Social insurance, described as the 'new institution which broke with the principles of the century-old European poor law',²⁰ provided a scheme whereby employees contributed to a fund on which they could draw on as a right in the event of unemployment, sickness, invalidity or old age. Social assistance schemes on the other hand cover a similar range of eventualities but are means-tested and are paid for solely by the exchequer, the level of benefits being below that of compulsory insurance schemes. In Ireland the only scheme that falls into neither category is children's allowances.* Based neither on the principles of insurance nor assistance, and available to families irrespective of financial status, children's allowance is described as a 'universal scheme'.

Universal schemes, social assistance and social insurance are all encompassed by the term 'social welfare' which has been defined as:

the various services provided by the public authority in an endeavour to help citizens cope with ordinary everyday social

¹⁷ 'In the service of social security: the history of the International Social Security Association, 1927-87', *International Social Security Review*, 2 (1987), p. 138.

¹⁸ Jens Alber, 'Some causes of social security expenditure development in western Europe, 1949-77' in Martin Loney, et al., *Social policy and social welfare* (Philadelphia, 1988), p. 156.

¹⁹ Sir William Beveridge, *The pillars of security* (London, 1943), p. 112.

²⁰ Peter Flora, *Growth to limits: the western European welfare state since World War II*, vol. 2, p. xiv.

* In 1986 children's allowances became known as child benefit.

problems or with social problems caused by special circumstances.²¹

In the Irish context the term 'social security' has become a synonym for 'social welfare', the 'various services' including unemployment insurance, unemployment assistance, old age pensions, widows' and orphans' pensions, and children's allowances, the main object of which has been 'to help the individual when, through no fault of his own, he is in danger of being overwhelmed by poverty'.²² More philosophically, the first report of the Department of Social Welfare stated that:

It is well to bear in mind that social welfare schemes, no matter how scientifically grounded, can never be reduced to mere problems in mathematics or abstract theory; they must always remain hopeful experiments in complex human relationships.²³

In the following chapters the terms 'social security' and 'social welfare' are used interchangeably, while the terms 'social insurance' and 'social assistance' are used to denote the type of income supplement scheme.

We can conclude our discussion of definitions by briefly alluding to the different categories of welfare state, notwithstanding the fact that no two welfare states are similar in all respects. Pekka Kosonen, a lecturer in the Sociology of Law at the University of Helsinki, Finland, identifies three categories of welfare state which he describes as follows:

1. Liberal welfare states, where means-tested assistance, modest universal transfers and modest social insurance plans predominate, as in the United States, Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom.
2. Corporatist welfare states, where the preservation of status differential predominates: rights are attached to class and status, as in Austria, France, Germany and Italy.

²¹ Annikki Suviranta, 'Social welfare and municipalities', *Finnish local government studies: selected writings*, vol. 9 (1981), no. 5, p. 74.

²² Department of Social Welfare, *First report, 1947-49*, p. 1.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

3. Universal welfare states, where the principles of universalism and market-independent social rights are extended to all classes, as in Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland.²⁴

This latter universal model is close to the 'Nordic Model' while the Corporatist Model equates with what other writers have termed the 'Catholic Conservative Model'.²⁵

From the following analysis it will be seen that Ireland perhaps best fits in to the Liberal welfare state model. What is important here to realise is both the complexity and diversity of the welfare state phenomenon in the broad European context, and the extent to which it forms a unique historical period of its own.

In order to gain insights into the philosophy and theory behind the rise and development of the welfare state, we must turn to the research of social scientists in other countries. Partially attributable to the fact that Ireland was never to the forefront of welfare legislation, the primary reason for looking abroad is the dearth of analysis of the Irish welfare state by historians in particular, despite the availability of numerous sources which have been used in researching the present work.

In a recent interview with *History Ireland* James Lydon, 'a real Irish historian',²⁶ commissioned by Routledge to write the new version of *A history of Ireland* to replace Curtis's volume, said:

I deliberately eschewed social and economic history because I did not want to make the book too long, so I concentrated on the political.²⁷

²⁴ Pekka Kosonen, 'European Community and the challenges to the Nordic welfare state model', Typescript of talk given at the Nordisk Seminar, 28 Sept. 1990.

²⁵ See John D. Stephens, 'Welfare state and employment regimes', *Acta Sociologica*, vol. 37 (1994), no. 2, pp 208-209.

²⁶ *History Ireland*, vol. 3 (1995), no. 1, p. 13.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

Perhaps Lydon's comment best underpins the lacuna of Irish historiography. Far from being a reflection of any shortcomings in his own work, it is rather a reflection on the 'the paucity of historical research'²⁸ into Irish social policy at a more basic and fundamental level. In the absence of such groundwork the survey histories, of twentieth century Ireland in particular, will remain political in emphasis. Mary Daly's *Social and economic history of Ireland since 1800* (Dublin, 1981), the first attempt at a more inclusive history of Ireland, best exemplifies this lack of research into the social history of twentieth century Ireland. Daly's work concentrates on the nineteenth century, social and economic change in independent Ireland being dealt with in just two of the eight chapters. Even J. J. Lee's *Ireland: politics and society, 1912-85* (Cambridge, 1989), which has a much narrower focus and which isn't constrained in terms of size in the way Daly's work is, contains at best an uneven emphasis on social history.²⁹

This absence of historical research into Irish social policy and in particular into the development of the Irish welfare state, remains unusual by European standards. European academics speak of the welfare state as 'an entire historical era in western society'.³⁰ The rise of the welfare state has been well documented and analysed and the subsequent expansion of the welfare state has been described as 'one of the most important historical transformations in the developing countries of the West since the end of World War II'.³¹

²⁸ Anthony McCashin, 'Social policy: 1957-82', *Administration: unequal achievement - the Irish experience 1957-1982*, vol. 30 (1982), no. 2 and 3, p. 205.

²⁹ Lee's work does focus on specific social issues, such as the introduction of children's allowances in 1944, but one feels that such treatment is almost incidental to the overall political and administrative thrust of the work.

³⁰ Tapani Paavonen, *Welfare state and political forces in Finland in the twentieth century*, p. 3.

³¹ Kari Salminen, *Pension schemes in the making: a comparative study of the Scandinavian countries* (Helsinki, 1993), p. 13.

Perhaps it is the 'national question' in Ireland, responsible as we shall see in the coming chapters for the near absence of social democratic politics in Ireland, and which consumed the energies of politicians and civil servants for decades after independence, which is responsible for the dearth of social history in Ireland: combing through the political history of the Irish nation from a revisionist or non-revisionist stance would appear a more pleasurable intellectual pursuit than the investigation of social history which, by its nature, includes political, administrative and economic history as well.

Of actual secondary source material available, historical works can be dealt with briefly. The poor laws have been researched and analysed in detail by Helen Burke in her book *The people and the poor law in nineteenth century Ireland* (Dublin, 1987), a major contribution if not the definitive history of the Irish poor laws. Her work is complemented by that of Séamus Ó Cinnéide, who has been a consistent contributor to our historical understanding of the Irish welfare state, in particular of home assistance, which had its foundations in the nineteenth century poor laws.³²

Welfare legislation in independent Ireland has been left almost exclusively to social scientists (excluding historians) who tend to introduce their subject by giving perhaps a paragraph or two of historical background before launching into a discussion of contemporary policy. Breaking this mould somewhat is the most recent volume by a lecturer in social studies, Mel Cousins, whose book *The Irish social welfare system: law and social policy* (Dublin, 1995) does contain a more detailed historical survey in the initial chapters.

³² See Séamus Ó Cinnéide, *A law for the poor: a study of home assistance in Ireland* (Dublin, 1970).

An earlier work with a strong element of historical analysis is that edited by another social scientist, Peter Flora. In volume two of his three volume work, welfare legislation in Germany, Britain, Italy and Ireland is discussed in a clear and well-presented fashion.³³ The drawback is that its point of departure is post-World War II, thus ignoring the rise as distinct from the expansion and consolidation of the Irish welfare state. Two similar studies were published by P. R. Kaim-Caudle, with the emphasis again being on the contemporary rather than the historical.³⁴ Now somewhat dated, however, having been published in 1964 and 1973 respectively, they are interesting for what they have to say on contemporary development.

In 1964 another social scientist, Desmond Farley, published what amounted to a catalogue of social security benefits in Ireland.³⁵ Useful as such, it was a missed opportunity at analysing and evaluating Irish legislation. Farley's decision to include neither references nor bibliography detract from the value of the work.

The most interesting and promising publications of late on Irish social policy, if not on the welfare state, have been Frederick Powell's *The politics of Irish social policy 1600-1990* (Lewiston, 1992) and Lars Mjøset's *The Irish economy in a comparative institutional perspective* (Dublin, 1992). Powell, Professor of Social Studies in U.C.C., can be credited with producing the first survey history of Irish social policy. It is obvious, however, that he vastly overstretched himself and his work is disappointing for its generality of discussion and its use of often obscure sources to bolster arguments. Nonetheless, it may well be

³³ Peter Flora (ed.), *Growth to limits: the western European welfare state since World War II*, vol. 2.

³⁴ P. R. Kaim-Caudle, *Social security in Ireland and western Europe*, (E.S.R.I., Paper no. 20, Dublin, 1964) and *Comparative social policy and social security: a ten country study* (London, 1973).

³⁵ Desmond Farley, *Social insurance and social assistance in Ireland* (Dublin, 1964).

considered the starting point for a historiography of Irish social policy, if not of the welfare state.

On the other hand, Lars Mjøset's work, commissioned by the National Economic and Social Council, is a fascinating contribution. Its depth of analysis and observation is a breath of fresh air and an eye opener for those who think Irish social history means a paragraph on Noel Browne's mother and child scheme. A Norwegian, Mjøset is always insightful, and it is perhaps his removal from Ireland which has allowed him to contribute in such a positive way to our understanding of ourselves. In the following chapters, and in the absence of any comparable study, Mjøset's work serves as a point of reference where appropriate.

In the absence of any studies focusing directly on the Irish welfare state, recourse has been made to a number of works which mention its development in a tangential way. Labour histories comprise one such set of works, and include Emmet O Connor's *A labour history of Ireland 1824-1960* (Dublin, 1992) and Ronnie Munck's *Ireland: nation, state and class struggle* (Colorado, 1985). The most useful volume on labour history, however, is Erhard Rumpf's *Nationalism and socialism in twentieth century Ireland* (Liverpool, 1977). Translated by A. C. Hepburn from Rumpf's original German doctoral thesis presented at Heidelberg, it is interesting that, like Mjøset's work, it is a scholar outside the country who seems to best understand developments within it.

Another corpus of work which has proved useful is that which describes the role of the Catholic church in independent Ireland. The church's role in the development of welfare legislation was in many ways central, and works such as J. H. Whyte's *Church and state in modern Ireland 1923-1979* (2nd edn., Dublin, 1980) are a valuable

contribution to Irish historiography. One feels in retrospect, however, that the role of the church has been over-simplified and perhaps over-dependent on Whyte's ground-breaking work, an issue raised in chapter two of the present work.

These then are the existing works to which reference may be made. The dearth of material presents the present author with both opportunities and problems. While unencumbered by previous approaches to the writing of Irish welfare history, the lack of any framework or guidelines in which to write poses its own problems. For the theoretical and philosophical undercurrent of the work it has often been necessary to marry an original Irish construction to the vast quantity of material existing in other European countries. Standard works by Douglas Ashford, Maurice Bruce and R. M. Titmus, and works with a specifically British approach such as Tony Novak's *Poverty and the state* (England, 1988), which provides a balance to Ashford's right-wing *The emergence of the welfare state* (Oxford, 1988), have been used where necessary in the absence of Irish material.

The amount of largely unused primary source material has been tremendously rewarding. Government records, now housed in the National Archives, Dublin, have been a major primary source of information and data, particularly the files of the Departments of Social Welfare, An Taoiseach, Industry and Commerce, Local Government and Public Health, and Finance. These have been complemented by the William Norton Papers held in the Irish Labour History Museum and by the Sean MacEntee Papers deposited in the Archives Department of University College, Dublin. These two latter collections contain a number of files from the government departments in which Norton and MacEntee worked, together with additional private correspondence and papers as laid out in the bibliography.

Apart from such manuscript sources, a vast quantity of printed primary sources has been used. The largest part of this is official government publications, including *Dáil Debates* and, where appropriate, Seanad Debates. Works by Catholic clergy have been especially important in the context of printed primary sources. Other such materials used have included election leaflets, pamphlets and a broad range of national and local press. It is through the variety and extent of primary sources consulted that we can construct in the following chapters a synthesis of the rise and subsequent development and consolidation of the Irish welfare state, thus going some way towards addressing the lacuna left by the absence of social analysis in twentieth century Irish history.

The parameters of the work are 1922 and 1952. The earlier date merely marks the coming of independence, from which time an Irish government was in a position to influence the course of Irish welfare legislation for the first time. However, the Irish revolution, despite signs to the contrary, firmly remained a political rather than a social revolution and, in the absence of any great legislative advances in the early years, the present work begins with a discussion of pre-independence welfare legislation. Chapter one is devoted to the poor laws, the Old Age Pensions Act, 1908 and the National Health Insurance Act, 1911, all of which provided a British basis for Irish welfare policy.

Chapter two examines the impetus behind the development of the welfare state, firstly in trans-European terms and then in the Irish context. It is a scene-setting chapter which emphasises the role of the Catholic church and the virtual absence of a strong or unified social democratic political movement in Ireland. It is in the light of this chapter that the timing, pace and extent of Irish welfare legislation up to 1952 can be best understood.

Chapters three and four outline the legislative developments which took place in Ireland in the first two decades of independence. The Cumann na nGaedheal years up to 1932 were characterised by conservatism and retrenchment in social welfare policy, while the coming to power of Fianna Fáil heralded the first years of social innovation, only to be replaced by a traditional conservatism by the time of the outbreak of World War II.

At this stage external developments provided the impetus for Irish social policy, and chapter five is devoted to the ramifications in Ireland of the publication in December 1942 of Sir William Beveridge's report, *Social insurance and allied services*. Its influence in Ireland, so far ignored by historians of the period, was extraordinary, commanding the popular attention for a sustained period over the following months and years. Two years after the publication of the Beveridge report, Dr John Dignan, Bishop of Clonfert, published what was described as an Irish version of the Beveridge plan. The chapter discusses Dignan and his report and its importance as a stimulant to debate in Ireland. The chapter also focuses on two major post-Beveridge reforms in Ireland, namely the introduction of children's allowances in 1944, the only example of an income supplement being introduced in Ireland before being introduced in Britain, and the establishment of separate Departments of Social Welfare and Health in 1947. Prior to the establishment of the Department of Social Welfare the Department of Local Government and Public Health had responsibility for the administration of old age and blind pensions, widows' and orphans' pensions and national health insurance while the Department of Industry and Commerce administered unemployment insurance, unemployment assistance and children's allowances.

While Sean Lemass cautioned that the introduction of children's allowances would rule out further innovation in welfare policy for the foreseeable future, in fact it was but the first in a series of legislative innovations and changes which finally forged social welfare policy in Ireland into a unified, co-ordinated whole. This was achieved through the Social Welfare Act, 1952 and had its origins in the white paper on social security of 1949.³⁶ The 1949 white paper was the first major review of welfare legislation in independent Ireland, it being another thirty-six years before a similar review was undertaken.³⁷ With the passing of the 1952 act Ireland had a unified and co-ordinated set of welfare legislation and the analysis of how this came about is the subject of chapter six.

A constant thread running through the entire work is the development of Irish legislation in a comparative framework. In particular reference is made where appropriate to developments in other European countries. Chapter seven is devoted exclusively to comparative perspectives, the timing, rate and extent of developments in Finland, Denmark and Norway being examined so as to provide a useful yardstick against which developments in Ireland can be assessed. The reasons for choosing these Scandinavian countries is explained in more detail in chapter seven. In the words of W. R. Mead, 'few countries in twentieth-century Europe have displayed a stronger attachment to welfare criteria than those of Scandinavia'.³⁸

The study focuses on social welfare but it is equally intended as a history of the rise of the welfare state in Ireland, bearing in mind the

³⁶ Department of Social Welfare, *White paper containing government proposals for social security* (Dublin, 1949).

³⁷ Commission on Social Welfare, *Report* (Dublin, 1986).

³⁸ W. R. Mead, *An historical geography of Scandinavia* (London, 1981), p. 289.

definition provided in the earlier part of this introduction that the historical core of the welfare state is the system of income maintenance.

CHAPTER ONE

FROM POOR LAW TO SOCIAL SECURITY: BRITISH FOUNDATIONS OF THE IRISH WELFARE STATE

The foundation of the Irish welfare state was laid by legislation passed by the British parliament at the turn of the twentieth century, the Old Age Pensions Act, 1908 and the National Health Insurance Act, 1911 representing the first statutory attempts to provide income security for economically vulnerable sections of the population. Important in themselves, these acts tied the development of the Irish welfare state to that of Britain in the post-independence period, successive governments of independent Ireland looking to developments in Britain as an exemplar in the area of social welfare legislation. Both of these acts, together with the earlier Workmen's Compensation Act, 1897 are discussed below.

It was the nineteenth century poor law, however, that formed the basis of Ireland's first statutory social service, and which provided the practical and philosophical backdrop against which the welfare state in Ireland developed in the last decade of the nineteenth century and in the early decades of the twentieth century. The poor law identified for the first time the various categories of people who required relief from the state. It was these categories which became central in the construction of the welfare state with the poor law distinction between the deserving poor and the able-bodied poor forming an important philosophical background to the development of welfare legislation in independent Ireland. Indeed part of the machinery of the poor law was kept in operation as a means of assisting certain classes of poor in independent Ireland up to 1977, despite the demonisation of the poor laws by nationalists in the pre and post independence eras. It is in this context that a discussion of the poor

laws from their introduction in 1838 up to independence forms the first section of the present chapter.

The introduction and functioning of the poor laws in Ireland

As early as 1772 the Irish parliament had introduced an act which provided for the erection of 'workhouses or houses of industry' in an attempt to relieve the growing poverty in Ireland.¹ However the act remained inoperative, private charity remaining the only practical channel for the relief of poverty. It was not until the introduction of the poor law in 1838 that the efforts of charitable organisations were complemented by a state scheme, the poor laws remaining the main instrument for the provision of social services and for the relief of the poor in nineteenth century Ireland.

The poor law was the first serious, statutory, attempt to get to grips with the increasing poverty of Ireland following the depression in agricultural prices with the ending of the Napoleonic wars. With the Act of Union in 1800 bringing Ireland's 'social and economic problems directly to England's door',² the poor law was a direct response to growing disquiet in England over the increasing poverty in Ireland. In Ireland itself the potentially disastrous consequences of this growing poverty were seen in the localised famine of 1817 and the more widespread famine of 1822. In Sligo, for example, the committee established to relieve the worst effects of the food shortage of 1822 reported in July of that year that:

Notwithstanding our exertions, want and wretchedness continue to increase around us. Members of the committee as they pass along the streets, are followed by crowds of hungry creatures, whose appearance attests to the urgency of their distress, but to whom we

¹ R. B. McDowell, *The Irish administration 1801-1914* (London, 1964), p. 165.

² Desmond Roche, *Local government in Ireland* (Dublin, 1982), p. 37.

are unable to give assistance. Today a young women fainted through hunger. The District Visitors feared deception and as is always done, they entered into a strict investigation of the circumstances. It appeared that she was the oldest of ten children, all dependent on the exertions of their once comfortable, but now destitute parents.³

In the absence of poor law structures the machinery employed to deal with distress on occasions such as this was described by the Sligo relief committee as follows:

The High Sheriff convened a meeting of the county gentry at the end of May in order to take steps to alleviate the sufferings of the poor. As a result of the meeting, parochial committees were appointed to manage the affairs of their own parish, to report to a central committee on the state of the poor, and to apply for subscriptions and contributions. The parochial committees would report to the central committee for relief every fortnight. The central committee would then apply for a grant from the government to provide employment for the poor by the making and maintaining of public roads.⁴

It was the experiences of such distress that formed the basis of Irish calls for the introduction of a poor law into Ireland. However it was support within England itself which would prove more effective and important in convincing the British government to introduce a poor law into Ireland, the English basis for such calls going beyond humanitarian concerns. As Virginia Crossman puts it, 'poverty was seen as a crucial factor in the disorder which plagued the country and many of those urging the need for reforms put great stress on the effect these would have on the dispositions of the people'.⁵ However 'probably the most important single factor'⁶ behind English support for an Irish poor law was the hope

³ Letter from Owen Wynne, Esq., M.P. and the Committee for the Town of Sligo, 1 July 1822, *Report of the Committee for the relief of the distressed districts in Ireland* (London, 1823).

⁴ Relief of distressed districts in Ireland 1822-23: letters of Rev/s. John Garrett, James Neligan, Wm. Urwick and John Yeats; Messrs. Wynne, Dowdall, O Hara, Perceval, etc., *Report of commissioners for the relief of the distressed districts of Ireland* (London, 1823).

⁵ Virginia Crossman, *Local government in nineteenth century Ireland* (Antrim, 1994), p. 44.

⁶ R. D. Collison Black, *Economic thought and the Irish question 1817-1870* (Cambridge, 1960), p. 103.

that it would put an end to the immigration of Irish labourers to Britain due to poverty. As one contemporary writer noted:

We must always keep in mind that the great and undisguised motive on the part of the English journals and British members of parliament is that a poor rate should be established in Ireland, not so much for the purpose of alleviating the miseries of the poor Irish, as to protect them, the English, from the visitation of the Irish labourer.⁷

It was a motive recognised though contradicted by Dr Whatley, the Protestant Archbishop of Dublin who was appointed chairperson of the first major investigation undertaken on the condition of the poor in Ireland.⁸

Established in 1833 in response to public opinion in England rather than in Ireland, as reflected in parliament, the commission of inquiry's terms of reference were 'to inquire into the condition of the poorer classes of Your Majesty's subjects in Ireland, and into the various institutions at present established by law for their relief; and also, whether any, and what, further remedial measures appear to be requisite to ameliorate the conditions of the Irish poor, or any portion of them'.⁹ It was by any standards a huge undertaking, the members of the commission saying that no inquiry at the time 'could possibly be entrusted with a wider or more complicated subject for its investigation'.¹⁰

The commissioners took evidence from all across the country, its examination proving 'to painful certainty that there is in all parts of Ireland much and deep-seated distress'.¹¹ This 'distress' was common

⁷ G. H. Evans, *Remarks on the policy of introducing a system of poor rates in Ireland* (1829), quoted in Séamus Ó Cinnéide, 'The development of the home assistance service', *Administration* vol. 17 (1969), no. 3, p. 286.

⁸ *Third report of the Commissioners for inquiry into the condition of the poorer classes in Ireland* (1836, Cmd. 43, xxx), p. 23.

⁹ *First report from His Majesty's Commissioners for inquiry into the condition of the poorer classes in Ireland* (1835, Cmd. 369, xxxii), p. v.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.xiii.

¹¹ *Third report of the Commissioners for inquiry into the condition of the poorer classes in Ireland*, p. 3.

not only among those unable in ordinary circumstances to provide for themselves, such as the blind, the old and the infirm, but was found to be the norm among the able-bodied poor as well. The evidence taken to this effect was copious, the following report taken by the commissioner in the Parish of Kilmacshalgan in County Sligo being typical:

The period of the year at which almost the entire of the labourers are out of work are June and July and part of August, and December, January and February: 'and in fact', the people said, 'there is not a single month in the year of constant work, as every man does his own work himself, in order to avoid employing anyone.'¹²

The report of the commissioners concluded that the agricultural nature of Ireland, where two-thirds of the population depended on the land for subsistence, meant that the causes of poverty there were different from those experienced in England, where less than one quarter of the population depended on agriculture for a livelihood.¹³ In the light of such differences the commissioners recommended in their report of 1836 the adoption of measures dissimilar to those of the British Poor Law system despite promptings to the contrary:

It has been suggested to us to recommend a poor law for Ireland similar to that of England, but we are of opinion that the provision to be made for the poor in Ireland must vary essentially from that made in England. The circumstances of the two countries differ widely... We cannot therefore recommend the present workhouse system of England as at all suited to Ireland.¹⁴

In place of the English poor law the report firstly recommended the official promotion of emigration, something 'the suffering labourers in Ireland' were 'decidedly in favour of'.¹⁵ The report emphasised the

¹² *First report from His Majesty's Commissioners for inquiry into the condition of the poorer classes in Ireland*, p. 392.

¹³ *Third report of the Commissioners for inquiry into the condition of the poorer classes in Ireland*, p. 3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp 4, 5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

importance of stimulating economic growth and of improving the efficiency of agriculture 'the only pursuit for which the body of the people of Ireland are qualified by habit'.¹⁶ For those unable to take care of themselves the report recommended the provision of institutions:

We think that a legal provision should be made and rates levied hereinafter mentioned, for the relief and support of incurable as well as curable lunatics, of idiots, epileptic persons, cripples, deaf and dumb, and blind poor, and all who labour under permanent bodily infirmities - such relief and support to be afforded within the walls of public institutions; also for the relief of the sick poor in hospitals, infirmaries, and convalescent establishments.¹⁷

Whatley's report, however, in part a victim of its own thoroughness and the length of time spent preparing it, was ignored and Lord John Russell, then Home Secretary, who invited George Nicholls, an English Poor Law Commissioner and former ship's captain and banker, to investigate the problem of poverty in Ireland:

to examine how far it might be judicious or practicable to offer relief to whole classes of the poor, whether of the sick, the infirm or orphan children... - whether the condition of the great bulk of the poorer classes would be improved by such a measure - whether a rate limited in its amount rather than its application, might be usefully directed to the erection and maintenance of workhouses for all those who sought relief as paupers - whether any kind of workhouse can be established which should not give its inmates a superior degree of comfort to the common lot of the independent labourer - whether the restraint of a workhouse would be an effectual check to the applicants for admission; and whether, if the system were once established, the inmates would not resist, by force, the restraints which would be necessary.¹⁸

Taking with him the reports of the commissioners of inquiry, Nicholls spent a mere six weeks in Ireland in the autumn of 1836. It is clear from Nicholls' *History of the Irish Poor Law* that, ignoring Whatley's warning that 'the utmost caution' was required in the application of any remedy to

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁸ George Nicholls, *A history of the Irish poor law* (London, 1856), p. 157.

the problems of destitution in Ireland,¹⁹ he had decided before ever visiting Ireland that the English workhouse system, totally rejected by Whatley, was the most suitable means of coping with distress in Ireland: having visited English workhouses with Irish inmates before travelling to Ireland he concluded that 'the discipline of the workhouse operated with the Irish precisely as it did with the English poor'.²⁰

Nicholls made his first report on 15 November 1836. Having got 'one bottle of water out of the Liffey and one out of the Shannon' he returned to England to 'persuade the English people that he can give them a better poor law than we who have been three years considering it', as Whatley observed.²¹ Telling of his conviction that Ireland 'has on the whole, during the last thirty or forty years, been progressively improving', it being 'impossible to pass through the country without being struck with the evidence of increasing wealth almost everywhere apparent',²² Nicholls duly confirmed his opinion as to the suitability of the workhouse system to Ireland's needs. Predictably his report recommended the adoption of the English poor law, dating back to 1601 but reformed in 1834, in Ireland, without substantial change.

It was Nicholls' report which provided the basis of the Irish poor law, and his recommendations were adopted by the government in December 1836. The bill providing for the introduction of the poor law into Ireland was introduced into parliament in February 1837, receiving royal assent in July 1838. It implemented by and large the English Poor Law system into Ireland. As such the Irish act of 1838 owed more to the 1832 Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Working of the poor law in

¹⁹ *Third report of the Commissioners for inquiry into the condition of the poorer classes in Ireland*, p. 4.

²⁰ George Nicholls, *A history of the Irish Poor Law*, p. 158.

²¹ Oliver McDonagh, 'The economy and society, 1830-45' in W. E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, v: Ireland under the union, 1801-70* (Oxford, 1989), p. 227.

²² George Nicholls, *A history of the Irish Poor Law*, p. 160.

England, established primarily to make the existing poor law more cost effective, the report of which was written by the *laissez faire* economist Nassau Senior and which was based on the 'less eligibility' idea 'that the condition of the paupers shall in no case be so eligible as the conditions of persons of the lowest class subsisting on the fruits of their own industry',²³ than it did to any Irish inquiry.

The Poor Law Commission of England and Wales, composed of three poor law commissioners including George Nicholls, and eight assistant commissioners, was initially responsible for implementing the poor law in Ireland, establishing the machinery of the poor law 'in a remarkably short space of time'.²⁴ In order to facilitate its implementation Nicholls arrived in Dublin in September 1838.

Ireland was divided into over one hundred unions each provided with its own workhouse, those 'Irish Bastilles'²⁵ which were already in existence in some areas. By 1842, 122 workhouses were in operation, catering for some 100,000 inmates.²⁶ Each of the unions was administered by a Board of Guardians (the albatross of the British welfare state according to Ashford²⁷) which had the right to value property and levy a compulsory poor rate for the area. Guardians, half of whom (three quarters before 1843) were elected by the rate payers of the union and half of whom (one quarter before 1843) were appointed from among the union's justices of the peace,²⁸ also had power over deciding who received relief and were responsible for the upkeep of the workhouse.

²³ Quoted in Séamus Ó Cinnéide, 'The development of the home assistance service', *Administration*, vol. 17 (1969), no. 3, p. 286

²⁴ R. B. McDowell, *The Irish administration 1801-1914*, p. 179.

²⁵ John Patrick Dunne, 'Poverty problems in a patriot parliament', *Journal of the Social and Statistical Inquiry Society of Ireland*, vol. 14 (1919-30), p. 196.

²⁶ Virginia Crossman, *Local government in nineteenth century Ireland*, p. 47.

²⁷ Douglas Ashford, *The emergence of the welfare state* (Oxford, 1988), p. 131.

²⁸ Enda Kelly, 'The poor law administrators in Navan Union during the Great Famine', B.A. Thesis N.U.I. (Maynooth), 1994, p. 18.

Every person liable to pay poor rates within a union could become a guardian or vote for a guardian, the number of votes per person being dependent on the amount of rate levied.²⁹ Each Board of Guardians was subject to the Poor Law Commissioners (of England and Wales up to 1847 and of Ireland from then on), by whom all of their actions had to be ratified. When it came to relieving the poor the principle was provision of relief within the confines of the workhouse, preference being given to the young, old and incapacitated.

However, 'before the machinery of the new poor law could be set in motion, or indeed a single workhouse erected, the commissioners were confronted with the cry of distress'³⁰ in the form of the localised crop failures of 1839. However it was with the coming of the Great Famine, described as 'the single most important event in the shaping of social policy in the nineteenth century,'³¹ that the near total inadequacy of the poor law system was underlined. Nicholls had never intended the poor law to deal with famine:

The occurrence of a famine, however, if general, seems to be a contingency beyond the power of a poor law to provide for. It is however, I think, impossible to contemplate the continuance of such a state of things in Ireland, as that in which any considerable portion of its population would be subject to the occurrence of famine.³²

Russell himself, who had fully endorsed Nicholls' recommendations, was forced to admit in 1849 that 'the poor law, although it might have succeeded according to expectations in some parts of Ireland, had in other parts been found unequal to contend with the distress'.³³

²⁹ *Report of the Poor Law Commissioners*, vol. 7 (1839), p. 58.

³⁰ Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and the Relief of Distress, *Report on Ireland*, (1909, Cmd. 4630, xxxviii), p. 13.

³¹ Helen Burke, *The people and the poor law in nineteenth century Ireland* (Dublin, 1987), p. 288.

³² Extract from *Report of George Nicholls, Esq., on poor laws, Ireland* quoted in George Nicholls, *A history of the Irish poor law*, p. 177

³³ Quoted in R. D. Collison Black, *Economic thought and the Irish question: 1817-1870*, p. 127.

Straining under the pressures placed upon it by famine, the poor law was amended by the Poor Relief (Ireland) Act of 1847. Commonly referred to as 'the Soup Kitchen Act',³⁴ it made allowance for the provision of outdoor relief for the first time for a limited number of specified classes, namely paupers permanently incapacitated through age or infirmity, those temporarily incapacitated through disease and certain classes of widows, all for a period of up to two months.³⁵ Guardians were required to receive permission from the poor law commissioners before they could undertake outdoor relief, however, the latter preferring financial support for the purpose of increasing the capacity of the workhouses, being loathe to sanction outdoor relief until the workhouse was full. This led to a problem where, as in the case of Navan Union in County Meath, 'though the workhouse [initially built to accommodate 500] was somewhat over crowded as the year 1847 drew to a close, it always seemed to have the capacity to admit more inmates and during the year 1848, when the workhouse had a capacity which never fell below 780, it was never full'.³⁶

The provision of outdoor relief was further extended in 1848 allowing paupers evicted from their holdings to benefit from such relief. It would appear to have been too limited to enable guardians cope with the problems of famine however, excluding as it did the able-bodied poor. The problems caused in one union by the limitations attached to outdoor relief were expressed in a resolution passed by the Sligo Board of Guardians in July 1848:

That this board think it but right to represent to the Poor Law Commissioners that they have since the passing of the poor law used their best endeavours to carry out its provisions, but that from

³⁴ Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, *Report on Ireland*, p. 17.

³⁵ Séamus Ó Cinnéide, 'The development of the home assistance service', p.292.

³⁶ Enda Kelly, 'The poor law administrators in Navan Union during the Great Famine', p. 11.

the almost total absence of employment for the able-bodied labourers, the pressure upon the house for relief still continues unabated.³⁷

By July 1849 the numbers being relieved in Ireland were at their maximum, 221,583 being relieved in the workhouses with a further 784,367 receiving outdoor relief.³⁸ In October of that year, however, the Poor Law Commissioners rescinded all outdoor relief orders.³⁹ It was another thirty-two years before outdoor relief became available as standard to most classes of destitute. By that time also the Poor Law Commissioners had been replaced by the Local Government Board which consisted of the chief secretary, a vice-president and three other commissioners, as outlined in the act of 1872. Some of the functions of the Boards of Guardians were transferred to the Urban and Rural Councils established under the Local Government Act of 1898. This latter act also made permanent statutory provision for the relief of poverty, marking an important departure from the wholly discretionary nature of the poor laws up to then.

As the nineteenth century came to a close there was increasing modification in the operation of the Irish poor laws, coinciding with a philosophical shift in emphasis from 'who are the poor?' to 'why are the poor?'⁴⁰ The *Report of the Vice-Regal Commission on Poor Law Reform in Ireland* of 1906, established to 'ascertain how, if at all, a reduction could, without impairing efficiency, be made in the expenditure for the relief of the poor, and at the same time to show, if possible, how an improvement in the method or system of affording relief might be

³⁷ Resolution of the Board of Guardians, Sligo, on 11 July 1848 in Famine Relief Commission Papers, Sligo, 1846-47.

³⁸ Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, *Report on Ireland*, p. 19.

³⁹ R. D. Collison Black, *Economic thought and the Irish question 1817-1870*, p.131.

⁴⁰ R. M. Titmuss (ed.), *Essays on the welfare state* (3rd edn., Great Britain, 1976), p. 17.

effected',⁴¹ concluded that the poor law act of 1838 was wholly inadequate in dealing with destitution in Ireland. In its place it recommended, as Whatley had done in 1836, that relief could only be satisfactorily dealt with 'by the development of the country's resources, which is, therefore, most strongly urged'.⁴² Critical in particular of Nicholls' report, it recommended the abolition of the workhouse system, the separation of the various classes of inmates, and the extension of outdoor relief as being 'better for the poor and more economical for the rate payers'.⁴³

In 1909 a second commission was established to inquire into the operation of the poor laws in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, 'and to consider and report whether any, and if so, what, modification of the poor law or changes in their administration or fresh legislation for dealing with distress are desirable'.⁴⁴ The report for Ireland was drafted by the only Irish representatives on the commission, Sir Henry Robinson, Vice President of the Local Government Board, and Denis Kelly, Bishop of Ross. Robinson was to later criticise the way in which evidence was taken by the commission on the operation of the poor laws in Ireland:

I think they found it hard to understand the mentality of the Irish witnesses and their way of expressing themselves. Certainly some of the persons locally deputed to attend and give evidence were chosen more on account of their willingness to take advantage of the opportunity of a free trip to London than of any special study or knowledge on their part of the needs and weaknesses of poor law administration.⁴⁵

⁴¹ *Report of the Vice-Regal Commission on Poor Law Reform in Ireland*, vol.1 (1906, Cmd. 3202, li), p. 1.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁴⁴ *Royal Commission on the Poor Law and Relief of Distress, Report on Ireland*, p. v.

⁴⁵ Henry Robinson, *Memories: wise and otherwise* (London, 1923), p. 216.

Recognising the pitfalls of this situation the commission 'came to the conclusion that they would understand the Irish part of the problem better by a study of the subject on the spot, so they divided into three sections, which made a hurried scamper through the country seeing workhouses'.⁴⁶ Leaving the drafting of the report on Ireland to Kelly and Robinson, the commission's recommendations were largely in line with those of the 1906 vice-regal commission, it concluding that workhouses and Boards of Guardians ought to be abolished, that the county or county borough ought in future be the area of administration in charge of relief and that classes of inmates should be segregated.⁴⁷

In the event political developments were to overtake social reform and with the outbreak of World War 1 attention was diverted from the poor laws, the dawning of independence placing the issue of reform firmly in the lap of the Irish Free State government. The extent to which reform was undertaken is discussed in chapter three of the present work.

From poor law to social security

The changing ideology inherent in the 1906 and 1909 commissions of inquiry into the poor laws was evident in the advent of the first income supplement policies, with the poor law being seen as an increasingly inadequate measure in the fight against poverty. This move from poor law to social security was nothing short of a radical redirection in social policy. These first social security measures implemented before the coming of independence in Ireland were the Workmen's Compensation Act, 1897, the Old Age Pensions Act, 1908 and the National Health Insurance Act, 1911. While they 'made an important contribution towards the alleviation of the hardships and sufferings of the poor and

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 217.

⁴⁷ Royal Commission on the Poor Law and Relief of Distress, *Report on Ireland*, p. 81.

undoubtedly prevented large numbers from being forced to have recourse to the resources of the poor law',⁴⁸ they were even more significant for the fact that, especially in the case of old age pensions, they established 'the principle of support from the state'.⁴⁹ As such they were the first in a series of social security measures which heralded the coming of the welfare state.

'It is difficult to overrate the boldness and importance of the step taken by the legislature'⁵⁰ in introducing the earliest of the acts, the Workmen's Compensation Act, 1897. It was the first act in which the principle of social insurance applied, the employer being directly responsible for compensating injured employees in certain jobs including railway, building, engineering and factory work, according to fixed rates. It provided for statutory compensation in the case of injuries sustained in the workplace, benefit taking the form of a weekly payment of approximately 50% of a persons usual wages prior to injury. In the event of the death of an employee due to injuries received at work, their family received a lump sum payment based on previous earnings.⁵¹ In 1900 the act was amended to include agricultural workers and was further amended in 1906 to cover most employees engaged in manual labour and those involved in non-manual labour with an income not exceeding £250 per year.⁵²

More significant than the Workmen's Compensation Act, 1897 both in the numbers encompassed by the legislation and for its fundamental and principled break with the poor law was the Old Age Pensions Act of 1908, which followed the German and Danish precedents

⁴⁸ *Report of the Commission on the Relief of the Sick and Destitute Poor, including the Insane Poor* (Dublin, 1927), p. 9.

⁴⁹ *Report of the Commission on Social Welfare* (Dublin, 1986), p. 29.

⁵⁰ Arnold Wilson and Hermann Levy, *Workmen's compensation* (London, 1939), p. 64.

⁵¹ *Report of the Commission on Social Welfare*, p. 28.

⁵² *Ibid.*

of the early 1890s. The introduction of the legislation was the result of lobbying dating back to the early 1870s, the 'mainspring' of which was William Lewery Blackley, a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, who was deeply involved in the work of the National Providence League in England.⁵³ Described in an editorial in the *Irish Times* as 'the blindest and most reckless experiment to which the legislature of a great country has ever committed itself',⁵⁴ the introduction of old age pensions was a radical departure from social policy precedent. Despite strong criticism from some quarters, however, the measure had near unanimous support in the House of Commons, the bill receiving royal assent on 1 August 1908. Initially proposed as a 5/- or nothing basis, the legislation as finally adopted provided for a minimum pension of 1/5 and a maximum of 5/- for people over seventy years of age with an annual means not exceeding £21 10s per year. Later becoming the object of much criticism, the means test was a significant move away from the poor law destitution test. Still in vogue however was a moral test, with convicted drunkards, prisoners both while in prison and for a period of ten years thereafter, those in receipt of indoor or outdoor poor relief, lunatics and those who had failed to work prior to qualifying for pension being disqualified from receipt of pension. It was the test of age however that proved the biggest problem in determining qualification for pension in Ireland. In the absence of statutory registration of births before 1864, it was often impossible to verify claimants' age, many 'old men, assuming the bent, decrepit attitude and the high quavering voice peculiar to applicants for old age pension'⁵⁵ in a effort to convince the officials of their age. In the place of birth certificates, other official certification of age was

⁵³ Arnold Wilson and G. S. Mackay, *Old age pensions: an historical and critical study* (London, 1941), pp 14-15.

⁵⁴ *IT*, 3 Aug. 1908.

⁵⁵ Henry Robinson, *Further memories of Irish life* (London, 1924), p. 158.

acceptable, such as baptismal certificates, the Archbishop of Dublin requesting all priests of the diocese to provide such certificates free of charge as claimants for old age pensions were often 'so poor that the payment even of the smallest fee would be all but impossible'.⁵⁶

The pension was made payable on a weekly basis through post offices, the duty of determining claims being imposed on local pension committees elected from and appointed by each borough, district or county council, 54 committees and 394 sub-committees being appointed throughout Ireland.⁵⁷ Determination of appeals of the decisions reached by the pension committees was the responsibility of the Local Government Board.

Described by Henry Robinson as removing 'forever the menace of destitution arising from the failure of the staple food of the country',⁵⁸ he portrayed the reception old age pensions received among the ordinary people as follows:

For a long time the people of Connemara attributed the pensions to the influence of the King, who since his visit had interested himself in them, and they could not bring themselves to believe that the pensions would last. 'You might believe', they would say, 'fifty or sixty of the old people might get the money maybe for a year, but for the whole of the old people to be getting the money for the rest of their lives - arrah, what nonsense! Sure where would it come from?'⁵⁹

The first payments were made under the act on 1 January 1909, a day of celebration in many communities throughout Ireland:

Perhaps the pleasantest feature of the day - especially in the rural districts - was the hearty sympathy and good will with which whole localities entered into the happy feelings of the pensioners.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ *ICD 1909*, p. 493.

⁵⁷ *Annual report of the Local Government Board for Ireland for the year ended 31 March 1909*, (1909, Cmd. 4810, xxx), p. xi.

⁵⁸ Henry Robinson, *Memories: wise and otherwise*, p. 206.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

⁶⁰ *IT*, 2 Jan. 1909.

The significance of the occasion was underlined by the extensive coverage of the first day of payments in the national papers. The *Irish Times*, like Henry Robinson, described the pensions as 'a substantial assurance of future safety from the worst evils of extreme poverty'.⁶¹ It described the scenes in over thirty individual post offices throughout the country on the first day of payment:

Inchicore: One old dame caused some amusement by her complaint as to the stinginess of the government. She said she had to support three children belonging to a useless son, and that if the Lord Lieutenant only knew of her struggles he would, no doubt, provide 'for them that was under seven as well as them that was over seventy'.

Galway: Among the applicants was an old woman who had attained the age of eighty, who wished to know why she should not be paid her 'back time'... Several old women from the Claddagh refused to take the pension unless they were assured that by accepting it the government would have no claim to send their sons to the wars to fight the 'black Boers'.

Limerick: Everything was done so that the recipients should be made to feel that they were not receiving absolute charity, and in this respect there was a strongly drawn contrast between the procedure and that which marks the granting of out door relief at the poor law union boards.⁶²

Amended in 1911 and again in 1919 with the effect of increasing both the means threshold and the maximum rate, the 1908 act introduced the first scheme of social welfare policy into Ireland dealing with a specific group identified as being vulnerable to destitution and which did not require proof of destitution for receipt of benefit. In this context it was a mile stone in the evolution of the welfare state. Similarly, its receipt did not involve deprivation of citizenship's rights, such as the right to vote.

⁶¹ *IT*, 1 Jan. 1909.

⁶² *IT*, 2 Jan. 1909.

Administered on similar lines to old age pensions were blind pensions first introduced in 1920 following the report in 1889 of a royal commission on the conditions of the blind in Ireland and Britain. Blind pensions were payable to those who were certified as blind by the medical profession, recipients being entitled to receive the same benefits as old age pensioners once they satisfied the same means test and had reached the age of fifty.

The third major piece of 'epoch-making'⁶³ social legislation introduced into Ireland by the British Parliament was the National Insurance Act, 1911. Again based on the German precedent of 1883, the act introduced the first, state-organised, national, compulsory social insurance scheme into Ireland, providing insurance for the majority of employees over the age of 16 against both unemployment and sickness. Becoming law on 16 December 1911, it came into operation in July 1912.

The introduction of unemployment insurance, considered by social scientists as a key element in the formation of the welfare state⁶⁴ and later described by an Irish government as 'one of the most significant schemes of social legislation ever framed',⁶⁵ was the first measure outside of the poor law which went some way towards ensuring the income maintenance of the 'able-bodied poor' while out of employment. It was a direct response to the new social problem of wide-scale unemployment brought about by the industrial depression in England from the 1880s.

Denounced by many English and Scottish industrialists as 'a grave menace to industry',⁶⁶ the bill received far less official support than the Old Age Pensions Act. In Ireland, the Catholic hierarchy, meeting in Maynooth in June 1911, asked that the bill not be extended to Ireland:

⁶³ Department of Social Welfare, *First report, 1947-49*, p. 10.

⁶⁴ Douglas Ashford, *The emergence of the welfare state*, p. 216.

⁶⁵ Department of Social Welfare, *First report, 1947-9*, p. 28.

⁶⁶ *IT*, 16 Dec. 1911.

The cost of this insurance scheme would be a heavy burden on many of our small struggling industries, and would, in our opinion, increase unemployment; whereas a great need of Ireland is more employment and better wages, and not a provision designed for the wounded member of a wealthy and powerful industrial system.⁶⁷

However the act was applied to Ireland, being limited as in the case of Britain to those involved in the trades of building, construction of works, shipbuilding, mechanical engineering, iron founding, construction of vehicles and sawmilling.⁶⁸ A weekly contribution of 5d. per week, shared equally between employer and employee, was payable while maximum benefit, deliberately kept low in comparison with wages so as to avoid a situation where people would decide to draw benefit rather than work, was 7/- per week. The scheme was administered through labour exchanges, established under the Labour Exchanges Act, 1909 with the aim of achieving the redeployment of labour, in order to offer claimants employment where possible.⁶⁹

The 1911 act also introduced sickness insurance including disablement, maternity and sanatorium benefits. The sickness insurance scheme was administered by 'approved societies' selected from among the numerous friendly societies already in existence and offering private sickness insurance, overseen by the Irish Insurance Commissioners.

Coming into operation in July 1912, the standard weekly rates of contribution were 2/5 from employers, 3d. from male workers and 2d. from female workers. The standard rates of benefit were 10/- per week for men and 7/6 per week for women for sickness benefit; 5/- per week for men and women as disablement benefit; and 30/- for maternity benefit.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ *ICD 1912*, p. 544.

⁶⁸ Department of Social Welfare, *First report, 1947-9*, p. 69.

⁶⁹ *Report of the Commission on social welfare*, p. 31.

⁷⁰ Department of Social Welfare, *First report, 1947-9*, p. 97.

The weaknesses of the 1911 act were numerous. In the case of sickness insurance, while there were flat rates of contribution and cash benefit, additional benefits could be provided by approved societies solvent enough to do so, in the context of them being debarred from making a profit. This resulted in certain low-risk categories of insured workers benefiting to a far greater extent from sickness insurance than high-risk categories, insurers of whom were often insolvent and in no position to offer additional benefits. Equally, the rates of benefit for sickness were lower than those for unemployment despite the fact that both eventualities resulted in a similar loss of income. Likewise no account was taken of claimants' dependants, benefit payments for a single man being the same as those for a married man with several children.

Such practical weaknesses were overshadowed, however, by the thinking which gave rise to the act, as it brought together for the first time the individual, the employer and the state in a cooperative way to deal with the problem of poverty among the able-bodied poor due to unemployment or sickness.

The 1911 act was modified by the National Health Insurance Acts of 1913 (which provided for increased state grants for the provision of medical benefit), of 1918 (which simplified administration and increased benefits to women), and of 1920 (which increased the rates of contribution consequent on the general rise in the cost of living to allow for corresponding increases in the rates of benefit). Being presented as the 'epitome of Liberal social democracy', the 1911 act and the subsequent amending acts had 'the twin effect of distinguishing between the deserving and the undeserving poor while creating a sense of national unity through contributions from both the employer and the employee'.⁷¹

⁷¹ Tony Novak, *Poverty and the state* (England, 1988), p. 135.

It was these three social security acts of the late 1800s and the early 1900s, combined with the earlier poor laws, which provided the background to and basis for welfare legislation in independent Ireland. Both the provisions and philosophy of the Irish poor law of 1838 in particular 'endured well into the present century',⁷² while the institution of the 'modern' welfare state in Ireland 'represents the end result of an evolutionary process which began with the enactment of the first Old Age Pensions Act in 1908'.⁷³ This historical backdrop was an important factor in the development of Irish social security legislation following independence. As the Irish Commission on Social Welfare of 1986 reported:

The historical link with Britain has undoubtedly had an impact on the development of the system in Ireland. Thus, some of the early schemes, such as old age pensions and national insurance, are directly attributable to that link while the influence of the poor law continued up to the mid 1970s. Even after independence, developments in Ireland have taken cognisance of developments in Britain.⁷⁴

Recognition of this historical and continuous influence on social security legislation in independent Ireland is important. The extent to which the philosophy of the poor law permeated Irish discussion is particularly striking in the early decades of the Free State.

⁷² *Report of the Commission on Social Welfare*, p. 27.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL WELFARE LEGISLATION

The introduction to the present work defined the concepts 'welfare state', 'social welfare' and 'social security', while the first chapter outlined the main components of welfare legislation in Ireland up to independence. What is necessary now, before embarking upon detailed analysis of legislation in independent Ireland, is to outline the major influences on the course, content and rate of development of social welfare policy in Ireland from independence in 1922 to the consolidation and institutionalisation of the welfare state in 1952. While such an examination is a continuing thread of the entire work, it is important to establish here the context of policy development and to determine the influences on the initiation and carrying out of legislation.

As is discussed in a later chapter, many of the influences on Irish social policy were in line with those of other European countries and are generally accepted by social scientists as the important considerations in analysing the development of social legislation. In Ireland the two major internal influences were the strong voice of the Catholic church and the virtual absence of a strong or unified social democratic political party. Before discussing these two factors in the development of the Irish welfare state however, the other factors influencing legislation in Ireland are briefly outlined.

Social scientists have traditionally seen the rise of the welfare state from three different but complementary perspectives. These are summed up by one writer as follows:

1. Political explanations, emphasising the primacy of political decision-making and explaining the growth of the welfare state by focusing on political processes;

2. Structural functional explanations which see the welfare state as a functional response to some basic structural changes in society, for example industrialisation and developing capitalism;

3. Structural political explanations which sees the welfare state as an outcome of a more or less peaceful struggle between social classes and their organisations in politics and in the labour force.¹

When we examine the development of the welfare state in an international context we realise that these perspectives provide us with a basic introduction to the influences behind it.

While Peter Flora, who has written extensively on the rise of the European welfare state, has said that the rise of the welfare state is a 'very complex phenomenon' with 'causality' being very difficult to explain,² there is general agreement that a process of 'modernisation' starting in the late nineteenth century is where the genesis of the welfare state may be found. This process of 'modernisation' took place at numerous, inter-connected, social, economic and political levels. Firstly, there was a modernisation of thought, the ideas and ideals of the French revolution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man (1793) for example permeating later philosophies.³ Secondly, there was the practical modernisation of agricultural techniques and the growth in the importance of industry, and the concomitant rise in an urban working class. This resulted in the progressive breakdown of traditional community methods of coping with the problem of want, the vacuum left by 'cultural welfare' obliging the government to step into the breach with national, state-organised, welfare schemes. There was also a modernisation of the political system, with the late nineteenth century

¹ Paraphrased from Risto Alapuro, et al., *Small states in comparative perspective* (Norway, 1985), pp 188-89.

² Peter Flora (ed.), *Growth to limits the western European welfare state since World War II* (Berlin, 1986) vol. 2, p. xxxii.

³ For a discussion of the influence of such events see William A. Robson, *Welfare state and welfare society: illusion and reality* (England, 1976) and Douglas Ashford, *The emergency of the welfare state* (Oxford, 1988).

witnessing for the first time the rise of popular, mass democracy, facilitated by universal franchise, leading in most European countries to the rise of Labour Parties which now had a strong electoral mandate from newly enfranchised working classes. The previously mentioned structural changes, especially the process of industrialisation, led to a number of new social problems, particularly unemployment, which became national in character and concern for which was now voiced by nationally-organised social democratic parties.⁴

Before directly applying the process of 'modernisation' to Ireland as a factor explaining the development of the welfare state, it should be noted that this 'functionalist bird's-eye approach'⁵ is being increasingly questioned for its over-simplification of the emergence of the welfare state. However, it does provide for us here a valid introduction to the influences behind social policy in general, once the greater complexity of the emergence of the welfare state is appreciated.

The limitations of applying the concept of 'modernisation' to Ireland in explaining the development of the welfare state is not so much that the concept itself is of limited value, but rather that Ireland at this time was not independent and therefore was unable to react to or influence on its own any of the above factors. However, the development of welfare policy in Ireland does fit in with another generally accepted prerequisite of the welfare state, the rise of the

⁴ All of the above factors are treated in more detail in Peter Flora (ed.), *Growth to limits* vol. 2, p. xiii; Guy Vanthemsche, 'Unemployment insurance in interwar Belgium', *International Review of Social History*, vol. 35 (1990), no. 3; Jose Harris, 'Political thought and the welfare state 1870-1940: an intellectual framework for British social policy', *Past and Present*, May 1992, no. 135; Tony Novak, *Poverty and the state* (England, 1988), p 90 -; Douglas Ashford, *The emergence of the welfare state* (Oxford, 1988); Peter Baldwin, 'The welfare state for historians', *Contemporary Studies in Society and History*, vol. 24 (1992), no. 4; John Saville, 'The origins of the welfare state' in Martin Loney, et al., *Social policy and social welfare* (Philadelphia, 1988).

⁵ Peter Baldwin, 'The welfare state for historians', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 24 (1992), no. 4, p. 701. A critique of this approach is provided by Baldwin in this review article. See also Guy Vanthemsche, 'Unemployment insurance in interwar Belgium', *International Review of Social History*, vol. 3 (1990), no. 3 and Gosta Esping-Anderson, *The three worlds of welfare capitalism* (Oxford, 1990).

nation state. As Peter Flora points out, 'the welfare state may be seen as a completion of the nation state, to the extent that individual social rights became an essential element of citizenship as the main basis of political legitimacy'.⁶ The subsequent political division of Ireland, and the failure to resolve satisfactorily the 'national question' introduced a unique factor into the development of the welfare state in Ireland. While the dominance of nationalist politics was largely responsible for the weakness of social democratic politics, a point expanded upon later in this chapter, the belief among politicians in a united Ireland should have afforded a unique impetus behind improving the standards of welfare legislation in independent Ireland.

From an early stage of independence the 'social dimension of the border'⁷ was apparent to people like John Patrick Dunne of the Mothers' Pensions Society who warned that:

Every social service established in the Northern Area, for which there is no parallel provision in the Free State but serves as an additional barrier to the unity of the nation.⁸

During the inter-war period the higher standards of benefit in Northern Ireland as compared to the Free State was more apparent to unionists, Captain Herbert Dixon, M.P., Chief Government Whip in the Northern Ireland Parliament, saying in October 1938 in response to de Valera's demand for a united Ireland:

He asks the working man here to give up all the great benefits of our social legislation, such as unemployment benefit, and to transfer to conditions which even Mr de Valera would not attempt

⁶ Peter Flora, *Growth to limits*, vol. 2, p. xv. For a brief discussion of this in the Irish context see Philip J. O Connell and David Rothman, 'The Irish welfare state in comparative perspective' in J. H. Goldthorpe and C. T. Whelan (eds.), *The development of industrial society in Ireland* (Oxford, 1992).

⁷ K. T. Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800: conflict and conformity* (London, 1989), p. 205.

⁸ P. J. Dunne, *Waiting the verdict: pensions or pauperism: necessitous widows and orphans in the Free State* (Dublin, n.d., [c 1930]).

to say are anything like so sound or so generous as those of the U.K.⁹

This unionist perception was strengthened as time went on, and as legislation in the United Kingdom progressed well ahead of Irish provisions.

There is little doubt that by the mid 1940s the Irish government and Irish political figures were taking more cognisance of developments in comparison with Northern Ireland. William Norton, Ireland's first social democratic minister for social welfare and leader of the Labour Party from 1932 to 1960, who described in 1946 Ireland's social services as 'lagging seriously behind the six county social legislation',¹⁰ saw his white paper of 1949 as going a long way towards remedying this situation:

It represents a credible effort to provide for our people social security not less favourable than is being provided for the workers of many other lands, including our neighbouring country Great Britain and even our own six north eastern counties.¹¹

At this time, for example, the higher rate of old age pension in Ireland was 12/6 per week for people over 70 years of age while in Northern Ireland the equivalent rate was £1.6.0., payable at 65 years of age.¹²

However further developments were taken out of the hands of Norton as Fianna Fáil returned to power in June 1951, Dr James Ryan, a founder member of Fianna Fáil, taking over the social welfare brief. The subsequent social insurance act of 1952 was again criticised by Norton in the context of legislation applying in Northern Ireland: 'our social services are still behind the social services of the six counties',¹³

⁹ *Belfast Newsletter*, 18 Oct. 1938.

¹⁰ DD vol. 103, 20 Nov. 1946, col. 1161.

¹¹ Transcript from recording of lecture on social security given by Norton in Newbridge Town Hall on 12 May 1950 (N.A., D/T, S 15069a).

¹² Quoted in *The Clann*, 11 Jan. 1948.

¹³ DD vol. 143, 2 Dec. 1953, col. 1408.

while Sean MacBride, leader of Clann na Poblachta, reported to the Dáil in April 1952 that in 'the six counties during the last elections the main leaflet and poster used by the partionists was one setting out in one column the social benefits payable in the six counties...and in another column the social benefits payable in this part of Ireland'.¹⁴ It was part of the unfavourable comparison which the Fianna Fáil government feared might be made 'between the two portions of the island'.¹⁵

The extent to which there was genuine concern in political circles for ensuring that social welfare standards in independent Ireland did not pose a practical impediment to unification was questionable however. Beyond the nationalist rhetoric, no specific steps were taken to bring Irish standards into line with those in Northern Ireland. Of far greater significance in the context of the 'national question' was the way in which the Labour Party, from the election of 1918, fell victim to it.

However, before discussing the role of social democratic politics in the development of the Irish welfare state, I wish firstly to turn to the role of the Catholic church in influencing the timing, pace and extent of social welfare legislation in independent Ireland.

The Catholic Church

'The overriding importance of the church's attitude to welfare issues',¹⁶ particularly in Catholic countries, is central to any investigation of the welfare state, and the presence of a strong Catholic phalanx undoubtedly had a crucial impact on the social welfare debate in independent Ireland. The position of the church had been cemented

¹⁴ DD vol. 130, 8 Apr. 1952, col. 1604. For analysis of economic and social development in the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland in the inter-war period, see David Johnson, *The interwar economy in Ireland* (Dundalk, 1985).

¹⁵ Considerations attending the problems of extending social insurance in Ireland', c1945 (U.C.D. Archives, MacEntee papers, Social Services, P67/361).

¹⁶ Joan Higgins, *States of welfare: comparative analysis in social policy* (Oxford, 1981), p. 48.

through its identification with national and nationalist movements in pre-independence Ireland, interestingly a development best documented by the Norwegian social scientist Lars Mjøset.¹⁷

An example of the church's role in the national question in the years prior to independence was its involvement in the anti-conscription campaign. First mooted in 1916 following heavy allied losses at Verdun, a bill was introduced in the British House of Commons on 9 April 1918 rendering Ireland subject to conscription by special order. It was at this stage that the standing committee of the Irish bishops, meeting in Dublin in April 1918, passed a resolution protesting against any attempt at introducing conscription into Ireland without consent.¹⁸ Two weeks later a meeting of bishops was held at Maynooth College the same day as a meeting in the Mansion House, Dublin, of Irish political leaders, the latter sending a deputation which included Eamon de Valera to the bishops' meeting. Together with supporting the actions of the political leaders, and facilitating the signing of an anti-conscription pledge and the collection of money to resist conscription, the bishops:

directed that a public mass of intercession be celebrated next Sunday in every church, that a national novena be observed in honour of Our Lady of Lourdes commencing on 3 May and that family rosaries be universally recited for the spiritual and temporal welfare of Ireland.¹⁹

Such actions by the Catholic Hierarchy ensured their unrivalled position following independence. They were, to all intents and purposes, a state within a state. An early and clear contemporary recognition of this was provided at a meeting held in Dublin in March

¹⁷ Lars Mjøset, *The Irish economy in a comparative institutional perspective* (N.E.S.C. Report No. 93, Dublin, 1992) pp. 248-249.

¹⁸ *ICD 1919*, p. 509.

¹⁹ *ICD 1919*, p. 511.

1927 on the serious poverty and level of unemployment in Ireland. The meeting resolved that it:

respectfully requests the Irish Hierarchy - in the absence of any other helpful medium - to bring together a number of Irish men and Irish women who will adequately point the way and provide remedies of work and public construction against the continued destruction of homes and children.²⁰

The church became particularly involved in the debate on social policy and the development of the welfare state, a phenomenon to which they were opposed on the basis of its similarity with the totalitarian state.

The extent to which the pronouncements of the Catholic church made a practical difference to welfare policy is more difficult to assess. Their lively contributions to debate did not necessarily result in influencing in a real or substantial way the actual course of legislation, and a number of unionist commentators were certainly of the opinion that the influence of the Catholic church was diminished in Ireland following independence.²¹ Certainly, historical analyses which claim that the Catholic church 'had successfully opposed increased state involvement in welfare in the 1940s and 1950s'²² are incorrect. In this period, for example, the Department of Social Welfare and the Department of Health were established and children's allowances were introduced. One could argue of course that a good deal more could have been achieved had the Catholic church come out in favour of welfare state legislation. However, it is quite clear from government archives that social conservatism and financial constraints were at least as important as pronouncements of the Catholic Hierarchy in determining the pace and extent of social legislation. Indeed Fianna Fáil governments in particular were not above selectively using statements

²⁰ *ICD 1928*, p. 573.

²¹ J. H. Whyte, *Church and state in modern Ireland, 1923-79* (2nd edn., Dublin, 1980), p. 35.

²² O Connell and Rottman, 'The Irish welfare state in comparative perspective', p. 237.

by the hierarchy on social problems as arguments against developing welfare legislation as a smoke screen for their own unwillingness to innovate and for the conservatism of the Department of Finance.²³

However, despite differences of interpretation on the extent of the real influence of the Catholic church on welfare legislation, their role in the debate and in influencing public opinion cannot be dismissed. The esteem of the Catholic church in Ireland in the period covered in the present work ensured its leading role in Irish society.

It was only in the 1920s that the Catholic church in Ireland began to focus on 'Catholic action', the delay being attributed to the dominance of nationalist issues and pre-independence preoccupations up until then. As Edward Cahill, S.J., a leading member of the Irish Catholic social movement, explained in his *magnum opus* published in 1932:

In Ireland, a Catholic social movement in the ordinary sense was practically impossible up to the very recent times. The land struggle, the fight for educational freedom, the national context, the work of church building and religious organisations, engaged the energies of the priests and people during the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth century.²⁴

However it was the early 1930s before the Catholic social movement, the major element of 'Catholic action', spurred on by Pius XI's encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, began to have a unified and decisive impact on the course of Irish social policy. Its philosophy was based on the papal encyclicals, in particular *Rerum Novarum*, published in 1891, and *Quadragesimo Anno*, published in 1931 to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the encyclical of 1891.

Catholic action, as interpreted by Pope Pius XI in his encyclical *Ubi Arcano Dei Consilio* (1922), involved the laity together with 'their

²³ See for example Department of Local Government and Public Health: children's allowances, Beveridgeism and the Catholic church, 16 May 1943 (N.A., D/T, 12117b).

²⁴ Edward Cahill, *The framework of the Christian state: an introduction to social science* (Dublin, 1932), p. 262.

pastors and their bishops', carrying out the work of the apostolate of the church.²⁵ In particular the encyclical lauded 'the numberless and diverse activities initiated for the education and development, as well as for the sanctification of both the clergy and laity'.²⁶ In Ireland as elsewhere the movement was based on the assumption that 'it is only the Catholic, the Christian teaching, which gives a proper basis for the politics of social reform'.²⁷

Before discussing the encyclicals as the foundation of Catholic social teaching in Ireland, it is necessary to emphasise that the Catholic church's attitude to social policy was an extremely complex one: various members of the Irish hierarchy made markedly different pronouncements on state centralised social legislation which cannot be simplified into a uniformity of approach. We shall see examples of this diversity of reasoning with the one aim in mind, as we examine in particular the church's attitude to the publication of the Beveridge report in December 1942 and the Irish *White paper on social security* published in October 1949.

Returning to the basis of the Catholic social movement,²⁸ we can now discuss in more detail the content and thrust of the papal encyclicals *Rerum Novarum*, given at St Peter's, Rome, on 15 May 1891 in the fourteenth year of Leo XIII's papacy, and *Quadragesimo Anno*, in essence a revised version of *Rerum Novarum* given on 15 May 1931 by Pope Pius XI.

Rerum Novarum, termed by one contemporary commentator 'the immortal encyclical' and earning Leo XIII the title of 'socialist pope' in

²⁵ *Ubi Arcano Dei Consilio*, Encyclical of Pope Pius XI on the Peace of Christ in the Kingdom of Christ, 23 Dec. 1922, para. 58.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 53.

²⁷ Rev. Pat Boylan, *Catholicism and citizenship in self-governed Ireland* (Dublin, 1922), p. 10.

²⁸ For a brief outline of the development of official Catholic social thought in the run-up to the first of the social encyclicals, *Rerum Novarum*, see for example Peter Coman, *Catholics and the welfare state* (London, 1977), pp 20-29.

some circles,²⁹ was the papal response to the process of 'modernisation' described earlier. Referred to in English as the encyclical 'on the condition of the worker', its stated aim was to provide guidelines within which 'the misery and wretchedness pressing so unjustly on the majority of the working class'³⁰ could be relieved. Dismissing the inevitability of class struggle, the encyclical was anxious in particular to underline the faults of socialism, presenting the Christian approach as an ideal easily attainable in its place. Above all it forcefully rejected the socialist idea of the interventionist state: 'the contention, then, that the civil government should at its option intrude into and exercise intimate control over the family and household is a great and pernicious error'.³¹ Such intervention could only be tolerated in the case of 'extreme necessity'.³²

Advising the merits of 'frugal living' and of keeping 'out of the reach of those vices which devour not small incomes merely, but large fortunes',³³ the pope stressed the importance of Christian charity which, he said, could not and should not be substituted by state-centralised relief. The encyclical was unequivocal on what was termed 'the heroism of charity':³⁴

At the present day many there are who, like the heathen of old, seek to blame and condemn the church for such eminent charity. They would substitute in its stead a system of relief organised by the state. But no human expedients will ever make up for the devotedness and self-sacrifice of Christian charity.³⁵

²⁹ J. B. McLaughlin, *The immortal encyclical: Rerum Novarum and the developments of Pope Pius XI* (London, 1932), p. v.

³⁰ *Rerum Novarum* Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII on Capital and Labour, 15 May 1891, para. 3.

³¹ *Ibid.*, para 14.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, para 28.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, para 30.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Describing *Rerum Novarum* as the 'magna carta of the social order'³⁶ Pius XI's encyclical on 'the reconstruction of the social order' was, of necessity, a more in-depth analysis and application of Catholic social teaching, being over twice as long as Leo's encyclical. Lauding Leo's encyclical as the basis for all time of the Catholic church's response to 'the social question', Pius recognised that the 'new needs and changed conditions of our age have made necessary a more precise application of Leo's teaching or even certain additions thereto'.³⁷

Dismissing both liberalism and socialism, and individualism and collectivism, it sought to find a middle way based on the teachings of Christ. It made a distinction between the idle and deserving poor, condemning those unwilling to work and quoting the apostle: 'if any man will not work neither let him eat'.³⁸

Like Leo, Pius emphasised the centrality of Christian charity, and its desirability above any form of state relief. Indeed, *Quadragesimo Anno* rejected all forms of state-centralised social policy, advocating in its stead syndicalism or corporatism (or, as it was to become known in Ireland in the 1930s and 1940s, vocationalism):

Anyone who gives even slight attention to the matter will easily see what are the obvious advantages in the system... The various classes work together peacefully, socialist organisations and their activities are repressed and a special magistracy exercises a governing authority.³⁹

The major 'addition' to Leo's teaching was in regard to the encyclical's view of socialism which it subdivided into communism on the one hand and moderate socialism on the other. Not surprisingly, Pope Pius rejected communism in its totality, but saw some merit in

³⁶ *Quadragesimo Anno* Encyclical of Pope Pius XI on reconstruction of the social order, 15 May 1931, para 38.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, para 40.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, para 57.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, para 95.

moderate socialism, or, as he referred to it simply, 'socialism', going so far as to equate it with the principles of the Christian tradition: 'it cannot be denied that its demands at times come very near those that Christian reformers of society justly insist upon'.⁴⁰ On this point the encyclical concluded, however, that 'no one can be at the same time a good Catholic and a true socialist'.⁴¹

Returning again to Leo's emphasis on the centrality of Christian charity, he said 'the law of charity which is the bond of perfection, must always take a leading role'.⁴² The only qualification was that 'admittedly, no vicarious charity can substitute for justice which is due as an obligation and is wrongfully denied'.⁴³

Among its concluding remarks, it advised that 'the church must be duly prepared by an intensive study of the social question'.⁴⁴ The Catholic church in Ireland was to follow this last urging to the same extent and as strenuously as the rest of the encyclical.

While the impact of *Rerum Novarum* in Ireland had been minimal, the impact of *Quadragesimo Anno* among official Catholic circles was enormous. It was immediately adopted by the Catholic hierarchy in Ireland as the firm foundation for all social action. Extracts were to be found in a number of government department files, one file dealing specifically with the encyclical.⁴⁵ The publication date of *Quadragesimo Anno* was commemorated annually by lectures on Catholic social teaching throughout the country.⁴⁶ Its publication came at a time when the Catholic church in Ireland was perhaps at its

⁴⁰ Ibid., para 113.

⁴¹ Ibid., para 120.

⁴² Ibid., para 137.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., para 142.

⁴⁵ Extracts from 40 years after Pius XI and the social order (N.A., D/SW, I.A. 154/53(j)).

⁴⁶ For example the *Mayo News* reported on 31 May 1952 on one such lecture given by Rev. F. Jones, CSSR, in Taibhearc na Gaillimhe.

strongest and most influential, a fact witnessed by the estimated one million people who attended the pontifical high mass in the Phoenix Park celebrated by the Papal Legate, Cardinal Lorenzo Lauri, on the occasion of the 31st International Eucharistic Congress in June 1932.⁴⁷

Preparation for the 'intensive study of the social question' was given priority by the Irish clergy. A 'regular course of social study' had been 'inserted by the Irish bishops in the programme of religious knowledge for the secondary school' by 1932.⁴⁸ In July 1937 the Catholic Hierarchy established a Chair of Catholic Sociology and Catholic Action at Maynooth, endowed by the Knights of Columbanus, a Chair of Catholic Action having been established in University College, Dublin in 1930. At their October meeting the hierarchy appointed Peter McKevitt to the Maynooth post, a position he held until 1953.⁴⁹

McKevitt had completed his doctorate in Louvain and had also studied in Rome where he examined Catholic action in Italy.⁵⁰ He went on to publish numerous papers on Catholic approaches to 'the social question', and in 1944 the Catholic Truth Society published his book *The Plan of Society* which formed the basis of McKevitt's course in sociology at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth. It is clear that central to the course were the papal encyclicals:

The social teaching of the church is then the only foundation of a complete study of society. Although the encyclicals in which this specific teaching is to be found are not equivalent to solemn definitions of doctrine, they give us the official teaching of the church and we must receive them with obedient assent and reverence.⁵¹

⁴⁷ ICD 1933, p. 633.

⁴⁸ Edward Cahill, *The framework of a Christian state: an introduction to social science*, p. 262.

⁴⁹ ICD 1938, pp 605-6, 630.

⁵⁰ See P. J. Corish, *A bicentenary history of Maynooth* (Maynooth, 1995), pp 315-316.

⁵¹ Peter McKevitt, *The plan of society* (Dublin, 1944), p. ix.

Apart from McKeivitt's work there were several other organs expounding the virtues and approaches of the papal encyclicals, and dedicated to their study. An *Ríoghacht* (The League of the Kingship of Christ), specifically dedicated to the study and propagation of Catholic social principles, was established in 1926 in response to Leo XIII's encyclical. Founded on the feast of Christ the King, it has been described as 'an important mainspring in the intellectual drive behind Catholic action in Ireland'.⁵² Some years earlier the Central Catholic Library had been opened in Dublin, an important source of information on Catholic social reconstruction. Meanwhile the formation of groups like the Catholic Social Study Circle, established in 1937 by the O Connell Schools Union in Dublin,⁵³ became more common-place, especially in Dublin. In 1951 the Social Study Centre for Catholics was founded, being officially blessed by Archbishop John Charles McQuaid. Located at 14 Gardiner's Place in Dublin and with over 160 members, it fulfilled McQuaid's wish to have established in his diocese a school of social science for Catholics. The idea of the Social Study Centre was that each person would 'follow a planned course in Social Ethics and Moral Philosophy under the direction of chaplains. The aim of the centre is to equip students with a clear knowledge of the church's teaching on the moral problem of social justice.'⁵⁴

To facilitate the education of clergy in the church's social teaching, the *Christus Rex Society* was established at a meeting of newly-ordained priests in Maynooth in September 1941. Its specific purpose was 'to promote among Irish diocesan clergy the study of the

⁵² Maurice Hartigan, 'The Catholic Laity of Dublin 1920-1940', Ph.D. Thesis, N.U.I. (Maynooth), 1992, p. 92.

⁵³ *ICD 1938*, p. 636.

⁵⁴ *ICD 1952*, p. 644.

church's social teaching'.⁵⁵ This aim was pursued through the publication of *Christus Rex* and the convening of an annual Summer School of Social Study for the priests of Ireland.

As already mentioned, a considerable number of public lectures on Catholic approaches to social justice were also organised.⁵⁶ The C.Y.M.S., founded in 1849 and increasingly involved in Catholic action by the 1930s, organised an annual Catholic Social Week for the Archdiocese of Dublin from the 1930s. Outside of Dublin Muintir na Tíre, established in November 1931 by Canon John Hayes of Tipperary, and based on the social principles outlined by Leo XIII, organised formal 'fireside chats', then 'rural weekends' and 'rural weeks'. The first of these rural weeks was opened by Eamon de Valera in 1937. Inspired by the French *semaines rurales*⁵⁷ and based on the Belgian *Boerenbond*,⁵⁸ Muintir na Tíre was described by Canon Hayes as 'an honest attempt to bring Catholic sociology from the text books to the cross-roads'.⁵⁹

The practical application of Catholic social principles, the extent to which the church succeeded in imposing them on social welfare legislation in Ireland, and the extent to which successive governments took cognisance of it, is a central issue in the following chapters. The church's reaction to each piece of legislation is documented and analysed as one of the major contributors to the debate on social legislation.

The church's reaction to two events in particular provides an insight into both the strength and forcefulness of its convictions in regard to social legislation and the principles and fears which guided

⁵⁵ C. B. Daly, 'Christus Rex Society', *Christus Rex*, 1 (1941).

⁵⁶ For e.g., Peter McKeivitt, 'The Beveridge Plan reviewed', Gresham Hotel, Dublin, 14 Feb. 1943; Cornelius Lucey, 'Ireland and the Beveridge Plan', Mansion House, Dublin, 18 Mar. 1943.

⁵⁷ Muintir na Tíre, *Official handbook 1941*, p. 44.

⁵⁸ Thomas Morris, *Muintir na Tíre: a sketch of its history* (Tipperary, 1962), p. 3.

⁵⁹ *ICD 1943*, p. 606.

members of the hierarchy and other Catholic writers. It also underlines the fact that, while all were guided by a similar set of principles as laid down in *Quadragesimo Anno* in particular, individual Catholic opinions were often at odds. Indeed the direct relevance of the encyclicals was called into question in December 1941 by Bishop William MacNeely of Raphoe in the context of serious poverty and in particular the lack of housing:

We may discuss encyclicals as long as we like and the various remedies suggested, but until we get suitable housing for our people it will be impossible to make any decent progress whatever in solving our social problems.⁶⁰

However, such a statement, calling into question the practical value of the encyclicals, was very rare and the point of departure in Catholic interpretation of the papal encyclicals centred on the role of 'charity' and 'justice'. Exponents of Catholic action were all agreed that Catholic charity was eminently more desirable than state-centralised relief; however, it was also agreed that 'justice' was due to everybody within the state. Pius XI had said in *Quadragesimo Anno* that 'no vicarious charity can substitute for justice which is due as an obligation and is wrongfully denied'.⁶¹ Whether 'justice' included the provision of income maintenance by the state in the absence of employment or in the case of ill-health led to a complexity in the attitude of the Irish hierarchy. This complexity comes through in the debate over Sir William Beveridge's *Report on social insurance and allied services* of 1942 and the Irish government's *White paper on social security* published in 1949.

Two of the main writers giving form to the Catholic church's views were Peter McKeivitt and Cornelius Lucey. Lucey, a strong

⁶⁰ *ICD 1943*, p. 599.

⁶¹ *Quadragesimo Anno*, para. 137.

supporter of the establishment of the Christus Rex Society, held the chair of Philosophy and Political Theory in Maynooth from 1929-1950, after which he was appointed coadjutor bishop of Cork and subsequently bishop in 1951. McKevitt and Lucey, the most important individuals in terms of written work and interpretation on Catholic social action in Ireland, and both professors at Maynooth, were pragmatists. On the publication of the Beveridge Report they were far from dismissive, despite government attempts at the time to portray the Catholic response as essentially negative and therefore supportive of their own non-persual of a Beveridge-type social programme.

It was perhaps Lucey who best evaluated the huge appeal of the Beveridge report in Britain:

It was radical enough for the socialists; it was moderate enough for the conservatives; it was complimentary enough in references to the soviet security system for the communists; it promised the working man what he had dreamt of but hardly dared to hope for; and it estimated an initial cost not so astronomical as to antagonise the Chancellor of the Exchequer or unduly alarm the industrialists.⁶²

He saw the plan as presenting more of a challenge to the Irish government than to Irish Catholicism, the only challenge to the latter being that the report was a step towards rather than against totalitarianism:

However, one step, or even a few steps towards totalitarianism, though dangerous, were not disastrous.⁶³

In Lucey's own words, 'the plan did not bring them halfway on the road to Moscow'.⁶⁴

Equally, Peter McKevitt wrote that 'the good points of the scheme are obvious', welcoming 'the expression of the principle that the welfare

⁶² Cornelius Lucey, 'The Beveridge Report and Éire', *Studies* vol. xxxii (1943), p. 36.

⁶³ *Catholic Herald*, 12 Feb. 1943.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

and security of the worker are put in the first place'.⁶⁵ However, he was obviously more worried by the prospect of the omniscient state than Lucey, saying that 'totalitarianism may come gradually like the flow of the tide, and the series of surrenders mount up until our freedom and spiritual independence have vanished'.⁶⁶ It was a point further emphasised by another frequent and well-known contributor to the debate, Rev. E. J. Coyne, S.J., who saw the ever-growing dependence of people on the state as leaving the way open for the state to dictate to its citizens 'their way of life, of worship, of thought, of speech and of work'.⁶⁷ The other danger in such schemes according to Coyne was that people were 'liable to become morally flabby.... There is a danger that certain types of social services may sap and weaken the moral fibre of citizens'.⁶⁸

The Beveridge Report, however, was designed for post-war Britain. It was only when the Irish government set about introducing the first comprehensive scheme of social security into Ireland that the principles of the papal encyclicals were stuck to more rigidly and that dogmatic conservatism replaced the Christian pragmatism expressed earlier by Lucey and McKeivitt.

In an attempt to bring on board the Catholic Hierarchy the Minister for Social Welfare at the time, William Norton, under whose direction the white paper of 1949 was drawn up, sent an advance copy of the paper to all the bishops of Ireland. Apart from the reply of Archbishop John D'Alton of Armagh, the letters acknowledging receipt of the white paper were cool and non-committal.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Peter McKeivitt, 'The Beveridge Plan reviewed', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, Mar. 1943, pp 147, 149.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

⁶⁷ E. J. Coyne, 'Irish Social services: a symposium', *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, vol. 17 (1942-3), p. 108.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Letter from John D'Alton to William Norton, 28 Oct. 1949 (Labour History Museum, Norton Papers, Item 114).

Criticism of the scheme by Lucey and McKevitt was widely reported, McKevitt, echoing the pronouncements of the papal encyclicals, arguing that 'the state should not do for people what they can do for themselves by private organisations'.⁷⁰ Just how big the gap had become between the views of Lucey in 1942 and his views a decade later when speaking on the subsequent Social Welfare (Insurance) Bill of 1952 can be seen in a sermon delivered by him commemorating the diamond jubilee of *Rerum Novarum*:

This is the age of the State, the age of the eclipse of the individual person and the family by the government departments and civil servants.⁷¹

Perhaps the 1952 act was a step too far towards Moscow.

In his Lenten pastoral of 1952 Archbishop D'Alton expressed views similar to Lucey's. Having privately complimented Norton's white paper for its potential for providing 'great help to a big section of the workers',⁷² he now warned of 'the menace' of the welfare state and criticised those 'willing to barter their freedom for security'.⁷³

Nevertheless, despite the marked conservatism of the Irish hierarchy when the government began to increase the extent of welfare legislation, the opinions of the Catholic church, now perhaps more in tune, could still not be described as uniform. In contrast to the foregoing statements of McKevitt, Lucey and D'Alton, Bishop John Dignan of Clonfert, who had produced his own welfare scheme in the early 1940s, was critical but for a different reason. While welcoming the general thrust of the scheme as outlined in the 1949 white paper, Dignan criticised it for not going far enough:

⁷⁰ *Limerick Leader*, 1 Apr. 1950.

⁷¹ Quoted in *ICD 1952*, p. 714.

⁷² Letter from John D'Alton to William Norton, 28 Oct. 1949 (Labour History Museum, Norton Papers, Item 114).

⁷³ Quoted in *ICD 1953*, p. 634.

Only 700,000 'wage earners' benefit from the scheme; all other 'workers' are excluded, and they number roughly another 700,000. Excluded are small farmers, shopkeepers and business people.⁷⁴

This diversity of opinion among the Catholic hierarchy may be illustrated at its most extreme when we compare Dignan's critique of the white paper to that of Bishop Neil Farren's of Derry. Speaking in April 1951 in the context of such welfare proposals he said that 'the power and the spirit behind practically all social legislation at the present time is taken from the worst principles of both Nazi and Russian imperialism'.⁷⁵ Awareness of this diversity of opinion within the Catholic church is necessary as we examine the course of welfare legislation over the next number of chapters.

Emphasising the influence of the church was the interaction between the church, the government, and the various political parties. The stance adopted by political parties in relation to church teaching would have an obvious importance, and all national political parties were at pains to stress the orthodoxy of their philosophy. In 1926, for example, Sinn Féin claimed that its social policies were 'true to the Christian doctrine and democratic principles', accusing Cumann na nGaedheal of being 'true to neither'.⁷⁶ Likewise Fianna Fáil claimed in the late 1920s to 'speak for the big body of Catholic opinion...we represent the big element of Catholicity'.⁷⁷ J. H. Whyte, who has contributed more than any other historian to our understanding of church-state relations during this period, said of Fine Gael that it was 'the first Irish party to respond to the new wave of Catholic social

⁷⁴ Rev. Dr John Dignan, 'The government proposals for social security', *Christus Rex*, 25 Mar. 1950, p. 107.

⁷⁵ *II*, 18 Apr. 1951.

⁷⁶ Sinn Féin, *How the republic will deal with poverty* (election handbill, Nov. 1926).

⁷⁷ S. T. O Kelly, *DD* vol. 30, 5 June 1929, col. 821.

teaching inaugurated by *Quadragesimo Anno*. It was in need of an ideology and the encyclical provided one.⁷⁸ Likewise the social democratic parties, discussed later in the present chapter, were at pains to stress their Catholic orthodoxy. Brendan Corish, a future leader of his party, assured the church that 'there was no vestige of Communism in the Irish Labour Party'⁷⁹ while Clann na Poblachta listed among its ten founding objectives 'the application of Christian teaching, tolerance and reason to public affairs'.⁸⁰

Successive governments also used the teachings of the church to reinforce their position. One feels that this resort to Catholic teaching had little to do with a genuine orthodoxy but was rather an expedient to which recourse could be had in the absence of other substantial arguments in favour or otherwise of developing social legislation. This became particularly evident in the debate on Beveridgeism and children's allowances.

Before concluding these introductory remarks on the role of the Catholic church in the development of the Irish welfare state, one further aspect namely, the practical effect of Catholic charity, deserves attention. It could be argued that the charitable organisations of the Catholic church took the wind from the sails of state-centralised welfare policy and were therefore a factor explaining the pace of development of social welfare legislation in Ireland. It also goes some way towards explaining the reluctance to accept the role of the state in providing for the needs of its citizens; the acuteness of those needs were often dulled by Catholic philanthropy. Apart from the 'social reconstructive'⁸¹ work of nationally-organised groups such as St Vincent de Paul, which was

⁷⁸ J. H. Whyte, *Church and state in modern Ireland 1923-79*, p. 80.

⁷⁹ *ICD 1938*, p. 602.

⁸⁰ Clann na Poblachta, *A portrait of Ireland from contemporary sources* (n.d., c late 1950s).

⁸¹ Edward Cahill, *The framework of a Christian state*, p. 262.

introduced to Ireland in the 1840s having been founded in France in 1833,⁸² individual efforts by priests and bishops provided relief in areas in which the government would otherwise have had to become directly involved. For example, the Bishop of Cork, Dr Daniel Cohalan, established a relief fund for the unemployed in December 1932,⁸³ an appeal he renewed in the Spring of 1933, a short time before the Fianna Fáil government introduced unemployment assistance.

The Catholic Social Welfare Bureau seems to have been set up not only to provide assistance organised by the Catholic church but to ensure that the government would not step into the breach. Established in Dublin in 1942 by Archbishop John Charles McQuaid, it was 'intended that the Bureau will deal with many aspects of social welfare'⁸⁴ with an emphasis on assisting emigrants. This primacy of private charity over public welfare was perhaps best expressed by Edward Cahill, S.J., founder of An Ríoghacht, in his *magnum opus*, *The framework of a Christian state: an introduction to social science* published in 1932. It was Cahill's opinion that as:

the legitimate functions of the state in social life are essentially supplementary, they have place only where private effort fails, or is manifestly inadequate. Thus, it would be an act of unlawful usurpation for the state to attempt to supplant private charity, as is being attempted under the existing unChristian régime in France. The normal duties of the State in regard to the poor are:...

(b) to protect and encourage private effort on behalf of the poor
(c) to supplement the same as far as is found necessary especially by subsidising and assisting religious and charitable organisations.⁸⁵

⁸² For a brief history of the Society of St Vincent de Paul and other charitable organisations see for e.g. Eamonn Dunne, 'Action and reaction: Catholic lay organisations in Dublin in the 1920s and 1930s', *Archivium Hibernicum*, vol. xlviii (1994). See also *Manual of the Society of St Vincent de Paul* (Dublin, 1935) and Charles K. Murphy, *The spirit of the Society of St Vincent de Paul* (Dublin, 1944).

⁸³ *ICD 1934*, p. 590.

⁸⁴ *ICD 1943*, p. 629.

⁸⁵ Edward Cahill, *The framework of a Christian state*, p. 570.

Cahill conceded, however, that the direct intervention of the state was required where poverty and destitution had reached 'dimensions beyond the power of private charity',⁸⁶ as it had already done, according to Cahill, in Ireland.

The extent to which Catholic philanthropy was effective in practice outside of the larger cities and towns is questionable; one medical doctor spoke of the 'failure to recognise the magnitude of the problem'⁸⁷ of poverty on the part of the church. While individual members of the clergy played a part in alleviating local poverty, there was no defined role for the clergy in the relief of poverty. Indeed propounding the theory of providing Catholic charity as opposed to state welfare seemed at times to have been indulged in more passionately and energetically than the practice of doing so. The 'hair splitting as to terms and definitions'⁸⁸ was often more rigorously pursued, perhaps explaining Dr McNeely's frustration at the level of action as distinct from discussion, as quoted earlier.

The Catholic church's philosophy as distinct from practice undermined the efforts of those seeking to establish a centralised welfare state but equally facilitated successive governments' unwillingness to expand Irish social welfare legislation. Disagreeing with Cahill regarding extent, governments claimed that poverty, the worst excesses of which were addressed by Catholic philanthropy, was not a major problem in Ireland.

The role of social democratic politics

It is widely accepted among writers on the rise of the welfare state that the position of the social democratic parties is reflected in the

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Dr James Devane, 'Towards a just social order', *Ireland Today*, vol. ii (1937), no. 10, p. 33.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

strength or weakness of welfare legislation.⁸⁹ In Ireland, the welfare state was achieved in the absence of social politics as the role of social democratic parties during the period under discussion in the present work was marginal. Their influence, or ability to influence, the course of social welfare legislation was virtually non-existent up to the first inter-party government formed in 1948. This position of weakness was in large measure the result of the way in which Ireland finally gained her independence, and the outbreak of the subsequent civil war, an 'enduring legacy' of which was the division of political parties on national lines. As Donal Nevin points out in his article on 'Labour and the political revolution', 'so long as this issue dominated politics, the influence of the Labour Party was bound to be marginal'.⁹⁰ The way this situation came about, and the failure of the Labour Party to appreciate the possibility of such a situation occurring after independence is important to outline.

There was little doubt in the minds of Irish nationalists including social democratic nationalists before independence that independence would put an end to an inequitable social system. It was James Connolly, described by a contemporary as 'Ireland's first socialist martyr',⁹¹ who best expressed the pre-eminence of national politics at the expense of social politics in the period up to independence:

Usually the democrats of Ireland have been rebels against political tyranny; the necessity of keeping up the fight for the establishment of the political machinery through which democracy might express itself interfered with, and indeed destroyed, the possibility of developing as a theory or

⁸⁹ O Connell and Rottman, 'The Irish welfare state in comparative perspective', p. 207.

⁹⁰ Donal Nevin, 'Labour and the political revolution' in Francis MacManus (ed.), *The years of the great test, 1926-1939* (Dublin, 1967), p. 55.

⁹¹ Robert Lynd, 'Introduction' in James Connolly, *Labour in Ireland* (Dublin, 1917), p. vii.

philosophical system those democratic principles which inspired the rebels personally.⁹²

Writing on how socialist movements in continental Europe had brought together the intellectual classes and the working classes Connolly noted that: 'in Ireland the fight for national freedom had absorbed the intellect of the one and prevented the development of the necessary class-consciousness on the part of the other'.⁹³ Such a situation was not unique to Ireland, as an authority on Austrian history has observed:

Independence movements were not generally protests against the established social order, but against what were generally perceived by the elites of that order as continued unwarranted intervention by the metropolitan powers; which denied them the full potential benefits of the social order... The metropolitan power, rather than the social order it had established and protected in its early, vulnerable years, was perceived as the source of social evils. National independence rather than social reform was seen to rectify the evils.⁹⁴

The irony was that in Ireland little changed on gaining independence. The post-independence party division in Ireland was unconventional in the context of Europe where divisions were generally between social democratic parties on the one hand and conservative parties on the other. Nationalist politics dominated independent Ireland leading to party divisions along primarily national political rather than social lines. James Connolly's 'reconquest of Ireland' by the Irish Labour Movement never happened. As Sean McBride was to comment twenty-five years after independence:

Unfortunately, since we obtained control of our own affairs, in this part of the country, political and economic questions have

⁹² James Connolly, *Labour in Ireland* (Dublin, 1917), p. 259.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 329.

⁹⁴ Brigitte Unger, 'Possibilities and constraints for national economic policies in small countries: the case of Austria', *Germany: Politics and Society*, no. 21 Autumn 1990, p. 68. Quoted in Lars Mjøset *The Irish economy in comparative institutional perspective* (Dublin, 1992).

mostly been clouded by issues that aroused heat and passion, often leading to virtual civil war conditions.⁹⁵

The Irish Labour Party lacked, not a progressive social policy, but rather the opportunity to implement it. Despite Thomas Johnson's substantial involvement in the drafting of the Democratic Programme of 1919, the party which he led from 1922 and which formed the effective parliamentary opposition for the first years of independence due to the abstentionist policy of the republicans, was never more than a token presence up to 1948. Its only real chance of gaining a grip on government came in 1927 when Thomas Johnson put down a motion of no confidence in the Cumann na nGaedheal government. The government needed the casting vote of the ceann comhairle to scrape by on this occasion.⁹⁶ Likewise, the Labour Party's back bench support for Fianna Fáil after the general election of April 1932 cannot be said to have significantly influenced the course of social welfare policy, as Fianna Fáil, returning with a majority of Dáil seats in 1933 and no longer dependent on the support of Labour deputies, was no more or less socially innovative than it had been when depending on Labour support. The divisions in the Labour party in 1943, resulting in the establishment of a break-away National Labour Party, only further weakened its position in national politics at a time when social democratic parties throughout Europe were to the fore in implementing social reform. The role of the Labour Party in Ireland was 'sectional or marginal, in no sense crucial or central'.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ 'Our economic problems', lecture given by Séan MacBride, S.C., T.D., 13 Oct. 1949 (Labour History Museum, Norton Papers, Item 90).

⁹⁶ For a biography of Johnson and his role in the Labour Party see J. Anthony Gaughan, *Thomas Johnson, 1872-1963* (Dublin, 1980).

⁹⁷ Patrick Lynch, 'The social revolution that never was' in T. Desmond Williams (ed.), *The Irish struggle 1916-1929* (London, 1968), p. 56.

This position of weakness did not deter the party however from speaking out on the necessity of developing Ireland's social legislation. In the first years of independence it published a booklet, *The Nation Organised*, which stressed the importance of not allowing Ireland's 'ameliorative social schemes to fall behind those of neighbouring countries', disagreeing 'emphatically with the policy avowed by the present ministry regarding social services'.⁹⁸ It was one of many such publications issued by the Labour Party.⁹⁹ However, in the absence of political clout, they had no practical effect, apart from contributing to the debate on social legislation instigated by others.

This weakness of Labour left the field open to both Cumann na nGaedheal/Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil to claim that they were the true Labour Parties, despite lacking any socialist agendas. Realising its opportunity, Fine Gael published a pamphlet in 1934 entitled *The Labour policy of Fine Gael*, underlining the vacuum left by the Labour Party. It was Fianna Fáil however who most vehemently campaigned for the Labour vote, unashamedly calling itself 'the true labour party',¹⁰⁰ a point it was intent on hammering home up to the 1950s.

The only serious prospect of filling the breach left by a weak and divided Labour Party came with the formation of Clann na Poblachta. It was a party in the James Connolly tradition in the extent to which it saw socialism and republicanism as complementary. It combined republican nationalism with radical socialism. Founded in the summer of 1946 it described itself as:

the first real attempt which has been made since the civil war to raise national affairs out of the rut of party politics and

⁹⁸ Labour Party, *The nation organised: Labour's constructive policy and programme* (Dublin, n.d. [c1920s]), p. 23.

⁹⁹ See for example Labour's *Programme of a better Ireland* (Dublin, 1943) and *Labour's Constructive programme* (Dublin, 1952).

¹⁰⁰ Fianna Fáil, *Gléas*, no. 3, June 1952.

recriminations. Public life has been largely the monopoly of persons whose only qualifications were derived from their association with events that occurred twenty or thirty years ago.¹⁰¹

Its social programme, outlined in the party's objectives, included increased allowances for recipients of old age pensions and widows' and orphans' pensions based on the cost of living.¹⁰² In its first election of 1948 it promised to introduce 'a comprehensive scheme of social security'¹⁰³ to give effect to its social objectives. Combining with Labour, National Labour, Clann na Talmhan and Fine Gael it became part of the first inter-party government in February 1948.

The 1948 inter-party government was the first administration with a strong social democratic influence, and while Clann na Poblachta in particular failed to live up to its radical pronouncements, the government achieved more in the construction of the Irish welfare state than any single government up to that time. William Norton, the Labour Minister for Social Welfare, produced the first comprehensive white paper on social security in Ireland. It was a reflection of what could have been achieved at a much earlier date in the construction of the welfare state had social democratic parties achieved power before this time. This fact is particularly evident when we compare the role of social democratic parties in other European countries and the resultant pace, timing and extent of development of the welfare state. Belgium might be taken as a case in point where social democratic politics 'succeeded in making a significant impact on policy',¹⁰⁴ while the comparative chapter of the present work indicates the importance of

¹⁰¹ Clann na Poblachta, *The Clann* (Dec. 1947).

¹⁰² Clann na Poblachta, *A portrait of Ireland from contemporary sources* (n.d. [c1960]).

¹⁰³ *II*, 24 Jan. 1948.

¹⁰⁴ Patrick T. Pasture, 'The April 1944 "social pact" in Belgium and its significance for the post-war welfare state', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 28 (1993), no. 4, p. 695.

such parties as determinants in the development of the welfare state in Finland, Norway and Denmark.

These are themes which are developed throughout the coming chapters. What is necessary is to bear in mind that one of the main ingredients in the development of welfare states, namely, 'the role of class and ideology operating through the party system',¹⁰⁵ was absent in Ireland. Perhaps the comment of Frank Sherwin, an independent T.D. for Dublin from 1957-1965, best sums up this post-independence political make-up: 'we had a political revolution but we never had a social revolution. That is the weakness of our system.'¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Maria Maguire, 'Ireland' in Peter Flora (ed.), *Growth to limits*, vol.2, p. 332.

¹⁰⁶ DD vol. 165, 5 Mar. 1958, col. 1136.

CHAPTER THREE
A DECADE OF STALEMATE: THE CUMANN NA
nGAEDHEAL YEARS, 1922 TO 1932

Apart from the maintenance of political stability and the avoidance of anarchy, the first ten years of the Irish Free State was remarkable only for what it did not achieve. By 1922 independence had become an end in itself, and there was little in the way of economic, social or cultural innovation. The reasons for gaining independence were largely ignored or deliberately forgotten. The cultural revolution so fervently campaigned for by the Gaelic League was abandoned in 1922, its central tenet, the revival of the Irish language, receiving little more than a tepid tokenism from the new authorities. Continuity became the key word; conservatism the *modus operandi*.

Continuity and conservatism also marked this first period of Saorstát Éireann in the context of the development of social policy. In fact the reality is that, if social policy in the context of income maintenance benefits is used as a yardstick, independence was a backward step for many sections of society. Had Ireland remained part of the United Kingdom, its citizens would have enjoyed a greater level of welfare benefits in 1932, such as widows' and orphans' pensions, than it did under a native government. This resulted from a combination of the tattered economy inherited by the Saorstát and the overwhelming desire of the Cumann na nGaedheal leaders to establish the economic security of the new state; to prove that an independent Ireland could and would exist as a financially viable entity, whatever about existing as a culturally and socially viable entity.

There was little doubt about, and no excuses made for, the short term hardship that political freedom would bring to the people.

Independence was 'not to be had for nothing'.¹ However the high price was unexpected, independence having been portrayed as the panacea which would solve all of Ireland's problems, and which would bring to the Irish people economic stability and equality.

There was no shortage of positive and promising political rhetoric however. Members of the Cumann na nGaedheal governing party such as Richard Mulcahy, a member of the First Dáil and former Commander-in-Chief of the pro-Treaty forces following the death of Michael Collins in 1922, assured the people that the objectives of the first Dáil were still central to the work of the government. In the summer of 1925 he told the Dáil that 'The same spirit that filled our people who entered the Dáil in 1919... is there today. We are only now beginning to get our machinery in order to do the work.'²

Still remaining outside the official political process, abstaining from taking its seats in the Dáil, Sinn Féin was publishing pamphlets containing similar rhetoric. From its extra-parliamentary position it promised, upon entering government, the creation of a 'proper department for Public Health'³ and the establishment of a Commission of Inquiry into the organisation of national insurance. Echoing the proceedings of the first Dáil, its pamphlet of Spring 1924, entitled *The economic programme of Sinn Féin*, promised 'the immediate consideration of effective solutions of the problems connected with public health, factory conditions, child welfare, care of the aged and infirm, education and temperance'.⁴

Despite all the solemn talk however, the existing British welfare policies were at best merely sustained, developments in Britain after 1922 taking a long period of time to find replicas on the Irish statute books.

¹ *IT*, 3 Nov. 1923.

² DD vol. 12, 30 June 1925, col. 1815-1817.

³ Sinn Féin, *Economic Development* (n.d.), p. 7.

⁴ Sinn Féin, *The economic programme of Sinn Féin* (Dublin, 1924), p. 4.

The reasons for this were numerous and complex. The prevailing political climate stressed financial orthodoxy rather than social reform. The pre-eminence of establishing the newly independent country on a financially secure footing in the eyes of the watching world has already been mentioned. W. T. Cosgrave, the political leader by default rather than by design, who served as President of the Executive Council from December 1922 until the final collapse of the Cumann na nGaedheal government following the election of mid-February 1932, speaking of the heavy financial burden imposed by 'the devastation done by Mr de Valera's followers',⁵ blamed the anti-treaty people.

However, if little was achieved by way of alleviating the problems of 'little work, much unemployment and a great mass of destitution',⁶ a lot was written about solving them. The decade 1922-32 was characterised by a series of commissions of inquiry into the condition of the poorer classes. Three major commissions were established, producing three significant reports: the *Report of the Old Age Pensions Committee of Inquiry*, published in 1926, the *Report of the Commission on the Relief of the Sick and Destitute Poor, including the Insane Poor*, published in 1927 and the *Report of the National Health Insurance Commission*, published in 1928. If of little value for what they achieved in practice, the three inquiries underlined in particular the need for radical reform of the poor law, the area of social legislation most criticised by nationalists in pre- and post-independence Ireland. Being the largest single piece of 'social' legislation, it is appropriate that the present chapter should begin with an analysis of how nationalist vilification of the poor laws was reflected in the government's approach to their reform.

⁵ W. T. Cosgrave, *To the people of Ireland* (election pamphlet, 1924), p. 3.

⁶ Rev. Pat Boylan, *Catholicism and citizenship in self-governed Ireland* (Dublin, 1922), p. 17.

Nationalist ideology. and changes to the poor law

As we have seen in chapter one, the poor law was the main channel for the provision of social services in Ireland between 1838 and 1872. It was this poor law system of the nineteenth century, continuously refined as the century progressed, which the government of independent Ireland inherited in 1922 as the chief foundation of the country's social system. With the coming of independence there was an expectation that reform of the poor laws would be a social priority of a native government, the promise of better social conditions and of a better social system being inherent in such declarations as the 1916 Proclamation and the Democratic Programme of the First Dáil.

Revolutionary in many ways, the Proclamation of 1916 spoke about guaranteeing 'religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens'. These general aspirations were defined in specific terms by the Democratic Programme of 1919 which singled out those sections of society, with the important exception of the able-bodied poor, which most required social and economic security, overtly promising them the same:

In return for willing service, we, in the name of the Republic, declare the right of every citizen to an adequate share of the produce of the nation's labour.

It shall be the first duty of the government of the Republic to make provision for the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of the children, to secure that no child shall suffer hunger or cold from lack of food, clothing, or shelter, but that all shall be provided with the means and facilities requisite for their proper education and training as citizens of a free and Gaelic Ireland.

The Irish Republic realises the necessity of abolishing the present odious, degrading and foreign Poor Law system, substituting therefor a sympathetic native scheme for the care of the nation's aged and infirm, who shall not be regarded as a

burden, but rather entitled to the Nation's gratitude and consideration.⁷

Using the immediate and valid excuse of the British presence as the reason why the 'social programme' could not be implemented by the provisional government,⁸ it was soon to become apparent that 'the occupation of the foreigner'⁹ was not the only circumstance blocking the proposals, which took on an increasingly hollow ring after 1922. It quickly became apparent just how ingrained the poor law mentality had become in the Irish psyche, despite the anti-poor law nationalist rhetoric. As Virginia Crossman points out, 'the poor law system continued to influence the character and administration of social services in Ireland'.¹⁰

However there were some external signals that the much criticised poor law was indeed going to be dismantled or at least 'vastly improved'.¹¹ Workhouses, 'the sole refuge of the vagrants, and of the physical wreckage of the population',¹² and Boards of Guardians, through a 1923 order of the minister, now relics of a harsh and intolerant imperialism, were abolished, with the Minister for Local Government taking over the functions of the Local Government Board from April 1922, thereby assuming responsibility for the poor law administration.

It would appear, however, that these reforms were not so much the result of independence as a change in political and philosophical attitudes to the problem of poverty as epitomised by the growth of 'new liberalism', the British government having already examined the desirability of closing the workhouses and of abolishing the virtually redundant Boards of Guardians in Ireland. As outlined in chapter one of the present work,

⁷ *Miontuairisc an chéad Dála 1919-1921: Democratic Programme*, 21 Jan. 1919, p. 23.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Virginia Crossman, *Local government in nineteenth century Ireland* (Antrim, 1994), p. 43.

¹¹ Rev. Pat Boylan, *Catholicism and citizenship in self-governed Ireland*, p. 18.

¹² Department of Local Government and Public Health, *First report*, p. 52.

both the Vice-Regal Commission of 1906 and the 1909 Royal Commission on the Poor Law recommended the abolition of workhouses and of Boards of Guardians.¹³ As Desmond Roche explains, 'the trend was away from the idea of a deterrent poor law with its workhouse test. But before anything was done World War I broke out'.¹⁴

The Local Government (Temporary Provisions) Act, 1923, described as 'an act to remedy the more serious defects in the existing law relating to the relief of the poor and certain other matters of local government',¹⁵ reinforced and consolidated the various changes since 1922 giving legislative ratification to the abolition of the workhouses, the availability of indoor and outdoor relief to all classes of poor, the centralization of poor law administration under one authority in each county and the establishment in each county of central institutions to replace the workhouses. This latter provision was given effect through the County Scheme Order of 1923 which established a County Board of Health in most counties, consisting of a chairperson and nine members, all elected by and from among the members of the County Council and responsible for the administration of the relief of the poor in its own area. As under the poor law, the expenses of the County Board were to be met by means of the poor rate. It was claimed that the main purpose of the new structures was:

to provide separate accommodation for the classes requiring special attention and to avoid as far as possible the chief defect of the workhouse - the housing of all classes together in one building. The two principal institutions under each scheme were the County Home and the County Hospital.¹⁶

¹³ *Report of the Vice-Regal Commission on Poor Law Reform in Ireland* vol. 1 (1906 Cmd. 3202, li), p. 77 and Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, *Report on Ireland* (1909, Cmd. 4630, xxxviii), p. 81.

¹⁴ Desmond Roche, *Local government in Ireland* (Dublin, 1982), p. 48.

¹⁵ Local Government (Temporary Provisions) Act, 1923.

¹⁶ Department of Local Government and Public Health, *First report*, p. 56.

As a main purpose it was a poor reflection on the Department of Local Government and Public Health that the main defect of the workhouse system should be seen as the fact that all classes of poor were housed together. Neither was the plan for separation an original one, it being an idea which had its origin in the poor law commissions of the early twentieth century:

We concur with the Vice-Regal Commission in recommending that there should be classification by institutions; that in each county the required number of the existing workhouses should be converted into specialised institutions for different classes of inmates.¹⁷

Chief among the criticisms of the new structures was the use, in many cases, of the former workhouse as the county home, the latter being referred to up to recent generations as 'the union beyond', i.e., the workhouse, or the poorhouse.

The spirit of the Democratic Programme of 1919 was hardly kept either in the context of the admission requirements to both institutions, which was limited to 'any person who is unable by his own industry or other lawful means to provide for himself or his dependants the necessaries of life or necessary medical or surgical treatment'.¹⁸

The Free State government also moved to abolish the remaining hindrances to outdoor relief, now known as home assistance, through section 10 of the 1923 act.¹⁹ The payment of home assistance, which could be in cash or in kind, and which was described as 'the source from which relief is afforded to persons who are not qualified to receive the assistance or benefits provided by other branches of the social services or to persons for whom such assistance or benefits were provided, are

¹⁷ Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, *Report on Ireland* (1909), p. 81.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹⁹ For a detailed analysis of home assistance see Séamus Ó Cinnéide in 'The development of the home assistance service', *Administration*, vol. 17 (1969), no. 3 and *A law for the poor: a study of home assistance in Ireland* (Dublin, 1970).

found to be inadequate',²⁰ was the responsibility of the local authorities. However local authorities shirked this responsibility when it was found that families were in receipt of relief from the society of St Vincent de Paul and other charitable associations. When this matter was raised in the Dáil Mulcahy simply said that 'I am aware the extent of home assistance allowed depends on considerations given to all the circumstances of applicants'.²¹

Initially covering the period up to March 1924, the provisions of the Local Government (Temporary Provisions) Act of 1923 were extended in 1924 and 1925 indefinitely, a tribute to the marked lack of success of the new government in tackling the root causes of destitution. In this context the self-congratulatory tone of the first report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health, which spoke of 'the radical changes'²² in the system of poor relief, was hardly justified. Its so-called remodelling of the system 'in accordance with Irish ideas'²³ was little more than name changing, or was perhaps a reflection on the paucity of Irish ideas when it came to relieving the poor.

The new structures were investigated by the Commission on the Relief of the Sick and Destitute Poor, including the Insane Poor which reported in 1927. Its object was to 'inquire into the laws and administration' relating to the poor with 'the object of devising permanent legislation for the effective and economical relief of the sick and destitute poor'.²⁴ The report, which recommended the ending of poor law relief and its replacement with income maintenance schemes where possible, was particularly scathing in its judgement on the operation of

²⁰ Sean MacEntee, DD vol. 91, 20 Oct. 1943, col. 678.

²¹ DD vol. 29, 2 May 1929, col. 1291.

²² Department of Local Government and Public Health, *Report, 1922-25*, p. 44.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

²⁴ *Report of the Commission on the Relief of the Sick and Destitute Poor, including the Insane Poor* (Dublin, 1927), p. 1.

the 1923 local government act, showing how the new county institutions differed only in name from workhouses:

In the County Homes we found the following classes: aged and infirm of both sexes, lunatics, idiots and imbeciles of both sexes; unmarried mothers and their children, in some cases married mothers and their children, and orphan and deserted children. In a number of homes there were cases of advanced tubercular disease and also cases of cancer...

We desire to state emphatically that in our opinion the County Homes are not fit and proper places for the reception of the various classes which we have found in them... We believe that it was originally intended that the homes should be reserved only for the reception of the aged and infirm poor and chronic invalids, and that separate provision should be made for the other classes. This has not been done.²⁵

However, this was a period of inquiry rather than action and the thrust of the commission's recommendations was ignored. This lack of practical innovation was to become symptomatic of the Cumann na nGaedheal period in office. Happy to talk about change, it dared not institute any. This was particularly evident in its approach to the Free State's single most pressing social problem of the time, the high level of unemployment.

Relief of Unemployment

By August 1922, 34,436 people were claiming unemployment benefit of which almost 30,000 were in receipt of benefit.²⁶ With only 250,000 people being employed outside the areas of agriculture and domestic services,²⁷ unemployment, described by the Labour Party as 'a

²⁵ Ibid., p. 17.

²⁶ DD vol. 1, 16 Nov. 1922, col. 135. It should be noted that these figures do not reflect total numbers of unemployed, a figure which is far more difficult to calculate for this period. These difficulties are highlighted by Cormac Ó Grada, *Ireland: a new economic history, 1780-1939* (Oxford, 1994), chapter 17. This problem was recognised in 1925 by Patrick McGilligan, Minister for Industry and Commerce, who informed the Dáil that publication of weekly unemployment figures would cease until 'some better system of unemployment statistics have been set up' (DD vol. 10, 5 Mar. 1925, col. 580).

²⁷ DD vol. 1, 16 Nov. 1922, col. 135.

national emergency as serious as the outbreak of a war or a plague',²⁸ was clearly a large social problem and a significant drain on the limited financial resources of the unemployment insurance scheme.

The Irish government's initial reaction to the problem was to initiate a series of public works for which £275,000 was allocated, the money being given to county councils for approved schemes. This was combined with the establishment of an emergency relief fund of £100,000.²⁹

Apart from this immediate reaction, the legislation in existence under British rule was to continue. The Irish Ministry of Labour, *Aireacht Oibreachas*, (later the Department of Industry and Commerce) located in Lord Edward Street, Dublin, took over the running of the 1911 and updated 1920, 1921 and 1922 unemployment insurance acts 'for the time being'.³⁰ From 1 April 1922 claims for unemployment benefit previously referred to the chief insurance officer at Kew were to be referred to local offices and the Dublin ministry. The only change was that the words 'Rialtas Sealadach na hÉireann' would now appear on all forms, alongside the existing words.³¹

However the issue of unemployment and the question of its relief by providing relief work or unemployment benefit was a constant topic of discussion at official parliamentary level, albeit to little practical avail. Thomas Johnson was to the fore in many of the debates, raising the issue in the Dáil as early as September 1922. Looking beyond independence as an end in itself, Johnson spoke of unemployment as a 'grievous social and

²⁸ Irish Labour Party, *Unemployment 1922-24: the record of the government's failure* (Dublin, 1924), p. 13.

²⁹ Department of Local Government and Public Health, *First report*, p. 141.

³⁰ Aireacht Oibreachas, *Unemployment Insurance Acts, 1920-1922, Explanatory Memorandum*, (May 1922).

³¹ Rialtas Sealadach na hÉireann: Ministry of Labour, 7 April 1922 (N.A., D/SW, Government of Ireland Act: Transfer to Northern Ireland, E.B. 55867).

economic loss to the commonwealth' and 'a danger to the state'.³² Defining the notion of nation as involving not only a cultural integrity but also being inextricably linked with the well-being of the individual, he urged the Cumann na nGaedheal government to 'make a deliberate and direct attempt to save the mass of the people from the contamination that results from unemployment, from the deterioration, the demoralisation that unemployment entails'.³³ It was in essence an appeal, in the absence of employment being available, for an increase in the levels of unemployment benefit.

Table 3.1

Weekly rates of contributions of unemployment insurance

	employers	workers	total value	state
Men	10	9	1/7	6.75
Women	8	7	1/3	5.25
Boys 16-18 yrs of age	5	4.5	9.5	3.8
Girls 16-18 yrs of age	4.5	4	8.5	3.6

Table 3.2

Weekly rates of Unemployment Insurance Benefit*

Category	Rate of Benefit
Men	15/-
Women	12/-
Boys 16-18 yrs	7/6
Girls 16-18 yrs	6/-

* Persons in receipt of unemployment benefit were also entitled to receive dependants' benefit in respect of their wives, dependent husbands and dependent children.

Source: Table 3.1 and 3.2 are compiled from Aireacht Oibreachas, *Unemployment Insurance Acts 1920 to 1922 Explanatory Memorandum* (May 1922)

³² DD vol. 1, 20 Oct. 1922, col. 1860.

³³ Ibid., col. 1862.

On this occasion the motion was predictably defeated, it being an oddity for an opposition motion to be passed on the floor of the Dáil. However the government did react to the severe unemployment of the early 1920s by a plethora of unemployment insurance acts which had the effect of extending the period for which benefit was paid and to marginally increase the levels of benefit. The Unemployment Insurance Act of 1924 also made provision for the men demobilised from the army who had been previously employed in insurable occupations. In addition the act revived stamps (which indicated the number of contributions to the insurance fund) which had been void since December 1920. A measure largely welcomed, it was nevertheless a last minute, stop-gap measure, the result of several deputations and protest marches in Dublin.

By the time the act was implemented a number of other measures to relieve unemployment had come into operation. The majority of these concerned the creation of relief employment: the development of the roads scheme, the reconstruction of Dublin, the facilitation of individuals wishing to carry out work under the Housing Act, the renewal of various drainage schemes, and the continuance of the division of estates by the land commission. In the early summer of 1924 a bill for the extension of unemployment benefit was promised, as was legislation on economic matters such as railways, the reorganisation of various branches of agriculture, patents, trade marks and designs, all of which would facilitate the development of employment opportunities in both agriculture and industry.³⁴ Security of the country and of the individual was seen as a *sine qua non* for economic growth however.³⁵ At least it was always used

³⁴ Patrick McGilligan, DD vol. 7, 6 May 1924, col. 190.

³⁵ Patrick Hogan, DD vol. 7, 12 June 1924, col. 2255.

as an excuse for its absence, the blame being taken from the shoulders of the government and firmly placed on those of the anti-treatites.

In the summer of 1925 it was claimed that most of the factories in Dublin were on half-time,³⁶ while the number of unemployed were being viewed increasingly as a possible source of insecurity in the state, a view exemplified by Richard Corish of the Labour Party: 'The unemployed are a serious menace to the state. They are susceptible to the influence of people who would exploit the unemployed in the interests of their own particular policy.'³⁷

Despite the statutory extension in 1924 of the maximum number of benefit weeks from fifteen to twenty-six within any one year,³⁸ Thomas Johnson moved a motion in the Dáil in June 1927 calling for legislation 'to extend the period over which unemployment insurance benefit may be paid to men and women who are willing to work but unable to find work'.³⁹ The motion immediately preceded the election of June 1927 which saw Fianna Fáil contention for the first time. The election, which returned Cumann na nGaedheal as a minority government, had occasioned a debate on unemployment. Despite this, Johnson's motion was defeated by 30 votes for to 54 against. However, with the presence of a real and substantial opposition in the Dáil from August 1927 in the form of the newly constituted Fianna Fáil party, debates on social issues became more fervent, more frequent and more important.

While unsuccessful again in the election of September 1927, which took place a few months after the assassination of Kevin O Higgins, the Minister for Justice, and which saw a greater polarization of political ideas, Fianna Fáil deputies began to constantly raise the issue of

³⁶ Alfred Byrne, DD vol. 12, 30 June 1925, col. 1842.

³⁷ DD vol. 12, 30 June 1925, col. 1829.

³⁸ Unemployment Insurance (Amendment) Act, 1924, (No. 26 of 1924).

³⁹ DD vol. 20, 29 June 1927, col. 88.

unemployment. If nothing else, it was a profitable subject which would yield votes in future general elections. The plight of women workers was raised by Eamon Cooney, a grocer's assistant representing Fianna Fáil in the Dublin North constituency.⁴⁰ It was more usual, however, to sketch graphically the hard lives endured by the family whose father was unemployed:

Picture the plight of an unemployed man, with a wife and family, whose benefits are exhausted or who was never entitled to draw unemployment benefits... Is it any wonder that I charge the minister and the government party with callous indifference to the plight of the unemployed.⁴¹

Another aspect of unemployment and unemployment benefit was the demoralisation caused by spending long periods of time doing no income related work. From the official government point of view, it was often thought a bad idea to provide unemployment benefit without requiring some work or service in return. It was a belief common in non-governmental circles too; even Thomas Johnson spoke of the desirability of attaching a duty to the receipt of unemployment benefit.⁴² The old poor law distinction between the idle/lazy poor and the genuine, job seeking poor came yet again to the fore, albeit in a refined language. Also coming to the fore in the context of working for benefit was the division, or lack of it, between providing each citizen with the necessities for leading an economically and socially secure life as an obligation of the state, and the provision of charity, an idea upon which the poor law of the nineteenth century had been founded. Patrick McGilligan, the Derry-born Minister for Industry and Commerce from March 1924 to March 1932, was to the fore in blurring the distinction between entitlement and charitable provision, a retrograde step by any standards, especially in the

⁴⁰ DD vol. 23, 9 May 1928, col. 1065.

⁴¹ Archie Cassidy, DD vol. 24, 5 July 1928, col. 2203.

⁴² DD vol. 1, 20 Oct. 1922, col. 1864.

context of the expressed wish to progress from the undesirable poor law system. With reference to the provisions of the various unemployment insurance acts of the 1920s, McGilligan was of the opinion that 'any further provision of that nature must be looked upon as dole, because contributions having been exhausted and having been multiplied five times over, any further multiplication, in the state in which the unemployment fund is, and having reference to those previous multiplications, would be nothing more or less than complete charity'.⁴³

Part of the impetus behind the 'work for benefit' idea came from a grass roots level. Illustrative of this is the resolution submitted by the Offaly Joint Committee of Farmers and Civic Reformers' Association to the government in 1926, which requested the government to devise schemes whereby those in receipt of 'the dole', the term popularly applied to unemployment benefit, firstly in Britain, in the post World War I period, could be employed at 'useful work' such as drainage or reclamation schemes: 'We consider the present system demoralising and only tends to lower the character and morals of the unemployed'.⁴⁴ A similar resolution was adopted in 1925 at a meeting of the unemployed in Wexford town, which again emphasised the desirability of employment over 'dole payments', but also the necessity of sufficient unemployment benefit where securing a job became impossible.⁴⁵

Exacerbating the lack of provisions for the unemployed was the less than ideal system of administration, a cause for concern and complaint during the period. In particular it was reported as not uncommon for employment officers, those charged with administering the legislation on the ground, to suggest to claimants of insurance benefit that, if they had

⁴³ DD vol. 12, 30 June 1925, col. 1770.

⁴⁴ Provision of employment of any kind in lieu of issue of unemployment benefit: resolution (N.A., D/Fin., Offaly Joint Committee of Farmers and Civic Reform Association, F 88/45/26).

⁴⁵ Resolution adopted at meetings of unemployed at Wexford, (N.A., D/Fin. F 88/53/25).

difficulty securing work in Ireland, then there was work to be had in Britain, or Belfast or other areas in Northern Ireland.⁴⁶

In 1930 Sean Lemass, then Fianna Fáil T.D. for South Dublin City, claimed to have received numerous complaints regarding the way claimants were treated by employment officers: 'I was told that workers who became unemployed and desired to claim benefit were not treated as insured persons receiving benefits for which they had paid premiums but as paupers seeking charity'.⁴⁷ A further cause for concern was the administrative delay of up to six weeks between the initial request for benefit and the first payment being made.⁴⁸

We can conclude therefore that, from every point of view provision for the unemployed was far from satisfactory under the Cumann na nGaedheal government. Benefits were low and applied only to the insured classes while those not covered by insurance relied on poor law relief in the form of home assistance.

National Health Insurance

Apart from unemployment insurance, a provision increasingly inadequate as time went on, the only other social insurance scheme in operation in the Free State was sickness insurance. Described by Dr Francis Ward, a Fianna Fáil T.D. appointed parliamentary secretary to the Minister for Local Government and Public Health in 1932, as the 'most unsatisfactory public service of all',⁴⁹ sickness, or as it was more commonly referred to, health insurance, proved an administrative and financial morass during the period under discussion here. Established

⁴⁶ Thomas Johnson, DD vol. 4, 17 July 1923, col. 962.

⁴⁷ DD vol. 34, 30 Apr. 1930, col. 1157.

⁴⁸ Hugh Colohan, DD vol. 34, 30 Apr. 1930, col. 1166; William Broderick, DD vol. 34, 30 Apr. 1930, col. 1168.

⁴⁹ DD vol. 23, 24 May 1928, col. 2024.

under British rule in 1911 when benefit payments for a single man were the same as those for a married man with several children, it was modified in particular by the National Health Insurance Acts of 1913 as discussed in chapter one. Separated from the British scheme on 1 April 1922, administration of the act in Ireland was cumbersome, with total expenses in 1926 amounting to £145,000, while the total amount of benefit paid out was £197,000.⁵⁰ This represented an administrative cost of over 3/8 for each insured person in the Saorstát, against 1/4 in England.⁵¹ There was also considerable administrative delay, up to two months in some cases, in the payment of benefit from the time the initial claim for benefit was submitted. This was in the context of the average duration of illness in acute cases being about three weeks.⁵² When payment was finally made, it was sometimes given in a grudging way.

Another persistent problem arose by virtue of the fact of having such a large number of approved societies. Societies which catered for workers in sheltered employment were in a position to pay, with the approval of the commission, increased benefits and to provide treatment benefits which had the effect of preventing or shortening illness. Over one hundred branches of approved societies were providing additional benefits ranging from optical and dental treatment to convalescent or hospital treatment.⁵³ On the other hand, societies which catered for members exposed to such hazards as all weathers and broken employment were near insolvency, frequently finding difficulty in paying the minimum statutory benefits,⁵⁴ in which case they could impose an additional levy on members:

⁵⁰ DD vol. 23, 24 May 1928, col. 2035.

⁵¹ *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Health Insurance and Medical Services* (Dublin, 1925), p. 7.

⁵² Francis Ward, DD vol. 38, 1 May 1931, col. 680.

⁵³ *National Health Insurance Commission Report*, (1921/28), pp 18-19.

⁵⁴ Department of Social Welfare, *First report*, p. 28.

The inequality in the benefit rate may not and as a rule does not arise from bad management or mismanagement on the part of a particular society, but arises most frequently from the fact that society 'B' has a selected membership, such for instance as bank employees, post office employees, railway employees or such like, while society 'A' has to recruit its membership amongst the industrial classes where conditions of employment are most unhealthy... The scheme...that permits inequality of this kind cannot seriously be termed a national system of insurance.⁵⁵

Faced with these problems in one of the most significant schemes of social legislation then in existence, and mindful of the fact that the 1911 act was based on the needs of an industrial country and therefore not altogether suited to Ireland, the cabinet, following much prompting over a number of years,⁵⁶ approved the establishment of a committee of inquiry at its meeting on 1 April 1924.⁵⁷ Or at least the committee of inquiry was officially credited with dealing with these issues. In fact the initial foundation of the committee rested upon the government's desire to cut public expenditure, by up to £4,000,000 in 1923,⁵⁸ Ernest Blythe being particularly involved in its early constitution. In a letter to Sir Joseph Glynn of the National Health Insurance Commission in October 1923, the Department of Finance stated that :

The present system of Health Insurance involves a heavy burden on the state, and it is a question for serious consideration whether the benefit to the community is in present circumstances commensurate with the burden imposed.⁵⁹

The correspondence was a prologue to the establishment of the committee of inquiry, its terms of reference including a directive to report into the possibilities of effecting greater efficiency and economy. The

⁵⁵ L. J. Duffy, 'National Health Insurance from the members standpoint', *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, vol. 14 (1919-30), p. 56.

⁵⁶ See for example Sinn Féin, *Economic Programme* (n.d.), p. 18.

⁵⁷ Meeting of Executive Council, 1 Apr. 1924, (N.A., Government Minutes, G2/3).

⁵⁸ Letter to Sir Joseph Glynn, National Health Insurance Commission, 19 Oct. 1923 (N.A., D/Fin, National Health Insurance: suggested inquiry, 1934, F 46/1/24).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

committee appointed to investigate the matter was chaired by William Magennis, former Professor of Metaphysics at University College, Dublin and then Cumann na nGaedheal T.D., and included Sir Joseph Glynn of the National Health Insurance Commission and representatives from the ministries of local government and finance, together with an actuary from the Department of the British Government Actuary, a representative of the medical profession and Canon M.J. McHugh of Ballyhaunis, 'in view of his knowledge and experience of the practical working of approved societies especially in rural areas'.⁶⁰

After twenty-nine meetings and having examined forty-nine witnesses, including representatives of the Irish Insurance Commissioners, the Department of Local Government and Public Health, Dublin Chamber of Commerce, the Approved Societies' Association of Ireland, the County Council General Council, the Irish Labour Party, the Irish Farmers' Union and a number of the County Boards of Health,⁶¹ the committee presented its interim report in February 1925. The report was critical of the cumbersome administration of the insurance scheme. More importantly, it made a strong case for the inclusion of agricultural labourers and domestic servants in the scheme,⁶² a recurring theme in a policy which was to continue to exclude these classes. The final report of the commission was presented in February 1927 and published in 1928. Presenting a number of recommendations, its most significant was recommendation number nine:

That unification [of the approved societies] - if feasible - offers the best method of simplifying national health insurance in the Saorstát

⁶⁰ Memo, National Health Insurance: suggested inquiry, 1934 (N.A., D/Fin F 46/1/24).

⁶¹ *Interim Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Health Insurance and Medical Services*, p. 1.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

and of effecting very considerable economies in the cost of its central administration.⁶³

While the committee had been in session, one modification had already been effected: each insurance society and branch not having its headquarters in the Free State was forced to cease business,⁶⁴ an issue raised by Sinn Féin at a very early stage.⁶⁵ Another modification came in the form of the National Health Insurance Act of 1924 which decreased the financial burden of the state regarding insurance by placing part of the burden of costs of medical certification on the insurance fund itself.

The approved societies *en masse* opposed unification, many of them submitting resolutions to the Department of Finance outlining their concerns. Long before the final publication of the committee's report, the Sláinte Insurance Society of Dublin submitted such a resolution, as did St. Mel's Catholic Diocesan Insurance Society of Longford, the Clare Insurance Benefit Society, the Dublin Protestant Insurance Society, the Limerick Workers' Approved Society, the Cork Railway Employers' Friendly Society and numerous others.⁶⁶ Following the publication of the Interim Report of the Committee on Health Insurance, the Approved Societies' Association of Ireland submitted its own 'protest' against unification to the government on the grounds that the proposed system would not affect economy, but would rather 'create friction of a dangerous nature between the various sectional and sectarian groups of insured persons'.⁶⁷

The objections, largely representing sectional and vested interests themselves, were taken cognisance of, as a bill was prepared to give

⁶³ Department of Local Government and Public Health, *Report on the administration of national health insurance* (1928), p. 10.

⁶⁴ National Health Insurance Act, 1923 (No. 20 of 1923).

⁶⁵ Sinn Féin, *Economic programme* (n.d.), p. 18.

⁶⁶ National health insurance: unification of approved societies: views of societies 1925-1941 (N.A., D/Fin., F 46/4/25).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

legislative effect to the thrust of the committee's proposals. The second stage of the national health insurance bill was debated in October 1929, again stressing the twin aims of simplification and economy. Based for the most part on the Reports of the Committee of Inquiry into National Health Insurance, it did not include proposals for the formation of a single unified insurance society, but rather would encourage the voluntary amalgamation of the existing sixty-five approved societies to produce a more economic and efficient administration.⁶⁸ The reason given for not implementing the recommendations of the committee of inquiry in this instance was to afford approved societies a further opportunity for such voluntary amalgamation.⁶⁹ Neither was the recommended system of medical benefits legislated for in the bill, despite Richard Mulcahy, the Minister for Local Government and Public Health, admitting that this would be 'very desirable'.⁷⁰ The reasons given for this omission were, firstly, that it would involve larger contributions from employers and employees and, secondly, that a longer period was necessary to judge the effectiveness of the recent centralisation of health services under Boards of Health, in order to avoid the duplication of services.⁷¹ Another important provision of the 1929 act was the fact that it terminated women's insurance upon marriage, a new marriage benefit being introduced in place of the limited benefits which were provided for under the previous schemes.

By 1930 the number of approved societies was still 65, one of these having 19 branches, while the total numbers insured was 399,967.⁷²

⁶⁸ National Health Insurance Act 1929: Notes for Minister (N.A., D/SW, I.A. 84/53(c)).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ DD vol. 32, 23 Oct. 1929, col. 77.

⁷¹ National Health Insurance Act 1929: Notes for Minister (N.A., D/SW, I.A. 84/53(c)).

⁷² DD vol. 33, 19 Feb. 1930, col. 404-5.

In conclusion it may be said that the 1929 act was a stop-gap measure with the short term aim of reducing the government's financial commitments; the act sprung from an economic rather than a social impetus. This economy was partly affected by a reduction of the numbers of staff working for the National Health Insurance Commission, a much more desirable means of effecting savings than that chosen by the government when it came to old age pensions.

Old Age Pensions

As in the case of national health insurance, the question of reform of old age pensions was approached from an economic rather than a social perspective, and perhaps best illustrated Cumann na nGaedheal's 'campaign for retrenchment'.⁷³ Introduced into Ireland in 1908 at a maximum rate of 5/- for people over seventy years of age, following the German precedent of 1891, old age pensions were the first scheme of British social policy which did not require proof of destitution for receipt of benefit, and in that context was a mile-stone in the development of the welfare state. In this sense also old age pensions were a move forward from the poor law idea. Under the Saorstát government, however, they were shunted back into the poor law mould, the reduction of one shilling in benefit effected in 1924 being seen as important enough for mention in the general surveys of twentieth-century Irish history. Even without accepting this as a yardstick of importance, the reduction was significant as it underlined the government's general attitude and approach to the maintenance and development of social security policies. They were viewed at best as a necessary evil, an economic burden largely necessary due to poor financial management by the recipients. Although termed

⁷³ Ronan Fanning, *The Irish Department of Finance, 1922-58* (Dublin, 1978), p. 105. Fanning discusses the conservative economic and fiscal policy of Cumann na nGaedheal under this heading.

differently, it was essentially seen in official circles as the provision of charity, often to the 'undeserving poor'.

Administered by the Department of Local Government and Public Health, the reduction from 10/- to 9/- per week was hinted at as early as November 1922, when the estimate set aside for old age pensions was over £3,300,000. On that occasion the chairman of the government, W. T. Cosgrave, reminded the Dáil that each pension granted came out of the revenue of the country 'which is sorely needed for... constructive work'.⁷⁴

It was in this context that complaints regarding the failure to pay pensions to people who would ordinarily qualify for them were treated with no great interest. Such cases were not difficult to find. The main difficulty was proving one's age in the absence of census papers or marriage certificates, 'and the sins of the young people are very often coming against the same people when they are old, by virtue of the fact that they put themselves down as much younger than they actually were when they were being married'.⁷⁵ Sean MacBride reported one such case in County Mayo where there were two sisters, the younger of whom had been receiving the old age pension for a number of years while it was refused to the older one.⁷⁶ Ernest Blythe, in effect the final court of appeal in cases where pensions were not paid, was unsympathetic:

There might be cases where the pension was refused to people who were entitled to get it, but I am equally sure that there are as many cases, or perhaps more cases, of people getting it who should not get it, and I think that if one grievance is remedied the other should also be remedied.⁷⁷

To illustrate his point, Blythe quoted statistics regarding the number of recipients of blind pensions, available to medically certified blind people over fifty years of age and administered under old age pension

⁷⁴ DD vol. 1, 16 Nov. 1922, col. 2128.

⁷⁵ Thomas Johnson, DD vol. 1, 16 Nov. 1922, col. 2129.

⁷⁶ DD vol. 1, 16 Nov. 1922, col. 2133.

⁷⁷ DD vol. 1, 16 Nov. 1922, col. 2130.

legislation. He claimed that the number of people in Ireland receiving blind pensions was 3,282, costing £82,000 annually while the corresponding numbers in Scotland, with a total population in excess of 1.5 million of Ireland's, were 1,436 and £35,000. 'The results show...the need for stringency and care'⁷⁸ concluded Blythe.

The topic was returned to by the president, W. T. Cosgrave, in the summer of 1923 during the debate on the pension estimates. He made known his belief that 'quite a number of people are getting pensions from the state at the present moment who are living in fairly comfortable houses, supported by their relatives'.⁷⁹ It was obvious that government thinking regarding pensions was underpinned by a philosophy more appropriate to poor law thinking. In the same debate the pensions committees, appointed for every borough or urban district with a population of 10,000 by the borough or urban district council and for every county by the county council with the primary duty of considering and deciding on claims, came in for criticism for their lack of stringency in applying the official rules to the full:

Perhaps some of the committees thought they were doing a good thing for the country by getting as much out of the British treasury as they could, and they think they can do the same now: the department does not intend to allow them.⁸⁰

On the same occasion Blythe again reiterated his point of 1922. Discussing once more the appeals by some deputies that there were people fully qualified to receive the pension but were not doing so, he replied that 'I am satisfied there are thousands of people getting pensions who are not entitled to get them'. Referring to the lack of conscientiousness of the pension committees he went on to state that their loose application of the qualification rules (more a supposition than a

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ DD vol. 3, 18 May 1923, col. 1112.

⁸⁰ Cathal O Shannon, DD vol. 3, 18 May 1923, col. 1114.

reality) 'has led to persons taking outdoor relief who would have been reluctant, and perhaps ashamed, in the past, because of their circumstances. They could have got along, and would have got along without it.'⁸¹ Again it betrayed the worst principles of poor law thinking: making relief so undesirable that only the destitute would seek it. It also associated old age pensions with poor relief, something specifically avoided by the British authorities from its introduction in 1909. This situation was not unique to old age pensions: we have already alluded to Patrick McGilligan's association of increases in unemployment benefit with the provision of 'complete charity'.⁸² The distinctions between income maintenance policies, poor relief and charity were becoming increasingly blurred in the minds of the Free State government and their administrative officials, the terms often being used interchangeably in political circles in this period.

It came as little surprise therefore when the cabinet approved a reduction in old age pensions from 10/- to 9/- at its meeting on 27 October 1923.⁸³ It came in the context of the appeal by the Saorstát for borrowings on the international market. It was seen as necessary to get domestic finances in order, so as to enhance the credibility of Ireland and to increase the chances of receiving international loans. At a time when expenditure exceeded revenue, Blythe's philosophy was that 'retrenchment, then, is the only course'.⁸⁴ Pensions became a focus for attention as it was claimed that almost one half of total normal expenditure, £10 million, was devoted to education and pensions. The opposition would argue of course that the weakness of the Saorstát economy had driven the productive population to more prosperous

⁸¹ DD vol. 3, 18 May 1923, col. 1119.

⁸² DD vol. 12, 30 June 1925, col. 1770.

⁸³ Meeting of Executive Council, 27 Oct. 1923, (N.A., Government Minutes G2/3).

⁸⁴ DD vol. 5, 14 Nov. 1923, col. 666.

shores:

What would naturally be the producing part of the population - the young people and the able-bodied people - are being driven out by emigration, and we have to carry on the service of education to deal with the young people and the service of old age pensions for the older population.⁸⁵

The reduction was announced in the Dáil in November 1923 alongside an announcement to reduce teachers' salaries by 10%, while the demobilisation of the army, already in progress, was expected to reduce government spending dramatically. In the case of old age pensions a suitable scapegoat was proffered: 'the pensioners may attribute a high degree of responsibility to those who have wasted and impoverished the country during the past two years'.⁸⁶ The necessary legislation was introduced in February 1924, the bill also providing for a review of the method of calculating the annual value of capital or property held by applicants. The only group excepted from the decrease were those over 80 years of age who had been in receipt of pension before the amending legislation was passed.

Predictably the bill met with strenuous objections, most vocally from Thomas Johnson who described the reduction as unsustainable and the administrative changes as 'Gradgrind' in character.⁸⁷ Johnson's colleague in the Labour Party, Padraig Hogan, a writer and composer from Clare who had been deported and tried in England following the 1916 Rising, was also harshly critical of the new legislation:

Deirtear go bhfuil rialtas na nGall inthighthe agus gur Rialtas Gaoldhalach atá againn anois. B'fhéidir ach...tá aon rud amháin cinnte - tá rud ceapaithe ag an rialtas seo nár cheap rialtas na nGall riamh; 'sé sin daoine bochta na tíre seo do chur chun bhás.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Eamon de Valera, DD vol. 25, 12 July 1928, col. 475.

⁸⁶ Ernest Blythe, DD vol. 5, 14 Nov. 1923, col. 673.

⁸⁷ DD vol. 6, 12 Feb. 1924, col. 808.

⁸⁸ DD vol. 6, 21 Feb. 1924, col. 1292.

Placing the new maximum pension at 9/- in context we can note that 1lb. of butter at the time cost 2s. 7d., a 2lb loaf of bread 5d., 1lb of cheapest tea 3s. 6d. and 1lb of sugar 7d.⁸⁹

Table 3.3

Retail prices in Irish towns of 500 inhabitants and upwards, as averaged from returns collected by Post Offices

	July 1914	March 1922	June 1922	Jan. 1923	Jan. 1924	Jan. 1925	Oct. 1925
Beef/lb	8d	13.5d	13d	-	-	-	-
Butter/lb	14d	24d	23d	2/2	2/3	2/2	2/2
Cheese/lb	10d	18d	17d	1/5	1/6	1/6	1/6
Fresh milk/quart	2.5d	7d	5d	6.5d	6d	6.5d	6d
Bread/ 2lb loaf	3d	6d	6d	5.5d	5d	6d	5.5d
Sugar/lb	2d	6d	6d	6d	7d	6d	3.5d
Tea (cheapest)/lb	18d	31d	27d	2/5	2/7	2/7	2/2

Source: Ministry for Economic Affairs, *Report on the cost of living, 1922-25*.

Blythe partially excused the reduction by claiming a greater purchasing power in money, a dubious point when we compare the price of basic foodstuffs in the period 1922-1925 (see table). The Minister for Local Government and Public Health, James Bourke, a graduate of St John's College, Fordham, New York, who had responsibility for administering pensions, offered no such practical reasoning, stating uncompromisingly that the state:

cannot afford to distribute charity on that extremely liberal scale... One of the most serious defects of the Irish character is this tendency to dependence of one kind or another, and it is a very serious thing in the state at the present time. The number of people who lead a parasitic existence, more or less, is increasing in proportion to the number of people who are striving to make an honest living.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Ministry of Economic Affairs, *Reports on the cost of living, 1922-25*.

⁹⁰ DD vol. 7, 25 June 1924, col. 3054.

Again the distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor was being stressed. Indeed Bourke went so far as to claim that the famine 'was mainly as a result of charity continually distributed at the expense of the provident and thrifty',⁹¹ a remark hardly worthy of George Nicholls.

The 1924 legislation did achieve its primary goal of reducing expenditure, the estimate for old age pensions being reduced by £357,800 to £2,919,200 on the previous year.⁹² The numbers in receipt of pensions also decreased by 7,000 between 1924 and 1925, the majority receiving pensions of 9/-.⁹³ The reduction also contributed to the halving of the rate of tax in the Free State from 6/- in the £ in 1922 to 3/- by 1927.⁹⁴ While saying in the spring of 1926 that he saw 'no prospect of being able to effect the restoration in the near future',⁹⁵ by the winter of 1927, Blythe was expressing the hope that an improvement in economic conditions would allow for the restoration to old age pensioners of the reductions made in 1924.⁹⁶

Table 3.4
Number of recipients of old age and blind pensions, 1914-1926

Year	No. of recipients
1914	154,000
1915	151,000
1916	147,000
1917	141,000
1918	137,200
1919	132,000
1920	130,000*
1921	131,400
1922	130,000
1923	127,323
1924	122,000
1925	115,000
1926	115,095

*Note: The blind pensions act was passed in 1920

Source: DD vol. 18, 23 Feb. 1927, col. 965

⁹¹ Ibid., col. 3055.

⁹² President, DD vol. 8, 25 July 1924, col. 2296.

⁹³ Department of Industry and Commerce, *Statistical abstract, 1931*.

⁹⁴ W. T. Cosgrave, *Policy of the Cumann na nGaedheal Party* (Dublin, 1927), p. 8.

⁹⁵ DD vol. 13, 25 Feb. 1926, col. 1053.

⁹⁶ DD vol. 21, 2 Nov. 1927, col. 586.

The provision in the 1924 act for a general investigation into old age pensions quickly became reality in the form of another committee of inquiry, 'to consider and report what alterations, if any, should be made in the provisions of the acts relating to old age pensions and pensions for the blind respecting the machinery for the determination of claims, questions and appeals, regard being had especially to the desirability of the just and expeditious treatment of all applications'.⁹⁷ Appointed on 1 January 1925, the committee, which included representatives of the Labour Party, the Catholic clergy, Dublin County Council and the Ministry of Local Government and Public Health, held nineteen meetings in all. Having placed a number of advertisements in Dublin daily papers to encourage submissions from individuals, the committee also received evidence from the National Executive of the Irish Labour Party, the General Council of County Councils, the Irish Farmers' Union, the Association of Municipal Authorities and the Societh of St Vincent de Paul. Many criticisms of the existing machinery were voiced. The committee of inquiry again placed a large amount of blame for the inadequacy of the administration on the shoulders of the pension committees, saying their 'general apathy' was resulting in 'careless investigation of claims'.⁹⁸ The administration of blind pensions was no less problematic, the committee finding that 'practically all blind pensions are appealed'.⁹⁹

The committee also criticised the appeals procedure as 'defective in its design and unsatisfactory in its working',¹⁰⁰ a fact in large measure attributable to a marked lack of co-operation between the pension officers who investigated claims and who were usually custom and excise officers

⁹⁷ *Report of old age pensions committee of inquiry*, (Dublin, 1926), p. 3.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

who performed pension work in addition to normal duties, and the pensions committees who had primary duty in considering and deciding all pension claims and who were appointed by each local authority:

Such a state of things naturally leads to a position in which each party considers the other unreasonable in every case of disagreement, and in which a sort of antagonism develops, resulting in the committee allowing claims which should never have been appealed, the ultimate result being an abnormal number of appeals and the delay, irritation and dissatisfaction consequent thereupon.¹⁰¹

To remedy this seriously defective system, the report of the committee recommended that pension officers attend pension committee meetings regularly and that an intermediate committee between the pension committees and the Department of Local Government should be appointed. At this time some appeal cases were taking up to six months to sort out.¹⁰² One of the main reasons for the large number of appeals, apart from the cumbersome method of administration, was the question of establishing means, the committee reporting that the existing system of evaluating stock, crops and the general condition of holdings, though not 'ideally perfect' was 'for general purposes the most satisfactory and fair method that can be adopted'.¹⁰³

It was the administration of the legislation on the ground that had the greatest impact on the ordinary people. While the parliamentary acts were binding on everybody, there was an element of the arbitrary at local level, where the pension officers and pension committees decided who should and who shouldn't receive a pension, and what level of pension was justified. In this context it is little wonder that most of the parliamentary questions relating to pensions concerned individual cases brought to the attention of local T.D.s. The cases raised at question time

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 16.

in the Dáil can be taken as representative of the hundreds if not thousands of cases which never went beyond the pension officer.

Often the pension officers were perceived as unhelpful in processing pension claims, as grudging in their allowance or rejection of individual applications. As in the case of home assistance, pension officers were accused of writing to the Societh of St Vincent de Paul and other charitable societies requesting to be informed if applicants were in receipt of support from these societies. When this particular issue was raised in the Dáil, Blythe did not fault the pension officers for taking such a course of action, saying it was their duty 'to ascertain and report to the pension authorities the means from all sources of every claimant to a pension'.¹⁰⁴

Another complaint regarding the way in which pension officers decided on applications harkened back to the worst excesses of the landlord and poor law eras, when the neat and thrifty were penalised:

If the local pension officer goes into a house which is kept clean and tidy and has any appearance of comfort he appears to make up his mind that these people are sufficiently comfortable without the pension. But if he goes into a place that is dirty and untidy, then his decision is reversed and the pension is granted.¹⁰⁵

Owing to the way in which the act is administered, thrifty people who keep their houses clean are penalised for their thrift and cleanliness when the pension officer comes to investigate their claim.¹⁰⁶

Stereotypically a problem associated with British imperialism in Ireland, its occurrence in the Saorstát was discussed in the Dáil on more than one occasion. Sean MacEntee, an engineer by profession and at the time a Fianna Fáil T.D. for Dublin and honorary treasurer of the party, again raised the matter in 1929:

¹⁰⁴ DD vol. 15, 20 July 1926, col. 2212.

¹⁰⁵ DD vol. 18, 25 Feb. 1927, col. 968.

¹⁰⁶ Timothy Murphy, DD vol. 20, 5 July 1927, col. 389.

Small farmers, particularly, are hard hit by these methods. The values put upon the land and farm produce, I am informed, are often unjustifiable and often quite thrifty people who keep their homesteads clean and who by their thrifty methods and their cleanliness maintain an appearance of comfort are penalised.¹⁰⁷

Blythe's reply that everything was being done to administer the act 'liberally and sympathetically'¹⁰⁸ was hardly adequate. It was also untrue. As he was to claim himself in June 1931, out of the 118,000 pensions granted or applied for, up to 20,000 were investigated annually: 'It does mean the penalising of thrift'.¹⁰⁹ The case was particularly difficult for farmers who owned any piece of property or livestock. Again harkening back to the 'quarter acre' clause of the poor law, Timothy Murphy, a Labour T.D. for Cork and member of the West Cork Board of Public Assistance and Old Age Pensions Committee, claimed that 'the difficulty of obtaining an old age pension for a person with a small patch of land is so great that it is almost impossible'.¹¹⁰

Determination of the age of applicants was the other major cause for criticism in the administration of old age pension. This was blamed by the government on two things. Firstly, Blythe claimed that 'there are many applications coming forward from people who are near the age and who think they will have a shot at it', thus resulting in 'a greater stringency and detailed examination of age in the case of all applications'.¹¹¹ Secondly, in the absence of official records in many cases to verify age, special precautions were necessary. Official registration of births did not begin in Ireland until 1 January 1864, while the destruction of records in the Four Courts during the civil war meant census schedules were not always available. In such cases certified

¹⁰⁷ DD vol. 31, 3 July 1929, col. 240.

¹⁰⁸ DD vol. 30, 3 July 1929, col. 266.

¹⁰⁹ DD vol. 39, 29 June 1931, col. 943.

¹¹⁰ DD vol. 20, 5 July 1927, col. 389.

¹¹¹ DD vol. 33, 19 Feb. 1930, col. 498.

extracts from school records, certificates of marriage or other family records, wills, parish records, and a large list of other documents were used to verify age. In the absence of these, statements from witnesses regarding a claimant's age were accepted, albeit with stringent regulations:

A mere assertion, even an oath, that a claimant is seventy years old, is not of much assistance. A witness should recite in his affidavit his name and full postal address, and state his own age and how proved, and then declare on oath the facts which in his judgement prove the age of the claimant... The affidavit should be signed and executed in the usual formal manner before a district justice, peace commissioner or commissioner for oaths.¹¹²

There were other difficulties in the administration of pensions at local level too, such as the fact that people in receipt of pensions before entering a county home had the pension revoked upon entering, and had to apply afresh when leaving the county home again.¹¹³

In the context of these problems, and the overall air of stringency which underpinned all of the complaints and inadequacies, it was hardly likely that the request of Michael Connolly, a Cumann na nGaedheal T.D. from Kenagh, Co. Longford, to have the qualifying age reduced by five years to sixty-five would be listened to. His talk about the 'universal satisfaction through the country' in the administration of old age pension was also somewhat optimistic.¹¹⁴

Before concluding discussion of old age pensions, it is important to mention briefly the area of blind pensions which were administered under the old age pension legislation. First introduced in 1920 blind pensions were payable to those who were certified as blind by the medical profession, the definition of blindness being strictly laid down by the government:

¹¹² Department of Local Government and Public Health, *Report 1930-31*, p. 37.

¹¹³ William Davin, DD vol. 27, 14 Nov. 1938, col. 90-91.

¹¹⁴ DD vol. 27, 14 Nov. 1928, col. 96.

Persons whose acuity of vision (refracted error being corrected) is below 1/20 of the normal (3/20 Snellen) are usually unable to perform work requiring eyesight, while persons with vision better than 1/10 (6/60 Snellen) are usually able to perform some such work.¹¹⁵

The government also provided grants to approved agencies and institutions which provided employment, training, education, and care and maintenance for blind people, the four principal agencies being St Mary's Asylum for female blind in Merrion Dublin, St Joseph's Asylum for male blind in O Connell Street, Dublin, the Richmond National Institution for the industrious Blind also in O Connell Street, Dublin and the Asylum for the Blind in Cork city.¹¹⁶

The pre-1924 rates of old age pensions were restored through the Old Age Pensions Act, 1928. Although alluded to by the government soon after the reduction had been affected, the impetus came in the form of a motion put down in the Dáil by Daniel Morrissey, a Labour T.D. from Tipperary and member of the Old Age Pension Commission, in February 1928, calling for a restoration in the former statutory rates of old age and blind pensions. The motion, with the support of Fianna Fáil, was carried by 78 votes to 71,¹¹⁷ Blythe introducing an amending bill in March 1928. Coming into operation on 6 April of the same year, the Old Age Pensions Act, 1928, restored the maximum pension to 10/- per week.¹¹⁸

Widows' and Orphans' Pensions

Unlike old age pensions, widows' and orphans' pensions was an area of social policy not formally legislated for in Britain until 1925,

¹¹⁵ DD vol. 22, 7 Mar. 1928, col. 821.

¹¹⁶ Department of Local Government and Public Health, *First report, 1922-25*, p. 42.

¹¹⁷ DD vol. 22, 29 Feb. 1928, col. 489.

¹¹⁸ Old Age Pensions Act, 1928 (No. 1 of 1928).

following the lead set by Germany in 1911 and Denmark in 1914. It was therefore an area which the government of the Saorstát would have to legislate for out of its own sense of social justice and economic need.

It was the Irish Mothers' Pensions Society which was to the fore in demanding the provision of economic security for widows and orphans. At a meeting in 1920 it resolved:

That the present poor law relief methods, as applied to widows and orphans are inadequate to the needs of such cases, and unjust in their economic incidence to those ratepayers who reside amidst largely populated working-class districts; that the system of state pensions for necessitous mothers and children prevailing in the United States affords a practical and just solution of this grievance; that we appeal to all Irish representative bodies to co-operate with this Society in its efforts to secure the establishment in Ireland of Mothers' Pensions modelled on the lines adopted by the American Republic.¹¹⁹

Such help and co-operation was forthcoming. As early as 1919 the following resolution had been passed by a number of public bodies in Ireland:

That the time has arrived when the burden imposed by the poor law system [in the form of rates] should be lightened by the establishment of adequate state pensions for widows and orphans and calls for immediate action to this effect.¹²⁰

A copy of the Mothers' Pensions Society resolution was forwarded to the Department of Finance which received many such resolutions specifically regarding the provision of pensions for widows and orphans who were wholly dependent on poor relief in the absence of personal means. Among those submitting resolutions was the Municipal Council of Wexford, which also used the example of the state pensions for mothers and children prevailing in America, the Benevolent Fund, the Irish Women Workers' Union (which also demanded that old age pensions be payable at 65 years of age) and the Irish Co-operative Women's Guild,

¹¹⁹ Letterhead of Irish Mothers' Pensions Society.

¹²⁰ Timothy Murphy, DD vol. 26, 17 Oct. 1928, col. 481.

which took 'a very serious view of the poverty and child neglect caused by the loss of the bread winner in the Irish Free State', calling on the government 'to immediately pass legislation to deal with widows' and orphans' pensions'.¹²¹ The Labour Party, in their booklet *The Nation Organised*, (c1920) also called for the introduction of such pensions as 'a must'.¹²²

In 1927 the Commission on the Relief of the Sick and Destitute Poor, including the Insane Poor, came out in favour of widows' and orphans' pensions: 'we received a considerable amount of evidence in favour of removing destitute widows and children from the purview of the poor law... We are in favour of a scheme of Mothers' Pensions'.¹²³ However, as we have seen, the decade of Cumann na nGaedheal rule was one of inquiry rather than action, the recommendations of the 1927 report being simply ignored.

The recommendation of the 1927 report, however, was debated on numerous occasions in the Dáil. Richard Mulcahy, the Minister for Local Government and Public Health, pointed out that 6,973 widows and widows' children were in receipt of home assistance, the total amount paid out in the year up to March 1928 being £118,600.¹²⁴ However, home assistance was seen very much as a last resort, and was stigmatised in the manner of all poor law relief, and the Labour Party, together with Fianna Fáil, pressed for the introduction of an insurance scheme to provide pensions and allowances where the need arose. In October 1928 Timothy Murphy, a Labour T.D. for Cork, introduced a motion which would have had just such an effect, calling for the removal of 'all stigma

¹²¹ Irish Mothers' Pensions Society: resolution urging that question of mothers pensions be dealt with by immediate legislation, 1925-31 (N.A., D/Fin, F 46/9/25).

¹²² Irish Labour Party, *The nation organised* (Dublin, 1922), p. 25.

¹²³ *Report of the Commission on the Relief of the Sick and Destitute Poor, including the Insane Poor* (Dublin, 1927), p. 57.

¹²⁴ DD vol. 26, 10 Oct. 1928, col. 22.

of pauperism in such cases'. Murphy used the example of Denmark, where, since 1914, women with four children and with property up to a value of £350, were entitled to support from the state pension scheme: 'a small country can be very often a pioneer in schemes of great national importance'.¹²⁵ However, Ireland was not about to become a pioneer in the area of social legislation, a position it avoided right through the period under discussion here.

The motion, which was almost one year on the order papers before being discussed was dismissed, predictably, by Blythe who did, however, hint at organising an inquiry into the question 'so that a motion or a bill dealing with this matter could be more satisfactorily discussed by the house'.¹²⁶ However the proposed inquiry was not completed before the election of March 1932 after which Fianna Fáil came to power, a different excuse being proffered by the government on each occasion that questions were asked in the Dáil by Labour and Fianna Fáil regarding the investigation.¹²⁷

The attitude of Cumann na nGaedheal to widows' and orphans' pensions underlined the remarkable neglect of the government in the area of providing economic security for those not in a position to support themselves by private income means. The lead provided by the British government before independence was not followed. The sheer paucity of the social legislation was in sharp contrast to the radical rhetoric of the Easter Proclamation, and of the Democratic Programme of 1919, notwithstanding the fact that the events of 1916 were bitterly criticised by, among others, the 'separation women', whose sole income was the allowance the British government paid them while their husbands fought

¹²⁵ DD vol. 26, 17 Oct. 1928, col. 480.

¹²⁶ DD vol. 26, 17 Oct. 1928, col. 493.

¹²⁷ President, DD vol. 29, 25 Apr. 1929, col. 905; Archie Cassidy, DD vol. 33, 19 Feb. 1930, col. 393; Archie Cassidy, DD vol. 36, 19 Nov. 1930, col. 1; Frank Fahy, DD vol. 38, 22 Apr. 1931, col. 2.

on the battlefields of the First World War.¹²⁸ Stripped of its cultural, social and economic idealism, the Democratic Programme was ignored, any positive changes in legislation being cancelled by a negative attitude to the whole idea of securing, not just politically but culturally and economically, the life of the Saorstát citizens.

There were a number of reasons for this marked conservatism among former revolutionaries, explaining the paradoxical replacement of radicalism by what Hoppen describes as 'instinctive caution',¹²⁹ not least of which was the loss of the leadership abilities and energy of people like Michael Collins, whose political dominance is evidenced by the cabinet minutes of 1922, and the economic vision of Arthur Griffith. The Civil War was also very much the cause of a low political and public morale, and its dominance as a political issue over the ensuing generations left little room for co-operation on social issues in these early years. It was a situation by no means unique to Ireland. Finland, for example, endured a much shorter but equally divisive civil war following independence which was to have a significant impact on the development, or lack of development, of social legislation in the early years of independence. In many ways an ideological struggle between the communists and the capitalists, one of the causes of the Finnish civil war was the reluctance of the ruling classes to grant any social reforms. The defeat of the Reds (the working classes) ushered in a period of conservatism in the area of social policy. By contrast Norway, which became independent of its powerful Swedish neighbour in 1905, entered a period of rapid growth and expansion in welfare services, providing a solid base for continued development. In Ireland, however, the political rather than the social became the official yard stick for success. Indeed in many ways social

¹²⁸ See T. P. Coogan, *Michael Collins* (London, 1990), p. 1.

¹²⁹ K. T. Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800: conflict and conformity*, p. 209.

legislation was sacrificed in the cause of political stability and respectability. The main reason for reducing old age pensions was to secure the Saorstát as an economically sound political entity in the eyes of the world.

Even in the history books, up to present times, it is in these contexts that this first decade of the Free State is discussed. Success in the political is seen as success; the provision and development of social policy is not an issue. And yet it is this area rather than the political that most fundamentally affected the lives of the individual citizens.

Free State attitudes to economic policy and economic growth were also crucial in deciding social policy. The reduction in old age pensions was paralleled with significant reductions in income tax, the standard rate of which fell from 5s in 1924 to 3s 6d by 1932.¹³⁰ The reduction was specifically calculated to bring Irish rates into line with those in Britain and to thereby appeal to the economic sensibilities of the influential and affluent in the Free State.¹³¹ In relation to the poor law and the work of the poor law commissioners in the nineteenth century, Helen Burke comments that 'keeping it going as inexpensively as possible was a top priority, one which often appears from the annual reports to be more important than meeting human needs'.¹³² The attitude and approach of the Free State government up to 1932 was identical.

¹³⁰ See James Meenan, *The Irish economy since 1922* (Liverpool, 1970), p. 247 for changes in the standard rates of income tax from 1924-67.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

¹³² Helen Burke, *The people and the poor law in nineteenth century Ireland* (England, 1987), p. 302.

CHAPTER 4

'THE POOR MAN'S GOVERNMENT': THE FIRST DECADE OF FIANNA FáIL IN POWER, 1932-42

Ideologically, politically and practically the early years of the 1930s was an important time in the development of the Irish welfare state. The importance of the publication of *Quadragesimo Anno* by Pope Pius XI in 1931 has already been described in chapter two. It fanned the flames of the nascent Catholic social movement in Ireland, J. H. Whyte, in his pioneering work on Irish church-state relations, underlining its effect as follows:

The growing interest in Catholic social teaching can be seen in the statements of the Irish bishops. In 1937 Bishop Kinane of Waterford pointed to the recent strikes in his city as illustrating the need for corporate organisation. Bishop Casey of Ross lamented that so little had been done in Ireland to implement the pope's social teaching. Cardinal MacRory made it clear his opposition to communism didn't mean he was satisfied with existing social conditions.¹

The encyclical revitalised existing Catholic social movements and gave rise to many more, such as the Dublin-based League against Poverty, the stated aim of which was raising the standards of economic life in the Saorstát: 'The demands of social justice have been stated with a noble finality in the two encyclicals'.²

This rise in the Catholic social movement was paralleled by political developments of equal importance, namely the coming to power of Fianna Fáil following the general election of 1932, heralding the first change in government since independence. The co-inciding of

¹ J. H. Whyte, *Church and state in modern Ireland, 1923-79* (2nd edn., Dublin, 1980), p. 74.

² *Prosperity* (published by the League Against Poverty) no.1, Nov. 1935.

these political and religious developments was complimentary if not ironic. The social teaching of the Catholic church would be especially relevant in terms of the Fianna Fáil administration which, despite a stormy relationship between its members and the Catholic church at the founding of the Free State, was claiming by the late 1920s to 'speak for the big body of Catholic opinion...We represent the big element of Catholicity'.³ Even if one questions the veracity of this statement, there is little doubt but that Fianna Fáil ministers and their administrative back-up teams were very familiar with Catholic social teaching as described in chapter two: departmental files contain numerous extracts from papal encyclicals, many files being given over entirely to the social teachings of the church.⁴

Genuinely perceiving itself as 'the poor man's government',⁵ Fianna Fáil from its inception held out the promise of social reform. Addressing supporters at La Scala theatre in Dublin at the party's foundation in May 1926, Eamon de Valera explained his decision to break from Sinn Féin in the context of the sterility of republican politics as represented by Sinn Féin, a republicanism which people has come to see as 'an empty formulism'.⁶ Rather than accepting Cumann na nGaedheal satisfaction with viewing independence as an end in itself, de Valera expressed his opinion that it was merely a means to a far greater end:

Independence, political freedom, is regarded by most of you, as it is regarded by me, simply as a means to a greater end beyond it. The thing beyond it is the right use of our freedom and that use must surely be to make provision so that every man and women

³ S. T. O Kelly, DD vol. 30, 5 June 1929, col. 821.

⁴ E.g. Extracts from 'Forty years after Pius XI and the social order' (N.A., D/SW, I.A. 154/53(j)).

⁵ Letter from Erskine Childers to Sean MacEntee, Feb. 1948 (U.C.D. Archives, MacEntee Papers, P 67/299).

⁶ Eamon de Valera's address at La Scala theatre, Dublin, 16 May 1926, (U.C.D. Archives, MacEntee Papers, P 67/443).

in this country shall have the opportunity of living the fullest lives that God intended them to live. It is only since I found how neglectful of this side of our purpose many are inclined to become that I have been able to sympathise fully with James Connolly's passionate protest.⁷

This founding speech of Fianna Fáil seemed to echo de Valera's appreciation of the social doctrine of republicanism which had become overwhelmed by political concerns: in an earlier election de Valera, as president of Sinn Féin, had said 'We intend to devote ourselves to social reform'.⁸

The speech in La Scala was followed in November 1926 by an outline of the provisional constitution of the new political party. Placing the establishment of the 'unity and independence of Ireland as a republic' as its first priority, it described its third aim, after the restoration of the Irish language, as follows:

To make the resources and wealth of Ireland subservient to the needs and welfare of all the people of Ireland.⁹

A variation on the theme of the 1916 Proclamation, this was to remain one of the primary aims of Fianna Fáil.¹⁰ The extent to which it was a genuine aspiration may be judged from the outspokenness of Fianna Fáil deputies while in opposition about the lack of social policies and social concern under the Cumann na nGaedheal government.

Neither did the Fianna Fáil party waver in its commitment to social reform on taking over the reigns of power in 1932. As the first governments had the Democratic Programme upon which to base their policies, Fianna Fáil, whose individual members had been very much

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Sinn Féin, 'The fruitful principle' (Election handbill, 1923).

⁹ Memorandum regarding constitution of Fianna Fáil, 9 Nov. 1926 (U.C.D. Archives, MacEntee Papers, P 67/443).

¹⁰ See for example Fianna Fáil, *Córu 1934-35*.

involved in the deliberations of the Democratic Programme albeit under a different guise, produced their own political, social and cultural yardstick, Bunreacht na hÉireann, the Irish Constitution of 1937. Drafted entirely by de Valera himself, it laid a significant amount of emphasis on the general area of social policy. In a debate in Dáil Éireann on the Bunreacht, de Valera claimed that 'the social system at present...is not anything like what it ought to be... It ought to be our constant endeavour to try to remedy it.'¹¹

Speaking in the Dáil in July 1939, two years after the introduction of the constitution, on the subject of the Banking Commission and economic policy, de Valera reiterated these statements, saying 'we still believe that these social services, notwithstanding the fact that they are, to the extent to which contributions have to be made by the individual in the way of taxes and so on, a burden - and they are a certain burden - constitute a burden which we ought to carry, which I believe we can carry, and which I believe it is our duty to carry.'¹² Defining the government's social aims as 'our effort to find for every member of the community as high a standard of material comfort as it is possible for the resources of our country to give', de Valera claimed that, in the area of social policy, 'we are at one with the Labour Party'.¹³

What is remarkable about such sentiments, if we ignore for a moment their application in practice, is the extent to which they differed totally from the poor law rhetoric and grudging attitudes of Cumann na nGaedheal from 1922 to 1932. The Fianna Fáil attitude was refreshing; it displayed a genuine interest in and enthusiasm for progressive social legislation. It perceived the provision of social policy in the spirit of

¹¹ Maurice Moynihan (ed.), *Speeches and statements by Eamon de Valera 1917-73* (Dublin and New York, 1980), p. 326.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 394.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 405.

the welfare state, i.e. the ensuring of economic stability for all the citizens of the state as a basic right, rather than their provision being seen in terms of charity, the poor law approach adopted in practice by Cumann na nGaedheal.

The attitude of Fianna Fáil towards social policy has been traditionally explained in terms of the party's initial dependence on the Labour Party for support, Fianna Fáil falling short of an overall majority by five seats in the election of 1932. Reinforcing the argument is the fact that the Fianna Fáil government implemented a number of policies which appeared in Labour's election manifesto, including the introduction of widows' and orphans' pensions, unemployment assistance and an improved workmen's compensation. However it seems likely that Fianna Fáil would have pursued a very similar course of social security legislation had it obtained an overall majority in 1932. Receiving a majority in the general election of 1933 and therefore no longer dependent on Labour support in the Dáil, Fianna Fáil continued to pursue a social programme similar in many respects to that of the Labour Party, leading to 'immense progress' in many areas of welfare legislation according to Oscar Traynor T.D., who served at different times as both Minister for Defence and Minister for Posts and Telegraphs: 'Fianna Fáil has established finally and definitely the right of the workers to work or sustenance' he claimed in the election of June 1938.¹⁴ While the claim of 'immense progress' was an over-statement, the social welfare legislation passed in the first decade of Fianna Fáil rule was far in advance of anything undertaken by Cumann na nGaedheal. Perhaps the most important innovation came with the introduction of unemployment assistance in 1933 and widows' and

¹⁴ Fianna Fáil election handbill of Oscar Traynor and Thomas A. O Reilly, Dublin north-east (n.d., c June 1938).

orphans' pensions in 1935. The national health insurance acts were also substantially amended while the old age pensions acts were also changed.

Another factor to be considered during this period was the establishment of Fine Gael (also called United Ireland) in 1933, the result of the coming together of Cumann an nGaedheal, the National Guard and the National Centre Party. Indicating the new party's social philosophy its first leader, General Eoin O Duffy, then head of the Blueshirts, wrote in 1934 that 'in pursuance of the principle that the state as the organ of society has an obligation to secure within the limits of its abilities a decent subsistence for its citizens, United Ireland will make the maintenance of the disabled and the destitute and the tackling of unemployment its special care'.¹⁵ However the ensuing decade in opposition gave little reason to believe that the social policies of Fine Gael would be substantially different from those of Cumann na nGaedheal.

Before embarking on a more detailed discussion of developments in this period, it is necessary to outline the rise in the cost of living from the early 1930s to the outbreak of the Second World War. Attributable in part to the worldwide depression and to the protectionist policy of the government, the rise in the cost of living was to form the central core in many arguments on social policy during the period. Table 4.1 gives the predominant retail prices of everyday goods during this period, highlighting both the across-the-board rise in the cost of every-day commodities and the higher price of these commodities in Dublin relative to the rest of Ireland.

¹⁵ Eoin O Duffy, *An outline of the political, social and economic policy of Fine Gael (United Ireland)* (Dublin, 1934), p. 18.

Table 4.1

**Predominant retail prices in pence of certain everyday commodities,
1931-40**

	Flour	Baker's bread	Coal	Tea	Sugar	Milk	Potatoes	Bacon Streaky
	14lbs	2lb	cwt	lb	lb	Quart	14lbs	lb
Town/ Date								
DUBLIN								
Feb. 1931	24	4	29	32	2.5	6	12	16
Feb. 1932	24	4	28	32	3	6	18	16
Feb. 1933	22	4.25	30	36	2.5	6	8	14
Feb. 1934	22	4.25	32	36	2.5	6	8	17
Feb. 1935	24	4.25	32	32	3.5	6	10	16
Feb. 1936	28	5	32	36	3.5	6	12	19
Feb. 1937	36	5.5	34	36	3.5	6	12	19
Feb. 1939	34	5.5	36	32	3	7	14	22
Feb. 1940	36	5.5	40	32	4.5	7	14	24
Galway								
Feb. 1931	20	4	28	34	2.5-3	5.5	10	16
Feb. 1932	19.5	4	28	36	3-3.5	6	14	14
Feb. 1933	19	4.5	30	38	2.5	5.5	5	10
Feb. 1934	20	4.5	30	34	2.5	5.5	7	12
Feb. 1935	21	4.5	30	30	3.5	5.5	7	13
Feb. 1936	25	5	28	34	3.75	5	9	14
Feb. 1937	31	5	28	34	3.5	5	8	16
Feb. 1939	29	5	32.5	30	3	5	14	17
Feb. 1940	33	5.25	39	30	4.5	5	9	20
TRALEE								
Feb. 1931	18	4.5	36	32	2.75	5	10	18
Feb. 1932	20	4.5	36	32	3.25	5	12	16
Feb. 1933	18	5	36	34	2.5	5	8	13
Feb. 1934	18	4.5	33	32	2.5	4	6	14
Feb. 1935	20	4.5	35	28	3.5	4	8	17
Feb. 1936	25	6	34	32	3.5	4	9	17
Feb. 1937	31	6	33	32	3.25	4	10	16
Feb. 1939	27	6	34	26	3	5	12	16
Feb. 1940	31	6.25	38	26	4.25	5	10	18

Source: DD vol. 69, 27 Oct. 1937, col. 585-595 and DD vol. 78, 22 Feb. 1940, col. 1949-50

Table 4.1(a)

Cost of living index in February of each year 1931-40
Base July 1914 = 100

Year	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939	1940
All items	164	162	151	152	153	159	167	173	174	197
Food	151	151	130	133	136	145	153	159	160	177

Source: *Statistical Abstract, 1937-45*

Old Age Pensions

One of the first actions of the Fianna Fáil government was to pass the Old Age Pensions Act, 1932 which greatly modified the means test and the definitions of what could be considered as means, as well as reducing the age at which blind pensions were payable from 50 years to 30 years.¹⁶ Coming into operation in September 1932, less than six months after Fianna Fáil came to power, the act also abolished the previous disqualification of recipients of old age pensions from public assistance. The act was a deciding factor in the election of January 1933. In an election leaflet entitled 'What Fianna Fáil has done for the old age pensioners', the party listed the reforms of 1932, warning that 'there are hundreds of old persons who got pensions under the Old Age Pensions Act, 1932, who will lose them if Cumann na nGaedheal get power again'. The election returned Fianna Fáil with 49.7% of the first preference votes,¹⁷ enabling them to form a single-party government. This positive attitude of Fianna Fáil towards the necessity of providing for the economic welfare of all the citizens of Ireland as a duty of government, was well demonstrated by de Valera's speech on the

¹⁶ Old Age Pension Act 1932 (No. 18 of 1932).

¹⁷ Vincent Browne (ed.), *The Magill book of Irish politics* (Dublin, 1981), p. 23.

banking commission and economic policy to Dáil Éireann in the summer of 1939:

We are paying for old age pensions because we are taking from a section of the community who have wealth and handing it over to people who have not got it, because we regard it as a social obligation on us to maintain those people.¹⁸

The object and intent amounted to a very adequate definition of the 'welfare state' ethos. The old age pensions bill of 1938 was also in this mould. Dealing exclusively with blind pensions, it proposed to exclude from the calculation of means moneys paid by the local authorities to the child dependants of blind pension recipients.¹⁹ Taken together with the 1932 act, it allowed Fianna Fáil to claim that it had removed:

the dread of the aged who, seeing their ability to work diminish year by year have no certain prospect of a livelihood. The "cut" made by Fine Gael has been restored and the vicious "maintenance" clause which pauperised so many in former years is removed.²⁰

Such understanding went only so far, however, the ICTU request that a pension scheme based on a trade union standard of living and available to employed workers at 60 years of age being turned down,²¹ as was a request to appoint a committee to 'report at an early date on the conditions of old age pension recipients and the value of the pension allowances compared with the purchasing power of allowances ten years ago'.²² Likewise, the increase in the cost of living due to the outbreak of the second world war was not reflected in any increase in pensions, O Ceallaigh saying: 'I am aware of the increase in the cost of living but I

¹⁸ Maurice Moynihan, *Speeches and statements*, p. 407.

¹⁹ Old Age Pensions Act 1938 (No. 26 of 1938).

²⁰ Fianna Fáil election handbill, Dublin North-East, June 1938.

²¹ ICTU, *Annual report 1935-36* (Dublin, 1936), p. 50.

²² Dr Joseph Hannigan, DD vol. 81, 11 Dec. 1940, col. 936.

regret that I cannot see my way to introducing the legislation which would be necessary'.²³ A further problem relating specifically to blind pensions was the delay in the processing of applicants, up to twelve months in some instances according to Richard Corish in 1941.²⁴

Unemployment Assistance Act, 1933

The plight of the unemployed was uppermost in de Valera's mind when he spoke of social policy. In his address to supporters in La Scala theatre in May 1926 he had said that it was 'a fundamental duty of any government in any civilised country to see that men and women will not starve and little children will not starve because opportunity for useful work is denied to the breadwinner'.²⁵ It was a point reiterated by de Valera in a publication of 1926 explaining the aims of the new Fianna Fáil party:

Unemployment and emigration if allowed to continue will so cripple this nation that there can be little hope for it in the immediate future at any rate. Work must be found. I have repeatedly stated that I hold it is the primary duty of the modern state to ensure that every man, who is able and willing to work, will have work, so that he may earn his daily bread.²⁶

Apart from the obvious social impact of unemployment, the cause of most concern was the lack of economic provision for the unemployed, the Unemployment Insurance Act, which as we have seen remained largely unchanged since its pre-war implementation, proving an increasingly inadequate measure.

²³ DD vol. 81, 11 Dec. 1940, col. 936.

²⁴ DD vol. 81, 6 Feb. 1941, col. 1998.

²⁵ Eamon de Valera's address to La Scala theatre, 16 May 1926, (U.C.D. Archives, MacEntee Papers, P 67/443).

²⁶ Eamon de Valera, *What Fianna Fáil stands for* (Dublin, 1926).

Table 4.2

Numbers registered as unemployed at employment exchanges and branch employment offices²⁷

Date	No. on register
April 1931	24,020
December 1931	29,331
April 1932	32,944
December 1932	102,619
April 1933	70,646
December 1933	82,018
February 1934	98,642

Source: Department of Industry and Commerce, *Memorandum on the trend of employment and unemployment in the Saorstát* (1935).

From very early in the Fianna Fáil administration there was an obvious sense of urgency with regards to the unemployment problem, springing both from a genuine social concern for the plight of the unemployed and their families, and from a real political concern that the crisis could precipitate wide-scale social unrest in the country. The problem was 'frequently discussed'²⁸ by the new administration. By November 1932 the Minister for Industry and Commerce, Sean Lemass, had prepared a detailed analysis of the social and political consequences of unemployment, offering his own solution within the parameters of the 'work or maintenance principle' already accepted by the government. His memorandum to Eamon de Valera, President of the Executive Council and Minister for External Affairs, underlined the inadequacies of existing provisions for the unemployed, namely unemployment insurance and public work schemes:

²⁷ See footnote 26 in previous chapter for notes on interpreting unemployment figures.

²⁸ Memorandum from Minister for Industry and Commerce to President, 14 Nov. 1932 (N.A., D/Fin., Economic and Financial position of Saorstát Éireann, F200/25/25).

With existing machinery it is not possible to deal with the great numbers of unemployed even if the finances and schemes of work were available which, as you know, is not the case... In the meantime the unemployed are there, dependent on what they can get from home assistance funds and private charities which is altogether inadequate. In these circumstances something more than relief schemes on the scale on which they can now be undertaken is required.²⁹

Lemass suggested that that 'something more' ought to be the introduction of unemployment assistance, thus placing the issue firmly on the cabinet agenda.

While the secretary of the Department of Finance, J. J. McElligott, predictably reacted negatively to Lemass's suggested course of action, the government was, by early 1933, preparing legislation for the provision of unemployment assistance, which would have the effect of supplementing the major weaknesses of the unemployment insurance provisions. The first of those weaknesses was of course that the unemployment insurance acts did not apply to persons employed in agriculture or private domestic service, with an estimate 148,000 being employed in non-insurable occupations in 1933.³⁰ The census of 1926 had indicated that 670,076 (53% of the active population) were occupied in the agricultural sector alone, 138,658 of whom were neither farmers nor assisting relatives.³¹ The second weakness was that for those in insurable employment, payments were restricted to one weeks benefit for every six contributions paid, with the maximum period of benefit being 26 weeks in any one year no matter how long a person had been employed, or how many contributions had been made. These two weaknesses resulted in the relief of those not insured or whose benefit had been exhausted being dependant on home assistance, which could be

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Department of Industry and Commerce, *Trend in employment* (1933).

³¹ *Census 1936*, vol. ii, pp 2-3.

highly arbitrary, the assistance given by local authorities varying from one area to another. There was the further problem of the 'taint of pauperism which has deterred many persons entitled to that [home] assistance from applying for it', as Lemass pointed out in the Dáil in 1933.³²

To address these problems an unemployment assistance bill, drafted in June 1933, was introduced in the Dáil in August 1933 by Sean Lemass providing that:

all able-bodied persons who are involuntarily unemployed and have either no means at all or insufficient means to maintain themselves and their dependants, should be given a statutory right to assistance.³³

The act provided for the payment of unemployment assistance to all nationals between the ages of 18 and 70 years whose means were within certain prescribed limits: £52 per year in the county boroughs and the borough of Dun Laoighre, and £39 per year elsewhere. Once the necessary conditions were met, qualification certificates were issued by unemployment assistance officers with an unemployment appeals committee, appointed directly by the minister, deciding appeals made on decisions of the former. No benefit was payable for the first six days of unemployment while rates of benefit after that time varied depending on place of residence, sex, marital status and number of dependants. Residence was seen as an important factor in determining rate, with three separate rates for those resident in county boroughs and the borough of Dun Laoighre, those resident in other urban areas and those resident elsewhere. Benefit was also on a sliding scale depending on weekly means. The rate of benefit for a single man resident in a county

³² DD vol. 49, 27 Sept. 1933, col. 1652.

³³ DD vol. 49, 27 Sept. 1933, col. 1651.

borough was 9/- per week while that for a married man was 13/- and for a married man with a wife and three children 16/-.

The new legislation was passed by the Oireachtas in October 1933. Subsequently attributed to the effects of the worldwide economic depression of 1929,³⁴ it would stand alongside the insurance acts and the provision of home assistance and would include at a future time, it was hoped, a type of social employment and training scheme: 'a person receiving assistance under this bill must, if required to do it by the minister, attend at a course of instruction appointed or approved by regulations under the bill'.³⁵ Described as 'a pious hope'³⁶ at the time by the minister, its mention at this time is significant, as it was to become a feature of unemployment assistance legislation much later on.

The financing of the scheme, the area which had caused Cumann na nGaedheal to shy away from such initiatives, was to be as follows: £250,000 was to come from the unemployment insurance fund, a rate of 1s. 6d. in the £ on the poor law valuation was to be levied on the county boroughs and 9d on the other local government districts, a sum equal to a rate of 9d. in the £ on the rateable value of other urban areas while the balance would be provided for by the exchequer.³⁷ It was estimated that the scheme would cost over £1,000,000 per year.³⁸

Speaking for one and a half hours on the second stage of the bill in September 1933, Lemass concluded that the provision of unemployment assistance was a 'necessary and desirable social legislation'.³⁹ According to Patrick McGilligan, the Cumann na nGaedheal Minister for Industry and Commerce from 1923 to 1932 (a

³⁴ Department of Social Welfare, *First report, 1947-9*, p. 16.

³⁵ DD vol. 49, 27 Sept. 1933, col. 1658.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Department of Social Welfare, *First Report, 1947-9*, p. 81.

³⁸ DD vol. 49, 27 Sept. 1933, col. 1661.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, col. 1666.

post he combined with the Ministry for External Affairs from 1927) it was a wasted ninety minutes of expostulating on what he derogatively called 'the dole policy'⁴⁰: 'we are moving towards getting out of every decent attempt that was made to provide work and we are depending almost entirely upon this [bill]'.⁴¹ Such criticism had a hollow ring about it however, coming as it did from McGilligan. It also served to illustrate how little Fine Gael thinking differed from that of Cumann na nGaedheal, the idea of income redistribution still being seen as unwelcome meddling:

The person who is in employment at this moment is going to have the deductions made from his wages increased, while the man who is paying him is going to have the exactions imposed upon him for that employed person increased, and the difference is going to be put into the fund not for the benefit of the people who have paid but for other people who are not in insurable occupations at all.⁴²

Not all sections of the Fine Gael party criticised the bill however, James Dillon, one of the most interesting of political figures for many decades in Irish politics very much welcoming it. A spirited campaigner for many causes who never allowed his instincts to be subjected to party ideology, Dillon had an inherent sense of justice and fair play for the ordinary people. His contributions to parliamentary debates are among the most colourful and sincere: during a debate on health insurance estimates in 1939 he declared 'I believe in controversy',⁴³ a fitting elegy. Never did he play the game of politics as a mere vote catching exercise, a criticism justifiably laid at the door of many of his contemporaries. Agreeing that the unemployment

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, col. 1670.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, col. 1682.

⁴² DD vol. 49, 27 Sept. 1933, col. 1676-77.

⁴³ DD vol. 75, 21 Apr. 1939, col. 954.

assistance bill was 'very necessary',⁴⁴ his contribution to the debate was insightful: 'it is madness to look forward for ever more to having a large part of our population mendicants, crawling to the government for the wherewithal to keep body and soul together... The people are now becoming dependants of the government'.⁴⁵ This was a crucial point which was to be raised in ensuing arguments, most notably by adherents of Catholic social teaching, as a reason why the state should not take on the responsibility of providing the economic necessities of its citizens.

The Labour Party also welcomed the bill, the party leader William Norton expressing his preparedness 'to defend the principle of this bill in any constituency in this country'⁴⁶ on the grounds that 'it is absolutely imperative for the state to step in and endeavour to relieve those destitute persons from the misery, poverty and suffering which they are enduring'.⁴⁷

The implementation of the act caused some initial administrative problems, most notably complaints that local poor law authorities were not providing relief for those entitled to unemployment assistance but who, because of delays, were not in receipt of it.⁴⁸ There were also complaints from local authorities about their level of contribution to the scheme.⁴⁹ Nevertheless the worst excesses of the administration of unemployment insurance at local level were avoided in the case of unemployment assistance, the Department of Industry and Commerce

⁴⁴ DD vol. 49, 27 Sept. 1933, col. 1711.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, col. 1712.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, col. 1690.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, col. 1692.

⁴⁸ Department of Local Government and Public Health, *Report, 1934-35*, p. 171.

⁴⁹ For e.g. letter from Dublin Corporation to Secretary, Department of Industry and Commerce, 24 Oct. 1933 (N.A., D/SW, Unemployment Assistance Bill 1933, E.B. 144057).

laying down specific guidelines on how applicants for assistance were to be treated:

In considering the question of whether the applicant is 'genuinely seeking and unable to obtain employment' unemployment assistance officers should approach the matter by taking it for granted that with the exception of certain well-known classes unemployed persons generally are only too anxious to obtain work and they are genuinely seeking it.⁵⁰

This official circular outlining the spirit in which the act was to be implemented was certainly worthy of the ethos of the welfare state and marked a clear departure from a poor law mentality.

In the first year of operation over 75,000 people received unemployment assistance, as compared to just under 12,000 receiving unemployment insurance (see table).

Table 4.3

Number of persons receiving benefit or employment at state expense

Year	Receiving Unemployment assistance	Receiving Unemployment insurance	On Employment schemes	Employed on land commission/improvement of estates	Totals
1933-4	NIL	15,022	12,136	2,720	29,878
1934-5	75,591	11,921	8,599	2,993	99,104
1935-6	96,279	13,937	10,625	4,942	125,783
1936-7	67,283	15,051	51,377	5,130	138,841

Source: Department of Finance, Notes on the economic situation for the Executive Council, Nov. 1937 (N.A., D/Fin., Economic and financial position in Saorstát Éireann, F200/25/37).

An important measure in itself, it being the first assistance-based social welfare policy introduced by an Irish government, unemployment assistance did not affect in any way the underlying problems which caused the unemployment crisis in the early 1930s. These problems were many and complex, McElligott attributing a large portion of the

⁵⁰ Department of Industry and Commerce, Assistance Circular 2/5: Unemployment Assistance Act, 1933..

blame to the economic war with Britain which started in 1932.⁵¹ A further insight into the reasons for such high numbers of unemployed was given in a series of confidential reports of the employment branch of the Department of Industry and Commerce which went through each town in Ireland with a local employment office, listing the numbers unemployed and the reasons for fluctuation in the unemployment figures. The following extract from one such report considers the situation as reported from the employment exchanges in Ennis, where 619 people were on the unemployment register, in Waterford, where 2,167 were on the register and in Clonmel, where 999 were on the register:

Ennis

Building work was dull. Conditions at the whiting factory improved. Sawmilling made good progress. Thomond woollen mills maintained a steady output.

In the Ennistymon area, the kelp industry was very slack. A sewage and drainage scheme and work on the erection of the creamery continued to provide employment in this area. The live register decreased by 53 due, it is stated, to the change of procedure in the recruitment of workers. At Kilrush, dockside work was dull. Building work was brisk. Good progress was maintained at the local flour, meal and saw mills. Considerable relief was still afforded on an Irish land commission drainage scheme.

Waterford

Quayside work continued brisk. Building work declined slightly. Conditions at the boot and shoe factory showed further improvement and 21 men were recalled. The position in the bacon factories and in the breweries was normal. Employment at the brick and tile factory continued good. Conditions in the sweet, pipe and electrical appliances factories were steady. Hotel work showed seasonal activity. county council work improved somewhat.

At Dungarvan, quayside work remained good. Building operations at Carrick-on-Suir, made good progress. In the Fermoy area, county council work declined.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Clonmel

Trade at the local mineral water factories was steady. County council work in the area was slack. An increase of 81 in the live register was in consequence of fresh applications for unemployment assistance.

Messrs. Mulcahy, Redmond and Company, woollen manufacturers, Ardfinnan, recalled 51 employees who had been temporarily suspended. This accounted for the reduction in the live register at Cahir. The local flour mills continued to afford steady employment. Road work in the Cahir and Tipperary areas was dull. At Tipperary, building work was plentiful. Increased employment was available at the Thurles Beet Sugar Factory and with the Great Southern Railways. Seasonal activity on farmwork caused a decrease of 45 in the live register in this area.⁵²

The act of 1933 was amended by the Unemployment Assistance Act, 1935 which modified certain sections of the 1933 act leading to, among other things, an acceleration of the appeals process through the appointment of an appeals officer who acted as an intermediary between the unemployment assistance officer and the unemployment appeals committee.⁵³ However the Labour Party, became increasingly uneasy with the provisions of the legislation, introducing a Dáil motion in November 1936 calling for an increase in the amount provided for under unemployment assistance.⁵⁴ Its argument was based on the rise in the cost of living index by 12.5% in the three year period up to August 1936.⁵⁵ This increase had resulted, for example, from a rise in the price of a sack of household flour from 28/- in 1933 to 40/- in 1936; a rise in the price of a 4lb loaf from 7.5d. to 9.5d.; and a rise in the price of coal from 35/- to 45/- per ton (see table 4.1). An earlier petition to the government from the Cork branch of the Irish Labour Party had been

⁵² Department of Industry and Commerce, employment branch, Report for week ended 16 July 1934 (N.A., D/Fin, F 88/6/33).

⁵³ Unemployment Assistance (Amendment) Act, 1935 (No. 38 of 1935).

⁵⁴ DD vol. 64, 25 Nov. 1936, col. 931.

⁵⁵ Ibid., col. 933.

more stinging in its criticism of the act's shortcomings. Claiming that the benefits were 'not even sufficient to keep their [the recipients] bodies and souls together', it foresaw a situation where:

large numbers of the unemployed, even those who are comparatively young, will be so unfitted for hard work, if and when they are re-absorbed in industry, that they will not be able to hold their places under the present system... The children who have to live under conditions which provide them with a shilling per week for their sustenance, must deteriorate into a class of weakly adults in later years, products of a system which condemned their fathers to a life of unemployment, and passed on to them a heritage of misery, through the low conceptions of human values possessed by a government which professed such deep interest in their welfare.⁵⁶

Presenting the harsh realities of unemployment, Labour's position was not accepted by the government, a private memorandum of the Department of Industry and Commerce recommending in the Autumn of 1937 that no link should be made in the legislation between the cost of living index and the assistance rates. Describing the 1933 and 1935 acts as being 'in the nature of an experiment',⁵⁷ McElligott warned, in

⁵⁶ Letter from Cork branch of Irish Labour Party to Eamon de Valera, 25 Oct. 1934, (N.A., D/SW, E.B. 154613).

⁵⁷ Unemployment Assistance Acts 1933 and 1935: rates of unemployment assistance. Memorandum for the executive council prepared by the Department of Industry and Commerce, Oct. 1937; Memorandum of the Parliamentary Secretary, 20 Sept. 1937 (N.A., D/SW, Proposed increase in rates of unemployment assistance, E.B. 215667).

the context of an increasingly worrying economic and financial situation in the Free State, that 'it is essential to disabuse people of the notion that this is a land flowing with milk and honey'.⁵⁸

However, in late 1937 a bill was introduced effecting an increase in the rates of unemployment assistance with the amount paid by the unemployment fund increasing to £300,000. During the second stage of the bill Lemass claimed that 'some time ago the government came to the decision that it was possible to effect an increase in these rates',⁵⁹ a seeming contradiction in the context of earlier government memoranda. The bill passed its final stages in mid January 1938,⁶⁰ five months before the general election of that year, following the ending of the economic war with Britain. The increases were applicable to all recipients except in the case of single men in rural areas and small towns.

The emergency also resulted in a considerable increase in the cost of living, leaving the lot of the unemployed in a more precarious position and leading to continuing demands for increases in both unemployment assistance and unemployment insurance. The unemployment insurance acts remained unchanged during this period, except for a 1940 legislative change assuring members of the defence forces that their rights under the legislation before they joined the forces would be preserved.

⁵⁸ Notes on the economic situation for the executive council, Nov. 1937 (N.A., D/Fin., F200/25/37).

⁵⁹ DD vol. 69, 12 Jan. 1938, col. 2954.

⁶⁰ Unemployment Assistance (Amendment) Act, 1938 (No. 2 of 1938).

The series of demands for increases in unemployment assistance following the 1938 act and unemployment insurance rates were put before Sean MacEntee receiving a distinctly less positive response than from Lemass. MacEntee, the Minister for Industry and Commerce from September 1939 to August 1941 and subsequently Minister for Local Government and Public Health, both ministries being directly concerned with social legislation, was obstinate in adhering to his own views, rarely taking on board the ideas and suggestions of others, especially if those others were not members of the Fianna Fáil party. Those who publicly disagreed with MacEntee paid the price, the most glaring example of which was the case of Bishop John Dignan as discussed in the following chapter. Initially a radical in the context of welfare legislation, beginning his political career as a member of the Socialist Party of Ireland when James Connolly was its driving force in Belfast, MacEntee's attitude was to change dramatically. The first inklings of this change may be seen in the Spring of 1941 when, following requests for increases in unemployment assistance he said: 'The rates of unemployment assistance are not intended to provide for unemployed persons a substitute for wages or maintenance over a lengthy period'.⁶¹

The extent to which many of the unemployed found both unemployment assistance and unemployment insurance inadequate for subsistence may be judged from the numbers of men and women who emigrated to Britain to work on the home front in the factories and to join the British armed forces. Economic exiles, they very much remain the unsung heroes in the fight for democratic freedom.⁶²

⁶¹ DD vol. 82, 2 Apr. 1941, col. 1168.

⁶² While there are no official numbers available, it is estimated that between 100,000 and 200,000 went to Britain between 1939-45. See Dermot Keogh, *Twentieth century Ireland: nation and state*, pp 122-3 and J. J. Lee, *Ireland politics and society, 1912-85*, p. 226.

National Health Insurance: 'a new epoch'

As in the case of unemployment benefit, there were significant changes made to the working and administration of national health insurance during this period, with the adoption of central recommendations made by the committee of inquiry into health insurance and medical services established in 1924.⁶³ With the results of the valuation of approved societies at the end of 1928 demonstrating that some societies were showing increasing deficits while others were enjoying surpluses, the urgent necessity of over-hauling the entire system of health insurance in order that all insured people could enjoy equal benefits was further underlined.

It was in this context that the Fianna Fáil government decided to amalgamate the societies, with a view to making 'all the assets of the society available for all the members'⁶⁴ through the National Health Insurance Act of 1933. The act replaced the 83 branches of Approved Societies, formerly responsible for administering health insurance, with a single National Health Insurance Society, Cumann an Árachais Náisiúnta ar Shláinte, which took over the assets and liabilities of the former societies. A provisional three-member committee of management appointed by the minister was charged with overseeing the transfer to the unified society of the activities of the Approved Societies, after which a fifteen-member committee of management was to be appointed. Nine members of the committee were to be elected by the societies' members, while three of the members were to be representatives of the employers of insured persons to be appointed

⁶³ Department of Local Government and Public Health, *Report on the administration of national health insurance*, (1928).

⁶⁴ National Health Insurance Bill 1940: explanatory memorandum, Department of Local Government and Public Health, July 1940 (N.A., D/SW, Financial basis amendment: National Health Insurance Act 1942, I.A. 91/53(a)).

directly by the minister. The remaining three members were to be appointed as trustees of the unified society by the minister.⁶⁵

Although receiving a comfortable majority, the bill was criticised by both Fine Gael for what it did and by Labour for what it did not do, William Norton calling for a co-ordination of all social legislation. At that time responsibility for social legislation was scattered between two principal departments: Industry and Commerce which administered unemployment insurance and unemployment assistance, and Local Government and Public Health which administered old age and blind pensions, resulting in at best a patchwork of legislation, each individual item being implemented with a minimum of reference to other legislation. It was indeed far from the ideal, William Norton capturing the essence of the problem in an article in 1935:

It is, unfortunately, only too true that in the Saorstát we have sadly neglected to plan and co-ordinate our existing services on comprehensive lines, with the result that we tolerate inefficiency, overlapping, complexity and, by our lack of co-ordination, create a veritable maze of technicalities to bar the path of the ordinary person whom our social services were intended to benefit.⁶⁶

Norton's suggestion that the 1933 bill should be broadened to facilitate the co-ordination of existing services was predictably ignored, not only on this occasion but on many subsequent occasions.⁶⁷

Predictable too were the complaints made about the centralisation of the administration of health insurance in the hands of the Department for Local Government and Public Health in Dublin. The approved societies in Cork wrote to the minister saying that 'such action would certainly be detrimental to the interests of the insured population of Cork and the south of Ireland'.⁶⁸ Numerous such letters were received

⁶⁵ National Health Insurance Act, 1933 (No. 13 of 1933).

⁶⁶ *Sídínte*, vol. 1 (1935), p. 42.

⁶⁷ E.g. DD vol. 55, 27 Feb. 1935, col. 74; DD vol. 65, 11 Mar. 1937, col. 1615-16.

⁶⁸ Approved societies (N.A., D/SW I.A. 85/53(1)).

from existing societies, the Approved Societies Association of Limerick and Clare demanding that, on implementation of the 1933 act, branches of the unified society should be established at local level.⁶⁹ This resistance to unification and centralisation was shared by John A. Costello, subsequently taoiseach from 1948 to 1951, who in 1933 expressed Fine Gael's 'objection to the principle of unification',⁷⁰ although the grounds for such a principled objection were not entirely clear. Neither were the objections in line with a report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health published under the Cumann na nGaedheal government in 1928 which specifically recommended unification as the best means of simplifying administration and reducing administrative cost.⁷¹

Centralisation did lead to difficulties both in the long and short term. There were increased delays in receipt of benefit, attributed to the administration moving from a local to a central basis:⁷² 'we have claims awaiting six or seven weeks and, in the meantime, these people have to receive home assistance'.⁷³ Partly attributing this delay to the lack of familiarity with national health insurance procedures, the committee of management of the new unified society decided to provide each member with a special membership card outlining the 'simple rules' that were to be observed when transacting business with the society. The cards, distributed in June 1937, were designed to 'secure an immense saving of work and time to the outdoor and indoor staffs of the society'.⁷⁴ Administration costs of the new society did prove

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ DD vol. 47, 26 Apr. 1933, col. 110.

⁷¹ Department of Local Government and Public Health, *Report on the administration of national health insurance* (1935), p. 42.

⁷² General Seán McEoin, DD vol. 55, 27 Feb. 1935, col. 73.

⁷³ James Everett, DD vol. 55, 27 Feb. 1935, col. 75.

⁷⁴ D/SW Agency Circular 102, 3 June 1937.

substantially less than those incurred under the old system however,⁷⁵ while the major thrust of the act, to secure equal benefits for all, was also realised.

The headquarters of the new society were officially opened by O Kelly in July 1934 at Arus Brugha in Upper O Connell Street, Dublin, the ceremony being followed by lunch in the Gresham Hotel where toasts were made to 'Éire', 'The Guests' and 'The Society'. Meanwhile, in preparation for the task of administering the new scheme the chairman of the provisional committee of management, D. J. O Donovan, together with the secretary, visited the Yugo Slavian unified and centralised health insurance society which 'had a unified society almost identical in membership to our ultimate organisation' and because Yugo Slavia 'is a small largely agricultural nation like our own'.⁷⁶ This openness to developments on the international stage from the outset was to remain an important characteristic of the society, the society's annual publication, *Sláinte*, carrying many articles on insurance schemes throughout Europe:

It has been the constant endeavour of the unified society to keep abreast of modern development's in the field of social insurance in other countries and to discover how our own system may be most fittingly harmonised with home needs and conditions.⁷⁷

This international context was further facilitated through the society's membership from 1934 of the International Social Security Association which had a membership of 144 institutions and 58 countries.⁷⁸ This involvement in international debate in many ways underlined the

⁷⁵ Seán T. O Kelly, DD vol. 55, 11 Apr. 1935, col. 2401.

⁷⁶ *Sláinte*, vol. 1 (1935), p. 16.

⁷⁷ *Sláinte*, vol. 2 (1936), p. 8.

⁷⁸ See chapter 7 of the present work for a discussion of this and other aspects of the Irish welfare state in comparative European perspective.

vibrancy of the new society, it proving to be far more than a mere administrative agency.

By early 1935 the last of the Approved Societies had been transferred to Cumann an Árachais Náisiúnta ar Shláinte, beginning 'a new epoch in national health insurance in Saorstát Éireann' according to O Kelly.⁷⁹ In July 1936 the three person provisional committee of the new unified society, appointed for a maximum period of three years, was replaced by a committee of management of fifteen. Dr John Dignan, Bishop of Clonfert, who was appointed by Sean T. O Kelly as chairman of the committee, was a person who featured in very large measure in the development of the Irish welfare state, especially in the mid to late 1940s. Dr Helena Concannon, a Fianna Fáil T.D. and Gaelic League activist, and Dr Robert Rowlette, a Sligo-born Fianna Fáil T.D., were among the trustees, while the employers' representatives included William O Meara of Smithwick's Brewery in Kilkenny, John O Neill, President of the Dublin Chamber of Commerce, and Seán Noone, manager of Freemount Dairy Society in Charleville.

The major drawback of the new scheme, as with all previous health insurance legislation, was the absence of medical benefit for the insured, a result of the 'slothful indifference' of the Department of Local Government and Public Health, according to Norton.⁸⁰ A topic returned to again and again in insurance debates O Kelly, echoing the words of his Cumann na nGaedheal predecessor Richard Mulcahy,⁸¹ told the Dáil in April 1938 while speaking on the insurance estimates that he was 'interested in seeing medical benefits...introduced',⁸² albeit at a later date. In July of the same year Dr Dignan, chairperson of the

⁷⁹ *Sláinte*, vol. 1 (1935), p. 5.

⁸⁰ DD vol. 82, 23 Apr. 1941, col. 1655.

⁸¹ See previous chapter.

⁸² DD vol. 70, 7 Apr. 1938, col. 1659.

committee of management, claimed that 'the society is doing nothing directly and has done nothing for the prevention and cure of sickness... In this it is a failure'.⁸³ By this time the total membership of the society was 580,000.⁸⁴

It was another three years before the government decided to introduce medical benefits through increasing the state contribution to the insurance funds. It was an issue which Bishop Dignan campaigned relentlessly for, having discussed the matter with the taoiseach, Eamon de Valera, on at least one occasion.⁸⁵ Medical benefits were finally legislated for in the National Health Insurance Act of 1942⁸⁶ which provided for dental, optical and hospital benefit, the heads of the draft bill having been sent to the British government's actuary department for consideration and suggestions.⁸⁷

The legislation ended a ten year period in terms of health insurance, the most significant changes being the introduction of medical benefit and the administrative co-ordination of the insurance legislation. More importantly the necessity and desirability of having co-ordination in this area of welfare legislation provided an example for what could be done in the area of welfare legislation in general, something O Kelly, himself was obviously conscious of.⁸⁸ To the forefront of 'public' as distinct from 'political' calls for co-ordination of social services under one ministry was the committee of management of the National Health Insurance Society, a 'suggestion, often made...in

⁸³ Address to the Committee of Management, 20 July 1938, *Sláinte*, vol. 3 (1937-8), p. 6.

⁸⁴ DD vol. 70, 7 Apr. 1938, col. 1653.

⁸⁵ Letter from Eamon de Valera to John Dignan 3 June 1941; letter from Seán T. O Kelly to John Dignan 16 June 1941 (N.A., D/SW, Financial basis amendment: National Health Insurance Act 1942, I.A. 91/53(a)).

⁸⁶ National Health Insurance Act, 1942 (No. 5 of 1942).

⁸⁷ National Health Insurance Act, 1942: financial basis amendment, (N.A., D/SW, I.A. 91/53).

⁸⁸ *Sláinte*, vol. 1 (1935), p. 24..

the hope that the government may deem the subject worthy of consideration'.⁸⁹

Widows' and Orphans' Pensions

In the same way that Fianna Fáil could claim old age pensions as their own, so too could they claim the area of widows' and orphans' pensions following Cumann na nGaedheal's reluctance to legislate for them. At the founding of the Free State it was the Irish Mothers' Pensions Society which was to the fore in campaigning for the introduction of widows' and orphans' pensions in the light of the 'pauperisation and life desolation' which followed the death of the main bread-winner:

Mothers' pensions has proved its worth whenever in operation, by preserving under the fostering care of the mother and midst the sanctities of home the children of the nation and thus enabling them to receive such training and care as will mould them into self-respecting citizens.⁹⁰

It was an issue taken up by Fianna Fáil at the party's first ard fheis in November 1926, resolution 39 promising 'to provide generous measures ...regarding widows and orphans'.⁹¹ In the Dublin North by-election of 1928 Fianna Fáil renewed its commitment to widows' and orphans' pensions,⁹² with an estimated 9,499 widows being in receipt of home assistance when the party came to power in 1932.⁹³ Following the election of January 1933, in which Fianna Fáil promised 'to ensure that needy widows and orphans will be a state charge',⁹⁴ the new

⁸⁹ *Sláinte*, vol. 3 (1937-8), p. 15.

⁹⁰ John Patrick Dunne, 'Poverty problems for a patriot parliament', *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, vol. 14 (1919-30), p. 195.

⁹¹ Fianna Fáil, *Clár an chéad ard fheis* (24-25 Nov. 1926), p. 26.

⁹² 'Dáil by-election, 1928: to the electors of North Dublin City' (Fianna Fáil election leaflet).

⁹³ Memorandum, 12 Jan. 1937 (N.A., D/SW, Heads of amending bill widows' and orphans' pensions, I.A. 89/53(a)).

⁹⁴ E.g. Fianna Fáil election handbill to the electorate of Tipperary, 11 Jan. 1933.

government established a fifteen-person committee under the Minister for Local Government and Public Health to inquire and report as to:

- (i) a scheme of widows' and orphans' pensions suitable for Saorstát Éireann
- (ii) the probable cost to the state and other interests concerned of such scheme, having regard to the consequential savings on existing social services.⁹⁵

Showing evidence of an increasing awareness of developments in other countries, the committee examined similar legislation in Canada, Denmark, New Zealand, New South Wales and forty-five of the United States in order to 'provide a basis on which a similar scheme for this country might be modelled.'⁹⁶ The committee also visited the Ministry of Health in London to examine the workings of widows' and orphans' pensions there,⁹⁷ hearing evidence from the principal actuary of the British government's actuary department and from the deputy controller in the pensions' department of the Ministry of Health.⁹⁸ Having evaluated such evidence from abroad, the committee recommended, in line with the 1927 report and the poor law commission, a non-contributory scheme.⁹⁹

The committee presented its proposals to the government in early 1935, after which the government introduced a widows' and orphans' pensions bill in June of the same year. Adhering only in part to the committee's report, the bill provided for four major categories of benefit: contributory benefit which was divided into agricultural and non-agricultural employment, and non-contributory benefits the rate of which depended on area of residence as in the case of health insurance.

⁹⁵ Committee of Inquiry into Widows' and Orphans' Pensions, *Reports* (Dublin, 1935), p. 4.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Memorandum 28 Nov. 1934, regarding visit to Ministry of Health on 20 Nov. 1934 (N.A., D/SW Widows' and orphans' pensions: preliminary visit of controller and Mr Keady to Ministry of Health, Nov. 1934, I.A., 87/53d).

⁹⁸ Committee of Inquiry into Widows' and Orphans' Pensions, *Reports*, p. 146.

⁹⁹ Committee of Inquiry into Widows' and Orphans' Pensions, *Report*, p. 37.

Widows of insured persons whose husbands had made the necessary number of contributions were to receive 10/- per week up to the age of 70 when they became entitled to old age pensions without a means test, while additional child benefit would be paid for children under 14 years or 16 years if attending full-time education at rates between 5/- and 3/- per week. These benefits extended to both illegitimate and step children, though not to adopted children. Orphans' pensions were to be paid at a rate of 6/- (agricultural) or 7/6 (non-agricultural) per week under the contributory scheme. The concomitant rates of contribution payable were 4d. for men in agricultural employment and 8d. per week for other men (50% of which was paid by the employer and 50% by the employee) while the corresponding rates for women were 2d. for those in agricultural employment and 4d. per week for other woman payable in both cases by the employer.¹⁰⁰

Non-contributory pensions, payable only to those widows and orphans of insured persons or smallholders whose contributions did not fulfil the necessary number to warrant contributory pensions, were subject to a means test and were not payable to widows under 60 years of age who had no dependent children. The rates of pensions varied according to locality and means, the highest rate being 7/6 per week for those resident in a county borough while a person resident in a rural area was entitled to 5/- per week.¹⁰¹ Such a variation was based on the lower cost of living in rural areas, the government ignoring a submission from the Irish Mothers' Pensions Society which, among other things, called for uniform rates of pension.

¹⁰⁰ Department of Local Government and Public Health, *Widows' and orphans' pensions acts 1935-1937*, Leaflet W.P.1 (1939).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

Introduced by Sean T. O Kelly, the Minister for Local Government and Public Health, with a preface that:

the general purpose to which all social legislation is directed is the alleviation of the hardships accruing from risks to which all persons are exposed, and to meet that which certain classes of the population are of themselves unable to make adequate provision for¹⁰²

the bill was broadly welcomed, Norton seeing it as 'the first step and a very important step'¹⁰³ towards relieving 'the appalling poverty and destitution which frequently follows in the train of the death of a bread winner'.¹⁰⁴ Interestingly, there was minimal Fine Gael input in discussion of the bill, which was passed into law in August 1935.

Table 4.5

Number of beneficiaries under widows' and orphans' pensions acts at 31 Dec. each year

Year	Contributory						Non-contributory			Total
	Non-Agricultural			Agricultural			Widows	Dependent Children of Widows	Orphans	
	Widows	Dependent Children of Widows	Orphans	Widows	Dependent Children of Widows	Orphans				
1936	596	983	18	106	172	1	13,660	12,466	550	28,552
1937	1,556	2,392	121	291	360	19	25,691	16,838	1,002	48,270
1938	2,519	3,618	218	483	545	33	27,989	16,671	1,200	53,276
1939	3,575	4,775	326	635	693	36	28,493	15,926	1,254	55,713
1940	4,621	5,943	424	790	810	46	28,131	15,022	1,277	57,064
1941	5,618	6,999	526	969	946	62	27,672	14,032	1,274	58,098
1942	6,618	7,961	632	1,112	1,033	57	26,698	12,995	1,179	58,285
1943	7,597	8,703	719	1,263	1,129	72	25,695	12,009	1,125	58,312

Source: Local Government and Public Health, *Reports* (1936-43).

Payable from 6 January 1939, a total of 28,552 people received benefit in the first year (see table). A residual problem associated with

¹⁰² DD vol. 56, 4 June 1935, col. 2234.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, col. 2250.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, col. 2254.



existing welfare schemes raised its head in the administration of the new legislation, namely the often prolonged delay (up to eight weeks in case of widows' and orphans' pensions) before investigation of claims was completed.¹⁰⁵

Agreeing with Norton that the 1935 act was only a first step,¹⁰⁶ O Kelly introduced amending legislation in late 1936, an act being passed in 1937. The object of the amending act was to enlarge the scope of the non-contributory scheme of widows' and orphans' pensions by removing the restrictions of payment of non-contributory pensions to widows of insured employees and smallholders. The act also reduced to 55 years the age at which widows' pension could be paid to widows without dependent children.¹⁰⁷ The means test was also modified 'in favour of claimants',¹⁰⁸ such income as bonuses or grants made to persons residing in the Gaeltachtaí no longer being taken into account.

The amending legislation was universally welcomed. On behalf of Fine Gael Michael Brennan, T.D. for Roscommon and a veteran of 1916, welcomed the bill as 'certainly a very generous measure',¹⁰⁹ while James Dillon said that the extension of 'this most excellent social service...from every point of view, social and economic, is good'.¹¹⁰ While such praise might have been overly effusive, there is little doubt that, although the initial introduction of 'this great social reform'¹¹¹ was quite late in view of the fact that the need for widows' and orphans' pensions was being publicised from the early 1920s, the course of the legislation approximated closely to the ideal approach to social welfare

¹⁰⁵ William Norton, DD vol. 89, 3 Feb. 1948, col. 353.

¹⁰⁶ DD vol. 61, 28 Apr., col. 1657.

¹⁰⁷ Widows' and Orphans' Pensions Act, 1937 (No. 11 of 1937).

¹⁰⁸ DD vol. 65, 3 Mar. 1937, col. 1144.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, col. 1148.

¹¹⁰ DD vol. 65, 11 Mar. 1937, col. 1614.

¹¹¹ Fianna Fáil election handbill, Dublin north-east (June, 1938).

planning. The initial 1935 act was allowed to stand for one year. The weaknesses observed in the administration and adequacy of the act were then reviewed and amending legislation was promptly introduced. The philosophy behind the act, the provision of welfare in a dignified fashion, replacing the charitable provision of the poor law was also of great importance. The entire debate was couched in the caring terminology which ideally underpins welfare legislation, and not in the grudging approach displayed in the first decade of the Free State. It was an approach underpinned by de Valera's constitution of 1937, during the debate on which he pledged state assistance for the widow to 'aid and contribute to such an extent as will not necessitate for her leaving her duties as a mother and engaging in outside labour... I am going, as long as I live, to try and work for that'.¹¹²

The act was further amended in 1940 to provide for the continued favourable status of agricultural workers who would continue to enjoy a lower rate of contribution but a higher rate of benefit. The amendment was carried out under the direction of Dr Francis Ward, the Parliamentary Secretary at the Department of Local Government and Public Health from 1932-1946.

By the time of this amending legislation the cost of living argument was also being used as a reason to increase the rates of benefit. However, rather than increasing the statutory rates of benefit, supplementary benefits in the forms of cash and food were introduced. It was a course common to all social welfare legislation during the emergency period and discussion of these emergency powers orders forms the final section of the present chapter.

¹¹² Maurice Moynihan, *Speeches and statements*, p. 325.

Table 4.6

Numbers in receipt of widows' and orphans' pensions

Year	Total
1936	28,552
1937	48,270
1938	53,276
1939	55,713
1940	57,064
1941	58,098
1942	58,285
1943	58,312

Source: Department of Local Government and Public Health, *Reports* (1936-43).

Food vouchers and cash allowances

The decision by the government to offset the rise in the cost of living by providing both cash supplements and commodity (usually food) vouchers was by no means a new approach to relieving poverty in independent Ireland: in the winter of 1934-35 beef vouchers were distributed by the Department of Agriculture through home assistance officers to people in receipt of home assistance, over 27,000 receiving beef in the first week of the scheme in December 1934. However on this occasion vouchers were a mere secondary effect of the Slaughter of Cattle and Sheep Act, 1934,¹¹³ the primary aim of which was to arrest the drop in cattle prices and to provide a market for the surplus cattle which resulted from the economic war with Britain (1932-8). The latter, sparked by de Valera's refusal to pay land annuities to the British exchequer, resulted in what Dr James Ryan described as a 'penal tariff'¹¹⁴ of 20% being imposed on Irish cattle and other agricultural exports to the United Kingdom, the number of cattle being exported

¹¹³ Slaughter of Cattle and Sheep Act, 1934 (No. 42 of 1934).

¹¹⁴ DD vol. 53, 2 Aug. 1934, col. 2061.

falling by 275,000. The incidental nature of this beef voucher scheme is of itself interesting: while it was recognised by Dr James Ryan that many families on home assistance and unemployment assistance 'find it impossible to buy meat sufficient for their families in the ordinary way',¹¹⁵ there is little doubt that no action would have been taken to rectify the situation were it not for the greater needs of the agricultural community. The extent to which the welfare provision of the scheme was incidental was underlined by the Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health of 1934-5:

In order to increase the consumption of beef at a time when there was a surplus of cattle, a scheme for the distribution of beef to certain classes of necessitous persons was put into operation.¹¹⁶

During the emergency, however, food vouchers were introduced not as a secondary result of other measures but for their own merit. They became familiar to recipients of all income supplement benefits at some stage, initially applying to persons in receipt of home assistance and unemployment assistance, national health insurance, widows' and orphans' pensions and old age and blind pension recipients residing in urban areas. In 1941, the first year of war time food vouchers, £400,000 was allocated to cover their cost, £168,000 being allocated to recipients of unemployment assistance, while a further £200,000 was allocated to meet the cost of special food allowances which boards of assistance could grant, at their discretion, to recipients of home assistance.¹¹⁷ Claimed by Lemass to be proportionally greater than the rise in the cost of living,¹¹⁸ they were made possible by the Emergency Powers (Food Allowances) Order of 1941.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, col. 2067.

¹¹⁶ Department of Local Government and Public Health, *Report, 1934-5*, p. 171.

¹¹⁷ DD vol. 86, 7 May 1942, col. 1769.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* See also DD vol. 88, 15 Oct. 1942, col. 1282.

The order of 1941 provided for, amongst other things, the issue of food vouchers to recipients of unemployment assistance. Vouchers were exchangeable free of charge for certain specified amounts of bread, butter and milk: 2lbs of bread, 0.25lb of creamery butter and 3.5 pints of milk per week in respect of each dependent of a recipient of unemployment assistance up to a maximum of six dependants.¹¹⁹ The scheme came into operation in September 1941, the initial allowances being increased as the war progressed. Of the £400,000 set aside in the first year to meet the costs, £168,000 was provided for food vouchers issued to recipients of unemployment assistance while an extra £200,000 was provided to meet the cost of special food allowances to be distributed by boards of assistance.¹²⁰ Recipients of unemployment insurance also benefited from emergency supplements, the Emergency Powers (No. 93) Order, 1941, increasing from 5/- and 1/- to 7/6 and 2/6 respectively the weekly benefits payable to recipients of unemployment insurance in respect of an adult and each child dependent.

The Emergency Powers (Food Allowances) Order, 1941 provided similar benefits for recipients of widows' and orphans' pensions. From 5 September 1941 food vouchers, exchangeable on a weekly basis for 3.5 pints of milk, 0.25lbs of butter and 2lbs of bread, were provided for recipients of widows' and orphans' pensions resident in county boroughs, boroughs, urban districts and incorporated towns. In April 1944 supplementary cash benefits became available for recipients resident outside of these 'scheduled areas'. Both the 1941 and 1944 orders were replaced by the Social Welfare (Cash Supplements)

¹¹⁹ Emergency Powers (Food Allowances) Order, 1941.

¹²⁰ Sean Lemass, DD vol. 86, 7 May 1942, col. 1769.

Order, 1947 which replaced previous supplements with cash supplements from April 1947.

Old age pensioners received similar benefits to widows and orphans under the food allowances scheme of 1941 while in 1944 an emergency supplement to public assistance of up to 2/6 per week was granted for necessitous recipients of old age and blind pensions in those areas where food allowances did not apply. An additional 1/6 could be paid to blind pensioners in respect of each dependent child. From April 1947 all old age pensioners became entitled to a cash supplement of 2/6 per week in addition to their existing pension.

By 1942 total expenditure on food vouchers increased to £435,000. The volume of expenditure was used by ministers as the main justification for not increasing the basic rates of income supplement benefits, an explanation which was unacceptable to opposition parties. However, this method of dealing with cost of living increases was to remain in force until 1948 and in some cases until early 1949, their initial restriction to residents of urban areas being widened to include residents of rural areas by 1944. They were further complimented by supplementary cash allowances in some instances (see table), and by the introduction in 1942 of a cheap fuel scheme designed to ensure that 'the poorer sections of the community'¹²¹ could afford fuel.

By the late 1940s the Fianna Fáil government had decided that the time had come to replace the temporary food and cash allowances by more concrete measures, namely the increasing of basic benefits so as to remove the necessity for supplementary benefits.

¹²¹ Department of Social Welfare, *First report*, p. 50.

Table 4.7**Dates of commencement and cessation of various supplementary income services**

Service	Categories effected	Commencement	Cessation
Food Vouchers (Urban Areas)	Unemployment Assistance, National Health Insurance, Widows' and Orphans' Pensions, Old age and Blind Pensions	1941	April-July 1947
Supplementary Cash Allowances (Rural Areas)	Widows' and Orphans' Pensions	1944	April 1947
Additional Cash Allowances (Rural Areas) paid by Local Authorities	National Health Insurance, Old Age and Blind Pensions	1944	1947-1949
Food Vouchers for recipients of Home Assistance	Home Assistance	1941	March 1948
Cash Supplements	Old Age and Blind Pensions, National Health Insurance, Unemployment Insurance, Unemployment Assistance, Widows' and Orphans' Pensions	1947	1948-49

Source: Social Welfare Act, 1955 (N.A., D/SW, Plan 4/55).

It was an idea furthered by the first inter-party government which took over the reins of government in Spring 1948. While certainly alleviating the plight of those on social welfare, the system of cash and commodity supplements was a backwards step in the context of welfare state development, having more in common with a poor law approach to relief than with a state implementing progressive and comprehensive social legislation. They smacked of charity, and their means tested base was very much out of tune with the development of a welfare state.

They were also, according to most sources, inadequate as relief measures. One feels that they contributed to the growing apathy and conservatism of Fianna Fáil towards social legislation from the late 1930s and into the 1940s. Cash and commodity supplements were perceived as justifying a reluctance to further change social legislation, a topic discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

Conversely, the move away from cash and commodity supplements underlined the inadequacy of basic benefits, contributing to a move towards positive legislative change. This shift towards increasing existing basic benefits and introducing new ones undoubtedly had its origin in the publication of the Beveridge Report in Britain just before Christmas 1942. Discussion of social policy took on a new vibrancy and a new urgency in Ireland, debates and expectations reaching fever pitch in the mid 1940s. It took this external impetus to highlight the inadequacies of Irish social policy and to provide the driving force behind a new era of welfare legislation. Arising directly from the second world war experience of the allies, the debate in Ireland was bitter and full of recriminations.

CHAPTER 5

BEVERIDGEISM IN IRELAND: NEW BEGINNINGS IN SOCIAL POLICY

December 1942 was to mark the beginning of a new era in the approach to social welfare policy in Ireland. Despite indications that Fianna Fáil was becoming increasingly conservative in its approach to social legislation - an election advertisement published in the daily newspapers in June 1937 held Fine Gael up to ridicule for its promise to introduce children's allowances¹ - the internal political dynamic was very much upset by external events, leading to a prolonged and fruitful debate on the whole area of social policy.

Not surprisingly, given the early foundations of Irish social policy and the continuous reference to British legislation, the impetus was to come from Britain in the form of Sir William Beveridge's report, *Social insurance and allied services*, published in December 1942. Written against the backdrop of war, its influence in Ireland was immediate, and anticipated by many. Its presentation in the popular press as a solution to Ireland's problems made it appeal very much to the ordinary Irish people, most of whom were experiencing the social and economic consequences of Europe at war, the decrease in industrial production due to shortage of raw materials combined with the general shortage of food stuffs and the sheer want of those forced to live on social welfare payments being especially acute. Such circumstances drove tens of thousands of Irish people to England where they contributed to the wartime effort of the allies, a phenomenon to which Dermot Keogh ascribes a conspiratorial character:

¹ *IT*, 30 June 1937.

It was of mutual benefit to both the allies and the Irish to facilitate the migration of tens of thousands to England for war work. Although the British were not permitted to advertise the Irish authorities did not impede the steady supply of workers to England.²

Many Irish men took active part in the war, Irish citizens being among those involved in Operation Overlord, landing on the Normandy beaches in June 1944. The fact that most war-time emigrants did not return following the war but were rather joined by many more was testimony to Irish economic and social conditions. As the Department of Local Government and Public Health itself observed in 1945: 'pauperism exists in this country to a considerable degree',³ the government recognising that 'the inducement offered by the British government social insurance scheme' was a significant factor in the continuing emigration from Ireland.⁴ As Dónall MacAmhlaigh, who emigrated to England in 1951 after being demobilised from the Irish army, was to write in his *Dialann Deoraí*, diary of an Irish exile in Britain:

Is é an feall go bhfuil an tír seo chomh haindiagach is atá, mar tá buanna go leor ag roinnt léi ar gaire don Chríostaíocht iad ná go leor dá bhfuil thiar in Éireann. Tóg an welfare state mar shampla.⁵

It was in the hope of improving social standards that the Beveridge report was greeted with popular enthusiasm in Ireland: it held out the promise of positive social reform.

The Beveridge report might well have had little practical effect in Ireland had it not been for the publication of a somewhat similar, though

2 Dermot Keogh, *Twentieth century Ireland: nation and state* (Dublin, 1994), p. 122.

3 Department of Local Government and Public Health, Considerations attending the problems of extending social insurance in Ireland with special reference to the rural community, c1945 (U.C.D. Archives, MacEntee papers, Social Services, P67/361).

4 Ibid.

5 Dónall MacAmhlaigh, *Dialann Deoraí* (Dublin, 1960), p. 61.

markedly less thorough, Irish plan, *Social security: outlines of a scheme of national health insurance* by Dr John Dignan, Bishop of Clonfert. A committed Sinn Féin activist prior to independence, Dignan, a graduate of St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, was ordained for the diocese of Clonfert in 1903. During the war of independence, by which time he was parish priest of Abbey, Loughrea, his home was raided and bombed by the black and tans. He was a known republican sympathiser⁶ during the civil war and supporter of Fianna Fáil, accepting from the Fianna Fáil government in 1936 the position of chairman of the committee of management of the newly established National Health Insurance Society. In March 1924 he was appointed Bishop of Clonfert, a position he held until his death in 1953.

Hailed as 'Éire's Beveridge Plan',⁷ the publication of *Social security* in March 1945 put increasing pressure on the government to introduce legislative changes in the area of social welfare. The Dignan plan, criticised by the government for its lack of detail on methods of financing and its overwrought idealism, caused a deepening of the popular and political debate on social policy, a debate which proved extremely fruitful to the extent that it purged forever the poor law mentality that had for so long pervaded philosophical approaches to social policy in Ireland.

The importance of the Dignan and Beveridge plans cannot be over-emphasised in the context of Irish social welfare legislation. Between them they took discussion of social policy in twentieth-century Ireland out of its nineteenth century ideological confines. It is particularly important to note that the Beveridge report, the unofficial blueprint for development in Ireland, was the most advanced analysis of welfare legislation then in existence in Europe, Ireland becoming in time what

⁶ Bernard J. Canning, *Bishops of Ireland 1870-1987* (Ballyshannon, 1987), p. 335.

⁷ *II*, 18 Oct. 1944.

social scientists describe as a 'Beveridge type' welfare state.

The two immediate changes precipitated by the report in Ireland were the introduction of children's allowances in 1944 and the establishment of a separate Department of Social Welfare together with a Department of Health in 1947.

As a central feature of social welfare legislation children's allowances 'breached an important principle',⁸ establishing the responsibility of the state in securing the well-being of children. In Ireland they are the only example of an income maintenance policy being introduced by an Irish government before being introduced in Britain. It was a necessary and crucial addition to the limited policies already in existence, and its non-means-tested basis was unique. The introduction of children's allowances also had the effect of temporarily placating the increasingly vocal demands for a co-ordinated and unified approach to the development and administration of income supplement policies, responsibility for which was divided between the Department of Local Government and Public Health and the Department of Industry and Commerce, with the Department of Finance in effect having the power of veto.

The inefficiency of such a cumbersome and often overlapping system of administration became increasingly obvious in the post war years, and in 1947 separate Departments of Social Welfare and Health were established, each administered by one minister for the first number of years. This development signified the greater importance of social policy in general and allowed for the future standardisation and co-ordination of the various social security schemes.

Before moving to a detailed discussion of Beveridge, Dignan, the

⁸ Tony Novak, *Poverty and the state* (England, 1988), p. 152.

introduction of children's allowances and the establishment of the Department of Social Welfare, it is necessary to outline briefly two developments in social democratic politics in this period. First among these was the founding of Clann na Poblachta in July 1946. Led by Sean MacBride the new party was primarily a reaction to the perceived repression of republicans by Fianna Fáil during the war, offering a constitutional, republican alternative. Advocating the declaration of a republic, it adopted, more importantly in the present context and equally important in the eyes of its members, a radical social programme, promising major reforms of social security. While winning two of three by-elections in October 1947, it only managed to gain 10 of the 157 Dáil seats in the general election of February 1948, perhaps as a result of overstretching its resources by fielding almost 100 candidates. Its political impact was to make itself felt more after 1948 when it took part in the first inter-party government.

Meanwhile the long standing flag-bearer of social democratic politics in Ireland, the Labour Party, divided, resulting in the formation of National Labour. The split came at a time when the Labour Party's continental brethren were to the fore in heralding a new post-war era of social reform. Orchestrated by William O'Brien following the return of Jim Larkin to the Labour Party, National Labour split from the parent party in 1943, accusing William Norton's followers of belonging to a communist-dominated party. The personality-based rather than policy-based division was mirrored in the trade union movement, further weakening the position of labour. The split was to last until 1950 resulting in the decimation of the combined parliamentary strength of Labour, leaving it in a very weak position to fight for the development of social legislation. A similar situation developed in post-war France where the labour movement divided into different political and

ideological groupings, very much diluting its influence in the crucial first decade of the Fifth Republic which saw rapid economic change.⁹

These, then, are the contexts in which the developments from December 1942 until the downfall of the Fianna Fáil administration following the general election of February 1948 took place. The following pages discuss, respectively, the publication and influence of the Beveridge report, the Dignan plan, the introduction of children's allowances and the establishment of the Departments of Social Welfare and of Health.

The Beveridge plan and its influence in Ireland

It is generally accepted by social scientists that one of the major driving forces behind the development of social policy is war: one observer has described war as a 'great engine of social advance'.¹⁰ History illustrates this clearly, the Boer War and World War I occasioning discussion and implementation of social legislation in a number of countries. In Belgium for example the national governments which brought together the socialist, liberal and Catholic blocks, introduced several important social and political changes following World War I including the legalisation of all trade unions and an eight-hour working day.¹¹

The result of World War II was even more marked in this respect, the allied nations and Germany both claiming to have the most innovative social legislation. Apart from this high-political competition, on a popular level there was a great need for development. World War II

9 See Martin Kolinsky, 'The trade unions in a divided Labour movement' in Michalina Vaughan, et al., *Social change in France* (Oxford, 1980).

10 Kathleen Jones, *The making of social policy in Britain, 1830-1990* (London, 1991), p. 121.

11 See Guy Vanthensche, 'Unemployment insurance in inter-war Belgium', *International Review of Social History*, vol. 35 (1990), no. 3, p. 358.

occasioned huge sacrifices by the populace which would have to be acknowledged through a better social system following the war. It also underlined the inadequacy of existing legislation and provisions. Widows, orphans and the demobilised would also have to be taken care of during and after the war, while the soldiers had to be provided with a *raison d'être*, apart from national pride, for fighting to win the war. War also facilitated the introduction of more far reaching social legislation through a greater acceptance of state intervention in the lives of the people, a requisite of war-time government.

Titmus points to two further factors influencing social policy as a direct result of war: as participation in war requires the total effort by the nation, the care of dependants becomes a more recognised and accepted social responsibility, while the waging of war 'presupposes and imposes a great increase in social discipline', a discipline 'only tolerable if social inequalities are not intolerable':¹²

The aims and context of social policy, both in peace and in war, are thus determined by how far the co-operation of the masses is essential to the successful prosecution of war.¹³

Sir William Beveridge was very much aware of this 'social unification' in time of war, and the benefits which could accrue from it:

The prevention of want, the diminution and relief of disease - the special aim of the social services - are in fact a common interest of all citizens. It may be possible to secure a keener realisation of that fact in war than it is in peace, because war breeds national unity. It may be possible, through a sense of national unity and readiness to sacrifice personal interests to the common cause, to bring about changes which, when they are made, will be accepted on all hands as advances, but which it might be difficult to make at other times.¹⁴

12 R. M. Titmus, *Essays on the welfare state* (Great Britain, 1976), pp 84-85.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 85.

14 Sir William Beveridge, *Social insurance and allied services*, (American edn., New York, 1942), p. 172.

It was the combination of all of these factors which resulted in the post-World War II period seeing the institutionalisation of the welfare state across northern and western Europe. To a greater or lesser extent, they were factors which influenced neutral Ireland, continental and British thinking permeating the Irish approach to social legislation.

The wartime experience of Europe also had the effect of forging a sense of national solidarity, and a shared determination that post-war society would be far removed from the economic and social depression of the 1930s, and the pronounced social stratification of society. In particular 'social security...realised the new sense of national community in terms of social policy; it modernised Liberalism, moderated Socialism'.¹⁵ The Nordic countries of Denmark and Norway are excellent examples of this. In the latter, following liberation in 1945, an all party government was sworn into office led by Einar Gerhardsen, a prominent figure in the Norwegian Labour Party. Influenced by Beveridge, the Norwegian Central Federation of Trade Unions published a report in 1944 on the development and co-ordination of social security schemes, subsequently agreed upon by the national government in its declaration on the future political, social and economic aims of Norway, published in 1945.¹⁶ National governments were also formed in Sweden and Finland:

The habit of co-operation across party lines...made for mutual understanding and also for recognition of the need for equitable distribution of the social product among all classes of society.

Thus by the end of World War II - and even more definitely in the decade immediately following it - there was no longer any group of importance in Scandinavia which did not accept the basic principles of a welfare state.¹⁷

15 Peter Baldwin, 'Bourgeois parties, social democracy and the origins of post-war reforms in Sweden', *International Review of Social History*, vol. 33, no. 2 (1988), p. 122.

16 See for example Stein Kuhnle, 'National equality and local decision making: values in conflict in the development of the Norwegian welfare state', *Acta Sociologica*, vol. 23 (1980), no. 2-3, p. 101.

17 Gunnar Heckscher, *The welfare state and beyond: success and problems in Scandinavia* (Minneapolis, 1984), p. 52.

A similar chain of events unfolded in Belgium. Influenced by the publication of the Beveridge report in Britain and while still under German occupation the Belgian labour movement drew up a social contract, officially called the 'draft accord for social unity', in April 1944. Over half the text of the contract was taken up with discussion of social security and was developed by the Minister for Employment and Social Welfare in the decree law of December 1944.¹⁸

The labour movement was also to the fore in promoting post war social legislation in France (up to its internal divisions in 1947), France achieving a national social security plan in 1945 following negotiations between the Free French Forces under de Gaulle and French resistance groups:¹⁹

By 1950 the modern welfare state had not only become a social and economic reality, but a political reality.²⁰

These developments were, of course, greatly facilitated by the launch of the European Recovery Programme in 1947 by the United States, commonly referred to as 'Marshall Aid'. France alone received a combined total of over \$15,000,000.²¹

As already noted, many of the wartime and post-war social security programmes took their influence from the Beveridge report, published in December 1942, 'the symbol of the arrival of the welfare state in Britain'.²² Officially entitled the *Report on social insurance and allied services* it was published at a time when 'the deep and vivid interest of

18 See Patrick J. Pasture, 'The April 1944 "social pact" in Belgium and its significance for the post war welfare state', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 28, no. 4 (1993).

19 See Douglas Ashford, *The emergence of the welfare state*, (3rd edn., Oxford, 1988), p. 284; Robert Leaper, 'The Beveridge report in its contemporary setting', *International Social Security Review* vol. 45 (1992), no. 1-2.

20 James McMillan, *Dreyfus to de Gaulle: politics and society in France, 1898-1969* (3rd edn., Great Britain, 1990), p. 294.

21 James McMillan, *Dreyfus to de Gaulle: politics and society in France, 1898-1969*, p. 164.

22 Tony Novak, *Poverty and the state* (England, 1988), p. 149.

the people of Britain in the kind of Britain which is to emerge when the floods of war subside' was realised.²³ Described as having an 'enduring, almost scriptural prestige',²⁴ the report was the result of an interdepartmental committee appointed by Arthur Greenwood, Minister without Portfolio but with general responsibility for the supervision of reconstruction planning, in June 1941. In January 1942 it was decided that the report should be made and signed solely by Sir William Beveridge.

Its publication came at a crucial time in the war for Britain, just weeks after the battle of El Alamein, the turning point in the desert war in North Africa. For the first time the church bells were ordered rung by Churchill - not to herald an invasion but rather to mark a new mood that victory was possible; that the war could be won and that planning for peace could begin in earnest.

The timing of the publication of Beveridge's report was therefore significant, and the impact the report had in Britain may be judged from the huge sales in the first three months of publication, when 250,000 copies of the full report, 350,000 of the official abridged version and 42,000 of the American edition were sold, making it the best selling British official report up to that time.²⁵ After liberation, Beveridge was invited to speak in many continental European countries including Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland, while his 1944 publication, *Full employment in a free society* was translated into eight languages.²⁶ In post-war Germany the socialists 'emblazoned Beveridgean ideals of welfare reform on their banners'.²⁷

23 William Beveridge, *The pillars of security* (London, 1943), p. 107.

24 Robert Leaper, 'The Beveridge report in its contemporary setting', *International Social Security Review*, vol. 45 (1992), no. 1-2, p. 17.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 203.

26 *Ibid.*

27 Peter Baldwin, 'Class interests and the post-war welfare state in Europe: a historical perspective',

The impressively detailed report began by boldly proclaiming that 'a revolutionary moment in the world's history is a time for revolutions, not for patching'.²⁸ With its ultimate aim when implemented being the abolition of want through the provision of income security, its method of achieving this was based mainly on compulsory social insurance, i.e. the 'giving in return for contributions benefits up to subsistence level, as of right and without means test',²⁹ with national assistance ('national assistance is an essential subsidiary method in the whole plan for social security'³⁰) and voluntary social insurance as subsidiary methods. The provision of insurance-based benefits rather than 'free allowances from the state' was, according to Beveridge, what people in Britain desired.³¹ Priority should be given, according to the report, to the welfare of children and the 'safeguarding of maternity',³² one of the prime arguments used in favour of the introduction of children's allowances being the restoration of the birth rate:

With its present rate of reproduction, the British race cannot survive; means of reversing the recent course of the birth rate must be found... Children's allowances should be regarded both as a help to parents in meeting their responsibilities and as an acceptance of new responsibilities by the community.³³

The report recommended that such allowances should be non-contributory, provided out of taxation returns, at a rate of 8/- per week for the second and each subsequent child. Recommending payment for children up to 16 years of age, Beveridge also advised that they be paid to every family, irrespective of means.³⁴

International Social Security Review, no. 3 (1990), p. 256.

28 William Beveridge, *Social insurance and allied services*, p. 6.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 154.

34 *Ibid.*, pp 156-7.

One of the other major areas dealt with by the report was that of unemployment and unemployment benefit. Underlining any insurance-based plan is the principle of relatively secure employment being available to the majority of those willing to work:

A satisfactory scheme of social insurance assumes the maintenance of employment and the prevention of mass unemployment... Income security which is all that can be given by social insurance is so inadequate a provision for human happiness that to put it forward by itself as a sole or principal measure of reconstruction hardly seems worth doing. It should be accompanied by an announced determination to use the powers of the State to whatever extent may prove necessary to ensure for all, not indeed absolute continuity of work, but a reasonable chance of productive employment.³⁵

However, in the event of prolonged unemployment, receipt of unemployment benefit was to be made conditional upon attendance at a work or training centre.

Among the other proposed administrative changes and social security provisions in the plan were the unification of social insurance contributions, allowing each insured individual to obtain all benefits through a single weekly contribution; an ending of the approved societies system which gave unequal benefit for equal contributions; provision of skills training and retraining for those who lost their jobs; and the centralisation of the administration of public assistance, at the time the responsibility of local authorities.³⁶ The plan also proposed the recognition of housewives as a distinct insurance class with benefits adjusted to their special needs. This latter recommendation underpinned Beveridge's belief that reform of social security would greatly improve the condition of women in society. A product of his time, however, the general thrust of the report, which referred to the employee as 'he',

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 15-16.

reinforced conventional stereotypes of the period.³⁷

The fact that the report was a direct response to the wartime situation may be seen from its concluding remarks: 'each individual citizen is more likely to concentrate upon his war effort if he feels that his government will be ready in time with plans for that better world'.³⁸ It was a point alluded to earlier by Beveridge in a talk to the Engineering Industries Association, when he said that 'thinking about reconstruction is one of the ways of ensuring victory'.³⁹ The report also formed part of the British contribution to the Atlantic Charter signed by the allies with the intention of bringing about 'the fullest collaboration between all nations in the economic field, with the object of securing for all improved labour standards, economic advancement and social security'.⁴⁰ Stretching a point Beveridge added that the sentiments expressed in the Atlantic Charter out of which his own report sprang were 'a sign of the belief that the object of government in peace and in war is not the glory of rulers or of race, but the happiness of the common man'.⁴¹

From an ideological view point, Beveridge described the report as leaning 'neither towards socialism nor towards capitalism', but rather a blueprint for dealing with the 'five giant evils' of want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness.⁴² In order to further placate any conservative, or indeed liberal, reaction to the report, Beveridge confirmed that neither the experience nor achievements of the past were being forgotten, the credentials of the report being firmly established in an historical context:

37 Elizabeth Wilson, 'Feminism in social policy' in Martin Loney, et al. (eds.), *Social policy and social welfare* (Philadelphia, 1988).

38 Ibid., p. 171.

39 William Beveridge, *The pillars of security* (London, 1943), p. 42.

40 William Beveridge, *Social insurance and allied services*, p. 171.

41 Ibid.

42 William Beveridge, *The pillars of security*, pp 42, 77.

The plan, as I have set it out briefly, is a completion of what was begun a little more than 30 years ago when Lloyd George introduced national health insurance and Winston Churchill, the President of the Board of Trade, introduced unemployment insurance.⁴³

While more frequently employing the rhetoric of revolution in describing the report, this appeal to history and tradition was both tactful and beneficial and, as we shall see later, a characteristic of social reform in a period when such reform was not universally accepted as desirable.

Over the period following the publication of the report the social evils identified by Beveridge were 'systematically tackled by legislation',⁴⁴ the recommendations being implemented by both Churchill and Atlee as part of their four-year and five-year plans respectively. Indeed some of the legislation introduced, such as the National Insurance Act of 1946 went beyond the provision of the Beveridge report, while unemployment was kept at a minimum by the Labour government, rarely rising above 2%. In 1946 Aneurin Bevan, the Minister for Health, began to reform significantly the national health service entitling everybody to comprehensive medical care free of charge from 1948. It was accompanied by other reforms including the National Insurance Industrial Injuries Act, 1946 and the National Assistance Act, 1948 which heralded the formal abolition of the poor law. It was only in 1951 with the return of the Tories to government that the focus of social reform moved from Britain to the Nordic countries.

While the report had several weaknesses which social scientists have since identified with the benefit of hindsight, it was to prove the single most important impetus behind the development of social security policy in Ireland in the 1940s and 1950s. Described at the time as 'the

⁴³ Ibid., p. 57.

⁴⁴ Kathleen Jones, *The making of social policy in Britain, 1830-1990*, p. 134.

Maginot Line of those who are tempted not to try to overcome their weakness',⁴⁵ the immediate influence of the report in the Free State may be judged from the numerous articles which appeared in newspapers and periodicals together with discussion of the report at government and parliamentary level. As Dr John Dignan declared in November 1944:

The publication in England of the Beveridge Report, of the government's white papers on social insurance and on the comprehensive medical services have undoubtedly awakened interest and expectation of similar development's in this country'.⁴⁶

The report generated a popular interest, all daily newspapers carrying reviews of the report itself. Such popular interest was crucial, as the Beveridge report and the subsequent legislation in Britain was 'clearly a case where popular expectations determined government reaction' according to Douglas Ashford.⁴⁷ It is interesting here to note that the immediate and constant thread running through the newspaper articles was the feasibility of adopting the essence of the Beveridge report in Ireland.

In anticipation the *Irish Times*, in its regular feature 'An Irishman's Diary', told of the imminent publication of the *Report on social security and allied services*, commenting that it should be worth 'careful study by people interested in the social development of our own country'.⁴⁸ Coverage in the *Irish Times* of various aspects of the report continued right through December 1942. While the 'London Letter' kept the readers abreast of developments in Britain⁴⁹ special feature articles on the

45 Arnold Marsh, *Ireland's new foundation* (Dundalk, 1944), p. 101.

46 Observations on a paper entitled 'Outlines of a scheme of national health insurance' read to the committee of management of Cumann an Árachais Náisiúnta ar Shláinte by chairperson, Dr Dignan (N.A., D/SW, Dr. Dignan plan, I.A. 122/53).

47 Douglas Ashford, *The emergency of the welfare state*, p. 269.

48 *IT*, 27 Nov. 1942.

49 *IT*, 2 Dec. 1942; 7 Dec. 1942; 11 Dec. 1942; 18 Dec. 1942; 24 Dec. 1942.

Beveridge report, written by 'special correspondents' and 'political correspondents' appeared - on three occasions on the front page of the newspaper.

The thrust of these articles was the relevance of the report to Ireland. On 14 December the front page article, under the headline 'The Beveridge scheme: interest in Éire' said:

Highly desirable...would be a similar document to the Beveridge report, setting out the possibility of its adoption here... There is strong reason why the Éire government should take early cognisance of it.

'A student of economics' in a front page article some days later said it was 'inevitable' that 'the government of Éire is to adopt some plans of "social security" on the general principles of the Beveridge report'.

On New Year's Eve 1942 the *Irish Times*, with obvious disappointment, declared in a front page headline, 'No Éire Beveridge plan yet'. Commenting on and quoting from an article that appeared in *The Economist*⁵⁰ earlier in the month, the paper hinted at what could be the first practical effect of the report in Ireland, saying 'it would not be surprising if the promise of [family allowances] were not to form part of the government's programme at the coming general election', which was subsequently held in July 1943.

The coverage which the plan received in the *Irish Independent*, a paper with a much greater circulation and wider readership base than the *Irish Times*, was equally expansive and also concentrated on the implications of the report for Ireland. The first major article appeared on 2 December 1942 under the headline 'British plan to abolish want: sweeping changes proposed'. Two weeks later the paper began a series of well-reasoned, knowledgeable and balanced articles on the report in

⁵⁰ 'The Beveridge plan', *The Economist*, 5 Dec. 1942.

response to what it termed the ‘considerable interest [that] has been aroused in Ireland, as elsewhere in the world, in the Beveridge Report on social insurance and in view of its possible influence on the course of social planning [here]’. While the first article, ‘Beveridge’s “No Want Plan”: an analysis’, was largely descriptive, the series continued by examining the ‘cash benefits and pensions’, the cost of the scheme to the state and to the contributor and the question of family and children’s allowances. The articles clearly supported the qualified implementation of the Beveridge plan in Ireland, the concluding remarks summing up the measured tenor of the series:

Every nation has to solve its problems in accordance with its own needs and resources. What may be feasible in one may be practicable in another only in a modified and more moderate pattern. Here, with every disposition to be liberal, it is necessary, in the words of Sir William Beveridge’s reminder to the relatively wealthier nations, to bear in mind that money cannot come from a bottomless pit.⁵¹

Coverage of the report in the *Irish Press* was less comprehensive, reflecting its political bias and the editorial control over the paper exercised by de Valera, and an early indication of what the Fianna Fáil government’s response to the report would be. An article on 2 December 1942 gave a descriptive and largely favourable account of the essence of the report, calling it a plan which ‘sets out to abolish below-the-breadline poverty’. In an unusual front-page article two days later however, under the headline ‘Beveridge plan “poor reward” Australian minister says’, the reporter cited criticisms of the report by the Australian Minister for Labour. Further down, a spokesperson for the German authorities was quoted as saying that the basis of the plan was taken from existing German policy, highlighting the political significance of the report in the

51 *II*, 19 Dec. 1942.

context of the war.

The only other immediate reaction to the Beveridge Report in the *Irish Press* appeared on 18 December under the headline 'work harder and produce better: minister's views on Beveridge plan'. The article reported a speech by Sean MacEntee, Minister for Finance until September 1939 and from then on Minister for Local Government and Public Health. MacEntee, again providing an indication of what the government's response to the Beveridge report would be, was reported as saying that:

for us the wiser course is to face the future realistically and to steel ourselves with the thought that, if we wish to continue the social progress which has characterised our history since we won our freedom, we can only hope to do so by working harder and producing more efficiently.

Coming so soon after the publication of the report the statement, apart from the dubious reference to social progress, underlined the government's anxiety regarding the influence the report would have in Ireland and how public finances could cope with increased social expenditure.

However the report became almost immediately a burning political issue, Fine Gael placing a notice of motion on the order paper on 10 December 1942 for discussion in the Dáil:

That this house is of opinion that the proposals outlined in the Beveridge report for the attaining of social security in Britain merit the earnest consideration of the government, and requests that a white paper be prepared showing the estimated cost of the application of such proposals to this country.⁵²

While the motion was never discussed on the floor of the lower house due to the Christmas adjournment, the essence of the motion was to appear as

⁵² A copy of the notice of motion is available in *Social insurance and allied services: report by Sir William Beveridge, 1942, (N.A., D/T, S 13053 A).*

a topic for discussion right through 1943 and long afterwards.

The negative campaign against Beveridgeism, which may not have been officially orchestrated by the government but which had its full support, continued apace in 1943. In what appears to have been an unprecedented incident, P. S. O Hegarty, secretary of the Department of Posts and Telegraphs (P. J. Little being the minister) wrote in the *Sunday Independent* of 21 March 1943 under the banner headline 'Plan means workers maintain idlers' that:

The man who is unable to set his own powers at work, who has neither the intelligence to do so nor the energy to do so, and whose powers are put to work by the energy and intelligence of someone else, is told that he is being 'exploited' until he believes it. But the boot is on the other foot. It is the employer who is being exploited - his brains and energy and his resourcefulness... Between his rights and his exploitation it is an easy step to the notion that he is entitled to a living, that the...state is bound to provide for him from the cradle... Out of this come the Beveridge and similar schemes.

Privately chastised by Little for 'this grave breach of civil service rules',⁵³ O Hegarty later claimed that the article was an attempt 'to draw attention to the moral and philosophical implications of the Beveridge scheme'.⁵⁴ Despite the 'graveness' of the transgression the cabinet decided to take no disciplinary action, O Hegarty, a pro-treaty supporter who was later described in an editorial of the *Irish Press* as being 'venemously disposed' towards Fianna Fáil,⁵⁵ holding his position as secretary of the Department of Posts and Telegraphs until he reached retiring age. Although a serious transgression of the rule that civil servants were forbidden to contribute to newspapers or other publications any letters or articles conveying information, comment or criticism on any matter of

53 Letter from P. J. Little to P. S. O Hegarty, 29 Mar. 1943 (N.A., D/T, P. S. O Hegarty: press article on social security, S 13186).

54 Letter from P. S. O Hegarty to P. J. Little, 30 Mar. 1943 (N.A., D/T, P. S. O Hegarty: press article on social security, S 13186).

55 *IP*, 4 Dec. 1945.

current political interest, the article, very much opposed to Beveridgeism, was in tune with government thinking.

In the same month as the article appeared, the Department of Local Government and Public Health wrote to the Taoiseach confidently reassuring him and taking solace from the fact that 'opinion in Great Britain is not as strongly in favour of the Beveridge report as the newspapers would have outsiders believe'.⁵⁶

The negative campaign of the government very much reflected the British government's attempts to frustrate the publicity surrounding the publication of the report.⁵⁷ The Irish government very quickly dropped all reference to Beveridge in its official memoranda and reports, again emulating the British government's move to exclude mention of the report in its official propaganda. It was a stance reinforced to some degree by the Catholic church, Dr Farren, Bishop of Derry, best exemplifying this church opposition to social policy at its most trenchant. Speaking almost ten years after the publication of the report, at a meeting of the Derry Catholic Social Services Centre, he said:

We hear of all the expenditure of money and human life that the defeat of Nazi materialism entailed, and we see at the present time a burden almost intolerable being placed on people to defeat the atheistic materialism of Russia, but the fact remains that the power and the spirit behind practically all social legislation at the present time is taken from the worst principles of both Nazi and Russian materialism. I am amazed at the fact.⁵⁸

However, as outlined in chapter two of the present work, most Catholic writers who took up the issue of Beveridgeism, did not reject the report out of hand, but rather gave a balanced assessment of its

⁵⁶ Family allowances - Cabinet Committee, Nov. 1939 (N.A, D/T, S 12117A).

⁵⁷ See Douglas Ashford, *The emergence of the welfare state*, p. 270 and Kathleen Jones, *The making of social policy in Britain*, p. 131

⁵⁸ II, 18 Apr. 1951.

recommendations and of their relevance to Ireland. Peter McKeivitt, the first person to hold the chair of Catholic Sociology and Catholic Action established at Maynooth College in 1937, while claiming that 'the Beveridge plan for social security is not for export' acknowledged that 'the good points of the scheme are obvious'.⁵⁹ Similarly, Cornelius Lucey, a colleague of McKeivitt's in Maynooth, while describing the report as 'a British report to meet British conditions'⁶⁰ nonetheless said that Ireland:

Cannot afford to ignore the report. If the social security system it proposes is adopted in Great Britain and Northern Ireland...and if it proves successful there, then we must perforce adopt it too or provide something just as good, if not better or else we are perpetuating the border on the one hand and encouraging emigration on the other.⁶¹

It was a theme further pursued by Lucey in a lecture arranged by the CYMS in the Mansion House in Dublin in February 1943 when he said that 'the most can be said against it [the Beveridge report] is that it plans a step towards totalitarianism rather than against it. However one step, or even a few steps towards totalitarianism, though dangerous, were not disastrous'.⁶² The plan did not lead halfway down the road to Moscow but rather 'a step nearer to Moscow'.⁶³

Despite the balanced views of most Catholic writers, however, the Fianna Fáil government often reverted to Catholic-based arguments as reasons for non-adoption of the principles of Beveridgeism. The extent to which this 'Catholic argument' was a mere cover for more deep-seated financial and ideological worries over extending social welfare legislation on the principles of Beveridgeism became apparent with the

⁵⁹ *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, Mar. 1943, pp 147, 150.

⁶⁰ Cornelius Lucey, 'The Beveridge Report and Éire', *Studies*, vol. 32 (1943), p. 36.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁶² *Catholic Herald*, 12 Feb. 1943.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

publication in 1945 by Dr John Dignan, Bishop of Clonfert, of *Social security: outlines of a scheme of national health insurance*.

The Dignan plan: 'something big and memorable'

The publication of the Dignan plan in March 1945 greatly enhanced the momentum for change in welfare policy in Ireland initiated by the publication of the Beveridge report. In essence it was an Irish blueprint for the restructuring and reorganisation of not only the health insurance services in Ireland, but of the entire spectrum of social security services from which, combined with the Beveridge report, was forged the theory and practise of the modern Irish welfare state.

Drawing newspaper headlines such as 'Éire's Beveridge Plan',⁶⁴ 'Beveridge - with differences',⁶⁵ and 'Comments on a bishop's Beveridge Plan',⁶⁶ Dignan's plan was undoubtedly spurred on, if not inspired by, Beveridge's report (as the *People's Press* observed in reviewing the plan 'we are an imitative people. What Britain does today, we must do tomorrow'⁶⁷) Dignan's scheme caught the imagination of politicians and ordinary people alike. Influenced by developments in Denmark and New Zealand, in many ways it put forward some radical suggestions and was undoubtedly the first major Irish contribution to the debate regarding the future of the social services in Ireland.⁶⁸

The three underlying principles of his plan - the establishment of a Department for Health and Social Services, the decentralization of all

64 *II*, 8 Oct. 1944.

65 *Catholic Herald*, 27 Oct. 1944.

66 *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post*, 1 Nov. 1944.

67 *People's Press*, 28 Oct. 1944.

68 In 1933 Sean Brophy published *Irish social security* which set forth 'a plan for national co-operation and Christian social security'. However Brophy's pamphlet was more an argument in favour of social security than a comprehensive plan and therefore cannot be considered in the same mould as the Beveridge report or Dignan plan.

social services and the co-ordination of all social services had formed the basis of an earlier submission by Dignan to Dr Francis Ward, parliamentary secretary to the Department of Local Government and Public Health, in July 1944, on behalf of the National Health Insurance Society. Stressing the importance of involving the government, labour and employers in the management and work of any new national health insurance society, this earlier submission called for 'full autonomous powers' for a newly constituted central insurance board to take the place of the existing insurance society.⁶⁹

Initially read as a paper to the committee of management of the National Health Insurance Society in October 1944, Dignan himself described *Social security: outlines of a scheme of national health insurance* as 'a comprehensive scheme, consonant with Catholic social principles, feasible and practicable and adapted to the circumstances of our country'.⁷⁰ It was, in effect, an outline for the future of the social services in Ireland. It described the system in existence as reeking with 'destitution, pauperism and degradation', in effect no better than the poor law of the nineteenth century. Dignan's attitude was '*Erasez l'infame*'.⁷¹ It provided for the total abolition of the remaining poor law services such as public assistance and envisaged that the new scheme would ultimately incorporate 90% of the population, or 2,600,000 people, as opposed to the 610,000 catered for by the existing insurance society (a mere 1 in 5 of the population).⁷²

As part of the reorganisation of the health and welfare services, the plan stressed the importance of establishing a separate Department

69 Memorandum submitted by Dignan to Ward, 22 July 1944 (N.A., D/SW, Synopsis of a submission by National Health Insurance Society, I.A./296).

70 *II*, 18 Oct. 1944.

71 John Dignan, *Social security: outlines of a scheme of national health insurance* (Sligo, 1945), p. 3.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

of Social Services which, in turn, would oversee the work of a new and vastly expanded national health insurance society with greatly increased powers which would carry out the administration of both health and welfare services with a very large degree of independence from the new ministry.⁷³

Referring to the existing sickness and disability benefits as inadequate, the scheme proposed that, subsequent to the transfer of all health services to the reconstituted society, it would undertake a nationwide health campaign through public lectures, advertisements, leaflets, etc.; would promote a campaign to modernise the sanitation services in every town and village; would encourage the installation of electricity; and would facilitate research into illness and occasionally survey the health of the members of the society:⁷⁴

Beneficiaries will have the fullest range of care which medical science can supply and this will include, in addition to hospital, sanatorial or convalescent home treatment, such other remedial agencies of cure as dental, optical and ophthalmic services, specialist and consultative advice or treatment, midwifery, medical and surgical appliances, economic prescribing, nursing and ambulance services, and so forth.⁷⁵

The plan further provided for improvements in the rates of widows' and orphans' pensions, blind pensions, old age pensions, unemployment insurance, families' allowances and workmen's compensation, the administration of all of which would be carried out by a new national health insurance society.

Published just two years after the Commission on Vocational Organisation, established to examine the practicability and best means of establishing vocational organisation in Ireland, and chaired by Bishop

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 18-19.

Michael Browne, issued its report,⁷⁶ the plan was framed along vocational lines, and therefore in accordance, as one might expect, with Catholic social teaching at the time. Describing the existing society as 'the nearest approach to vocational organisation in this country',⁷⁷ the new society would have, in addition, a number of regional committees, conceivably based on the county divisions. Furthermore Dignan thought 'it would be to the greatest advantage of the society if the church were represented on the central and regional committees. It is indeed hard to see how these committees could function satisfactorily except this is done'.⁷⁸ The plan also provided for the establishment of the principal offices of a number of services outside the Dublin area. On the other issue that concerned the church at this time, the question of the state becoming increasingly involved in the life of the citizens, Dignan was pragmatic: 'I suppose the state *must* step in and assist but the less it interferes with the rights of the family the better'.⁷⁹

It is little wonder that Dignan foresaw that the plan would be greeted as revolutionary by some people.⁸⁰

He concluded his *Social security: outlines of a scheme of national health insurance*, by saying that it 'clamours for criticism'. That it most certainly did. Its publication was marked by a flurry of newspaper articles, official government reaction, and a bitter war of words between the author and Seán MacEntee. The whole thrust of the government's reaction, as in the case of the Beveridge report, was one of suspicion. The publication of the report obviously took the government by surprise (a headline in the *Irish Independent* on 19

76 Commission on Vocational Organisation, *Report* (1943).

77 John Dignan, *Social security*, p. 31.

78 *Ibid.*, p. 33.

79 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

80 John Dignan, *Social security*, p. 11.

October 1944 read 'Plan a "surprise" for minister'), despite the fact that Dignan claims to have spent ten years in its preparation. The report of the departmental committee on health services called the plan 'fundamentally defective',⁸¹ while the government, still somewhat in shock, strongly criticised the obvious weaknesses of the plan - the fact that the entire scheme was not costed (a weakness acknowledged by Dignan in the report, and criticised by Alderman E. E. Benson, President of the Dublin Chamber of Commerce, as 'a most dangerous thing'⁸²), the lack of provision made for those who would fall behind in their insurance payments, and the lack of provision for those who did not fall within an insurance scheme:

No examination is made as to what risks the voluntary class may insure against or whether in a unified scheme, a farmer, or a professional man, having selected his wage-group and paid his 'single inclusive stamp', may be entitled to receive one of the unified benefits, for instance unemployment benefit.⁸³

Criticism of the plan on the basis of these weaknesses was justified. It was rather unusual, if not naïve, to produce a detailed scheme for what amounted to a radical overhauling of the social services in Ireland and to leave the entire plan uncOSTED. Providing for improvements in the rates of all social welfare payments without attempting to cost the measure was inadequate. It was hardly sufficient for Dignan to say on the second last page of the plan that 'I could not be expected at this stage to give any indication of the total cost or of the contribution to be borne by the contributing parties'.⁸⁴ Beyond suggesting that the profits of the Sweepstakes should be put at the

81 Departmental Committee on Health Services, *Report* (Dec. 1945).

82 *Evening Mail*, 25 Oct. 1944.

83 Observations on a paper entitled 'Outlines of a scheme of national health insurance' read to the Committee of Management of Cumann an Archaise Náisiúnta ar Shláinte by chairman, Dr Dignan (N.A., D/SW, Dr Dignan Plan, I.A. 122/53).

84 John Dignan, *Social security*, p. 36.

disposal of the society and that the war-time levels of taxation should be continued for a few years with the money being transferred to the society, the scheme was very short on financing ideas. Dignan did not include his suggestion of July 1944 as submitted to Dr Francis Ward regarding financing, which made provision for benefits from 'legacies, charities, voluntary donations, local efforts', together with 'advances from the central bank of interest-free money',⁸⁵ two remarkably amateur suggestions in the light of the overall thrust of Dignan's thinking. Returning to his published report, Dignan suggested that the first step should be 'to find out how much money can be afforded and then draw up the best possible scheme within our means'⁸⁶: Fianna Fáil would have argued that this was precisely what it had been doing. Such an important omission left the report wide open for criticism by an unresponsive government.

Internal government memoranda also criticised the proposal that the scheme ought to be run by a reconstituted national health insurance society with a large degree of independence from the government and implied that the publication and contents of the report had been influenced by the publication of the Beveridge report in Britain.⁸⁷ The inaccuracies in the Dignan report were put down to misunderstandings as to how the existing system worked, an unusual accusation to level against the chairman of the National Health Insurance Society, appointed successively to that position from its inception in 1936 by Fianna Fáil governments. Specific measures such as a mortality benefit and an

⁸⁵ Memorandum submitted by Dignan to Ward, 22 July 1944. (N.A., D/SW, Synopsis of a submission by National Health Insurance Society, I.A./296).

⁸⁶ John Dignan, *Social security*, p. 33.

⁸⁷ Observations on a paper entitled 'Outlines of a scheme of national health insurance' read to the Committee of Management of Cumann an Archaise Náisiúnta ar Shláinte by chairman, Dr Dignan (N.A., D/SW, Dr Dignan Plan, I.A. 122/53).

interest-free loan on marriage were also questioned.⁸⁸ In 1945 a departmental committee on the health services examined the recommendations regarding the health proposals contained in the report. Reporting in December 1945 it concluded that 'the plan is impracticable and can neither be financed nor administered on insurance grounds'.⁸⁹

Despite the negative reaction of the government, the popular attitude, reflected through the provincial papers, was one of welcome towards the plan. The *Carlow Nationalist* particularly welcomed the fact that it was 'based upon really Christian foundations and upon existing Irish conditions',⁹⁰ a sentiment echoed by the *Tuam Herald*: 'His scheme as published seems to be an admirable plan, based on a Christian conception of things and is intended to make the social services the right of every citizen, not merely a State charity'.⁹¹ The *Connaught Telegraph* described the plan as 'refreshingly bold and far-reaching'.⁹² Interestingly, despite its portrayal as an inherently Christian document, none of Dignan's colleagues in the hierarchy publically supported the plan. Neither did *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* or *Studies* carry the same analysis of the plan which had earlier greeted the Beveridge report.

Apart from Fianna Fáil, political opinion was supportive of the plan, William Norton, now leader of a divided Labour Party, issuing a press release on 18 October 1944 welcoming the proposals:

88 Ibid.

89 National health insurance: proposals of Most Rev. Dr Dignan (N.A., D/T, S 13570).

90 *Carlow Nationalist*, 4 Oct. 1944.

91 *Tuam Herald*, 21 Oct. 1944.

92 *Connaught Telegraph*, 21 Oct. 1944. A number of other provincial papers carried favourable reviews of the report, demonstrating the popular interest generated by it and the interest of ordinary people in the issues raised. See for example, *Clare Champion*, 21 Oct. 1944, *Limerick Leader*, 21 Oct. 1944, *Wexford People*, 28 Oct. 1944, *Dundalk Democrat*, 21 Oct. 1944, *Westmeath Independent*, 28 Oct. 1944, *Leinster Leader*, 22 Sept. 1945.

as a comprehensive attempt to raise the present wretchedly low standard of social services in Éire which were based on pauper standards and provided no real economic or social security for those who, through economic or physical adversity, were compelled to rely on social services to succour them in such circumstances.⁹³

The Labour Party's sub-committee on social services later reinforced Norton's views, saying the importance of Dignan's plan 'cannot be too strongly emphasised'.⁹⁴

In January 1945 the national executive of the Irish Trade Union Congress adopted a motion welcoming Dignan's proposals 'as an important and valuable contribution to the solution of the very grave problem'⁹⁵ of poverty. Circulating the motion to each affiliated organisation, it prompted many such expressions of support, the Irish Women's Workers' Union passing an 'emergency resolution' to the same effect.⁹⁶ Both resolutions were forwarded to the Department of Local Government and Public Health, as were numerous other petitions calling on the minister to seriously consider Dignan's proposals.⁹⁷

The national newspapers also warmly welcomed the report, the *Irish Independent* saying that:

we are glad to find this reform advocated by Dr Dignan in his suggestive and thought-provoking paper... The scheme is the Beveridge Plan with modifications in accord with Christian and Catholic principles.⁹⁸

93 Most Rev. Dr Dignan's social services proposals, (Labour History Museum, Norton Papers, Item 104).

94 Labour Party, Interim report of sub committee on social services (n.d.), (Labour History Museum, Norton Papers, Item 104).

95 Letter from ITUC to each affiliated organisation, 9 Jan. 1945, (Labour History Museum, Norton Papers, Item 104).

96 Letter from Miss Louie Bennett to Minister for Local Government and Public Health, 7 Feb. 1945, (U.C.D. Archives, MacEntee Papers, National health insurance society - Dr Dignan's proposals, P67/257).

97 For example, Resolution from Kilrush U.D.C., 20 Mar. 1945, (U.C.D. Archives, MacEntee Papers, National health insurance society - Dr Dignan's proposals, P67/257).

98 *II*, 18 Oct. 1944.

If the popular press was supportive of the scheme, it was in the pages of the newspapers that the increasingly bitter row between Seán MacEntee, Minister for Local Government and Public Health, and Bishop Dignan was played out. In large measure this situation was precipitated by Dignan himself, who released his plan to the newspapers before providing the Department of Local Government and Public Health or the minister with a copy, a move most lightly calculated to stave off the possibility of any ministerial attempts to have the report blocked before publication. In a letter to the National Health Insurance Society on 21 October 1944 the secretary of the Department of Local Government and Public Health spoke of the 'grave issues raised by the manner of publication' of the report, and on 19 October 1944, T. J. Barrington, private secretary to the minister, wrote a letter to the national papers in response to the claims that Dignan's scheme 'for the extension of the social services' had been submitted to the minister. The letter, a copy of which was sent to the committee of management before publication, was printed in full in the *Irish Press*:

Dear Sir,

I am desired by the Minister for Local Government and Public Health to say that he has read with surprise the statement in this morning's papers that a scheme for the extension of the social services in the state had been submitted by the National Health Insurance Society to the Minister...

If by a scheme for an extension of social insurance is meant a proposal substantially worked out in detail, supported by factual argument and embodying estimates of the expenditure involved and concrete proposals for defraying the cost, the minister can categorically state that no such scheme has been submitted to him. Inquiry at other government departments has revealed that no proposals of the kind have been submitted to them.

In the ensuing public argument, MacEntee had his departmental officials investigate Dignan's running of the society in search of an instance 'where difficulty was experienced in getting the Society to carry out the

minister's instructions'.⁹⁹ Following investigation, one minor administrative difficulty was unearthed, but nothing more and the investigation was terminated. MacEntee's hope of unearthing material which he could use in his case against both Dignan and his plan, a classic instance of *argumentum ad hominem*, an art to which MacEntee had recourse to on more than one occasion, spoke volumes of both the minister's attitude to the plan and Dignan's record as chairman of the national health insurance society.

In the public controversy however, Dignan, far from letting MacEntee make all the running, issued a statement to the newspapers in March 1945:

I venture to ask (i) does a minister become, by his ministerial appointment, an autocrat with absolute power "whose will and pleasure" counts for everything in the affairs of his department; (ii) is it an offence and crime to offer a minister suggestion, for e.g. to submit to him a scheme of National Health Insurance: (iii) is it a "derogation of his office" to request him to give reasons for branding proposals based on Christian principles as "impracticable under almost every heading"?¹⁰⁰

The statement was in response to a lecture delivered by MacEntee on the topic of 'Some recent proposals for the co-ordination of our social services', organised by the Tomás Ó Laoighre cumann of Fianna Fáil in Dublin, as reported in the *Irish Press* on 14 March 1945.

MacEntee confirmed his disapproval of both Dignan and his scheme by failing to reappoint him as chairman of the committee of management of the National Health Insurance Society when the position came up for renewal in 1945. Dignan was the only member of the outgoing committee not to receive a letter from the minister asking

⁹⁹ Memorandum, 3 Nov. 1944 (N.A, D/SW, Dr Dignan Plan, 122/53).

¹⁰⁰ II, 27 Mar. 1945.

whether he would be prepared to act on the new committee which would come into office on 1 August 1945.¹⁰¹ It was in effect a dismissal as Dignan had been reappointed to the position of chairman from the inception of the society. The failure to reappoint him on this occasion was greeted with both shock and anger in popular and political circles. Laois County Council passed a resolution proposed by Oliver J. Flanagan saying that the members of the council 'protest against the action of the government in failing to reappoint His Lordship, Most Rev. Dr Dignan...and we place on record the great work of his Lordship in preparing a plan for improved social services'.¹⁰² A similar resolution was passed by Dublin City Council, while the Irish National Union of Woodcutters sent the government a copy of the resolution they passed regarding the non-appointment of Dignan: 'We maintain that the minister's attitude in this matter has been in the true Fascist tradition and in conflict with the principles embodied in the constitution'.¹⁰³

Many public representatives urged MacEntee to reconsider his decision, among them Norton, who chided the minister for the 'humiliation' to which he had subjected Dignan:

I think that every reasonable person will regret the manner in which these proposals by His Lordship were received by the Minister for Local Government and Public Health. One could scarcely imagine a more intemperate display of pettiness and petulance than was exhibited by the Minister in his tirades in connection with these proposals... The mere fact that the Minister for Local Government and Public Health has seen fit to engage in what can only be regarded as a disorderly harangue, so far as he was concerned, with His Lordship the Bishop of Clonfert, is no

101 Dr Dignan's proposals, (U.C.D. Archives, MacEntee Papers, P67/257).

102 *Leinster Leader*, 22 Sept. 1945.

103 *IT*, 28 Aug. 1945.

reason why His Lordship's proposals in respect to social services ought not to hold the stage.¹⁰⁴

In March 1946 James Pattison of the Labour Party raised the issue on an adjournment debate 'to point out that this [Dignan's non-appointment] is a further definite indication of a tendency on the part of the minister to adopt a dictatorial attitude in all matters within the responsibility of his department'. It was not an unreasonable comment. However MacEntee held firm in his resolve, responding to Pattison in the following manner:

I had to make certain that those whom I proposed to appoint would accept what I regarded as the fundamental condition of their appointment, that is to say, that they would strive to ensure that a close and cordial liaison was maintained between the committee of management and the minister.¹⁰⁵

Dignan was not reappointed. As far as MacEntee was concerned the case was closed.

Despite the negative governmental reaction to the Dignan report, and MacEntee's preparedness almost to the point of vindictiveness to discredit both Dignan and the report, many of the ideas contained in it were implemented over the following decade. In April 1944 Dignan had written to Dr Ward urging him to 'do something big and memorable in the field of social services'.¹⁰⁶ Now Dignan himself, who continued to write about social security in Ireland, had done just that. While one commentator has described the report as 'more cogent when criticising existing Irish institutions than when offering alternatives',¹⁰⁷ the importance of the report lay not so much in its contents as in the

104 DD vol. 99, 30 Jan. 1946, col. 144.

105 DD vol. 99, 13 Mar. 1946, col. 2246, 2440.

106 Letter from John Dignan to Dr Ward, 23 Apr. 1944 (N.A., D/SW, Dr Dignan plan, I.A. 122/53).

107 J. H. Whyte, *Church and state in modern Ireland, 1923-79* (2nd edn., Dublin, 1980), p. 103.

discussion it precipitated and the awareness it created of the need for a vastly expanded and co-ordinated network of social policies in Ireland.

In the immediate post-Beveridge period, and before the coming to power of the first inter-party government, the first practical steps were taken giving effect to this new awareness of the centrality of progressive social legislation to the lives of the citizens. The first of these reforms, which predated the publication of the Dignan plan, was the introduction of children's allowances.

'The new half crown': the introduction of children's allowances

Children's allowances was the most topical social security issue in Ireland at the time of the publication of the Beveridge report, and it can reasonably be argued that, while discussion of children's allowances was a live issue in the cabinet before December 1942, the publication of the Beveridge report hastened the process which led to their introduction in Ireland. Certainly it was the piece of social legislation which many commentators predicted would be the first dividend of post-Beveridge reform in Ireland.¹⁰⁸

Beveridge described children's allowances as one of the three assumptions (comprehensive health and rehabilitation services being the other two) upon which a satisfactory social insurance scheme had to be based.¹⁰⁹ However, he advised that allowances could not be based on an insurance principle:

Without such allowances as part of benefit or added to it, to make provision for large families, no social insurance against interruption of earnings can be adequate. But if children's allowances are given only when earnings are interrupted and are not given during earnings also, two evils are unavoidable. First a

¹⁰⁸ See for example *IT*, 31 Dec. 1942.

¹⁰⁹ Sir William Beveridge, *The pillars of society*, p. 98.

substantial measure of acute want will remain among the lower paid workers... Second, in all such cases, income will be greater during unemployment or other interruptions of work than during work.¹¹⁰

The latter was also stressed by the British Chancellor of the Exchequer in a memorandum on family allowances which commented that 'any scheme which involves compulsory contributions...offers an incentive to enter or leave the fold according to individual circumstances and therefore leads to the exercise of ingenuity on the part of individuals in a manner detrimental to the finances of the scheme'.¹¹¹ Significantly, a copy of this memorandum is to be found in Irish governmental and departmental archives.¹¹²

Before the introduction of children's allowances in Ireland, parents did receive some allowances for children under a number of social insurance and social assistance schemes, notably under the provision of widows' and orphans' pensions, unemployment assistance, and unemployment insurance. However, the rates were far from adequate, the unemployment insurance rates allowance for each child being 1/- per week. Equally inadequate were the limited powers of the local authorities, namely 'to make such arrangements for attending to the health of expectant and nursing mothers and children under five years of age, as may be approved by the minister'¹¹³ under the Notification of Birth (Extension) Act of 1915. While national government defrayed 50% of the net cost of such child welfare services organised by local authorities or by one of the over seventy voluntary maternity and child welfare agencies, the total paid out in the year

110 Sir William Beveridge, *Report on social security and allied services*, p. 8.

111 *Family allowances: memorandum by the chancellor of the exchequer* Presented to parliament by Command of His Majesty, May 1942, (London, 1942).

112 *Family allowances: interdepartmental committee* (N.A., D/SW, I.A. 129/53).

113 Department of Local Government and Public Health, *Report*, 928-29, p. 47.

1928-29 was a mere £18,204, over half of which went to the voluntary sector.¹¹⁴ Local authorities were also empowered to provide benefit in kind directly to children in the form of school meals under the Education (Provision of Meals) Act, 1914, subsequently amended on numerous occasions.

It was this lack of provision for children that prompted discussion of the idea of child welfare or mothers' pensions as early as April 1922 by the Irish Mothers' Pension Society, when John Patrick Dunne, the honorary secretary of the association, said:

I would make the state the custodian of necessitous women and children, and in order to make the wealthy element of the community take a real interest in the welfare of the workers I would provide such dependent allowances from a capital levy on all funds accumulated in Irish banks... Mothers' pensions has proved its worth wherever in operation, by preserving under the fostering care of the mother, and midst the sanctities of home the children of the nation, and thus enabling them to receive such training and care as will mould them into self-respecting citizens.¹¹⁵

However, it was the late 1930s before the Irish government started seriously investigating the whole area of family allowances, a debate which was taking place across Europe earlier in the same decade. In the Netherlands for example, the debate resulted in a bill being introduced in 1939 to provide children's allowances on insurance lines for children under 15 years of age after the third child, while in the same year the French government introduced a family code which included family allowances.¹¹⁶ In Ireland it was James Dillon who first raised the issue in the Dáil, asking Seán Lemass, then Minister for Industry and

114 Ibid., p. 48.

115 John Patrick Dunne, 'Poverty problems for a patriot parliament', *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, vol. 14 (1919-30), pp 193, 195.

116 James McMillan, *Dreyfus to de Gaulle: politics and society in France 1898-1969* (London, 1985), p. 115.

Commerce, in November 1938 if statistics were available 'showing the number of children under 16 years of age in families, the heads of which enjoy an annual income of £250 or less'.¹¹⁷ Lemass replied that statistics of this nature were not available. Dillon's purpose in asking became clearer in March 1939 when, during a debate on the local government and public health estimates, he made an impassioned plea on behalf of those children and parents living on and below the poverty line. Referring to his own experiences in his home town in Roscommon he said:

I could not help remembering having seen people coming in and buying margarine because they could not afford butter. I could not help remembering children that I saw going to school with a slice of bread and mixed fruit jam on it because it was cheaper than butter... The person who has really got his back to the wall is the person whose income is only 30/- or 35/- a week and who has ten children... Let us go now to the relief of the person whose position is intolerable, the person with more than four children, whose income is below £2 a week.¹¹⁸

It is clear that the Fianna Fáil government had at least begun to collect information regarding children's allowances in other countries at this time, on the impetus of the Department of Agriculture, which circulated a memorandum in September 1939 stressing the need for allowances for agricultural families in particular:

In view of the great urgency for forcing every person in the community to engage in productive activity and at the same time of securing that mothers will be able to support their children, it is of the greatest importance that we should introduce a system of family allowances for agricultural workers and small farmers... The proposal...is taken on the basis of 2/- for a wife and 16d. per child

117 DD vol. 73, 23 Nov. 1938, col. 851.

118 DD vol. 75, 30 Mar. 1939, col. 405-407.

for the agricultural workers and farmers under £1 valuation and applying it only to farmers under £16 valuation.¹¹⁹

In mid November 1939 a cabinet sub-committee on family allowances was appointed, a strong and positive indication of the importance the government attached to the issue. By December 1939 it was clear that the committee was very much in favour of the introduction of children's allowances in Ireland, saying that:

There is one general argument in favour of family allowances which appears to be of application [in Éire]... The life history of many working class families could be represented by a graph in which the wage is approximately a straight line and the living needs of the household a curve which rises above it, as children are born, and drops again as they cease to be dependent. The gap between income and needs is a measure of poverty. There is little doubt but that this is a true picture of the lives of many urban wage earners and possibly also of many agricultural labourers in this country and this would justify the payment of family allowances with the object of raising the standard of living and alleviating poverty.¹²⁰

Reporting in April 1940, the cabinet sub-committee forwarded proposals for the payment of allowances in respect of all children under 14 years of age living in families, with the exception of children already provided for under the widows' and orphans' pension act and children whose means exceeded limits to be agreed to. It based the desirability of children's allowances on the necessity of alleviating poverty within families and the encouragement of early marriage.¹²¹ It was estimated that 700,000 children would benefit under the proposals, at a cost of £3,000,000. £2,000,000 would be raised by contributions from employees and the balance would be provided by the exchequer.¹²²

119 Memorandum on Family allowances for agricultural workers and small farmers, 29 Sept. 1939 (N.A., D/SW, E.B. 237766).

120 Family allowances, (N.A., D/SW, I.A. 129/53A).

121 Cabinet Committee: outline of proposals for the payment of family allowances, April 1940 (N.A., D/SW, Family allowances, I.A. 129/53A).

122 Ibid.

Not surprisingly the strongest opposition to the sub committee's proposals came from the Department of Finance. Rejecting the introduction of children's allowances on a purely 'to each according to his need', social justice philosophy, the Department of Finance, in a circular of July 1940, also questioned whether the introduction of allowances would increase the population in the face of a decline in the marriage rate and in fertility,¹²³ a consideration which was to become more acute as time went on. Such questioning ran counter to historical precedent which seemed to favour the introduction of children's allowances as a means of increasing the birth rate: the French government had introduced an *allocation de maternité* for the first child of mothers under twenty-five years in 1918 following the first world war to boost the population¹²⁴ and had again introduced allowances following World War II with the aim of arresting population decline, an idea taken over and developed by Vichy to the point of 'obsession',¹²⁵ while Beveridge concluded that 'children's allowances can help to restore the birth rate'.¹²⁶ In Ireland the 1936 census had showed a significant decline in population revealing the lowest marriage rate in the world, the age at marriage being the latest. A significant number of females, up to one quarter, remained single while 66% of males and 44% of females were still single at the ages of 30-44.¹²⁷ Similarly the number of births showed a decrease, perpetuating a continuous downward trend since 1881¹²⁸ (see table). Rather than focusing on children's allowances however, as a means of arresting population

123 Observations of the Minister for Finance on a scheme of family allowances proposed by the cabinet sub-committee, July 1940 (N.A., D/SW, Family allowances, I.A. 129/53A).

124 Douglas Ashford, *The emergence of the welfare state*, p. 251.

125 James McMillan, *Dreyfus to de Gaulle*, pp 115, 133.

126 William Beveridge, *Social insurance and allied services*, p. 154.

127 Inter-departmental committee report, Oct. 1942 (N.A., D/SW, Family allowances, I.A. 129/53E).

128 *Census 1936* vol. iv.

decline, the Department of Finance later concluded that the only effective means of increasing the population was to bring about an end to emigration.¹²⁹ However in the absence of any effort to bring this about such a statement rang more than a little hollow, emigration being perceived as the '*bealach éalóidh*'¹³⁰ not only by those who left but also by the government. As an article in *Comhair*, a monthly journal founded in 1942 with the aim of promoting debate on issues of national importance within universities, commented:

*Bhí lá agus bhíomar ag caint faoi n-ár gcuid deoraithe a thabhairt 'na bhaile as an Oileán Úr agus anois tá 'n dubh-eagla orainn go dtiocfaidh cuid acu sin arais atá thall i Sasana.*¹³¹

Shifting the emphasis to emigration was expedient. Infact, the number of births had begun to rise from 1942, the increase being swallowed up

Table 5.1

Births and Birth Rates, 1941-1952

Year	No. of Births	Crude birth rate (births per 1,000 population)
1941	56,780	18.97
1942	66,117	22.31
1943	64,375	21.85
1944	65,425	22.22
1945	66,861	22.65
1946	67,922	22.91
1947	68,978	23.23
1948	65,930	22.00
1949	64,153	21.46
1950	63,565	21.41
1951	62,878	21.24
1952	64,226	21.80

Source: Commission on emigration and other population problems, 1948 - 1954, *Reports* (1954), p. 89.

129 Family allowances: inter-departmental committee (N.A., D/SW, I.AA. 129/53).

130 *Comhair*, iml.II (1943), uimh. 8.

131 *Comhair*, iml. II (1943), uimh. 4.

by growing levels of emigration, a trend which was 'likely to continue' according to a post-war memorandum of the government.¹³²

The Department of Finance was also anxious that, should a scheme of children's allowances be introduced, it would be based firmly on an insurance principle. However, the department concluded that the sub-committee's proposals were inadequate, containing some 'striking anomalies and peculiarities'. Describing its proposals for the alleviation of poverty as defective and, significantly, suggesting that a scheme of children's allowances based on benefits in kind rather than in cash could be administered by vocational organisation,¹³³ it decided that a 'more complete investigation of objectives' was necessary.¹³⁴ It was as a result of these observations that an inter-departmental committee on family allowances rather than, as Dillon had suggested, a review body composed of social workers and economists,¹³⁵ was established in November 1940. If nothing else it bought the government more time while giving the appearance of action. Its terms of reference were to:

- i) Examine and report on the question whether, having regard to social, economic and financial considerations, it would be practicable to establish a system of family or children's allowances having for its object the making of due provision for family needs and

132 Considerations attending the problems of extending social insurance in Ireland, c1945 (U.C.D. Archives, MacEntee Papers, Social services, P67/361).

133 Department of Local Government and Public Health memorandum, 5 Sept. 1940 (N.A., D/SW, Family allowances: interdepartmental committee, I.A. 129/53).

134 Observations of the Minister for Finance on scheme for family allowances proposed by the cabinet sub-committee, July 1940 (N.A., D/SW, Family allowances, I.A. 129/53C).

135 DD vol. 81, 28 Nov. 1940, col. 936.

ii) If such a system was to be introduced, to make recommendations as to a scheme of family allowances, with particular reference to the following matters:

- (a) classes and circumstances of persons
- (b) scale of allowances
- (c) minimum number of dependent children which should be held to entitle a family to allowances
- (d) administration
- (e) cost
- (f) method of financing

Lastly the committee was to report on the probable social, economic, and industrial consequences of the scheme.¹³⁶ In order to quell any unfounded hopes, Seán T. O Kelly, the Minister for Finance, added the proviso that the establishment of the committee was 'without committing myself in any way to the adoption of any scheme for such allowances'.¹³⁷

Composed of representatives from the Department of Finance, the Department of Education (whose representative, Pádraic Ó Dubhthaigh, was absent from many of the meetings due to illness), the employment division of the Department of Industry and Commerce, and P. J. Keady, the superintendent of widows' and orphans' pensions from the Department of Local Government and Public Health who went on to become vice-chairman of the International Social Security Association in the late 1940s, with T. K. Whitaker acting as secretary, the committee acquired a number of publications regarding children's allowances, including Eleanor Rathbone's three works *Ethics and economics of family endowment* (1940), *Care for family endowment* (later 1930s) and *The disinherited family* (late 1930s); the Family Endowment Society's *Family allowances* (1938) and Alexander Gray's *Family endowment*. Apart from these publications, the committee

¹³⁶ Report of inter-departmental committee on family allowances, Oct. 1942 (N.A., D/T, Family allowances; (a) inter-departmental committee, 1940; (b) legislation proposals, S 12117B).

¹³⁷ DD vol. 81, 11 Dec. 1940, col. 985.

collected a number of books and articles on the operation of family allowances in, for example, the Netherlands, for purposes of comparison.

The committee held its first meeting at the Department of Finance on 13 December 1940, the chairperson ruling out the taking of evidence from 'persons or bodies outside the civil service', a decision taken in view of Lemass's response to Dillon when he called for a review body of social workers and economists to be established.¹³⁸ The absence of professional input was an immediate and significant weakness in any proposals the committee might make. At a subsequent meeting in January 1941 it was decided to agree that family allowances were desirable 'on general grounds...in many cases'.¹³⁹ However it was not until the following October that it was agreed by the committee that 'family allowances should, as a general principle, be given only where the number of children exceeded three'¹⁴⁰ and that 'an allowance of 2/6d a week might be tentatively considered as giving a fairly substantial help',¹⁴¹ with a higher allowance for residents of county boroughs and larger centres of population than rural areas.

The question of financing the scheme was also discussed at some length at a number of meetings, the first suggestion that individual employers should be responsible for paying compulsory family allowances (a suggestion not dissimilar to the practice in France) being dismissed due to the possibility that such a course of action would lead to discrimination against married employees. A further, though hardly equitable suggestion, that unemployment assistance would no longer be

138 See DD vol. 81, 28 Nov. 1940, col. 936.

139 Inter-departmental committee, meeting 15 Jan. 1941 (N.A., D/SW, I.A., 129/53H).

140 Interdepartmental committee, meeting 22 Oct. 1941 (N.A., D/SW, Family Allowances, I.A. 129/53H).

141 Ibid.

paid to single men, allowing the savings to go towards family allowances, was similarly dismissed as was a suggestion that the local authorities should be made responsible for their provision:

The functions of local authorities were confined to the relief of distress of temporary incidence; they came to the rescue, when other sources failed, to prevent destitution. It was not appropriate that permanent allowances or pensions for the relief of hardship should be charged even in part to local authorities.¹⁴²

The committee finally issued its recommendations towards the end of October 1942, having drawn on the example of existing systems in France, Belgium, Germany, Italy and New Zealand. Its report was impressively mature and considered. Crucially, it described the provision of children's allowances as 'socially desirable',¹⁴³ underpinning a major philosophical shift in official approaches to the provision of social welfare. It implied that not only was social security necessary to alleviate poverty on an individual level, but that it had a greater significance in the context of society as a whole, and the responsibility of society towards each individual. In advocating the introduction of children's allowances it recommended they be confined to low-income families in need of 'assistance', its argument centring around the malnutrition resulting from the low wages of the working classes which were insufficient to bring up a healthy family: 'this is the only case for family allowances which need receive consideration in the circumstances of this country'.¹⁴⁴ The health-based argument was one investigated in detail by the committee in 1941 using information

142 Interdepartmental committee, meeting 14 Nov. 1941 (N.A., D/SW, Family allowances, I.A. 129/53G).

143 Report of interdepartmental committee, Oct. 1942 (N.A., D/SW Interdepartmental Committee, I.A. 129/53E).

144 Ibid.

gleaned mostly from experience in Britain.¹⁴⁵ (The use of British material and statistics was later used by the government as an argument against the adequacy of the report.) A submission by the statistical branch of the Department of Industry and Commerce to the committee stated that a 'normal' family of husband, wife and two children required 21/1 per week for food, and a total income of 37/6 when other expenses were considered.¹⁴⁶ In the same year, 1941, the Fabian Society published *The Irish question today*, which also raised the question of 'the malnutrition of many of the children and mothers in Ireland':

The food of the people at the lowest income level in the town is predominantly white bread and tea. It is claimed that between one fifth and one sixth of the population of Dublin is subsisting on a deficiency diet... The traditional diet of cabbage and potatoes in the rural areas is healthier but still inadequate.¹⁴⁷

Dismissing children's allowances as a means of increasing the birth rate, the report made fleeting reference to the support given by Catholic social teaching to the introduction of children's allowances. Underpinning the weight attached to Catholic teaching, the inter-departmental committee drew on the papal encyclicals *Casti Connubii* and *Quadragesimo Anno* and on statements by the Catholic hierarchy in Britain, all supporting children's allowances. All three sources were later used by both the Department of Local Government and Public Health and by the Department of Finance to support arguments against their introduction.¹⁴⁸ To avoid the stigma of poor relief, the

145 Memorandum by Dr. E. J. T. McWeeney, Medical Inspector, Department of Local Government and Public Health, on the constitution of a minimum basic diet for an Irish family, 29 June 1941 (N.A, D/SW, Family allowances: inter-departmental commit, I.A. 129/53).

146 Memorandum of Nov. 1941 in Family allowances: inter-departmental committee (N.A, D/SW, I.A. 129/53).

147 John Hawkins, *The Irish question today* (Fabian Society, 1941), pp 25, 26.

148 See memorandum from the Department of Finance for the government re family allowances, 11 Mar. 1943 and Memorandum of Department of Local Government and Public Health on 'Children's allowances, Beveridgeism and the Catholic Church', 16 Mar. 1943 (N.A, D/T, S 12117B).

committee recommended the payment of allowances in cash rather than in kind. However, although admitting that a means test was seen as a relic of the poor law by many people, the committee recommended that children's allowances be means tested.

Despite deciding that the recipient should be the mother at a meeting of the committee in October 1941, in line with the practice in Australia and New Zealand, the interdepartmental committee decided at a subsequent meeting in November 1941 that the father should be the recipient, the father being allowed to nominate the mother as payee if he so wished.¹⁴⁹ So it was in the final report, which recommended that allowances be paid along the following lines:

- i) Allowances in cash to be paid to each child above the number of three in families whose weekly income was:
 - (a) in county boroughs and Dun Laoighre, 50/- or less
 - (b) in towns of 7,000 people or over, 40/- or less
 - (c) elsewhere, 33/- or less

- ii) Allowances were to be paid at a rate of
 - (a) 2/6 per week in the case of (i.a)
 - (b) 2/- per week in the case of (i.b)
 - (c) 1/6 per week in the case of (i.c)¹⁵⁰

The committee recommended that the scheme should be administered by the Department of Industry and Commerce and that the cost involved in financing the scheme should be raised by the tipping of the income tax scales more against the unmarried tax payer.¹⁵¹ However the report concluded by commenting that the most satisfactory solution to poverty in families would be the insurance that 'every able person would be

149 Inter-departmental committee, meeting 24 Oct. 1941 (N.A., D/SW, Family allowances, I.A. 129153H).

150 Report of inter-departmental committee on family allowances (N.A., D/SW, Family allowances: inter-departmental committee, I.A. 129/53).

151 Report of inter-departmental committee on family allowances (N.A., D/SW, Family allowances: inter-departmental committee, I.A. 129/53).

productively employed at a wage sufficient at least for the minimum needs of himself and his family'.¹⁵²

The confidential report of the committee was discussed by the cabinet on 4 December 1942, two days after the publication of the Beveridge report, when it was decided that, based on the inter-departmental committee's report the Minister for Industry and Commerce should submit to the government an outline of a scheme for the provision of children's allowances 'by the method of compulsory contributory insurance'.¹⁵³ It was an unusual and contradictory request as all of the evidence had pointed towards the shortcomings of an insurance-based children's allowances scheme, a point highlighted in the Beveridge report. Meanwhile the Department of Local Government and Public Health, which had earlier claimed that an insurance-based scheme 'would evoke strong opposition',¹⁵⁴ produced its own alternative proposals for a scheme of children's allowances in February 1943 based on a two-tier system of compulsory and voluntary contributory insurance, the compulsory branch of which, it was suggested, could be administered through the national health insurance society.¹⁵⁵

However, despite the government requesting the Minister for Industry and Commerce to submit an outline scheme for the provision of children's allowances, and the popular¹⁵⁶ and political support for the expansion of social welfare services, especially children's allowances, the government choose to use the arguments of the Irish Catholic church to justify its reluctance to introduce such allowances. Drawing attention

152 Ibid.

153 Cabinet Minutes, 4 Dec. 1942 (N.A., D/T, Family allowances (a) inter-departmental committee, 1940, (b) legislation proposals, 12117B).

154 Department of Local Government and Public Health, Family allowances: summarised statement, 5 Sept. 1940 (N.A., D/SW, Interdepartmental Committee, I.A. 129/53).

155 Family allowances (N.A., D/SW, I.A. 129/53 F).

156 See for example Joseph Anelius, *National action: a plan for the national recovery of Ireland* (Dublin, 1942), p. 116.

to *Quadragesimo Anno*, which had been earlier used by the cabinet sub-committee to justify such allowances, the Department of Local Government and Public Health now declared somewhat ironically that:

It can be shown that the moral objection to a scheme of family allowances are greatest (a) if the scheme is non-contributory in character, (b) is universal in application and (c) if the distribution of allowances is not related as strictly as possible to the actual need of the recipients. If therefore, a scheme of family allowances is to be adopted...it should be contributory in character.¹⁵⁷

Offering an equally coloured, though expedient, interpretation of the encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*, the Department of Finance stated that, in the area of children's allowances, according to Beveridge an area which required immediate attention, the church:

advocates family allowances only as a palliative in instances where a father or a breadwinner of a family is not in receipt of a just wage, which, it may be presumed, means a wage sufficient to maintain himself and his family free from want. That allowances are not advocated on account of any intrinsic merit is clear.¹⁵⁸

As though agreeing with the church's arguments against state encroachment on the private lives of the citizens, the memorandum went on to say:

Other Catholic writers have stressed again and again their dislike of the present increase of state interferences in the private lives of families and have stated their fears that family allowances may tend further in this direction and towards 'the socialisation of children'.¹⁵⁹

This approach underlined a recurrence of poor-law thinking in government circles, something Fianna Fáil could not be accused of in the past. It was a highly selective use of Catholic pronouncements both

¹⁵⁷ Department of Local Government and Public Health, Memorandum entitled Children's allowances, Beveridgeism and the Catholic church, 16 Mar. 1943 (N.A., D/T, S 12117B).

¹⁵⁸ Department of Finance, Memorandum for the government on family allowances, 11 Mar. 1943 (N.A., D/T, S 12117B).

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

national and international, on the question of children's allowances, with high profile Catholic figures such as Cornelius Lucey calling for the introduction of family allowances as early as November 1942. At a meeting in St Patrick's College, Maynooth, on the subject of 'Family Allowances', chaired by the Bishop Michael Browne of Galway, Lucey described children's allowances as being most desirable.¹⁶⁰ It was this insistence on the importance of children's allowances which led to Lucey being described as a 'well-known champion of the family allowance system'.¹⁶¹ In March 1943 Lucey's favourable disposition towards children's allowances was reported upon in the *Irish Press*, for all intents and purposes the government paper. Speaking at a meeting organised by An Ríoghacht in the Mansion House, Dublin, Lucey was quoted as saying that, 'above all family allowances we must have and at once'.¹⁶²

Meanwhile, despite the government's frequently negative attitude, by January 1943 the Department of Industry and Commerce had drawn up the heads of bills for the provision of children's allowances on a contributory and non-contributory basis without means test at rates of 2/6 per week for children other than the first child under the age of 16 years. Lemass made known that such legislation was in preparation in February 1943 in the Dáil¹⁶³ but this did not prevent James Dillon and Alfie Byrne from moving a motion on the floor of the house saying that 'Dáil Éireann is of opinion that a scheme of family allowances on a national scale should be instituted forthwith'.¹⁶⁴ The motion discussed the position in New Zealand, Australia and Britain. Byrne, who had

160 *ICD 1943*, p. 648.

161 *Catholic Herald*, 12 Feb. 1943.

162 *IP*, 19 Mar. 1943.

163 *DD* vol. 89, 4 Feb. 1943, col. 493.

164 *DD* vol. 89, 24 Mar. 1943, col. 1461.

received the Grand Cross of the Order of Sylvester from Pope Pius XI in 1930, said that the government was being asked merely to 'introduce a long-overdue act of Christian social justice'.¹⁶⁵

In the course of the debate Dillon, commenting on the feasibility of a means-tested allowance, said that:

I regard any scheme which involves the application of a means test as obnoxious... I would put the subsistence allowance for all children on the same basis and I would entitle every parent-citizen of the state to draw it without question, without investigation and without any stigma of charity or pauperism attaching to its receipt.¹⁶⁶

Spurred on by this continuing debate and the approaching general election, the government, having agreed to the principle of children's allowances as evidenced by the decision in January 1943 to draw up the necessary heads of bills, continued discussing the manner of payment of allowances. Contrary to the departmental report of 1942, a memorandum by Professor T. A. Smiddy, de Valera's unofficial economic advisor, dated April 1943 suggested that:

It would be advisable to consider giving [children's allowances] in kind - clothing and milk, cheaper medical and dental services. Such a scheme on account of the knowledge now acquired of the technique of rationing and coupons would be feasible from the point of view of administration. It would ensure that children would directly benefit... Such a scheme could also be made to serve industrial development and increased milk production.¹⁶⁷

It is likely that this suggestion was based on the Beveridge report which equally recommended that 'children's allowances should clearly be made to some extent in kind'.¹⁶⁸

165 Ibid., col. 1460-1477.

166 Ibid., col. 1469.

167 Observations of T. A. Smiddy, Apr. 1943 (N.A, D/T, National health insurance: proposals of Most Rev. Dr Dignan, S 13570).

168 William Beveridge, *Social insurance and allied services*, p. 155.

In September 1943, two months after the general election in which social security provisions formed part of the debate, being described by the Labour Party which promised the introduction of a children's allowances scheme, as 'the main issue before the people',¹⁶⁹ and in which Fianna Fáil were returned as a minority government having suffered a 7% drop in support,¹⁷⁰ the cabinet discussed a submission regarding allowances by the Department of Industry, Commerce and Supplies, now headed by Seán Lemass. The submission suggested that:

- i) allowances be payable irrespective of means
- ii) allowances be supplementary to those for children under existing social services and that
- iii) the cost of the scheme would be borne entirely out of state funds.¹⁷¹

Following discussion the cabinet decided that

- i) the number of children in a family after which children's allowances were to be payable would be two and that
- ii) allowances should be at the rate of 2/6 per week.¹⁷²

It was further decided that the scheme would be non-contributory and, in line with Dillon's argument of February 1943, not means tested.

The children's allowances bill was finally introduced in the Dáil in November 1943, Lemass defining the bill as providing for 'the inauguration of a new social security service in this state'.¹⁷³ Being more realistic, pragmatic, and above all diplomatic than MacEntee, Lemass drew on the example of how children's allowances worked in

169 Labour Party, *Labour's programme for a better Ireland*, (Election handbill, 1943).

170 Vincent Browne (ed.), *The Magill book of Irish politics* (Dublin, 1981), p. 25.

171 Department of Industry and Commerce, memorandum re children's allowances, 11 Sept. 1943 (N.A, D/T, National health insurance: proposals of Most Rev. Dr Dignan, S 13570).

172 Cabinet minutes, 24 Sept. 1943.

173 DD vol. 92, 23 Nov. 1943, col. 23.

other countries. More significantly, he quoted from the Beveridge report:

"Abolition of want requires, second, adjustment of incomes, in periods of earning as well as in interruption of earning, to family needs, that is to say, in one form or another it requires allowances for children."¹⁷⁴

The allowance proposed was 2/6 to be paid weekly for each child under 16 years of age, after the first two. This age limit was in line with that in New Zealand and Germany for example, with other countries, including France, Spain and Belgium having an age limit of 14 years. No means test was planned. If the bill was not accepted on these grounds, Lemass threatened the resignation of the minority government, an eventuality which did not come about. It would have been political suicide to vote against such a measure, even if it was viewed as not going far enough, the bill passing all stages in the Dáil without a vote. Under the bill 340,000 children from some 150,000 families would benefit.

W. T. Cosgrave heavily criticised the bill for not being contributory in character,¹⁷⁵ using in a rather dubious fashion Beveridge's report to support his position, although Beveridge explicitly favoured a non-contributory allowance. Similarly Norton, while welcoming the principle of the bill, criticised what he saw as its limitations,¹⁷⁶ most notably that it would not make significant inroads into the 'endemic poverty'¹⁷⁷ in many parts of the country. Dillon, in many ways the energy behind the bill, welcomed it, saying:

174 DD vol. 92, 23 Nov. 1943, col. 28; William Beveridge, *Social insurance and allied services*, p. 7.

175 DD vol. 92, 23 Nov. 1943, col. 45.

176 *Ibid.*, col. 51.

177 *Ibid.*, col. 54.

In our rejoicing in what I regard as something closely approximating to a great revolution which will be brought about by this bill when it becomes an act, we should not lose sight of the fact that family allowances...are only a second best. The ideal would be to ensure that every person who did an honest days work would receive for that labour a wage sufficient to enable him to rear a Christian family.¹⁷⁸

Giving credit where it was due, he commended the government for being 'courageous' in recognising 'a great principle', although he would have been happier had the allowance been made payable to the mother rather than the father.¹⁷⁹ Michael Donnellan, leader of Clann na Talmhan, described the bill as 'a Godsend' but also argued that the allowance be payable to the mother as 'the chief parent',¹⁸⁰ a position supported by Bridget Redmond,¹⁸¹ a Fine Gael T.D. for Waterford and daughter-in-law of John Redmond. Indeed Cosgrave put down an amendment calling for payment of allowances to the mother,¹⁸² a request which the Department of Industry and Commerce refused to grant:

By inference, the proposal means that the fathers of families in the state who have provided and are providing for their families to the best of their ability and according to their opportunities are not to be trusted with the allocation of an allowance granted to them by the state to augment the family income.¹⁸³

With what appears with the benefit of hindsight as a dated theory, Lemass stated in the Dáil that:

There may be some social theory behind that suggestion. If there is, I disagree with it, and I strongly support the view...that we

178 Ibid., col. 103.

179 Ibid., col. 106-108.

180 DD vol. 92, 23 Nov. 1943, col. 59.

181 DD vol. 92, 24 Nov. 1943, col. 204.

182 Children's allowances bill, N.A., D/SW C2.

183 Children's allowance bill, 1943, N.A., D/SW C 2.

should regard the father as the head of the family, and responsible for the proper utilisation of the family income.¹⁸⁴

However regulations were provided for whereby the father could delegate the mother as payee.

In conclusion it may be said that the government seemed to have viewed the legislation as both the alpha and the omega of the state's new social policy. The estimated cost of the plan was £2,250,000 per year, an increase of 25% on the amount that was already being provided for under existing social security services. Sean Lemass put the matter as follows:

The imposition of this new charge upon the tax-payers of the country must inevitably mean that any other further and substantial change in our social security services must await the advent of better times.¹⁸⁵

To provide for the amount required, he pointed out, would mean an extra 1/- in the £ on income tax; 1/- in the lb. on tobacco; 2d. on tea; a half pence on sugar and 1d. on the pint of beer.¹⁸⁶

Winding up the final stages of the debate on the bill, in December 1943, Lemass paid tribute to James Dillon, 'for his efforts in bringing about the introduction of this bill'.¹⁸⁷ The bill became law in 1944, children's allowances being payable from 1 August of that year. It was an obvious occasion of joy for many families, a song entitled 'The New Half Crown', commemorating the event becoming popular in North Leitrim. Equally the government was anxious that the first day of payments should be marked as a significant event, several employees of the G.P.O. in Dublin being detailed to form a crowd for official photographs of a packed post office on the first day of payment of

184 DD vol. 92, 23 Nov. 1943, col. 224.

185 Ibid., Sean Lemass, col. 30, 31,

186 Ibid., col. 32.

187 DD vol. 92, 10 Dec. 1943, col. 1015-16.

allowances.¹⁸⁸ The act was amended in Spring 1946¹⁸⁹ improving the administration of the scheme and removing the citizenship clause upon which entitlement rested, while the Social Welfare (Children's Allowances) Act of 1952¹⁹⁰ introduced further important changes in administrative procedures. Most significant among these changes was the extension of the code to cover the payment of allowances at the rate of 11/- a month in respect of the second qualified child and the increase in allowances to 17/6 a month for each subsequent qualified child.¹⁹¹ The rates were again increased in 1957 following the withdrawal of food vouchers (see table 4.7 in previous chapter), payment of an additional 4/6 per month coming into effect from June 1957, bringing total expenditure on children's allowances to almost £7,000,000 per year.¹⁹²

As we shall see later, Lemass's forecast that further changes in social policy would have to await better times proved incorrect. The introduction of children's allowances was the first of many post-Beveridge changes in social welfare legislation in Ireland, directly influenced if not initiated by, developments in Britain.

The establishment of the Department of Social Welfare

It was in the light of the Beveridge and Dignan reports that it became increasingly obvious that the social legislation of the Saorstát was lacking most of all in organisation and co-ordination. It was an issues which came to the fore many times during the debate on children's allowances. Services and policies had developed in isolation

188 I am indebted to a former employee of the G.P.O. in 1944, for this information.

189 Children's Allowances (Amendment) Act, 1946 (No. 8 of 1946).

190 Social Welfare (Children's Allowances) Act, 1952 (No. 12 of 1952).

191 Department of Social Welfare, *Report 1950-53*, p. 9.

192 Dáil Éireann brief on Social Welfare (N.A, D/SW, Children' Allowances Act 1957: second stage, Plan 5/57).

of existing legislation. Such an ad-hoc approach to ensuring the economic and social security of the citizens was far from ideal, not to mention overly bureaucratic and wasteful of the limited finances available. As the unification of the health insurance societies had demonstrated, co-ordination resulted in appreciably lower administrative costs, a more balanced and equal distribution of welfare, and an equalisation of benefits. Such experience in the co-ordination of one crucial welfare service led to demands for the co-ordination of welfare and social services in general.

From the early 1930s it was clear to the government that such co-ordination was not only desirable but inevitable. While claiming that the pressure of work in organising the day-to-day running of the existing services left only limited time for thinking about new organisational structures and methods, Sean T. O Kelly felt 'that sooner or later a step in that direction will have to come, that co-ordination of social services must be secured'.¹⁹³ It was a view very much supported by the opposition parties, Norton speaking in the late 1930s about the necessity of establishing a 'department for social services'.¹⁹⁴

While in February 1944 MacEntee foreshadowed the development of such a department in a speech he delivered to the Medical Society of University College, Dublin, it was February 1945 before the Fianna Fáil government decided to establish an interdepartmental committee on social services to examine and report on:

- (a) the desirability and practicability of the assignment of the administration of social services such as old age pensions, widows' and orphans' pensions, unemployment insurance, national health insurance, unemployment assistance, children's allowances, etc., to a single minister, and

¹⁹³ DD vol. 65, 11 Mar. 1937, col. 1623.

¹⁹⁴ DD vol. 75, 21 Apr. 1939, col. 944.

(b) the practical step which would be necessary to give effect to such an arrangement if it should be decided upon by the government.¹⁹⁵

Established by the Minister for Finance, Seán T. O Kelly, on 15 May 1945, one of his last actions before being installed as President of Ireland, the committee was composed of one representative each from the Departments of Finance, Industry and Commerce and Local Government and Public Health. Having received detailed memoranda from the concerned departments on the effects of unifying social welfare legislation under a new department, the committee produced its report in July of the same year following eight meetings. Reporting on each individual social service at the time, the overall thrust was that the establishment of a new department would result in a more uniform and comprehensive approach to social services, leading to greater economic and administrative efficiency. Its recommendations regarding the following services capture the positive tenor of the report:

Widows' and orphans' pensions: *Prima facie* allocation of all this work to one central authority should make for more efficient administration and should lead to economies.

Unemployment insurance and assistance: Here again it seems to us that the centralisation of the work under one authority should improve administration and tend towards economy.

Children's allowances: This service falls clearly into the income maintenance class and we recommend that it should be included in any merger with other social services.

The report concluded that:

If the future developments of social services are to be adequately supervised, planned and co-ordinated, the government should have

¹⁹⁵ Secretary, Department of Local Government and Public Health from Department of the Taoiseach, 21 Feb. 1945 (U.C.D. Archives, MacEntee Papers, Social Services, P67/361).

at its disposal the specialist advice of a minister and a department for that purpose.

This recommendation was made in the light of a perceived expanded role for social services in post-Emergency Ireland, and therefore the necessity for the government to keep abreast of 'modern trends' in social legislation.¹⁹⁶

When no action on the report was immediately forthcoming, James Everett of the Labour Party introduced a motion in the Dáil in November 1945 which described social security measures as 'the first and most urgent consideration in our post-war planning',¹⁹⁷ and which called upon the government to:

Introduce proposals for the establishment of a scheme of social security in which all the existing social services shall be unified and co-ordinated under a Ministry for Social Services.¹⁹⁸

While much of the debate was taken up with the issue of Dignan's report and his dismissal from the National Health Insurance Society, the taoiseach claimed that the question of unifying and co-ordinating the administration of the income maintenance services had been 'for a considerable time engaging the attention of the government' but that:

As a result of an investigation which had been made in some detail the general conclusion would seem to be that the present system of administration of the social services is efficient and economical...The government had taken no decision adverse to the establishment of a Department of Social Services, but were of the opinion that there was no urgent need for any closer investigation of the matter.¹⁹⁹

However, on 7 November 1946 a ministries and secretaries bill was introduced in the Dáil by the government allowing for the

196 Report of inter-departmental committee on social services, 2 July 1945 (U.C.D. Archives, MacEntee Papers, Social Services, P67/361).

197 DD vol. 98, 14 Nov. 1945, col. 1143.

198 DD vol. 98, 14 Nov. 1945, col. 1143.

199 DD vol. 99, 30 Jan. 1946, col. 170.

establishment of a Department of Health and a Department of Social Welfare. To the Department of Social Welfare was to be transferred responsibility for children's allowances, food allowances, national health insurance, unemployment insurance, unemployment assistance, widows' and orphans' pensions, blind pensions and old age pensions, the term 'social services' being defined as 'the income maintenance services'.²⁰⁰ Described by the government as 'a real advance towards promoting social welfare and the public health of the country',²⁰¹ the bill received a less than enthusiastic welcome from W. T. Cosgrave, the leader of the opposition. His unusual line of argument, that the inability of the Department of Local Government and Public Health to carry out its duties was no excuse for the establishment of two new departments,²⁰² was a mere example of opposition for opposition's sake, a similar approach having been adopted by Cosgrave in the case of children's allowances. It also illustrated the lack of any principled approach by Fine Gael to social legislation.

Putting the provisions of the Ministerial and Parliamentary Offices (Amendment) Act, 1947, into practice took some time as the offices of the new Ministry for Social Welfare were scattered throughout eight separate buildings in Dublin city, including at the Customs House, on Lord Edward Street and Earlsfort Terrace. It was September 1953 before Seán Lemass, then Tánaiste and Minister for Industry and Commerce, officially opened Áras Mhic Dhiarmada, bringing together the staff of the Department of Social Welfare under one roof.

200 DD vol. 103, 15 Nov. 1948, col. 1031.

201 P. J. Burke, DD vol. 103, 20 Nov. 1948, col. 1147.

202 Ibid., col. 1149.

There is little doubt but that the establishment of the new department and the continuing unification and co-ordination of the social services in Ireland was a Beveridge-inspired reform, a fact made clear by J. J. O Sullivan of the employment branch of the Department of Industry and Commerce at a lecture he delivered to social science students in University College Dublin in 1952:

The main advantage claimed for this change was immensely improved efficiency and the possibility of economies through concentration of administrative machinery.²⁰³

It was in the same year that the Department of Social Welfare, in a paper dated October 1952, made clearer reference to the influence of the Beveridge report:

Sir William Beveridge in his report on social insurance and allied services made unification of administrative responsibility one of the six fundamental principles in his scheme of social insurance against interruption and destruction of earning power which was the main feature of his plan for social security...

[In Ireland] a major step in the unification of administrative responsibility was the establishment on 22 January 1947 of the Department of Social Welfare.²⁰⁴

The establishment of the new department was a crucial step on the co-ordination of social legislation in Ireland. It was a necessary pre-requisite upon which the structured unification and expansion of social legislation could take place. This unification and expansion came in the form of the Social Welfare Act, 1952 which is discussed in detail in the following chapter.

203 Lectures in UCD on unemployment insurance, unemployment assistance, etc. 1945-64 (N.A, D/SW, E.B. 316481).

204 'The new social welfare scheme', 27 Oct. 1952 (N.A, D/SW, EB 316481). See William Beveridge, *Social insurance and allied services*, p. 15.

Unemployment - a perennial problem

Before moving on to the next chapter, however, it is necessary to outline developments in another important area, that of unemployment, which was to become a major issue in post-1945 Ireland, a problem equalled only by emigration, the sole solution to unemployment for thousands of Irish people. After the war London and many British cities needed to be rebuilt and Ireland largely provided the labour to do it, Britain actively seeking labour supplies during this period, especially for lower-grade jobs. It was an indictment of the social effects of de Valera's politics, and a problem that was to become increasingly severe in the 1950s. Not only did the emigrants of the mid to late 1940s not return after a few years to settle in Ireland as they had hoped, but they were joined by thousands more who themselves never returned to settle in Ireland, their passage made easier by the dropping of the visa requirement from Irish people entering Britain from October 1947. The Fianna Fáil election slogan 'Work and Maintenance' with 'Fianna Fáil under it, Fianna Fáil over it, Sean Lemass to the right of it and Sean Lemass to the left of it'²⁰⁵ rang increasingly hollow. Work was difficult to find and the levels of unemployment insurance and assistance were less than adequate.

In Spring 1945 Alfred Byrne introduced a motion in the Dáil regarding poverty amongst the unemployed:

That, having regard to the continuous increase in the cost of food, clothing and footwear, especially in relation to children, and the consequent hardship on many of our citizens, Dáil Éireann requests the government to undertake an early survey of poverty prevailing amongst the unemployed.²⁰⁶

205 John Hennigan, DD vol. 89, 3 Mar. 1943, col. 920.

206 DD vol. 95, 2 Feb. 1945, col. 2185.

The motion further called for increases in unemployment benefits. However it was not increased benefits that were most important but rather the creation of more jobs. Beveridge had stressed the maintenance of high levels of employment as a prerequisite of the welfare state.

However, following the war, the government's focus of attention in the area of unemployment was in respect of demobilised members of both the Irish and British defence forces. To this end Lemass introduced an unemployment insurance bill in June 1945 which had the effect of providing unemployment insurance for members of the defence forces demobilised and unable to find employment. The reports of the Department of Industry and Commerce witness to the potential social problem caused by the numbers of demobilised men. From 1939 to 1944 the numbers of unemployed entered a downward trend due to the expansion of the defence forces and emigration.²⁰⁷ However, in 1945 15,733 N.C.O.'s were discharged from the defence forces, 5,577 going on the live register of unemployed.²⁰⁸ By 1946, 28,179 had been discharged and 5,610 were on the live register.²⁰⁹ This latter number had dropped to 2,723 by 1949, many demobilised men deciding to emigrate to Britain.²¹⁰

While the plight of Irish emigrants overseas does not fall within the remit of the present work, we can note that John Charles McQuaid, Archbishop of Dublin from 1940 to 1972, was to the fore in looking after their welfare, establishing the Catholic Social Welfare Bureau in 1942.²¹¹ McQuaid was also chairperson of the Commission on Youth

207 Department of Industry and Commerce, *Employment and Unemployment 1943 and 1944*, p. 24.

208 Department of Industry and Commerce, *Trend of employment 1944 and 1945*, p. 7.

209 Department of Industry and Commerce, *Trend of employment 1945 and 1946*, p. 6.

210 Department of Industry and Commerce, *Trend of employment 1948 and 1949*, p. 9.

211 See J. H. Whyte, *Church and state in modern Ireland 1923-79*, p. 77.

Unemployment, having been appointed to the position in 1943 by the government.²¹²

Regarding those demobilised from the British forces, the unemployment insurance bill of 1946 enabled the payment of benefit in respect of unemployment insurance contributions acquired in Britain to be made to those ordinarily resident in Ireland, an arrangement made with the British government at a conference in London in July 1946.

This post-emergency period of high unemployment, high emigration and decreasing population was not inevitable. It was rather, the result of negative politics during the war. Ireland defined her neutrality as a negative force; like the achievement of independence, it was very much seen as an end in itself. In no way was it presented as a constructive policy. To this extent it was very much a lost opportunity. The only other European country which declared its neutrality and survived the war without foreign occupation was Sweden which, in contrast with Ireland, emerged from the war as an exemplar in the field of social reform. Unlike Ireland, Sweden used its neutrality in a profitable and constructive way.

In turn this 'negative neutrality' in Ireland was to have a further unhelpful effect. While Ireland suffered during the war, albeit spared from active participation, there was no sense of relief or popular joy to lift the national spirit following the war. The sense of hope and victory which permeated Europe was absent as Ireland became increasingly isolated from mainstream European politics.

It is in these contexts that the publication of the Beveridge report and Dignan plan and their long term influence and effect would be crucial. In the short term they had served to revolutionise the Irish

212 Correspondence between His Grace Rev. Dr John Charles McQuaid DD, Archbishop and the Minister regarding the staff of the Commission on Youth Unemployment (N.A, D/SW, D 209/45).

approach to welfare legislation: through the popular support for them they had forced the government to change its view of social services, from one of dispensing, grudgingly, a form of charity to the citizenry, to viewing social services as the right of the people to receive and the duty of the government to provide through redistributive economic and social policies. The two reports also served to heighten popular expectations in the areas of social benefits, and greater demands on government to provide them. It was these changes which ushered in the modern welfare state in Ireland. They forged the new philosophy underpinning the introduction and co-ordination of social services in Ireland. The product of the 'Beveridge period' in Ireland was an expanded and co-ordinated body of social legislation, allowing Ireland to be described, up to the 1970s and beyond, as a Beveridge type, distributive welfare state, similar to Britain and the Netherlands in particular.

However, it is in the years following the publication of the Beveridge report and Dignan plan that this mind-shift could be made concrete in terms of further expansion and co-ordination of social legislation in comprehensive terms.

CHAPTER 6

CONSOLIDATING SOCIAL WELFARE, 1948-52

The period from the late 1940s to mid 1950s, was one of reconstruction in Europe, one of the major aims being the organisation of social services and welfare legislation. In Ireland, albeit on a different scale, the period was of great importance in the construction, future emphasis and definition of the Irish welfare state. The coming to power of the first inter-party government, representing a broad spectrum of political opinion in Ireland (and, therefore, similar to Fianna Fáil), was an important factor in this, not so much for any change in ideology from the previous Fianna Fáil governments, but rather for the introduction of new blood into the offices of state. By the 1940s, Fianna Fáil had lost its initial enthusiasm for change: Fianna Fáil ministers had become less innovative, and were beginning to lose touch with the reality of people's lives in Ireland. As Erskine Childers was to conclude following an investigation as to why Fianna Fáil lost the election of February 1948: '[there is] a feeling, intangible in character, that we have ceased to be the poor man's government'.¹ Complacency, conservatism, and a feeling that it knew what was best for Ireland without having to look outside its own party, began to replace the earlier dynamism. The gulf between de Valera's vision of the 'Ireland which we dreamed of'² and the reality of social and economic deprivation underpinned the extent to which Fianna Fáil was losing touch with reality.

¹ Letter from Erskine Childers to Sean MacEntee, Feb. 1948 (U.C.D. Archives, MacEntee Papers, P67/299).

² Radio broadcast on St Patrick's Day 1943, quoted in Maurice Moynihan (ed.), *Speeches and statements of Eamon de Valera* (Dublin, 1980), p. 466.

The general feeling among opposition parties in the late 1940s was that an alternative to Fianna Fáil rule was necessary and desirable after sixteen years, and this shared feeling initially proved to be a stronger force than the deep seated ideological differences between Fine Gael, Labour, National Labour, Clann na Poblachta, Clann na Talmhan and the handful of independents, all constituents of the first inter-party government formed in February 1948. The change was fruitful, not least in the area of social policy and much was achieved in the three-year administration.

Now that an alternative government was in the offing, politics in general and social politics in particular, took on a new vitality. While historical caricatures of the 1950s, invariably based on a political and economic analysis of events, generally involve the words 'gloomy', 'failure' and 'depressing', they are terms which cannot be applied without qualification to the field of social welfare legislation during the period. From an economic perspective the 1950s in general was certainly a decade of 'gloom', profoundly marked by the high levels of emigration, the reality of which is documented in Dónall MacAmhlaigh's *Dialann Deoraí: 'mhothaigh mé mar a bheadh méara fuara an éadóchais i ngreim ar mo phutóga'*.³ However the paradox is that it was the same period which established Ireland as a welfare state in the modern sense founded on the principles of Beveridgeism and consequently organised on the principle of distribution of benefits rather than on the provision of services.

It was the lack of structural development which postponed the impact of these reforms in the short term. As welfare policy is reactive rather than proactive to underlying structural factors, the reforms could

³ Dónall MacAmhlaigh, *Dialann Deoraí* (Dublin, 1960), p. 2.

have little immediate impact in terms of improving the lot of recipients by means of substantially increased rates of benefit. For example, one major structural development judged by experts to be important in the development of the welfare state is the transformation from an agriculturally-based to an industrially-based economy. While such a transformation had been slowly taking place in Ireland from the late 1920s, when 53% of the active working population were still engaged in the agricultural sector, by 1952 40% were still engaged in agriculture, while 22% were engaged in other areas of production including industry.⁴ In this Ireland was unique in western Europe where the rapid shift to industry, a prerequisite of post-war economic reconstruction, led in time to an economic boom on the continent. It was the 1960s before Ireland was to share in that boom.

As alluded to in the last chapter, this economic boom greatly facilitated the development of the welfare state right across western Europe. This international development had a positive, driving influence on Ireland, especially in the context of the Beveridge report. Once provided with the Beveridge model, a number of developments within Ireland itself facilitated the implementation of legislation in this country. The first development was the cross-party consensus which arose in favour of social welfare legislation. Secondly, the changes in government led to issues-based election campaigns which, in the absence of core political issues for the first time, brought social issues to the forefront. Civil war divisions, still strong, were becoming less relevant and acceptable as mainstays of election campaigns. The lack of enthusiasm for the declaration of the Republic in 1948 underlined the increasing obsolescence of such issues in southern Ireland. Issues

⁴ *Trend in employment 1950-52*, p. 10.

that affected the ordinary lives of the voters, unemployment, emigration, poverty and social legislation, came to the fore.

This new political climate allowed Dr James Ryan, the first Minister for Health and Social Welfare, to declare in the Dáil in June 1949 from the opposition benches that:

We may take it for granted that any party that comes into power in this country is going to progress in the way of increasing and not decreasing these [social] services.⁵

In the same month de Valera said that:

We have advanced, thank goodness, very far from the day in which one had to preach that if individuals in our community through no fault of their own, are unable to support themselves, the community and the state has a duty to come to the aid of those individuals.⁶

Such post-war cross-party consensus was one of the significant political developments right across western Europe in this period. In Denmark, for example, 'the largest part of the political spectrum'⁷ was supportive of the broad thrust of welfare policy, while in Finland a similar situation became evident by the 1950s.

This cross-party consensus regarding the desirability and necessity of social policy - whether motivated by a genuine social democratic ideal or by the hope of boosting party support - and the importance of welfare issues in elections is well illustrated by events surrounding the three by-elections of June 1952 during the period of Fianna Fáil government between the two inter-party administrations, from June 1951 to June 1954. The opposition deputies accused Fianna Fáil of using the resources of the Department of Social Welfare in its

⁵ DD vol. 116, 23 June 1949, col. 1331.

⁶ *Ibid.*, col. 1461.

⁷ Daniel Levine, 'Conservatism and tradition in Danish social welfare legislation, 1890-1933: a comparative view', *Comparative Studies in History and Society*, vol. 20 (1978), no. 1, p. 56.

campaigning in the Mayo-North, Waterford and Limerick-East constituencies. Fianna Fáil was accused of using the provincial press in each constituency to extensively advertise the benefits that would accrue to recipients of unemployment assistance, old age pensions and, as Thomas O Higgins of Fine Gael commented, 'to various classes of voters who might be affected by the sudden appearance in their local papers of advertisements by the Department of Social Welfare telling them what a great new deal the Fianna Fáil government were giving them. That was a scandalous abuse by the government party.'⁸ The relevant advertisement outlining the increases appeared in the *Waterford News* on 20 June, six days before polling day, and was spread across the top portion of the front page of the paper.⁹ Presented in a very graphic and attractive style, with a reminder that the first payment of increased rates was imminent, the advertisement outlined the enhanced benefits in health insurance, children's allowances, old age pensions, blind pensions, unemployment insurance and assistance and widows' and orphans' pensions.

While not abandoning its usual election rhetoric (for example, Fianna Fáil's candidate in Limerick thought it sufficient to surround a picture of himself with the phrases 'his father was a freeman of our city', 'Honour the dead by electing the living' and 'Give your No.1 vote to the son of the fenian'¹⁰) Fianna Fáil were obviously becoming more attuned to political functionalism. While Fine Gael took the Limerick-East seat, Fianna Fáil held the seat in North Mayo and gained a former Fine Gael seat in Waterford where the advertising by the Department of Social Welfare had been most intense. While there is no obvious

⁸ DD vol. 136, 4 Mar. 1953, col. 2142.

⁹ *The Waterford News*, 20 June 1952.

¹⁰ *Limerick Chronicle*, 26 June 1952

precedent for the civil service advertising extensively in the provincial press, the prestige of welfare issues in electoral politics is very significant, and was to remain significant in subsequent elections.

The one organisation that remained outside this enthusiasm for state-organised welfare legislation was the Catholic church which, during the 1950s became more entrenched in its opposition to state-centralised social policy in what appears to have been a final attempt to bolster an ideology patently out of step with developments on continental Europe and increasingly called into doubt at home in Ireland. Willing to discuss the benefits or otherwise of social reform outside of Ireland, the church became obviously more conservative when discussion moved to reform within Ireland.

While the role of the Catholic church in the controversy over the mother and child scheme has been over-emphasised to the near exclusion of discussion of other developments in social policy in independent Ireland, what happened, when placed in the context of developments over the previous twenty years, was one of the final stages in the conflict between church and state over state-centralised social policy versus the provision of Catholic charity. Having its origins in an earlier bill of James Ryan, the mother and child scheme proposed by Noel Browne in June 1950 would provide free and non-means tested post- and ante- natal care for mothers as well as medical care for children up to sixteen years of age.¹¹ The Catholic church although recognising the necessity of improving the dispensary system available to the '*technically** poor people', it objected to exposing

¹¹ The most inclusive account of the mother and child scheme and the subsequent controversy is given in J. H. Whyte, *Church and state in modern Ireland* (Dublin, 1980), chapters 7 and 8. See also Noel Browne, *Against the tide*, chapters 9 to 11.

* Present author's emphasis.

people to 'the danger of a state medical service'.¹² While discussion of the events are avoided here as the entrails have been picked through by so many already, the conclusion of the episode in the form of Dr James Ryan's health bill of 1953 put the first significant dent in the power of the Catholic church to influence negatively social welfare legislation.

In the context of developments in Britain, but more particularly in Europe, the Catholic church's rhetoric was dated. In an article headed 'Dangers in the evolution of health services' which appeared in *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* in 1948, D. J. Cannon, a medical doctor who contributed numerous articles to the debate on health legislation and who fully supported the church's view, wrote that:

It is my opinion that the undue consideration being given to the evolution of the Public Health Service in this country tends to make us forget the excellent services which have long been given to the Irish poor and needy by voluntary organisations...

On the principles of Catholic Sociology the government should be able, without any undue interference with the people or with the medical profession, not only to build up a happy and prosperous Ireland, but Public Health and Social Services which...will be the envy of the world.¹³

In the discussion which follows, the position of the Catholic church has to be considered when evaluating the legislative history of the period: it was not until the 1960s that the church changed its fundamentally negative attitude to state organised social policy.

The discussion that follows begins with an analysis of the Social Welfare Act, 1948. Combined with the dissolution of the National Health Insurance Society and the transfer of its functions to the Department of Social Welfare, the act paved the way for the Social Welfare Act 1952 which provided what the Minister for Social Welfare

¹² D. J. Cannon, 'Dangers in the evolution of health services', *IER*, vol. lxx (1948), pp 802, 809.

¹³ *Ibid.*

called 'a fairly comprehensive insurance scheme'¹⁴ by establishing a general scheme of compulsory insurance, covering employees aged between 16-70 years for the following range of eventualities: disability, unemployment, marriage, maternity, widowhood and orphanhood. The emphasis of the 1952 act was on the co-ordination of the existing three schemes of social insurance (i.e. unemployment insurance under the Unemployment Insurance Acts; health insurance under the National Health Insurance Acts; widows' and orphans' contributory pensions under the Widows' and Orphans' Acts) which had developed in isolation of each other resulting in two cards for stamps and different rates of contribution and benefit despite similar needs. In the area of assistance legislation, the act increased the various rates under old age pensions, unemployment assistance, and widows' and orphans' non-contributory pensions, while children's allowances was dealt with by a separate act in the same year.

The 1952 act, which had much in common with post-Beveridge reforms in Britain, was the culmination of the work of both the first inter-party government and of the Fianna Fáil administration, Dr James Ryan claiming that, with the passing of the act, 'the structure of social services in this country might be regarded as having taken final form'.¹⁵ While there can be nothing final about social legislation, as the social problems themselves continue to change, it was a significant achievement within a decade of the publication of the Beveridge report. The initial white paper of October 1949, drawn up under the direction of William Norton, Tánaiste and Minister for Social Welfare, had the direct aim of achieving a modern welfare state.¹⁶ The fact that

¹⁴ 'The new social welfare scheme', Dec. 1952 (N.A., D/SW, EB 316481).

¹⁵ DD vol. 143, 2 Dec. 1953, col. 1394.

¹⁶ Transcript of recording of lecture on social security given by William Norton in Newbridge Town Hall, 21 May 1950 (N.A., D/T, Progress Reports 1949-1963, S 15069).

it was initiated by the five-party coalition government and carried into law (albeit with some changes) by Fianna Fáil further cemented cross-parliamentary support, not just for this act, but for future social legislation.

The Social Welfare Act, 1948 and the dissolution of the National Health Insurance Society

The election of early 1948 saw social issues coming to the forefront, alongside the more traditional political issues. While the tired election slogans of the two largest political parties persisted - Fine Gael's newspaper advertisements for example spoke of the need to 'end political jobbery'¹⁷ - the emphasis placed by Labour, National Labour and Clann na Poblachta on social issues forced the larger parties to pay a significant amount of attention in both speeches and advertisement campaigns to social issues in general and welfare issues in particular. Sean MacBride, leader of Clann na Poblachta, promised to institute 'a comprehensive scheme of social insurance'¹⁸ if returned to power, while Labour's William Norton and National Labour's James Everett proposed the introduction of a similar scheme if elected to office.¹⁹ Likewise, Clann na Talmhan, upon its foundation, was eager to stress that it was 'not just a land-minded party', but was also concerned with social legislation.²⁰ As things turned out, all four parties, together with Fine Gael, formed the new government in February 1948.

Adhering to pre-election promises the government immediately set about standardising and simplifying pensions and benefits available under the various welfare schemes. By March 1948, one month after

¹⁷ *II*, 24 Jan. 1948.

¹⁸ *II*, 24 Jan. 1948

¹⁹ *II*, 27 Jan. 1948; *II*, 29 Jan. 1948.

²⁰ *The book of Clann na Talmhan* (1944), p. 2.

taking office, the government had outlined a 'proposed new scheme of old age pensions', but later extended its scope to include, by May of the same year, a broader spectrum of welfare benefits, reflecting the three-fold concerns of the Department of Social Welfare: the cessation of cash supplements and payments through public assistance authorities, the modification of the means test and the increasing of maximum rates of benefit.²¹

Within six months of coming to office, the new inter-party government had introduced a comprehensive social welfare bill based on these proposals. William Norton, the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Welfare, described the purpose of the bill during the second reading in July 1948 as being 'to distribute £2,500,000 a year by way of increased social welfare benefits',²² the greatest share of which, over £1,500,000, was to be allocated to old age pensions while widows and orphans were to be the second largest class to benefit through increased pensions and allowances. Norton's strongest adversary was P. J. McGilligan, Minister for Industry and Commerce from September 1923 until the downfall of the Cumann na nGaedheal government in March 1932 and at this time the Minister for Finance, who strongly criticised the proposal to grant a pension to a childless widow at the age of 45 years, a reduction of 10 years on the former age of 55 years. On the instruction of McGilligan the secretary of the Department of Finance wrote to Norton claiming that:

The minister sees grave objection to the proposals under this head. The grant of a pension to a childless widow at the early age of 45 years would be indefensible; it would encourage idleness at state expense in the class to which it applied, serve as a lever to lower still further the age at which pensions generally

²¹ Social Welfare (Reciprocal Arrangements) Act 1948 bill file (N.A., D/SW, I.A. 93/53A).

²² DD vol. 112, 28 July 1948, col. 1626.

are granted and would in all probability immediately raise the question as to whether spinsters should be treated in like manner.²³

A compromise was eventually agreed upon where the age limit was lowered to 48 years. The bill also significantly modified the means test in regard to both old age pensions and widows' and orphans' pensions, Norton expressing the desirability of doing away with the means test altogether, something he hoped 'that, in the not to distant future, it will be feasible to do'.²⁴

Norton, who seemed more anxious to devote his energies to the Public Services Executive Union of which he was general secretary than to take up a ministerial position,²⁵ was Ireland's first social democratic Minister for Social Welfare, a role he combined with that of Tánaiste. Being leader of the Labour Party from 1932-1960, it is significant that this bill was carried through by a Labour minister: had Labour been part of government at an earlier time the development of the Irish welfare state might have been significantly different.

While Norton acknowledged that the 1948 bill was not 'an end in itself', he described it as carrying 'our social services and our social legislation a very substantial step forward. It provides more security for the weak and the helpless and it is calculated to brighten their lot.'²⁶ If we take the old and blind as part of this 'weak and helpless' group then it was a step forward. For a number of years while in opposition, the parties now in government had been calling on Fianna Fáil to legislate for more just pensions for the old and the blind, putting forward numerous motions in the Dáil covering all aspects of pensions,

²³ Letter from Department of Finance to Secretary, Department of Social Welfare, 15 July 1948 (N.A, D/SW, Social Welfare Act 1948: submission to government, Plan 4/48).

²⁴ DD vol. 112, 28 July 1948, col. 1627.

²⁵ Garry Sweeney, *In public service: a history of the public services executive union, 1890-1990* (Dublin, 1990), p. 110.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, col. 1636.

from rates of benefit to severity of means tests.²⁷ Now the 1948 bill proposed to reduce the minimum age for the receipt of blind pensions by nine years to 21 years of age, a measure initially opposed by the Department of Finance which feared that the reduction would 'tend in many cases to remove the incentive to blind persons to look for suitable employment or training'.²⁸ The act also modified the calculation of means by excluding certain personal earnings. In common with old age pensions, the maximum means allowable was increased from £39 to over £52 per year in urban areas with a new minimum pension of 5/- replacing the old minimum of 1/- (or 3/6 when supplementary allowances are considered). The two-fold effect was that many people previously excluded from receiving pensions could now benefit from them, while those already in receipt of pensions could hope for increases in that benefit. With the introduction of these increases, the various emergency supplements, described in chapter four, were withdrawn. These had included, as from 1 April 1944, emergency supplementary allowances of up to 2/6 per week payable through public assistance authorities to needy pensioners not entitled to food allowances outside of urban areas. This measure had been further supplemented from April 1947 with benefits of 5/- and 2/6 per week, irrespective of rate of pension, payable to urban pensioners at the higher rate and rural pensioners at the lower rate.²⁹

While on the one hand the new provisions had been criticised in the preparatory stages by the Department of Finance for being too generous,³⁰ Fianna Fáil deputies criticised the bill for not going far

²⁷ See for example DD vol. 92, 23 Nov. 1943, col. 889; DD vol. 92, Sept. 1944, col. 2005; DD vol. 99, 6 Mar. 1946, col. 2054; DD vol. 104, 20 Mar. 1947, col. 2569.

²⁸ Observations of Department of Finance to Secretary Department of Social Welfare, 15 July 1948 (N.A., D/SW, Plan 4/48).

²⁹ Social Welfare Act 1948: bill file (N.A., D/SW, I.A. 94/53).

³⁰ Observations of Department of Finance, 15 July 1948 (N.A., D/SW, Social Welfare Act 1948: submissions to government, Plan 4/48).

enough.³¹ Neither were the Fine Gael members of government allowed to forget the 10% reduction in pensions their members had introduced in 1924.³²

Certainly the reform did not go quite as far as the Labour Party had wanted according to its motion placed before the Dáil in September 1944 by Michael Keyes, Minister for Local Government from 1949-1951. In that motion Keyes requested from the Fianna Fáil government the introduction of 'proposals for the purpose of providing for persons over 65 years of age, who have ceased being gainfully employed, old age pensions at the rate of 20/- per week',³³ although the upper means limit suggested by Keyes on that occasion was implemented in the 1948 act. Perhaps it was this motion of 1944 that led to Keyes' circumspection when commenting on the 1948 bill: 'I do not wish to delay the House, except to congratulate the minister on the steps which he is taking'.³⁴ Of course Keyes was not the only member of the inter-party government who had called for vastly improved legislation from the opposition benches but was now happy to support something less.³⁵ By March 1949, 4,093 extra persons were in receipt of old age and blind pensions, the weekly cost by that time having increased by £35,286 (see table 6.1).³⁶

The changes made to the receipt of widows' and orphans' pensions were similar to those made regarding old age and blind pensions. The means test was modified for non-contributory pensions, allowing the widow to earn up to 10/- per week and to receive 10/- per week from other sources, a sum that previously stood at 2s 6d. The

³¹ E.g. Patrick Beegan, DD vol. 112, 28 July 1948, col. 1658-1659.

³² See Dr James Ryan, DD vol. 112, 28 July 1948, col. 1643.

³³ DD vol. 94, 26 Sept. 1944, col. 2005.

³⁴ DD vol. 112, 28 July 1948, col. 1655.

³⁵ See for example the motion of Martin O Sullivan in DD vol. 99, 6 Mar. 1949, col. 2054.

³⁶ *Statistical Abstract 1950*.

qualifying age for receipt of non-contributory pensions was reduced from 55 years of age to 48 years, the effect of which was to permit 7,000 widows to qualify for non-contributory benefits.³⁷ These changes meant that, for the first time, in certain cases a non-contributory pension could be larger than a contributory pension, the maximum being increased from 11/6 to 14/- per week in urban areas and from 8/- to 10/-per week in rural areas.³⁸

Table 6.1

Persons in receipt of old age pensions on 31 March of each year

Year	Total	not exceeding 5s	exceeding 5s but less than 15s	15s and over	Total expenditure on pensions
1943	145,302	4,271	141,031	NIL	£3,620,035
1944	145,387	4,290	141,097	NIL	£3,717,139
1945	146,243	4,472	141,771	NIL	£3,695,789
1946	147,582	4,567	143,015	NIL	£3,709,168
1947	146,777	4,583	142,194	NIL	£3,729,678
1948	149,414	567	120,100	28,747	£4,841,386
1949	153,507	470	11,187	141,850*	£5,426,982

* Of this number, 132,014 were receiving the maximum pension of 17/6 per week.

Source: *Statistical Abstract 1950*

The other areas changed under the act related to national health insurance and unemployment benefit, the purpose of the changes again being the replacement of cash supplements introduced during the emergency period through the re-establishment of the principle of

³⁷ DD vol. 112, 28 July 1948, col. 1635.

³⁸ See Dáil Éireann: brief on Social Welfare Act 1948: committee stage (N.A, D/SW, Plan 6/48).

insurance based benefits in the non-assistance based policies. In the case of unemployment benefit, the cash supplements were made a permanent part of the rates of benefit, an increase off-set by an increase in the rates of insurance contributions. The act also allowed for the period of disqualification from unemployment assistance 'in the case of persons losing employment through misconduct or leaving voluntarily without just cause, at present fixed at three months, to be varied from one week to three months according to the circumstances of the individual case'.³⁹

Regarding national health insurance, enhanced rates of sickness and disability benefits were provided for together with an increase in the remuneration of doctors who issued certificates to claimants of benefit, again making the cash supplements permanent by merging them with basic benefits.

The thrust of the act was therefore in the direction of unification and simplification of benefits, with somewhat increased rates of benefit, most notably in the area of old age and blind pensions, widows' and orphans' pensions and unemployment insurance. To some extent therefore it was returning to a pre-emergency position, before the introduction of cash supplements as a temporary means of increasing benefits without effecting contributions. This return to benefits based strictly on an insurance principle was a positive step in the context of the development of the welfare state: as discussed in chapter four, cash supplements were arbitrary and could be viewed as charitable handouts rather than entitlements. With their abolition the employee, employer and the state again took collective responsibility for welfare provision.

³⁹ Dáil Éireann: brief on Social Welfare Act 1948: second stage (N.A, D/SW, Plan 5/48.)

Coming into effect in January 1949, the act was seen, not as an end in itself, but as a further step paving the way for substantive change in welfare legislation:

Much, however, remains to be done before we can regard our social services as adequate... With this bill out of the way and in operation, the comprehensive scheme will be tackled with earnestness and expedition.⁴⁰

The unity of feeling in the Dáil on this matter was both new and strong. For the first time there was an overwhelming unanimity of intent. Dr. James Ryan welcomed the bill, although he thought the 'country could afford more'.⁴¹ Describing the act as an 'interim scheme', a fact already acknowledged by Norton, he urged the necessity of a 'comprehensive scheme'.⁴²

A further but necessary piece of legislation was introduced by Norton in March 1950 for debate in the Dáil to complete the preparatory work of clearing 'the ground for the implementation of the wider social security scheme'.⁴³ The aim of the bill was to include in the remit of the Department of Social Welfare the activities carried out until then by the National Health Insurance Society, thereby eliminating duplication in the work of the department and the society.⁴⁴ Describing the non-inclusion of the activities of the society in the duties of the department as a 'regrettable deficiency', the act dissolved Cumann um Árachais Náisiúnta ar Shláinte, the 600 strong staff of the society, who had been on strike over pay in early 1948, being transferred *en masse* to the Department of Social Welfare from 1

⁴⁰ William Norton, DD vol. 112, 28 July 1948, col. 1636.

⁴¹ DD vol. 112, 28 July 1948, col. 1647.

⁴² *Ibid.*, col. 1649.

⁴³ DD vol. 120, 29 Mar. 1950, col. 223.

⁴⁴ Views of Minister for Finance on memorandum of Minister for Social Welfare on national health insurance society, n.d., c1949 (Labour History Museum, Norton Papers, Comprehensive social welfare scheme, Item 108).

August 1950.⁴⁵ The measure put paid to Dignan's expressed desire to have an even stronger National Health Insurance Society with powers largely independent of the department, one of the major planks of his proposed scheme for social security. Dr James Ryan was not slow to remind the inter-party government that many of its supporters 'stamped up and down the country blaming our government for not adopting that [Dr Dignan's] scheme. We knew at the time that these parties did not believe in the scheme'.⁴⁶

Keeping consistency in the Fianna Fáil approach Ryan supported the dissolution of the National Health Insurance Society. MacEntee, still harbouring obvious feelings of enmity for Dignan, also expressed support for the bill, but, like Ryan, spoke of:

the unprincipled political somersaults to which the various parties in the coalition have made us accustomed... If this bill represents anything it represents the complete abandonment of the Dignan plan - a slap in the face, if one might so describe it, to a member of the hierarchy who had almost been elected as a patron saint by the members of the political parties now forming the government.⁴⁷

Indeed it was a 'political somersault' when we compare the contents and effect of the bill in the context of the support Dignan received for his ideas among the coalition parties while in opposition, as outlined in a previous chapter. However it is important to note that a strong, unified and largely independent national health insurance society was only one aspect of Dignan's overall plan: the second major plank of his plan, namely the introduction of a comprehensive social welfare scheme, was now being embraced right across the political spectrum.

⁴⁵ Social Welfare Act, 1950 (No. 14 of 1950).

⁴⁶ DD vol. 120, 29 Mar. 1950, col. 229.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, col. 248.

With the preparatory work achieved by the 1950 act through the incorporation of the work of the National Health Insurance Society into the brief of the Department of Social Welfare, and with the provisions of the earlier 1948 Social Welfare Act, the path was clear for giving legislative effect to the desire for a more comprehensive and co-ordinated set of welfare legislation. This process had already begun in 1949.

'Principles of modern thought': the 1949 white paper on social security

The preparation and legislative history of what became the Social Welfare Act, 1952, was anything but straight forward. Having been first raised by Fianna Fáil, prepared by the first inter-party government and subsequently altered slightly and brought to fruition by a new Fianna Fáil administration, it was the cross-party consensus on the necessity of such a measure which ensured its success

From an early stage after the election of February 1948 the inter-party government made it clear that a white paper dealing with a comprehensive social insurance scheme was in preparation. The white paper⁴⁸ was presented to the government just prior to the Dáil recess of Summer 1949, Norton promising that 'no avoidable delay will be permitted to occur in the preparation of the necessary legislation', but cautioning that 'the task involved will necessarily be a heavy one'.⁴⁹

Published in October 1949, the *White paper containing government proposals for social security* was comprehensive and wide-ranging. Above all, it was a clear, systematic analysis of past developments, contemporary structures and recommendations for future

⁴⁸ Department of Social Welfare, *White paper containing government proposals for social security* (Dublin, 1949).

⁴⁹ DD vol. 116, 7 June 1949, col. 1. See also DD vol. 112, 13 July 1948, col. 1.

planning in Ireland, placed within the context of 'general principles and modern thought'.⁵⁰

The paper was consistently reflective of Beveridge and of post-Beveridgean reform in Britain, the Department of Social Welfare having written to the British Ministry of National Insurance for 'a complete set of the propaganda literature, leaflets, pamphlets, advertisements, etc., published by your ministry in connection with the social insurance schemes'.⁵¹ Echoing what Beveridge described as the 'five giant evils' to be overcome by welfare legislation, the 66-page white paper, which opened with an historical survey of social legislation in Ireland, spoke of 'the major evils of destitution',⁵² first tackled 'to some degree'⁵³ by the Poor Relief (Irel.) Act of 1838. The first 'departures' from the poor law system were then detailed, starting with the Old Age Pension Act, 1908 and the first state-organised national health insurance of 1911. It is interesting here to note that the various stages in the development of the welfare state in Ireland were merely catalogued rather than critically appraised: comment upon individual schemes was invariably favourable. To this extent the construction of the white paper fitted in very much with the *genre*: right across Europe this appeal to history was a crucial factor when introducing new, innovative welfare legislation, or simply reforming existing legislation. Innovation and reform was down-played. From comparative analysis it would appear that nowhere was the welfare state heralded as revolutionary, but rather as a development deeply rooted in a long history.

⁵⁰ This was the heading given to Part II of the *White paper* (1949).

⁵¹ Letter from Department of Social Welfare to Ministry of National Insurance, 7 July 1948 (Labour History Museum, Norton Papers, Item 54).

⁵² *White paper*, p. 1.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

In the previous chapter I have already noted Beveridge's appeal to history. A similar emphasis is evident in Denmark, to take another example, where an important context of welfare state legislation was its traditionalism, an 'ideological traditionalism which posed no challenge to conceptions of the relationship between society and the individual'.⁵⁴ There was much emphasis placed on the fact that the development of the Danish welfare state was not the creation of something new, but rather the bringing to fruition of an existing inheritance, specifically the development of the guild system.

The perceived necessity for history's *imprimatur* on new developments perhaps best explains the blandly descriptive outline of the poor laws in the Irish white paper. The 'odious, degrading and foreign poor law system' described in the Democratic Programme of 1919 was now admonished merely for the 'original restricted power'⁵⁵ of the 1838 act.

The white paper was based on the principle of insurance, in keeping both with the recommendations of Beveridge and, more importantly, with the recommendations of the 26th session of the Conference of the International Labour Organisation held in Philadelphia in summer 1944 which recommended that social insurance was the most effective method of promoting the welfare of people.⁵⁶

The white paper defined social security as 'the organisation by society of protection for the individual and his dependants against the financial efforts resulting from such hazards as sickness, unemployment, old age or death', specifically excluding from the

⁵⁴ Daniel Levine, 'Conservatism and tradition in Danish social welfare legislation, 1890-1933: a comparative view', *Comparative Studies in History and Society*, vol. 20 (1978), no. 1, p. 68.

⁵⁵ *White paper*, p. 3.

⁵⁶ For an outline of the proceedings of the historic 1944 Philadelphia Conference see 'In the service of social security: the history of the ISSA 1927-87', *International Social Security Review*, (1987), no. 2.

meaning of the term the co-ordination of that protection with the medical services or involving the wider concepts of the provision of housing or the maintenance of employment.⁵⁷ Excluded too was the provision of workmen's compensation, first introduced in 1897 and which placed on employers a liability to provide compensation in respect of workers injured or killed in employment and which was administered by the Department of Social Welfare since its establishment.

By virtue of definition, the white paper fitted in with contemporary definitions of distributive as distinct from services-based welfare states, although including only five of what Beveridge identified as the eight primary causes of need to be remedied. Marriage requirements of women and the need for vocational training due to loss of livelihood were the principal omissions.

Describing the establishing of the Department of Social Welfare as an important step in the co-ordination and reform of welfare legislation, the white paper went on to point out that:

it had been evident for some time that their [i.e. welfare services] independent and spasmodic development had given rise to various anomalies and inconsistencies, and that they had a number of defects and shortcomings.⁵⁸

Significantly, this assessment was placed in 'the light of modern developments in other countries',⁵⁹ an oft repeated phrase in the white paper,⁶⁰ and an important background against which the report was framed. This 'modern' context of the white paper was largely made possible and relevant through Ireland's membership of the International Labour Organisation and the fact that the Department of Social Welfare

⁵⁷ *White paper*, p. ii.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. ii.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp 10,11.

and the National Health Insurance Society during its lifetime were members of the International Social Security Association: 'development has been assisted by the pooling of ideas through the International Labour Organisation and by the efforts of bodies such as the International Social Security Association'.⁶¹ Ireland's involvement in both organisations is discussed in the following chapter.

On the central issue of whether welfare benefits should be placed on an insurance or assistance basis, the white paper was unequivocal: insurance-based welfare benefits were seen as infinitely more desirable:

It is generally recognised that an insurance system safeguards the self-respect of the beneficiary providing a firm guarantee of benefits, payable as of right in return for contributions which form the basis of such right.⁶²

Assistance on the other hand was described as suffering from 'serious disadvantages' including the existence of the means tests which more often than not penalised the thrifty; assistance could not be provided for those who had made private provisions for themselves in order to cope with illness or old age:

There results a tendency to the weakening of individual initiative and family responsibility, the foundations on which the social and economic welfare of the community must ultimately rest.⁶³

Despite such drawbacks, the paper concluded by pointing out that, while the emphasis of social security provision had to be on insurance, the maintenance of assistance schemes was necessary as 'a device to catch those who fall through the meshes of the insurance net'.⁶⁴ This directly reflected the line of argument used by Beveridge in his *Report on social insurance and allied services*. As the title suggests, his report

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 10.

⁶² Ibid., p. 16.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 10.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 12.

was 'first and foremost a plan for insurance'. However in the opening pages of the document (coincidentally on the same page number as the Irish white paper) Beveridge wrote that:

The state cannot be excluded altogether from giving direct assistance to individuals in need, after examination of their means. However comprehensive an insurance scheme, some, through physical infirmity, can never contribute at all and some will *fall through the meshes of any insurance*.⁶⁵

The latter phrase was used *verbatim* in the Irish white paper,⁶⁶ symptomatic of a certain amount of paraphrasing of Beveridge right through the Irish document.

The insurance principle was to apply to all employees as a single class insured for all benefits, thus bringing agricultural labourers and domestic servants within the insurance bracket for the first time. It was recommended that previous differences in the rates of benefit, most notably the higher rates in urban as against rural areas, ought to be abolished as 'it appears to imply discrimination against agricultural employment and because it tends to increase migration to the urban areas'.⁶⁷ Widows' and orphans' pensions was perhaps the 'best' example of separate categories of recipient, benefit being divided into urban/rural, contributory/ non-contributory and agricultural/ non-agricultural recipients.

On the question of rates of contribution and benefit, the white paper was very much in favour of 'a fixed and flat rate of benefit for a fixed and flat rate of contribution'⁶⁸ at a level broadly in line with the cost of living and irrespective of wages. Claiming that this was 'in accord with Christian principles',⁶⁹ it was certainly in accord with what

⁶⁵ William Beveridge, *Social insurance and allied services*, (London, 1942), p. 12.

⁶⁶ *White paper*, p. 15.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 17

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

Beveridge referred to as one of the six fundamental principles of social security.⁷⁰ Both the white paper and the Beveridge report left room for voluntary private insurance and saving.

From a statement of principles the white paper went on to list the proposed amendments to existing legislation together with the suggested innovations: the simplification of widows' and orphans' pensions from the position pertaining as outlined above; an increased maternity benefit to consist of a lump sum grant together with the provision of twelve weeks allowances for employed women to allow them time off work before and after 'confinement'; a 'modest' funeral benefit; the introduction of a contributory pension at the age of 65 years for men and 60 years for women; the unification of employment and sickness insurance schemes; together with the maintenance of unemployment assistance, non-contributory widows' and orphans' pensions and non-contributory old age pensions.

The proposed unification of unemployment and sickness insurance schemes was a vital component of the white paper, and very much an overdue reform. Due to the arbitrary development of welfare legislation, and in the absence of either any underlying philosophy or co-ordinating plan, a number of anomalous situations had developed. Despite 'an obvious case for a considerable degree of similarity'⁷¹ in the hardships caused by unemployment and sickness, for example the loss of earnings, benefit rates and conditions for receipt of benefit varied in a number of ways. The sickness insurance scheme made no provision for dependants' benefit while the unemployment insurance scheme provided an adult and child dependence allowance each week. Those aged between 16 years and 18 years were not entitled to sickness

⁷⁰ William Beveridge, *Social insurance and allied services*, p. 15.

⁷¹ *White paper*, p. 20.

insurance but were entitled to unemployment insurance. There were in existence two rates of sickness benefit (leaving aside age differences and gender distinctions outlined above), one for the first 26 weeks and a lower amount for the subsequent period, but there was only one rate for unemployment insurance benefit. Sickness benefits could be reduced or suspended due to arrears, whereas no reduction existed in relation to unemployment benefit.

There were also a number of dissimilarities regarding the receipt of unemployment insurance and sickness insurance. Firstly, the number of contributions required for receipt of benefit differed: 26 in the case of sickness insurance and 12 in the case of unemployment insurance. The duration of benefit was significantly different in both cases. The number of 'waiting days', i.e. the initial days during which no payment of benefit was made, was six in the case of unemployment and three in the case of sickness benefit. Finally, regarding sickness insurance, insurance was not maintained during unemployment even though the requisite number of contributions may have been paid during a prior period of employment. This situation did not develop with regards to unemployment insurance.⁷²

In order to rationalise such an anomalous system, the white paper proposed 'as a matter of principle'⁷³ that there should be no distinction made between unemployment insurance and sickness insurance in terms of rates of benefit or conditions to receipt of benefit.

Regarding the administration of the revamped schemes, co-ordination was to be the key word, both in terms of the central administration and in the way contributions were to be collected and benefits paid:

⁷² An outline of these dissimilarities can be found in *White paper*, p. 20.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 20

The central feature of the administration of the scheme will be a single record for each insured person and there will be a single card in each case to which the employer will affix a single stamp.⁷⁴

This recommendation was equally in accord with Beveridge's ideas, his report being based on:

unification of social insurance in respect of contributions, that is to say, enabling each insured person to obtain all benefits by a single weekly contribution on a single document.⁷⁵

The scheme was to apply to 'virtually all employed persons',⁷⁶ the estimated cost of benefits in the first year being £8,800,000, broken down as follows:⁷⁷

Unemployment benefit - £3,050,000

Disability benefit - £2,100,000

Retirement pensions - £2,100,000

Widows' and orphans' benefit - £1,050,000

Maternity benefit - £400,000

Death grants - £100,000

The scheme was to be largely financed through the insurance principle: by means of the contributions of the employer, employee and state. It was seen as reasonable that any extra financial requirements should be paid by the exchequer, as the welfare of individuals was the duty of the community as a whole. The greater level of insurance cover envisaged by the plan would lead, it was hoped, to a raising in the standards of 'efficiency, contentedness and security of the workers', thereby increasing national productivity and employer profits.⁷⁸ This

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁷⁵ William Beveridge, *Social insurance and allied services*, p. 15.

⁷⁶ *White paper*, p. 34.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

latter expectation, it was hoped, would cancel out the increased contributions of both employer and employee in any new scheme.

In an attempt to bring on board the Catholic hierarchy Norton sent an advance copy of the white paper to all members of the hierarchy. While letters acknowledging receipt of the white paper were largely non-committal, both the archbishop of Tuam, John Walsh and Dr John D'Alton of Armagh congratulated the minister for attempting to get to grips with what John Walsh described as 'this difficult and important question'.⁷⁹ However, there were no public expressions of support forthcoming from the hierarchy, Catholic writers being to the fore in criticising the most contentious element of the white paper, the method of financing, leading in turn to a questioning of the desirability of the fundamental principles upon which the welfare state was based. E. J. Coyne, S.J., was particularly vociferous in questioning whether the community should be made responsible for the welfare of individuals within it. Developing this line of argument, which was remarkable both in the light of Roman Catholic teaching and the principles of Catholic charity, Coyne reduced insurance based legislation, the ideal method of provision in the construction of the welfare state, to poor assistance by another name:

When the beneficiaries receive their benefits it should be clearly understood that only one-third of the benefit has been paid for in any sense by the participants while the other two-thirds of the benefit are merely a masked form of poor relief or public assistance.⁸⁰

The percentages alluded to referred to the portion of contributions paid by employer, employee and exchequer.

⁷⁹ Letter to William Norton from John Walsh, archbishop of Tuam, 27 Oct. 1949 (Labour History Museum, Norton Papers, Item 114).

⁸⁰ Symposium on social security, 2 Dec. 1949', *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, vol. 18 (1948-9), p. 251.

Coyne wished to advise people under what he saw as the illusion that payment of insurance contributions entitled one to benefits if the need arose, was wrong and an unjust burden on society. He continued his argument, best elucidated at the symposium on social security organised by the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland in December 1949, by saying that at least half of the 700,000⁸¹ which the new scheme planned to cover, would never benefit from insurance benefits anyway and that, therefore, they should not be expected to pay contributions 'for risks which are completely non-existent in order to qualify for benefits which they will never need', and which, if they did need, 'would be relatively useless to them' anyway.⁸² Not satisfied to leave his rather confusing direction of argument there, Coyne went on to extol the virtues of Christian charity, provision of which he perceived as ennobling rather than degrading: 'that does not mean to say that Christian social charity is something which necessarily degrades either the giver or the recipient'.⁸³ Seemingly, according to Coyne's line of argument, only insurance-based benefits did that.

The scheme was criticised by Bishop John Dignan, however, for not going far enough him saying it 'greatly disappoints me'.⁸⁴ While welcoming such measures as the equalisation of employment and sickness benefits, his strongest criticism was that the scheme would not 'give social security to the *nation*... Excluded are small farmers, shopkeepers, business people, etc.'. ⁸⁵ Also alluded to by Coyne,⁸⁶ this was undoubtedly the most serious omission from the scheme, the

⁸¹ *White paper*, p. 34.

⁸² 'Symposium on social security, 2 Dec. 1949', *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, vol. 18 (1948-9), p. 252.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

⁸⁴ John Dignan, 'The government proposals for social security', *Christus Rex*, 25 March 1950, p. 107.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ 'Symposium on social security, 2 Dec. 1949', *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, vol. 18 (1948-9), p. 252.

definition of 'existence' or citizenship in terms of insurance rights being limited to employment status.

This limitation of the insurance scheme to recipients of cash income, reduced the number of insurable people to approximately 700,000. The white paper acknowledged that this excluded in particular individuals living on small agricultural holdings from participating in insurance schemes, due to the absence of a regular cash income.⁸⁷ While it is noteworthy that the paper recognised and appreciated the difficulties caused to individuals such as small holders, (not to mention small employers, shopkeepers and independent trades people such as dressmakers, shoemakers and craftsmen⁸⁸) the reasons given for their non-inclusion simply did not stand up to scrutiny. Certainly its appraisal of developments in other countries is not entirely accurate:

While, therefore, development of social security along insurance lines may be approved, it must not be assumed that such developments can readily be carried to all groups in the community. In the circumstances of some countries, indeed, the problem is one which not only involves enormous administrative difficulties and financial risk, but has to be considered from the angle of practicability.⁸⁹

In fact the Beveridge-type insurance system was operating quite satisfactorily in Northern Ireland as well as in Britain, provision for all sections of the population including the self-employed being described as one of his fundamental principles of social security.

Denmark was another excellent example of inclusive insurance legislation. While Danish welfare legislation blossomed long before Ireland's, the background in both countries was agricultural rather than industrial. In Denmark, welfare legislation was heavily influenced by

⁸⁷ *White paper*, p. 11.

⁸⁸ Symposium on social security, 2 Dec. 1949', *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, vol. 18 (1948-9), p. 252.

⁸⁹ *White paper*, p. 3.

this social-agrarian milieu⁹⁰ whereas in Ireland, not only were the majority of those involved in agriculture excluded from state-centralised welfare rights, but now the white paper of 1949 foresaw a continuation of this situation, admitting in the concluding chapter that 'a ready criticism to be anticipated is that the scheme is more suitable to a country which is largely industrial than to a country which is largely agricultural'.⁹¹ This contradicted the assertion on page one of the white paper that 'social security' was 'now generally seen as a problem relating to the whole population'.⁹²

This income-based insurance scheme also automatically excluded women who choose to remain 'home makers' from benefiting from insurance of any kind in their own right. Furthermore, the rights of married women in employment were not augmented in the recommendations of the white paper. In keeping with previous legislation, the white paper proposed 'that a somewhat lower sickness benefit rate be granted to married women'.⁹³ The reasoning behind the proposal was as follows:

The sickness experience of this class has been exceptionally heavy, and if the higher rates became applicable to them, it is to be feared that the degree of malingering would be even worse than it has been.⁹⁴

Dignan's criticism of the exclusiveness of the scheme was certainly more constructive than that of Rev. E. J. Hegarty's who, writing in a later issue of the same journal as Dignan, said that:

These state schemes tend to promote improvidence, indolence and degeneration - throwing 'a gold chain around the necks of the

⁹⁰ See for example, Byron Nordstrom (ed.), *Dictionary of Scandinavian history* (London, 1986), pp 628-9.

⁹¹ *White paper*, p. 43.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

workers' (as reported by Bismarck), to leave them a mere proletariat rabble 'securely' under the thumb of a growing bureaucracy.⁹⁵

The inevitable result was, according to Hegarty, the institution of polygamy and divorce: 'in fact, you might ask why ought people to bother with any form of marriage at all if the state will care for them "from the cradle to the grave"'. The benefits which he had particularly in mind here were maternity benefits and children's allowances among others, policies which, he claimed, led to the absorption and suppression of people's rights. Further criticising the proposals for making no mention of the 'social encyclicals' and for paying only 'lip service to Christian principles',⁹⁶ Hegarty went on to suggest his own solutions:

True social policy must co-operate with true Religion to re-establish a *natural* form of security through widespread private ownership and moral use of real wealth.⁹⁷

Neither was Hegarty alone in this level of negative criticism of the white paper: similar articles and comment were to be found in *The Standard*, *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, and *Irish Weekly*, the latter established by Bishop Patrick Dorrian of Down and Connor as a forum for Catholic and nationalist views, and from such groups as An Ríoghacht, the League of the Kingship of Christ, dedicated to 'the study and propagation of Catholic social principles',⁹⁸ and the Catholic Societies Vocational Organisation Conference, and from individuals such as Peter McKeivitt who underlined the church's basic opposition to state interference in the lives of people:

⁹⁵ E. J. Hegarty, 'The principles against state welfare schemes', *Christus Rex*, vol. iv (1950), p. 327.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 316, 317.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

⁹⁸ *ICD 1952*, p. 713.

The worst feature of the proposed measure is that it takes for granted that the state must play the principal part in securing social justice.⁹⁹

Members of the Catholic clergy were by no means the sole objectors to both the spirit and content of the white paper. A number of negative arguments were put forward at the symposium on social security organised by the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland, alluded to previously. Vociferous in his objection was P. S. O Hegarty, secretary of the Department of Posts and Telegraphs, who also objected to the adoption of any part of the Beveridge report in Ireland (see previous chapter). Agreeing with Coyne, he reiterated his view as revealed in an article in the *Sunday Independent* on 21 March 1943 in response to Beveridgeism:

I object to the principle of the scheme or similar schemes. The more is done for some people, the less they will do for themselves. The proposed scheme is another step on the road to totalitarianism. It will not end where it is, but will be extended to other things, on the assumption that everybody is entitled to be kept by the State.¹⁰⁰

Obviously unimpressed by the evidence and argument of the intervening six years, O Hegarty stuck rigidly to his first principles. Again his objection was to any scheme which placed responsibility (or the 'burden' to use his own term) of individual welfare on the community in which that individual lived.

Neither was O Hegarty alone in fearing that state-organised welfare schemes would lead to people looking to and depending on the government for their every need. At the same symposium, J. C. M. Eason expressed the view that inherent in the introduction of schemes such as that outlined in the white paper of 1949 was:

⁹⁹ *Limerick Leader*, 1 Apr. 1950.

¹⁰⁰ Symposium on social security, 2 Dec. 1949', *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, vol. 18 (1948-9), p. 266.

A danger of introducing into the minds of citizens - particularly to the younger ones - that they really are not responsible for their state of health or for their unemployment, whereas, in fact, we know that many of the absences which arise from illness can be traced to carelessness or to the pursuit of selfish enjoyment without any recognition of the duty to try and maintain one's health in order to do one's work.¹⁰¹

However, such criticism received little attention from an actively enthusiastic government and Dáil, Norton quite rightly claiming that the government had 'produced for the first time in Ireland a comprehensive and co-ordinated scheme of social security...[It] represents a credible effort to provide for our people social security not less favourable than is being provided for the workers of many other lands'.¹⁰² This lack of attention to church criticism is surprising in retrospect in the light of the controversy over the mother and child scheme two years later.

The bill, based on the white paper and which would 'make Éire a welfare state'¹⁰³ according to some commentators, was introduced in the Dáil just before the summer recess in July 1950. Following closely on the lines of the white paper it was with the second stage of the bill, in early March 1951, that discussion began in the Dáil.

Reiterating the defects in the existing code of social legislation, namely its lack of co-ordination and its 'haphazard and disjointed pattern',¹⁰⁴ Norton dealt firstly with the criticisms of the white paper from people like Dignan and O Hegarty (although no particular critic was mentioned by name). On the question of vocationalism, and the argument that the scheme should be planned on vocational lines, Norton replied that 'we are not living in the clouds. We are dealing with an

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

¹⁰² Transcript from recording of lecture on social insurance given by William Norton in Newbridge Town Hall, 12 May 1950 (N.A., D/T, Progress Reports 1949-1963, S 15069a).

¹⁰³ *Sunday Graphic*, 22 Oct. 1950.

¹⁰⁴ DD vol. 124, 2 Mar. 1951, col. 1073.

urgent practical problem, not with one that can wait until all ancillary problems of vocationalism have been solved.’¹⁰⁵ Regarding the objections, raised most strongly by O Hegarty, he said:

To suggest that the new scheme is a step on the road towards totalitarianism is completely unjustified and wholly misleading.¹⁰⁶

Again stressing the need to bring Irish social legislation in line with ‘modern conditions’¹⁰⁷ Norton proceeded to outline the provisions of the bill, including the possibility for farmers who were members of co-operatives to become voluntary members eligible for all benefits with the exception of disability and unemployment.

One important departure from the white paper was in the rates of contribution. While the white paper advocated a flat rate of contribution for a flat rate of benefit, irrespective of wages and in line with the Beveridge report, Norton announced that the bill would provide for two classes of persons with two rates of contribution, depending on income.¹⁰⁸

Norton concluded his speech advocating the acceptance of the bill by advising that ‘the absence of social security is a challenge to our social conscience, a challenge to our concepts of social justice’.¹⁰⁹ Placing the bill firmly in the context of the development of the welfare state in Ireland, he said:

We may hear it said in a smug, complacent way that this scheme aims at the welfare state...[If] doing these things represents a step towards the welfare state, then I, for one, proudly plead guilty to the charge.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., col. 1070.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., col. 1074.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., col. 1074.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., col. 1082.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., col. 1088-9.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., col. 1092.

It was indeed an important step in the construction of the welfare state, a term which we can see by inference from the earlier statements quoted above was not necessarily seen in a positive light or accepted as a positive structure at this time in Ireland.

The Fianna Fáil response to the bill seemed unnecessarily harsh and politically rather than socially motivated. Richard Mulcahy would later claim with some accuracy that 'except there is the imprimatur of Fianna Fáil on a piece of social legislation the idea is that it has to be worked against and struggled against and maligned'.¹¹¹ On this occasion James Ryan claimed that the positive aspects of the bill had been 'robbed' from his own ideas: 'I would like to say that I proposed nothing in the way of benefit that is less than what the minister proposes'.¹¹² Indeed there is evidence in departmental files that a wide range of social security measures was under review by the Fianna Fáil government prior to the election of February 1948, including a proposal from 1946 by the Department of Local Government and Public Health to 'draw up outlines of a scheme of social insurance',¹¹³ although no co-ordinated draft document has been located by the present author.¹¹⁴

Described as Fianna Fáil's 'champion of lost causes'¹¹⁵ by Gerard Sweetman, a future Minister for Finance, Ryan put down a motion calling on the Dáil not to allow the bill pass the second stage as (a) it was not a comprehensive or balanced scheme and (b) it imposed greatly increased burdens on both employers and employees through increased contributions.¹¹⁶ The motion was supported by two similar motions,

¹¹¹ DD vol. 130, 27 Mar. 1952, col. 686.

¹¹² DD vol. 124, 2 Mar. 1951, col. 1123.

¹¹³ Memorandum on Ministry of Social Affairs, Nov. 1946 (U.C.D. Archives, MacEntee Papers, Ministry of Social Affairs, P67/280).

¹¹⁴ See for example Social Welfare Act 1948: submissions to government (N.A., D/SW, Plan 4/48).

¹¹⁵ DD vol. 125, 4 Apr. 1951, col. 51.

¹¹⁶ DD vol. 124, 2 Mar. 1951, col. 1092.

Lemass expressing concern in particular over the different rates of contribution. All three motions were defeated however and despite Fianna Fáil voting *en masse* against the second stage the bill passed to the next stage by 71 votes to 67 in mid April 1951.¹¹⁷

However by this time other events were beginning to dominate the Irish political scene, namely Dr Noel Browne's 'mother and child scheme', issued in June 1950 and growing out of a deepening concern for the high rate of infant mortality in Ireland: 49 per 1,000 in Ireland as a whole in 1949.¹¹⁸ While members of the Catholic hierarchy in Ireland published their criticisms of the white paper on social welfare, they became significantly more forceful in their opposition to the mother and child scheme.¹¹⁹ The arguments in both cases, however, were similar, the church strongly objecting to what it perceived as the increasing power of the state encroaching on the private lives of the citizens.

On 11 April 1951, by which time he was out of favour with John A. Costello, the taoiseach, Sean MacBride, his party leader, and the Catholic hierarchy, Dr Browne resigned, precipitating a protracted debate on church-state relations. On the following day the *Irish Times* spoke of the event as revealing that the Roman Catholic church would 'seem to be the effective government of this country'.¹²⁰ It was an important contemporary observation. For an ostensibly non-political organisation, the Catholic church wielded significant political power.

The crisis hastened the approach of a general election, held in May 1951, causing the Social Welfare Bill of 1950 to fall. In the election Browne, who participated as an independent, almost doubled

¹¹⁷ DD vol. 125, 5 Apr. 1951, col. 636.

¹¹⁸ *Statistical Abstract 1950*.

¹¹⁹ Perhaps the best elucidation of the events leading up to and surrounding the mother and child scheme is to be found in J. H. Whyte, *Church and state in modern Ireland 1923-79*, chapters 7 and 8.

¹²⁰ *IT*, 12 Apr. 1951.

his first preference vote to 8,473, a sign of the overwhelming support both he and his health bill enjoyed among the people of his Dublin South East constituency, while Norton increased his first preference vote by 1,500, a measure of support and approval for his white paper and subsequent social welfare bill.

Welfare legislation formed a major element of the election campaign, more so than in 1948. On numerous occasions the de Valera-influenced *Irish Press* led with headlines, mostly reporting speeches of de Valera's, which invariably included references to social legislation. One such headline read 'Mr de Valera on Fianna Fáil's Social Progress',¹²¹ the article reporting a speech by de Valera at an election rally in his own constituency of Clare which he had represented since 1917.

The promise of more comprehensive social legislation undoubtedly boosted the position of Fianna Fáil and, while individuals from the inter-party government performed well, the result of the election was the formation of a minority Fianna Fáil government with the support of a number of independents, including Noel Browne who later became a member of the party, having been refused membership of Labour. It was under the direction of Dr James Ryan as Minister for Health and Social Welfare that reform of welfare legislation, along the lines of the inter-party bill, would be carried to fruition.

Ryan, a medical doctor who had taken part in the 1916 Rising for which he was interned in Frongoch, was first elected as a Sinn Féin M.P. for Wexford in 1918. He was to spend further periods in jail, firstly under the British in Spike Island in 1920-21 and then under the Free State forces in 1922-23 when he went on hunger strike for thirty-

¹²¹ *IP*, 19 May 1951.

five days. A founder member of the Fianna Fáil party his first ministerial position was in the Department of Agriculture between 1932 and 1947, moving to the Department of Social Welfare and Health on the establishment of these new departments in 1947. Following the collapse of the second inter-party government in 1957, Ryan became Minister for Finance, being very much involved in the commissioning and implementation of T. K. Whitaker's programmes for economic development.

As they had spoken 'at length, wept very bitterly and groaned and cried severely about old age pensions'¹²² according to Oliver J. Flanagan, during the election campaign of May 1951, it was appropriate that Fianna Fáil's first target of reform was old age pensions. It was a social policy the party claimed as its own since Cumann na nGaedheal reduced the pension in 1924, de Valera taking every opportunity in the 1951 election of referring to Fine Gael as 'the people whose great economy on one occasion was to reduce old age pensions by one shilling'.¹²³ Shortly after coming into office, the government presented a social welfare bill 1951 to the Dáil which had a threefold effect: it increased rates of benefit; it modified the means test; and it excluded certain categories of income from being included in means altogether.¹²⁴ Becoming law in July 1951 the measure was in essence taken from the inter-party government's social welfare bill: Norton congratulated the Fianna Fáil administration for 'following so faithfully the good example of the previous government'.¹²⁵

¹²² DD vol. 126, 28 June 1951, col. 849.

¹²³ *IP*, 21 May 1951.

¹²⁴ Social Welfare Act, 1951 (No. 16 of 1951).

¹²⁵ DD vol. 126, 28 June 1951, col. 750.

Social Welfare Act. 1952

Taking up the substantive issue contained in Norton's bill, Ryan, having sought observations from the various government departments, had prepared a new bill by late autumn 1951 which he submitted to government on 28 December. He subsequently introduced the new social welfare bill to the Dáil, discussion upon which commenced in late March 1952, much to the chagrin of the Department of Industry and Commerce who had requested 'much more time' to consider the bill.¹²⁶ Although limited to insurance benefits, the similarities with the earlier coalition proposal were obvious, the bill setting out to achieve the same end, primarily the integration, simplification and general improvement of the existing welfare schemes.¹²⁷ The bill made provision for a single insurance card with a single stamp; uniform benefits for sickness/disability, unemployment and widowhood; together with provision for maternity and marriage as in the case of the coalition bill.

As provided for in Norton's bill, male agricultural workers and domestic servants were to be included for the first time in the scope of unemployment insurance, although female employees in both categories were to remain outside the scheme.

Another important issue regarding provision for agricultural workers in general was left unaddressed in this and subsequent acts in the 1950s. This concerned the non-payment of old age pensions to farmers, a policy heavily criticised on numerous occasions by the Department of Agriculture. Some months before the publication of the white paper on social security in 1949 the department claimed that 'a vast social improvement in Irish agriculture could be effected by

¹²⁶ Memorandum from Department of Industry and Commerce, 9 June 1952 (N.A, D/Ind. and Comm., Social security measures: legislation to implement proposals published in white paper 1952-1960, E 107/49/1).

¹²⁷ Social Welfare Act, 1952 (No. 11 of 1952).

allowing all farmers to qualify for the old age pension without first having to go through the formality of conveying the farm to their sons'.¹²⁸ Despite such a suggestion, the act of 1952 made no such provision resulting in 'the demoralisation of the eldest son who is middle-aged or elderly before he gets the farm and can marry'.¹²⁹

No justification was offered for the exclusion of female agricultural workers and domestics.¹³⁰ The very fact justification was seen as otiose is a commentary in itself. Openly discriminatory, it underpinned the justification for feminist criticism of many facets of the developing welfare state. The institution itself, dependent largely on women working in the home rather than outside it, was 'employee' and therefore 'male' oriented. The non-inclusion of female workers in this instance may be paralleled with the negative definition of 'maternity' implied in this and similar cross-European welfare legislation, equating it with 'sickness', i.e. absence from the workforce.¹³¹ Ireland, suffering from a singular dearth of imagination when it came to formulating and implementing welfare legislation, only re-inforced the discriminatory emphasis of such legislation. It should also be noted that, while only male employees were liable to pay widows' and orphans' insurance, female employees who did pay insurance contributions were obliged to pay less than male employees: the new rates of contribution following the 1952 act were 2s. 6d. for men and 1s. 4d. for women. Equally, the employer's rate of contribution for female employees was 4d. less than

¹²⁸ Department of Agriculture, memorandum for the government, 29 June 1949 (N.A., D/T, S 13384B).

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ For example, the Minister for Social Welfare merely alluded to this point in a matter-of-fact way offering no explanation for the 'special' treatment of women, in a lecture to social science students in U.C.D. in Dec. 1952. (N.A., D/SW, EB 316481).

¹³¹ For a discussion of these issues see for example, Wiebke Kolbe, 'Modrama och valfardstaten. Svensk och vastertysk moderskapspolitik under 1950-talet: en jamforelse (Mothers and the welfare state. Swedish and West German maternity policies in the 1950s: a comparison)', *Historisk Tidskrift*, no. 4 (1992), with English summary.

that for male employees. In turn the rates of unemployment and sickness/disability benefit were lower for female than for male employees up to the passing of the 1952 act. Subsequent to this act the rates for unemployment benefit were the same for single women, widows and certain classes of married women as those payable to men.

The act did contain a number of changes from Norton's bill however. Ryan questioned the wisdom of contributory old age pensions at 65 or 60 years of age and instead provided for a higher rate of non-contributory pension at age 70 years. Another change was the provision of full ordinary benefits for 'men in the agricultural industry', requiring moderate contributions from farmers.¹³² The idea of a death grant was done away with.

Rates of benefit in the new bill differed only slightly from those proposed in Norton's bill, the most obvious differences being decreased maternity benefits and an almost doubled upper means limit of over £104 for recipients of old age pensions, the latter being in line with statements made by Ryan during the discussion of the inter-party legislation.¹³³

The overall cost of the scheme was £1.3 million less than that of Norton's plan, explained by Ryan by the fact that he envisaged a number of complementary reforms in the parallel health bill, the Fianna Fáil version of the mother and child scheme. Explaining the decrease in maternity benefits, the minister said:

I hope to produce a health scheme before long. This scheme will deal, amongst other things, with maternity and child welfare.¹³⁴

Similarly, the issue of children's allowances was not covered in the bill but Ryan said that 'it was always my intention, however, to proceed

¹³² DD vol. 130, 27 Mar. 1952, col. 632.

¹³³ See DD vol. 124, 2 Mar. 1951, col. 1124.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, col. 642.

without delay with the preparation of an assistance bill which would deal with children's allowances'.¹³⁵

Echoing the politically-biased response of Ryan when in opposition to Norton's bill, it was now Norton's chance to decry the shortcomings of Ryan's bill while claiming that the overall thrust of the bill with which he agreed, was in fact taken from the 1949 white paper:

I do not think anybody will now have any doubt that, whatever good is in this bill, has been taken from our bill.¹³⁶

However, because of what it omitted (retirement pensions without a means test at 65 years; death benefits; increased maternity benefits; increased children's allowances) Norton refused his support for allowing the bill pass its second stage, moving a motion to that effect in the Dáil in March 1952.¹³⁷

Richard Mulcahy, leader of Fine Gael, the largest constituent of the first inter-party government and former Minister for Education was also harsh in his criticism of the government bill. Attempting to run with the hare while chasing with the hounds, he claimed that the legislation was a duplication of the coalition government's bill but that 'no one could be satisfied in the case of people who will have to depend on the amount of benefit in this bill...that the state is doing its duty'.¹³⁸ J. A. Costello, the former taoiseach, seemed to agree with Mulcahy's assessment that the bill 'failed to introduce a comprehensive plan of social security'.¹³⁹

The reaction of the other important element of the inter-party government, Clann na Poblachta, now reduced to only two T.D.s from a high of ten, was very much in tune with its radical social and republican

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, col. 643.

¹³⁶ DD vol. 130, 27 Mar. 1952, col. 663.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, col. 646.

¹³⁸ DD vol. 130, 27 Mar. 1952, col. 685.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, col. 749.

ideals. In the debate which went on in to the early hours of the morning, MacBride, the founder and leader of the party, describing the necessity for such a bill in the first place as underlining the structural weaknesses of the Irish economy, referred to the bill as 'a sort of stop-gap measure'.¹⁴⁰ In keeping with his party's philosophy he expressed concern over the differences in level of benefits between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland:

In the Six Counties during the last election the main leaflet and poster used by the Partionists was one setting out in one column the social benefits payable in the Six Counties...and in another column the social benefits payable in this part of Ireland.¹⁴¹

The criticisms of the bill were largely based on political expediency, on the necessities of the democratic model of electoral politics. Everybody agreed with the principle: this was an important step forward. Disagreement over how to achieve that principle was fruitful and ensured a lively debate on social security issues impossible just a few years earlier.

Dr Noel Browne, now a supporter, though not yet a member, of Fianna Fáil described the bill as 'the fruition of the achievements which those men on both sides of the House set before themselves 25 or 30 years ago in order to achieve equality of opportunity for all the children of our nation',¹⁴² a reference to the Democratic Programme of 1919. Describing himself as a 'confirmed believer in what has been described as the welfare state'¹⁴³ he equally alluded, as MacBride had done, to the underlying structural and economic problems which made such a bill necessary:

¹⁴⁰ DD vol. 130, 1 Apr. 1952, col. 1602.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, col. 1604.

¹⁴² DD vol. 130, 27 Mar. 1952, col. 1000.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, col. 1003

I believe that this bill is a true measure of the poverty of the state thirty years after the declaration of the democratic programme.¹⁴⁴

This increasing reference to the lack of achievement in almost every sphere other than the maintenance of political stability since gaining independence was a characteristic of this period. The Labour Party, in a publication from 1952, summed up this legacy of three decades of independence:

Thirty years ago Irish men and women rightly took pride in having defeated the British government....Today the majority of Irish people are dismayed at our failure to overcome our economic and social problems and to provide the Irish people with a reasonable and decent standard of life, a sense of security in the knowledge that our country was progressing rather than standing still.¹⁴⁵

Coming into effect in January 1953 the Social Welfare Act, 1952, the formulation of which was the result of the efforts of all the Dáil parties to a greater or lesser extent, and which contained several positive aspects of the British National Insurance Act of 1946 and of the Beveridge Report, was a crucial achievement in the context of the Irish welfare state. Dr Ryan claimed that 'with the passing of that act the structure of social services in this country might be regarded as having taken final form'.¹⁴⁶ While there is no finality in the structure of social services legislation, the general tenor of the remark was justified. Echoing Norton's sentiments of March 1951, Ryan did not make any excuses for the fact that the act was of crucial importance in the achievement of the Irish welfare state: 'Suppose it does. Suppose it does aim at creating a welfare state. Is there anything particularly reproachful in that?'¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., col. 1007.

¹⁴⁵ Labour Party, *Labour's constructive programme* (Dublin, 1952).

¹⁴⁶ DD vol. 143, 2 Dec. 1953, col. 1394.

¹⁴⁷ Transcript of lecture on social security given by Minister for Social Welfare in Newbridge Town Hall, 12 Dec. 1952 (N.A., D/T, Progress reports, 1949-63, S 15069 (A)).

CHAPTER SEVEN

COMPARATIVE CONTEXTS AND PERSPECTIVES

Having examined the timing, pace and extent of welfare legislation in Ireland over the course of the preceding chapters, one question remains to be dealt with: the extent to which the course of welfare legislation in Ireland reflected trends in other European countries. To help place Irish legislation in the wider European context developments in three North European countries are examined: Finland, Norway and Denmark. Before embarking upon these parallel studies, however, it is necessary to examine another comparative aspect to Irish legislation, namely the extent to which Irish policy was influenced by existing legislation in other countries. Never an innovator in the field of social policy, Ireland turned in particular to Britain as an exemplar in the field of social legislation.

Right through the present work comparisons have been drawn between developments in Ireland and elsewhere: certain periods, such as the course and aftermath of the Second World War had very similar results in terms of social policy and attitudes towards the necessity of expanding the role of the state in the social lives of its citizens right across Europe. To a greater or lesser extent, these developments were reflected within Ireland.

Through membership of the International Social Security Association and the International Labour Organisation, the Irish government and administrative officials kept up to date with developments in social policy right across Europe and beyond. The International Social Security Association (ISSA) alone boasted a membership of 144 institutions and 58 countries. Having its origin in the International Conference of National Unions of Mutual Benefit Societies

and Sickness Insurance Funds founded in Brussels in 1927¹ the Irish National Health Insurance Society was a member of the ISSA from 1934 until the amalgamation of the society with the Department of Social Welfare in 1950, while the Department of Social Welfare accepted an invitation to become a member in November 1948.² Indeed underpinning the enthusiasm of the National Health Insurance Society for international comparative studies, the chairman and secretary of the provisional committee of management travelled to Yugo-Slavia in late 1934 to examine how 'a unified society almost identical in membership to our ultimate organisation' operated in a 'small and largely agricultural nation like our own'.³ It was an enthusiasm taken up and pursued with vigour by the committee of management under Dr John Dignan which took over from the provisional committee: the society's journal of 1936 stated that:

It has been the constant endeavour of the unified society to keep abreast of modern developments in the field of social insurance in other countries and to discover how our own system may be most fittingly harmonised with home needs and conditions. For this purpose the system of international conferences and the resulting exchange of information are invaluable. During the year the chairman and secretary represented the society at the International Social Insurance Conference held in Brussels, and at the International Congress of Social Insurance Experts held in Budapest the society was represented by the secretary.⁴

The primary aim of the International Social Security Association was to promote the exchange of information on welfare legislation between the member countries and institutions as Article 1 of its constitution made clear:

¹ For a history of the ISSA see 'In the service of social security: the history of the International Social Security Association 1927-87', *International Social Security Review*, 2 (1987).

² Department of Social Welfare, *Second report*, p. 12.

³ National Health Insurance Society, *Sláinte*, vol. 1 (1935), p. 16.

⁴ National Health Insurance Society, *Sláinte*, vol. 2 (1936), p. 8.

The object of the ISSA is to co-ordinate internationally and to strengthen efforts towards the extension, the protection, technical and administrative improvement of social security, particularly by

(a) the organisation of periodical international meetings of its members

(b) the exchange of information and the comparison of experiences in the matter of the activities of its members.⁵

Ireland's participation in this 'exchange of information' is clear from government records which contain a number of files on the provision and receipt of information from other countries, the Department of Social Welfare establishing a separate file series with the prefix 'ISSA'.⁶

In order to facilitate at an official level the 'exchange of information and the comparison of experiences' the Committee of Experts of the ISSA met regularly in different countries to discuss issues of mutual concern in the area of welfare legislation. In 1938, for example, the ISSA's predecessor held its general meeting in Prague. Attended by delegates from Ireland, it heard papers on 'Economic and security functions of social insurance' by Frank Spalowsky, Chairman of the Austrian Federation of Workers' Funds, and on 'Present day problems of invalidity and old age insurance' by Professor Emile Schonbaum, Director of the General Pensions Institution of Czechoslovakia.⁷ In January 1949 the ISSA committee, under the vice-chairmanship of P. J. Keady of the Department of Social Welfare, gathered in Dublin to discuss the collection of social insurance

⁵ International Social Security Association, *Constitution*. A copy of the constitution can be found in a number of government departmental files, e.g. International Social Security Association (N.A., D/SW, ISSA 1).

⁶ See for example Request from American Consul for particulars of social services with which this department is concerned, 1937, D/SW E.B. 215801; Swiss social welfare laws 1948-57, D/SW E.B. 311553; Request from M. McLoughlin of the American Legation for information regarding social services in this country, D/SW E.B. 312936; Government Information Bureau, Dublin - request for particulars of social services 1946-47, D/SW E.B. 294657; Enquiry from Netherlands regarding unemployment insurance, D/SW E.B. 306082.

⁷ A report on the proceedings is given in *Sláinte*, vol. 3 (1937-38).

contributions and the financing of social security. Representatives from Belgium, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, France, Denmark, The Netherlands, Italy and Ireland attended the meeting, each being asked to supply a national monograph on the issues for discussion.

There is little doubt that Ireland's involvement in the ISSA, and its attendance at such meetings, played an important role in the formulation of Irish policy, either as a reference point for what could be achieved, or as an argument against state-centralised social policy. Certainly the Dublin meeting of the committee in 1949 focused the Irish government's attention on the role of the National Health Insurance Society, Norton commenting in the context of its deliberations that 'it may be necessary that the integration of the National Health Insurance Society into the department [of social welfare] should take place at a date earlier than I contemplated'.⁸

As already mentioned, Ireland was also a member of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), established in 1919 at the Versailles Peace Conference.⁹ Ireland automatically became a member in September 1923 on being admitted to membership of the League of Nations and, as in the case of the ISSA, supplied and received information about a broad range of social policy areas, the Department of Social Welfare again opening a file series specific to the ILO.¹⁰ The first reference to an ILO convention in the drafting of welfare legislation was

⁸ DD vol. 116, 23 June 1949, col. 1326.

⁹ For a general background to the International Labour Organisation, and a list of Irish delegations to annual conferences of the ILO from 1923 to 1969, see Brian Hickey and Patrick Lynch, *Ireland in the International Labour Organisation* (Dublin, 1969).

¹⁰ The numerous files in the Department of Social Welfare dealing with the ISSA and the ILO testify to their importance. Two series of files within the Department of Social Welfare dealt respectively with the ISSA and the ILO. The files include the following: Department of External Affairs: International Labour Office, Geneva: the world unemployment situation; Objectives and advised standards of social security: ILO Conference, Geneva, 1952, D/SW ILO 17; International Labour Office European Regional Conference, Geneva, 1955; Age of retirement, D/SW ILO 51(c); International Social Security Association, D/SW ISSA 1; International Labour Office Committee of Social Security experts: request for national monograph on social security, 1949, D/SW ISSA 23; Monograph on social security, 1951, D/SW ISSA 30.

in the case of widows' and orphans' pensions. First introduced in 1935 by the Fianna Fáil government, the initial act was amended in 1937 in accordance with a draft convention adopted at the seventeenth session of the International Labour Conference in June 1933 which stated that:

where economic, social and administrative conditions permit, national laws or regulations should provide that invalidity, old age and widows' and orphans' insurance should also include persons of small means working on their own account in industry, commerce and agriculture.¹¹

Taking on board at least part of the recommendation, the amending legislation abolished the restrictions on payment of non-contributory pensions to smallholders.

Together with these direct influences on policy, the National Health Insurance Society together with government departments collated data on how various social welfare schemes operated in other countries, before attempting to introduce such schemes into Ireland. Such was the case with the introduction of widows' and orphans' pensions, the committee of inquiry examining similar legislation in Canada, New Zealand, New South Wales, Denmark and forty-five of the United States of America.¹² *Sláinte*, the annual publication of the National Health Insurance Society, contained numerous articles on social insurance schemes elsewhere,¹³ while the first major collection of comparative data collated by a government department in the preparation of welfare legislation was in relation to the introduction of children's allowances by the Department of Industry and Commerce. The situation prevailing in eighteen countries was investigated and reported upon (Australia, New Zealand, Germany, France, Belgium, Italy, Spain, Chile, Hungary, The

¹¹ Extract from League of Nations International Labour Conference: draft conventions and recommendations adopted at the 17th session, 1938, p. 81. A copy of this is to be found in Heads of amending bill, widow's and orphans' pensions, 1936, D/SW I.A. 89/53(a).

¹² Committee of Inquiry into Widows' and Orphans' Pensions, *Report* (Dublin, 1935), appendix H.

¹³ See for example 'Social insurance in Greece', *Sláinte*, vol. 2 (1936).

Netherlands, Sweden, The Argentine, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Luxembourg, Poland, Rumania and Switzerland). In each case four areas in particular were documented: those entitled to receive allowances, the number of children from each family included, the source of funding, and the rate of allowance.¹⁴

Similarly, the 1949 *White paper on social security* included comparative material, making particular reference to the recommendations of the twenty-sixth session of the International Labour Conference held in Philadelphia in 1944, saying that 'social insurance was the most suitable method in modern conditions for securing freedom from want'.¹⁵ In the drafting of the subsequent social welfare bill in 1951 it is clear that the Department of Social Welfare was anxious that it would bring Irish social security standards into line with international standards as laid down by the ILO.¹⁶

In the 1950s reference to legislation in other European countries became a standard part of constructing and presenting legislative change in Ireland. Undoubtedly attributable to Ireland's increasing interest in becoming a member of the European Economic Community, the Department of Social Welfare was anxious to bring its legislation into line with the Treaty of Rome, signed in 1957 establishing the EEC.¹⁷ Article 51 of the treaty stated that:

The council shall, acting unanimously on a proposal from the commission, adopt such measures in the field of social security as are necessary to provide freedom of movement for workers; to this end it shall make arrangements to secure for migrant workers and their dependants:

¹⁴ Children's allowances bill, 1943, N.A. D/SW C2.

¹⁵ *White paper containing government proposals on social security* (1949), p. 11.

¹⁶ Proposals for new legislation compared with standards in international conventions: social welfare (insurance) bill, 1951 (N.A., D/SW, ILO 13). The 'international standard' referred to was that outlined in ILO, *Industry and Labour*, vol. vi, no. 1-2 (Geneva, 1951).

¹⁷ See Séamus Ó Cinnéide (ed.), *Social Europe: European Community social policy in Ireland* (Dublin, 1993).

(a) aggregation, for the purpose of acquiring and retaining the right to benefit and calculating the amount of benefit, of all periods taken into account under the laws of the several countries;

(b) payment of benefits to persons resident in the territories of member states.¹⁸

Having finally applied for membership in 1961, in 1962 the Minister for Social Welfare, Kevin Boland, requested approval from the government to increase the benefit rates of welfare services, 'having regard to minimum subsistence requirements, the general level of wages and the levels obtaining in Britain and continental countries'.¹⁹ The request came in the context of the European Social Charter which was opened for signing at Turin in October 1961, the draft of which, dating from November 1958, was familiar to the Irish government. The opening page of the draft included the proposal that:

The governments' signatory, hereto, being members of the Council of Europe [have resolved] to make every effort in common to improve the standard of living and to promote the social well-being of their peoples.²⁰

Ireland was also a signatory of a number of bilateral and international agreements which focused on social welfare legislation. A number of reciprocal agreements were concluded with the British government, the need for which arose from the establishment of the Free State and the consequent divergence of legislation.²¹ Negotiations on

¹⁸ Article 51 is paraphrased in Department of Social Welfare, *Report, 1959-62*, p. 24.

¹⁹ Department of Social Welfare, Summary of memorandum for the government: the general level of social welfare payments, 9 Feb. 1962 (N.A., D/T, Social services: expenditure on and unification of social welfare insurance bill 1951 and social welfare (amendment) act 1960, S 133384 K/62).

²⁰ Council of Europe, *Text of the draft European social charter established by the Social Committee of the Council of Europe* (Strasbourg, 1958), p. 1. A copy of the text can be found in Social security: international agreements, 1952, D/T S 15360B.

²¹ These arrangements are outlined in detail in Department of Social Welfare, *First report*. See also the following departmental files: D/SW EB 255730; D/SW I.A. 70/53; D/SW I.A. 217/53; D/SW I.A. 93/53A; D/SW I.A. 94/53; D/SW Plan 7/48; D/SW Plan 8/48B; D/SW Plan 9/48; D/SW Plan 4/49; D/SW Plan 3/52; D/SW Plan 1/58; D/T S 15069 (A).

reciprocal arrangements were also opened on occasion with other countries, as in the case of the Swiss government in 1929:

by virtue of which Swiss citizens who have become unemployed in the Irish Free State will, with the exception of those employed on board an Irish Free State ship or vessel, be placed on the same footing as citizens of the Irish Free State for the purposes of unemployment insurance on condition that citizens of the Irish Free State enjoy reciprocal treatment in Switzerland.²²

While such an agreement was a more peripheral abstraction, Ireland ratified a number of significant European agreements. By the late summer of 1951 the Department of Social Welfare had created a file on the 'Council of Europe: recommendations relating to the draft European convention on reciprocal treatment of nationals'²³ and by 1958 the following agreements had been ratified:

I. European Interim Agreement on Social Security Schemes, relating to old age, invalidity and survivors, which provided equal treatment with nationals for non-nationals under the social security laws of contracting countries.

II. European Interim Agreement on Social Security other than schemes for old age, invalidity and survivors, which made the same provisions as in (I) but applied to (a) sickness, maternity and death including medical benefits insofar as they were not subject to means testing; (b) employment injury; (c) unemployment; (d) family allowances.

III. European Convention on Social and Medical Assistance, which provided for contracting countries to ensure that a national of any other contracting party legally residing in the country but without sufficient resources, were entitled to similar social and medical assistance as nationals.²⁴

²² *Exchanges of notes between the government of the Irish Free State and the Swiss government respecting unemployment insurance, Berne, Nov. 3/4, 1930* (Dublin, 1930) in Department of External Affairs: unemployment insurance reciprocal agreements with Switzerland, D/SW E.B. 98851. The agreement was based on the ILO's International Convention on Unemployment Insurance.

²³ D/SW E.B. 327160.

²⁴ Department of Social Welfare, *Report, 1954-58*, p. 18.

By the same period, the government had ratified two important ILO conventions, namely:

I. Convention concerning workmen's compensation in agriculture which required that laws and regulations providing compensation for workers for personal injury by accident arising out of their employment should include agricultural wage earners

II. Convention ensuring benefit or allowances to the involuntarily unemployed.²⁵

It is clear, therefore, that successive governments were becoming increasingly aware of European trends in welfare legislation in particular, and were anxious to bring Irish legislation into line with that in the rest of western Europe.

Of course, it was not only in political and administrative circles that developments in other countries were raised in discussion. Several contemporary pamphlets, journals, and books contained detailed discussion of social welfare legislation elsewhere,²⁶ apart altogether from discussion of such legislation in Britain where developments formed a more integral part of discussion and debate in Ireland.

Developments in the Nordic countries, welfare legislation in three of which is discussed for comparative purposes below, appeared frequently. Indeed the Labour Party seemed to think that so widespread was knowledge of social legislation in these countries among Irish people that one of its election slogans in the 1948 election campaign ran as follows: 'Countries like Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Australia and New Zealand have prospered under Labour governments. Why not Ireland?'²⁷ Arnold Marsh summed up the importance of these countries as references in the case of Ireland in 1944 when he said:

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²⁶ A number of these have been alluded to already in this and previous chapters.

²⁷ *II*, 3 Feb. 1948.

So far no great state has at the same time secured economic welfare for all of its citizens and preserved their personal liberty, whereas little countries like Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Czechoslovakia and Switzerland - places with no colonies and no empires have all succeeded to a great extent in doing this. In the British Commonwealth the state that has achieved most in the same direction is the smallest, New Zealand.²⁸

The implication was that Ireland could equally be to the forefront in securing the economic welfare of all of its citizens.

Many individual politicians were also aware of developments in these countries, Jack McQuillan, an independent T.D. for Roscommon, mentioning in particular developments in Sweden and Norway during a debate on old age pensions in December 1953.²⁹

It is partly for the reasons outlined by Marsh that three of these Nordic countries, Finland, Norway and Denmark, have been chosen: firstly, to assess the level of comparative reference in Ireland to individual European countries; secondly, as a yardstick against which we can measure the pace and extent of legislative developments in Ireland; and thirdly, to highlight the major actors and influences on the development of the welfare state in a broader European context. While at first glance the countries have little in common with Ireland, in fact there is a basic common ground during the period discussed: each had relatively small populations; each is religiously homogeneous; agriculture was crucial to their economies, especially up to 1945; and the development of the welfare state was preceded by vigorous nationalist movements, leading to independence in the case of Finland and Norway.

On the other hand there are many contrasts with Ireland: Protestantism is the dominant religion; social democratic parties have been an integral part of politics and government; and the rate of

²⁸ Arnold Marsh, *Ireland's new foundation* (Dundalk, n.d., [c1944]), p.10.

²⁹ DD vol. 143, 2 Dec. 1953, col. 1483.

industrialization, and concomitant move away from agriculture, long predated similar trends in Ireland (see table).

Table 7.1

Population and political statistics from Finland, Norway and Denmark in comparison with Ireland

Country	Population		% of economically active population engaged in agriculture		Social expenditure as % of GDP	Coverage of social security schemes as % of labour force**		Social democratic parties		
	c1920	1950	1920	1950		1925	1950	Established	First government	% support post WW II
Finland	3,147,600	4,029,000	73%	46%	7.7%	2%	45%	1899	1926-7	1945: 50%
Norway	2,649,775	3,278,000	37%	26%	7.4%	18%	80%	1887	1928	1945: 50%
Denmark	2,921,200	4,281,000	35%	26%	10%	70%	79%	1871	1924-6	1940s 40%
Ireland	2,971,992*	2,960,593+	51%*	40%+	9.3%	23%	52%	1912	-	1948: 11.3%

** Schemes include old age pensions, sickness insurance, unemployment insurance and occupational injuries insurance

* Figure relates to 1926

+ Figure relates to 1951

Source: *Social security in the Nordic countries: expenditure on and scope of certain social security measures, 1972* (Copenhagen, 1976); Research Group for Comparative Sociology, University of Helsinki, *Structural change, classes and the state: Finland in an historical and comparative perspective* (Report No. 33, 1986); Risto Alapuro, et al., *Small states in comparative perspective* (Norway, 1985); Fritz Hodne, *The Norwegian economy, 1920-80* (New York, 1983); Martti Häikiö, *A brief history of modern Finland* (Helsinki, 1992); *Census of population (Ireland)*, 1936, vol. ii; 1961, vol. ii.

It must also be borne in mind that the concept of 'welfare' is culture bound: the definition and priorities of 'welfare' in the predominantly Lutheran Nordic countries is not necessarily paralleled by the definition and priorities of 'welfare' in some of the traditionally Catholic western European states. As Stein Kuhnle, one of the major contributors to the

welfare debate in *Norden*, points out, 'welfare is a many dimensional concept. Its content varies with time and space.'³⁰ Most writers on the subject agree, however, on the essential elements of the welfare state - the distribution by central government of moneys raised through taxation to ensure a certain equality of income distribution, together with other support for individuals in areas such as health and education. It is given this proviso that the emergence of income supplement policies as a main pillar of welfareism is examined in Finland, Norway and Denmark.

Finland

While discussion of Finnish social policy in Ireland was limited, study of how welfare legislation developed in Finland is illuminating in the context of Arnold Marsh's comments quoted earlier and of the number of comparisons which may be drawn between the historical development of Finland and Ireland in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Dominated by powerful neighbours for centuries - Sweden and Russia in the case of Finland - both Ireland and Finland achieved independence in the early decades of the twentieth century. A bitter civil war immediately preceded independence in both countries, although the division in Finland was on social rather than constitutional national lines. However national issues, particularly the language question in Finland, often dominated post-independence political debate, leaving less time and energy for debate on social policy issues. a phenomenon which also occurred in Ireland.

Both Ireland and Finland remained predominantly rural economies up to the Second World War after which Finland began to change rapidly

³⁰ Stein Kuhnle, 'Welfare and the quality of life' in Erik Allardt, et al., *Nordic democracy: ideas, issues and institutions in politics, economy, education, social and cultural affairs of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden* (Copenhagen, 1981), p. 399.

to an industrially-based economy (see table). The relatively late structural changeover was in large measure responsible in both Finland and Ireland for the 'slowness' in the development of the welfare state: the comment that 'in Finland the building of the welfare state has been a prolonged project'³¹ could equally be applied to Ireland. Given these general observations, some of which are later discussed in more detail, we can now turn to the development of social welfare legislation in Finland.

Erik Allardt, perhaps the most notable contributor to the discussion of welfare legislation in Finland, defines the concept of welfare state as a society 'in which certain fundamental values have been realised: social security [including social insurance and social assistance], relative equality of opportunity, the notion that everybody has the right to a modicum of well-being, that certain forms of inequality are not legitimate'.³² Complementing this definition is Annikki Suviranta's definition of social welfare, saying it implies 'the various services provided by the public authorities in an endeavour to help citizens cope with ordinary everyday social circumstances'.³³

It is against these definitions that the development of the welfare state in Finland can be examined, the institutionalisation of which was largely a post World War II phenomenon when the country embarked upon a period of remarkable structural and economic change, the whole basis of the Finnish economy shifting from agriculture to industry.

³¹ Vappu Taipola, 'Introduction' in Juhani Lehto (ed.), *Deprivation, social welfare and expertise* (Finland, 1991), p. 11.

³² Erik Allardt, 'Experiences from the comparative Scandinavian welfare study, with a bibliography of the project', *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 9 (1981), p. 170.

³³ Annikki Suviranta, 'Social welfare and municipalities', *Finnish local government studies: selected writings*, vol. 9 (1981), no. 5, p. 74.

Table 7.2

Proportional size of agricultural population as % of economically active population in Ireland, Finland, Denmark and Norway

Country	1926 (Ire.) 1920	1936 (Ire.) 1930	1946 (Ire.) 1940	1952 (Ire.) 1950
Ireland	53%	49.3%	46.6%	40.3%
Finland	73%	70%	64%	46%
Denmark	35%	35%	30%	26%
Norway	37%	35%	30%	26%

Source: Nordic statistics taken from Matti Alestalo, *Structural change, classes and the state: Finland in an historical and comparative perspective*, Research Group for comparative sociology, University of Helsinki, No. 33, 1986, p. 26; Irish statistics taken from *Trend in employment 1950-52*, p. 10.

In order to highlight the development of the welfare state in Finland, and to better illustrate the predominance of those other issues of national importance, the following discussion is divided by period: developments before independence in 1917 and the impact of the Bismarckian reforms through independence to the Second World War, a period characterised by a marked conservatism in the area of social policy; the immediate post war period when the results of the war necessitated a radical rethinking of social policy; and the 1950s and 1960s which saw the institutionalisation of the welfare state.

Finland had perhaps the most restricted form of national autonomy in the Nordic countries at the time of the Bismarckian social insurance reforms in Germany being a Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire. It is only in this context that developments in Finland can be compared with developments in the other Nordic countries. Despite the lack of independence however, there is little doubt that the Bismarckian national

social insurance scheme of the 1880s stimulated discussion of social legislation in Finland, a country which had always been very much influenced by cultural and political events in Germany. Even before the German Reichstag had approved Bismarck's proposals, the Finnish historian Yrjö Koskinen had introduced the concept of social policy to Finland. Greatly influenced by German thinking, he praised the establishment of the *Verein für Sozialpolitik*, and went on to found the Finnish National Economic Society in the 1880s based on the German model.

It was in the context of German legislation that the Finnish Lantdag petitioned the government to establish a committee to draft proposals for workers' insurance. In October 1889 such a committee was appointed, reporting in February 1892 that the establishment of compulsory insurance was not desirable. Likewise, proposals for a national pension scheme came to nothing. This lack of innovation can be explained both in the context of 'Russification', the term given to the increasingly direct involvement by Russia in the process of Finnish legislation from the mid 1890s, and the fears of the Russian tzar that any concessions in the area of social legislation in Finland would result in demands for similar legislation in Russia. Despite this, some reforms were introduced, namely the 1889 act on the protection of industrial workers against accidents and the 1897 act on unemployment relief funds, although neither affected more than a minority of the working population.

More important than any changes in policy in Finland, was the change in attitude, especially among political parties, which the Bismarckian reforms precipitated. Although affecting no immediate result, the political parties began to focus on social legislation, an important development in the context of later reforms.

The Finnish Party, whose primary defining interests were in relation to the language question (the hegemony of Finnish over Swedish) and Finland's relations with Russia, now began to show a new interest in social policy. Danielsson-Kalmari, one of the leading figures of the Finnish Party who had spent some time studying in Germany, began to debate the importance of social as well as linguistic and political reform. However, following the later split in the party into 'Old' and 'Young' factions, the Old Finnish Party (which, following independence, became the Conservative Party), despite some allusion to the importance of social reform following the electoral reforms of 1905-06, showed little interest in social policies in adopting a new 'magna carta' at its national congress in 1922.

The Young Finnish Party however, and to a greater extent the Labour Party (founded in 1899, the last in the Nordic countries) embarked on a more sustained discussion of social issues. In 1903 the Social Democratic Party, the new name adopted by the Labour Party, demanded general social insurance, basic education and free health care in its *Forssa Program*. In the election of 1907, following the franchise reform of the previous year (the change from a four estate diet constituted in 1772 to a unicameral assembly and the introduction of universal suffrage) the Social Democratic Party became the largest party, winning 80 of the 200 seats. However, even after independence it was never to hold a very strong or influential position in parliament (with the exception of 1916 when it held a majority of seats), unlike the other Nordic countries where the social democratic parties have always been important, even in opposition. The main opposition came from the Agrarian Party (renamed the Centre Party in the 1960s, by which time it had moved from a centre right to a centre position) founded in 1906 and representing the farming classes.

Table 7.3

Percentage electoral support of major parties in Finland at every second general election, 1922-1951

	1922	1927	1930	1936	1945	1951
Finnish Party, Coalition (Conservative) Party	17.5	17	21	10	14	14
Swedish People's Party	12.5	12	10	10.5	7	7.5
Young Finnish Party, Progressive Party, People's Party, Liberal People's Party	7.5	5	5.5	3.5	4.5	5
Agrarian Party, Centre Party	22.5	26	29.5	26.5	24.5	25.5
Social Democratic Party	26.5	30	33	41.5	25	26.5

Source: Compiled from statistics in Juhani Mylly and R. Michael Berry (eds.), *Political parties in Finland: essays in history and politics* (Turku, 1987).

With the coming of the revolution in Russia in 1917, and the overthrowing of the tzar, interest in Finland was again to focus on political issues. Finland's response to the revolution was to assert its right to self determination, a move supported following negotiation by the revolutionary authorities in Petrograd. There followed a short but in many ways bitterly divisive civil war* which was to have a big impact on the development, or lack of development, of social legislation in the first years of independence. One of the causes of the civil war was the reluctance of the élite ruling classes to grant any social reforms. The country split into the Whites (the bourgeois and farming classes) and the Reds (the working classes). The war ended in defeat for the workers, resulting in a pronounced social cleavage developing in Finnish society lasting until the Second World War, a period marked by conservatism on

* Revisionist interpretations of the Finnish 'civil war' are now leaning towards explanations which see the conflict as part of the 'war of independence' rather than a civil war. The revisionist argument is led by Prof. Matti Klinge, History Department, University of Helsinki.

the part of the victorious Whites in the area of social policy, they shying away from any changes based on labour interests. It was also a period of conservative governments: the Social Democratic Party, which drew most of its support from the working class, only participated in one short-lived government between 1917 and 1936.

There were some positive developments in the area of social welfare legislation, however, in the period between independence and the Second World War, despite the prevailing air of conservatism. The institution of voluntary unemployment insurance in 1917 and the establishment of a Ministry for Social Affairs three years later was followed by a renewed interest and debate in social issues in the 1930s. Initiated by the Social Democratic Party, this renewed debate, although lacking in real enthusiasm,³⁴ was partly the result of the economic depression of 1929-33. However, coinciding with the depression was an upsurge in the nationalist debate and renewed arguments regarding the language question, reawakening many old antagonisms and absorbing political attention. (The language question³⁵ was to remain an intensely important and often divisive issue in Finnish politics until the Winter War of 1939 when the Finnish people again felt, in the face of the common Soviet enemy, that what united them was stronger than what divided them.)

The only substantial pre-war legislation was passed in the late 1930s, a product of the coalition government between the Social Democrats and the Agrarian Party. In 1937 the coalition introduced the first general pension scheme in Finland. Becoming operative in 1939, it extended old age pensions and disability pensions to the entire population

³⁴ Matti Alestalo, *Structural changes, classes and the state: Finland in an historical and comparative perspective*, Research group for comparative sociology, University of Helsinki, Research Reports, no. 33 (1986), p. 31.

³⁵ For a discussion of this issue see for e.g., Matti Klinge, *The Finnish tradition: essays on structures and identities in the North of Europe* (Helsinki, 1993).

(state pensions had been introduced in 1926). Although described as 'only a reform on paper,'³⁶ as it was based on the accumulation of individual insurance premiums, the value of which was greatly reduced following the war, it was more significant in its ending of a period of stagnation in social policy than in what it achieved in practice. It also provided an indication of the direction Finnish (and indeed Nordic) social policy was to take after the war: the low rates of benefit (on this occasion amounting to only 30% of a person's income) were to become a feature of Finnish social welfare legislation, comprehensiveness being seen as of greater importance than rate of benefit.

In 1939, the year the pensions act came into effect, attention was again averted from social policy to the more pressing area of political developments, World War II resulting in many changes in Finnish life. Fighting at different stages on both the German and then the Soviet sides, Finland was to cede part of its national territory to the Soviet Union and to pay the Soviet Union a very heavy burden in reparations. Structurally, there was need for radical rethinking of policies in Finland, not least in the area of social policy, to facilitate the veterans, widows, evacuees, etc., that were a consequence of war. Even before the war was over there was a very evident debate regarding social legislation, the establishment of social policy as an academic discipline in Finland dating from this period. Following the Winter War with Russia, the Finnish Population and Family Welfare Federation, *Väestöliitto*, was founded, campaigning for the introduction of children's allowances, under the slogan, 'We are too few' and 'A fourth child to the country'. The movement reflected a general concern regarding the declining fertility rate and the population trend, the taxation laws having been changed in 1935 in favour of

³⁶ Peter Flora, Matti Aalasto and Hannu Uusitalo, 'Structure and politics in the making of the welfare state: Finland in comparative perspective' in Risto Alapuro, et al., *Small states in comparative perspective* (Norway, 1985), p. 193.

families with young children. It was partly in response to the demands of *Väestöliitto*, and partly out of necessity, that the government introduced a system of state financed home loans in 1944 for couples under 30 years of age. The burden of repayment was reduced if the couple had a child, and was totally cancelled if the couple had four children. The change was preceded by the introduction of maternity grants (1937) and allowances for large families (1943) while in 1945 means tested allowances for families with four or more children were introduced. Then, on the eve of the parliamentary elections of 1948, children's allowances were introduced providing allowances, *Lapsilisä*, for all families with one or more children.

Contributing to the renewed interest in social legislation, combined with the practical necessity of introducing changes to provide social and health care services for war victims and housing for veterans and evacuees, was the shift to the political left following the war, sometimes described as the shift from the First to the Second Republic,³⁷ political control moving from the hands of the right wing parties, to the left. This change was precipitated partly by the reluctance of the conservative parties to change their pre-war positions regarding social policy. (It was only in 1957 that the Conservative Party adopted a programme of social policy reform, 'dynamic conservatism', a process which the conservative party in Sweden for example embarked upon immediately after the war.³⁸)

The Popular Front government of Social Democrats, Agrarian Party and Communists (who had now been permitted to return to the

³⁷ Matti Alestalo and Hannu Uusitalo. 'Finland' in Peter Flora (ed.), *Growth to limits: the modern European welfare states since World War II: vol. i*, (Berlin, New York, 1986), p. 255.

³⁸ For an account of the 'new social policy' of the Swedish Conservatives, see Peter Baldwin, 'Bourgeois parties, social democracy and the origin of post-war reform in Sweden', *International Review of Social History*, vol. 33 (1988), no.2.

political fold following their banning in the late 1920s³⁹) formed after the general election of 1945, increased social expenditure. It was actively encouraged in this by the Confederation of Finnish Trade Unions, SAK, which had an important input into social and economic policies at this time.

Perhaps the most important development under the Popular Front government was the establishment of a committee of experts representing civil servants, trade unions, employees and employers to examine and report on the reform of the 1937 pension scheme. Reporting in 1952 the committee recommended a scheme financed largely by employers and employees. A scheme was subsequently introduced, providing a flat rate benefit with means tested supplements.

The 1950s and 1960s saw remarkable structural changes in Finland, one result of which was the institutionalisation of the welfare state. Described as an 'explosive structural change',⁴⁰ the agricultural population in Finland fell from 50% to 15% in the thirty year period following the war, a process which had earlier taken 50 years in Sweden and 80 years in Norway. The recovery of the Finnish economy from the effects of the war and the huge indemnities it was obliged to pay the Soviet Union, coupled with this structural change resulting in a tripling of the gross value of industrial production, with a total increase of 243,000 workers in commerce and services and 82,000 in manufacturing industry,⁴¹ facilitated the introduction and expansion of social welfare legislation. The period also saw a relative reduction in the traditional areas of government expenditure such as administration, transport and

³⁹ Erik Allardt, *Social struktur och politisk aktivitet: en studie av väljaraktiviteten vid riksdagsvalen i Finland 1945-54* (Helsinki, 1956), p. 21.

⁴⁰ Pekka Kosonen, Tapio Lovio and Jikka Pekkarinen, 'Den finska modellen: förändringar och förvittring eller kontinuitet och allmängiltighet?', *Nordisk Tidskrift för Politik och Ekonomi* vol. 15/16 (1984), p. 20.

⁴¹ D.G. Kirby, *Finland in the twentieth century* (London, 1979), p. 201.

communications, and defence, with a concomitant increase in spending on education, health and social services.

The first major changes were introduced in 1956 when the national basic pensions were increased, with effect from 1957. At the same time, following the general strike of 1956, a committee of employers, employees and political parties was established to examine the issue of occupational pensions for private sector employees. As a result of the committee's recommendations, an occupational pensions scheme for private sector employees was accepted by parliament, albeit after much intense debate. This was followed in 1959 by the introduction of state unemployment assistance and in 1960 by an employment act which introduced, among other improvements, general (though modest) unemployment benefit.

In conclusion it may be said that the development of welfare legislation in Finland up to the 1950s provides a pattern of emphasis and influences which are largely similar to those present in other European countries where the welfare state has become institutionalised. The development of welfare policy was directly influenced by a number of factors: the extent of political independence, the hegemony of other, mainly political, issues, and economic growth being of central importance. The development of social welfare legislation in Finland was both accelerated and made necessary by the economic changes in Finland after the Second World War, expenditure on income maintenance increasing twelve times in the three decades after 1950.

Part of the explanation offered for the 'success' of the Finnish welfare state, and the Nordic welfare state model in general, is the decentralised system of administration, the tradition of local government. In Finland, administration of welfare has always been heavily dependent on the 461 municipalities which enjoy a strong tradition of self

government. The hierarchical structure of administration consists of the municipalities, supervised by provincial offices of the Ministry for Social Affairs and Health, which in turn are subordinate to the National Board of Social Welfare, a body with administrative, executive and guiding authority, supervised by the ministry. This decentralised structure has resulted in increased knowledge of local conditions and an opportunity to iron out regional differences.

This ideal of organising as much as possible outside the state, or at least in a decentralised fashion, is shared by Norway, the second of our comparative Nordic studies.

Norway

As in other European countries, the beginning of the Norwegian welfare state can also be traced to the nineteenth century, although in Norway it predates the Bismarckian reforms in Germany. Indeed the term 'welfare' itself is derived from the Old Norse, *velferd*,⁴² while the use of the term 'welfare state' in Norway from 1939 predates its use in the English language.

As in the case of Finland, the following discussion is divided into the period from the mid nineteenth century to independence in 1905; from 1906 to the outbreak of the Second World War; and the effects of the Second World War and the subsequent social security measures adopted.

In common with many other European countries, the first wave of industrialisation came to Norway in the 1840s, with a concomitant rise in the growth of towns and urbanisation. While the total population of Norway doubled from one to two millions in the period 1822-1890, an

⁴² Byron J. Nordstrom (ed.), *Dictionary of Scandinavian History* (London, 1986), p. 625.

increase which would have been far more pronounced had it not been for considerable emigration to North America and elsewhere, there was also a marked shift from the countryside to the towns: while in 1835 only 11% of the population lived in urban areas, the figure had increased to 33% by 1900.⁴³ This industrialisation, most notably around Oslo and Bergen, gave rise to the first labour organisation in Norway, founded by Marcus Thrane in 1849. Influenced by Louis Blanc, the French socialist, it was Thrane who made the first calls for the introduction of welfare policies to protect the growing industrial work force, calling for among other things the introduction of old age pensions. However relief of the poor on a local level remained the principal means of supporting the needy until the Bismarckian programme of national, compulsory, social insurance began to have an influence on policy in Norway. A relatively generous poor law had been passed by parliament in 1845, restricted in 1863 due to financial constraints.

At the time of the Bismarckian reforms, Norway was the only Nordic country to have introduced the principle of parliamentarianism (in 1884) and the only country to get an all Liberal government.⁴⁴ Following the developments in Germany the King of Sweden, then also the King of Norway, suggested to the Norwegian government in 1885 that it should carefully study the German developments with a view to implementing similar legislation in Norway. A parliamentary commission consisting of a wide range of groups and interests was duly established in August 1885 by the Prime Minister, Johan Sverdrup of the Liberal '*Venstre*' (Left) Party, to draft proposals for social insurance legislation. Reporting in February 1890, the commission proposed the

⁴³ Arne Selbyg, *Norway today: an introduction to modern Norwegian society* (Oslo, 1987), p. 10.

⁴⁴ See Stein Kuhnle, 'The beginnings of the Nordic welfare state: similarities and differences', *Acta Sociologica*, vol. 21 (1978) Supplement, p. 17.

introduction of accident and sickness insurance, and at a later stage old age insurance. Framed in accordance with German principles, the recommendations regarding compulsory accident insurance were accepted with minor modifications, the Accident Insurance Act of 1894 becoming the first social security measure in Norway. It was also perhaps the most pressing insurance need in a rapidly industrialising country. However a government proposal on sickness insurance was rejected by the Storting in 1893, and again in 1894, 1895 and 1896. A new proposal in 1902 following the appointment of another commission in 1900 was also rejected, and it was 1909 before sickness insurance finally became law. Until then the 225 voluntary sickness funds established in Norway, with up to 35,000 members,⁴⁵ remained pre-eminent. A proposal for the introduction of old age pensions, discussed in parliament some years earlier, also came to nothing. In 1900 the earlier Poor Law was replaced by a Social Assistance Act, providing public support for those unable to support themselves and not eligible for other social benefits.

A separate but important development of this period was the introduction of universal male suffrage in 1898, women obtaining the universal right to vote in 1913. Among other things, the reform stimulated the development of political parties, the Labour Party being established in 1887. Remaining largely in the shadows until the 1930s, its founders were Carl Jeppesen, for a number of years editor of the party's newspaper *Social Demokraten*, and Christian Holtermann Knudsen, the party's chairman at various times between 1899 and 1918. Both men were also leading figures in the Federation of Trade Unions founded in 1899.

⁴⁵ Stein Kuhnle, 'Welfare and the quality of life' in Allardt, et al., *Nordic democracy*, p. 401.

However, from the 1890s to the opening years of the new century, foreign policy dominated the political scene, the question of union with Sweden becoming the main issue in parliament. In June 1905 the parliament unanimously passed a resolution declaring that the union with Sweden no longer existed, a resolution widely supported by the Norwegian public in a plebiscite. Inviting the Danish Prince Carl to become their own king, Norway remained a monarchy, but was now independent of its powerful neighbour.

The first decades of independence witnessed rapid industrial growth, resulting in the transformation of the Norwegian economy and country from a mainly agricultural to a mainly manufacturing and trading society (see table 7.2). It was also a period when welfare services were rapidly expanded, providing a solid base for the further expansion of social welfare legislation that took place after the Second World War.

The years 1906-1919 have been described as 'the first golden era of social reform',⁴⁶ and not without justification. In 1909 the Liberal government under Gunnar Knudsen introduced state-organised compulsory sickness insurance, following closely the principles established in Germany in 1883. Providing only for temporary illness and limited in terms of members, benefits and risk coverage, the scheme was substantially widened and made more comprehensive when the law was amended in 1915. From the outset it covered both wage earners and their families, the inclusion of 'spouse and children' remaining an element peculiar to Norwegian sickness insurance law up to the 1930s.

Little further reform in the area of social welfare were achieved until the mid 1930s, when the Labour Party, coming to power in 1935 and staying in power until 1963, embarked upon a social policy

⁴⁶ John Midgaard, *A brief history of Norway* (Oslo, 1986), p. 109.

'crusade'. Labour's coming to power in 1935 was facilitated by the introduction of proportional representation in 1919, and by the ending of a bitter three-way split in the party following the First World War. Divided on their attitude towards communism, the radical, revolutionary element took over the party in 1918, shortly afterwards adopting the principle of dictatorship as the only form of government. This caused the initial breakaway by a group forming the Norwegian Social Democratic Labour Party. When the Labour Party dropped its ties to the Russian communists another group split forming the Norwegian Communist Party. However at this stage Labour and the Social Democrats merged, making considerable progress in the election of 1927. Abandoning its revolutionary programme in the 1930s, the party began to stress the importance of social reform and in particular the reduction of unemployment. Receiving enough seats to form a single party government in the 1935 election, it was now in a position to carry out its social reform programme. Politically, its accession to power has been described as 'the definite social democratic take over'.⁴⁷

Among the first measures successfully introduced was the Labour Protection Act of 1936 which provided for such entitlements as paid holidays for workers. Perhaps the most important reforms however were the introduction of old age pensions and unemployment insurance.

The introduction of old age pensions had been discussed in parliament as early as 1892, although a law had not been agreed upon until 1923. Even then, the law was not implemented in practice due to financial constraints. However the Labour government had an almost identical old age pensions law to that of 1923 formulated and passed with

⁴⁷ Matti Alestalo and Stein Kuhnle, 'The Scandinavian route: economic, social and political developments in Denmark, Finland and Sweden' (MS, n.d.), p. 50.

the support of all parties in the Storting in 1936. Financed through general taxation and means tested, it became effective from 1937.

Just before the Second World War an Unemployment Insurance Act was passed, perhaps the most necessary social security measure at the time. While the unemployment rate for union members was as high as 15% in 1929, it had more than doubled by 1933, amounting to 110,000 unemployed, while the numbers on the dole reached 158,000 by 1935.⁴⁸ It was in response to such high unemployment, partially caused by the economic slump following the world depression of the early 1930s, that the Labour government introduced compulsory unemployment insurance for industrial workers financed equally by the employees, employers and the state.

So severe was the unemployment problem, and so important its alleviation, it has been claimed that 'it was above all out of the trauma of mass unemployment in the 1930s that the welfare state was born'.⁴⁹ By the outbreak of the Second World War the alleviation measures adopted by the Norwegian government, combined with the other social legislation of the period, gave Norway a leading position among the welfare state countries of Europe. This had been made possible largely by the coming to power of the Labour Party, replacing the predominantly non-interventionist philosophy of the Liberals (although the Liberals had introduced direct taxation in 1892), increasing economic growth and a constructively high level of cross party consensus on the issue of social policies.

Despite declaring its neutrality when the war broke out, Norway's position was first violated by Britain and then, more directly and forcibly by Germany. German troops launching an attack on Norway in April

⁴⁸ Fritz Hodne, *The Norwegian economy 1920-1980* (New York, 1983), pp 72-73.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

1940. By June of that year resistance to the German invasion was subdued and the king together with his government sought exile in Britain for the remainder of the war. A serious set back economically, the war was followed by a period of growth and generally improved living standards. Following liberation in 1945 an all party government was sworn into office pending national elections. Led by Einar Gerhardsen, a prominent figure in the Labour Party who had spent most of the war in concentration camps, the provisional government issued an agreed declaration on the future political, social and economic aims of Norway. Alluding to the importance of a just distribution of national income to ensure the welfare of all, the declaration said:

Social legislation will be developed aimed at making the relief system redundant. The social security schemes will be harmonised so that one common social security system covers sickness, invalidity, unemployment and old age.⁵⁰

An aspiration which formed the core of social policy developments in Norway after the war, it was greatly influenced by trends in Britain and Sweden, the Beveridge Report of 1942 forming the basis for the post-war debate on social policy. These ideas had already been incorporated in a report published in 1944 by the Norwegian Central Federation of Trade Unions which sought the co-ordination of the social security schemes. It would appear correct to assume that this document formed the backbone of the agreed declaration of 1945.

The job of implementing the policies of the agreed declaration fell to the Labour Party who received a majority of the seats in the Storting following the election of October 1945. Among the first measures taken was the introduction of children's allowances in 1946, an aspiration

⁵⁰ Quoted in Stein Kuhnle, 'National equality and local decision making: values in conflict in the development of the Norwegian welfare state', *Acta Sociologica*, vol. 23 (1980), no. 2-3, p. 101.

outlined in the declaration of 1945, a system unanimously agreed to by the parliament. Benefits were paid to the second and subsequent children, extended to include all children in 1969, although tax allowances for children, available from the 1930s, were of greater importance financially for a number of years.

Provision of more generous and comprehensive social welfare legislation was made possible by a period of stable, and at times rapid, economic growth experienced by Norway from the 1950s. The period saw further changes in the insurance schemes. Already in 1949 unemployment insurance was extended to agricultural workers and certain other groups not included in the 1938 act. In 1953 sickness insurance was extended to cover the whole labour force, and extended to all residents four years later. In the same year, 1957, an orphans' pensions scheme was introduced. In 1959 the means test for old age pensions was abolished and all wage earners were brought within the scope of unemployment insurance. The following year a general occupational injury insurance became law while in 1961 comprehensive disability insurance and rehabilitation aid was introduced. From 1965 widows' and unmarried mothers' pensions were made available together with support for mothers with small children. With the Labour Party as a driving force behind these measures, it is important to remember that their passage through parliament was facilitated by a very high level of cross-party support.

Denmark

The last of our comparative studies is Denmark, which became the first Nordic welfare state. Perhaps more than any other Nordic or western European country, Denmark's welfare state legislation was examined by the Irish government as providing a possible blue print for

Ireland. The reason behind this was the agricultural basis of the Danish state, more relevant to Ireland than the industrially-based legislation of Britain.

In the mid-1940s, when the Irish government realised the necessity of coordinating social welfare legislation and of making it more reflective of Ireland's agriculturally-based economy, it drew very much on the experience of Denmark. Realising that 'the greatest problem of all is having to apply social insurance measures to a population, half of whom are unoccupied and half of whom are in the rural community'⁵¹ the Department of Local Government and Public Health identified Denmark, together with Sweden, as being in the same group as that of Ireland in terms of national income. Attributing Denmark's 'high degree of civilisation' to its largely peaceful development, the completion of land division by the end of the eighteenth century, and the fact that universal education and universal franchise had been introduced in the early 1800s, the department went on to say that 'some comparison can be made with Ireland as to the amount of benefit which could be conferred on the people by redistribution of a given proportion of the national income'.⁵²

While Irish welfare legislation remained largely in line with its inherited industrial base, it is important to note that the Irish government was familiarising itself with welfare legislation in Denmark, the social security measures of the Danish welfare state being considered generous in terms of provisions in comparison with both its Nordic and western European neighbours.

Welfare legislation in Denmark has been characterised by four main elements: universal coverage irrespective of employment status, the

⁵¹ Considerations attending the problems of extending social insurance in Ireland with special reference to the rural community, c1945 (U.C.D. Archives, MacEntee Papers, P67/361).

⁵² Ibid.

exclusion of persons with higher incomes, the financing of pensions and benefits primarily out of public revenues, and administrative decentralization.⁵³ As in the case of Finland and Norway a remarkable consensus in relation to social policies among the major political parties characterised the introduction and development of these measures, there existing a common belief in the necessity and desirability of instituting and developing social security legislation.

As alluded to in a previous chapter, an important context of this legislation, again an idea very much shared by the main political parties, was its traditionalism, an 'ideological traditionalism which posed no challenge to conceptions of the relationship between society and the individual'.⁵⁴ There was much emphasis placed on the fact that the development of the Danish welfare state was not the creation of something new, but rather the bringing to fruition of an existing inheritance, specifically the development of the guild system.

A further context of the development of the Danish welfare state already alluded to was the agricultural rather than the industrial background which stimulated social policy well into the twentieth century. Legislation was as often as not a direct result of agrarian agitation, rather than of increasing industrialization: 'the welfare state in Denmark is based on regulations and attitudes which long preceded industrialization'.⁵⁵

As in the case of Finland and Norway, the following discussion is loosely broken into developments in the nineteenth century, the inter-war period, and World War II and its aftermath.

⁵³ P.R. Kaim Caudle, *Comparative social policy and social security: a ten country study* (London, 1973), p. 148.

⁵⁴ Daniel Levine, 'Conservatism and tradition in Danish social welfare legislation, 1890-1933: a comparative view', *Comparative Studies in History and Society*, vol. 20 (1978), no. 1, p. 68.

⁵⁵ Byron J. Nordstrom (ed.), *Dictionary of Scandinavian history* (London, 1986), p. 628.

As early as 1798 poor relief reform in Denmark decreed that anyone who needed social aid was entitled to it. By 1803 the task of the public poor relief system was defined as four fold: to give assistance to those unable to provide for themselves, to provide relief for the old and weak, to provide employment opportunities for the able bodied, and to provide medical care for the sick.⁵⁶ However the reforms of the early 1800s were immediately followed by a severe and prolonged economic crisis in Denmark from 1804, greatly affecting the economic provisions maintaining the poor law. Coinciding with the spread of liberal and Malthusian ideas in Denmark, the economic decline resulted in a regressive reform of the poor law, the concept of paternal responsibility being replaced by the stigmatizing of relief. A 'deterrent system' was introduced in 1824, recipients of relief being denied the right to marry without the prior consent of the poor relief commissioners. Further regressive legislation was introduced in 1838 when the system of outdoor relief was replaced by indoor assistance, relief within the confines of the workhouse becoming predominant.

Meanwhile in the political arena important developments were taking place, King Frederick VI announcing in February 1831 that he intended to establish consultative provincial assemblies, thus diluting the absolute authority of the monarchy. Leading to a greater political awareness among the general public, who previously had little influence and therefore interest in political developments, the change from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy was marked by the Constitution of 1849. Establishing poor relief as a right, paragraph 89 of the constitution stated that 'Anyone who cannot support himself or his dependants and is not himself the dependent of someone else, has a right to public support,

⁵⁶ Norby Johansen. 'Denmark' in Peter Flora (ed.), *Growth to limits*, vol. 1, p. 296.

though he must comply with the obligations imposed by law in such cases'. Remaining one of the few unaltered provisions in the Danish constitution, this clause established the right to a modicum of poor relief, though the 'obligations' entailed the loss of political rights, such as the right to vote.

The next twenty years saw little development in social legislation, and it was not until the 1870s that Denmark embarked upon a thirty year period of reform, establishing the foundation of a 'modern' welfare state. The period from the 1870s to the early 1900s was one which saw the coming together of two major structural changes in Denmark - the comprehensive industrialization of the 1870s and 1880s and the concomitant demographic changes which ensued, together with what has been described as the 'rural crisis' of the same period and the efforts to maintain the rural labour force, while preventing the spread of socialist ideas. It was in the early 1870s that the Agrarian Liberal Party, *Det Forenede Venstre*, was founded, predating the establishment of the Conservative and Social Democratic parties, and gaining an absolute majority in the *Folketing*, the lower house of parliament, in the election of 1872. The coming together of the problems in industry and agriculture was reflected in the dramatic increase in the number of workhouses during the 1860s and 1870s. However it was clear that a far more comprehensive response was necessary and, in part influenced by the German and later European social insurance reforms of the 1880s and 1890s, Denmark, at this time enjoying the strongest economic growth among the Nordic countries, embarked upon a series of reforms in the areas of poor relief, old age relief, sickness insurance, accident insurance and unemployment insurance between 1891 and 1907, signifying the

foundation of the 'modern welfare state'.⁵⁷ Although influenced by Bismarckian legislation, it is nevertheless important to note that the framework of the Danish social reforms in the 1890s in particular was established by investigating commissions and committees long before the social reforms were carried out in Germany. Examples of this are the 1862, 1866 and 1875 committees of investigation on state involvement in voluntary sickness funds and the 1881-83 investigations into the provision of old age pensions.

The most important legislation of the Bismarckian period was the Old Age Relief Act of 1891, Denmark being the first Nordic country to introduce such legislation. Stressing the continuation with tradition, Viggo Hørup of the ruling Conservative Party, when introducing his proposals in 1890, said that 'our proposals in this respect do not, of course, go in for anything new. They simply continue principles which are widely recognized.'⁵⁸ The pension scheme had its roots in agricultural conditions, and the demands of farmers for a better quality of life: 'the Pension Act of 1891 was tailor made to meet the needs and interests of farmers.'⁵⁹ Separating relief of the old from the poor relief system, the act allowed for assistance without stigma and without the loss of political citizenship rights. With a very low age limit of 60 years, a non-contributory system financed out of general state and local government revenues was instituted, while benefits which carried a means test and a moral test and were often paid in kind rather than in cash up to the early 1900s, were payable at the same rate as poor relief. This rate was determined by local and municipal authorities. Coming

⁵⁷ Byron Nordstrom, *Dictionary of Scandinavian history*, p. 628.

⁵⁸ Daniel Levine, 'Conservatism and tradition in Danish social welfare legislation, 1890-1933: a comparative view', *Comparative Studies in History and Society*, vol. 20 (1978), no. 1, p. 62.

⁵⁹ Kari Salminen, *Pension schemes in the making: a comparative study of the Scandinavian countries* (Helsinki, 1993), p. 125.

into effect in 1892, Denmark became the first country to pay non-contributory pensions.

In the same year the sickness funds, established in the 1820s and 1830s, were reformed. Comprising up to 120,000 members by 1885, the 1892 reform was based on voluntary membership which was restricted to those of limited means and provided state subsidies for the voluntary insurance funds. By the end of the first year of operation the reformed and recognized funds had a membership of almost 1.2 million people. An Accident Insurance Act was introduced in 1898, insurance being paid by the employer, while in 1907 an Unemployment Insurance Act was introduced providing public subsidies to voluntary (i.e. trade union) funds to which the state contributed one third and the communes one sixth of the total contribution, rounding off the first period of welfare legislation in Denmark.

The inter-war period was one of gradual transition in Denmark from the agricultural to the industrial sector, although agriculture was to remain a significant economic force up to the 1950s. Pensions were again the focus of social security reforms in the period, being one of the few areas that didn't experience retrenchment during the 1920s, a trend particularly evident in the area of unemployment insurance. In 1922 old age pension reform introduced statutory fixed benefits replacing the existing discretionary benefits. In the 1930s pensions were again reformed, this time to allow for their indexing with the cost of living.

However the major piece of social legislation of the inter-war years came in 1933 as a result of co-operation between the Social Democratic and Radical Liberal government. It was based on the initiative and ideas presented ten years earlier by K. K. Steincke of the Social Democrats. Known as the Great Social Reform it rationalized and simplified the varying disparate pieces of social welfare legislation then in existence

under four basic acts: the Employment and Unemployment Insurance Act and the Accident Insurance Act, both of which introduced relatively minor alterations to existing legislation, and the Public Assistance Act and the National Insurance Act, which were rather more important in their consequences. The latter catered for sickness and invalidity insurance together with old age pensions, while the Public Assistance Act introduced communal assistance and special assistance together with poor relief, receipt of which still involved the loss of citizenship rights.

Although collectively described as the Great Social Reform, many commentators have questioned their actual significance, beyond the administrative co-ordination and simplification which they achieved. According to Johansen, they fell far short of establishing the social democratic welfare state with which they have been credited. He argues that the principle of universal compulsory social insurance contained in the reforms was merely cosmetic, as individuals could choose between active and passive membership of funds. Passive membership entailed the payment of 'a ridiculously low fee and in no way guaranteed protection, the only entitlement being the right to old age benefits which were granted and financed as before',⁶⁰ while active membership and the benefits it bestowed were restricted by a number of qualifying conditions.

The context of the reform was, of course, the world depression of the early 1930s which severely affected Denmark, as it did Finland and Norway. Indeed the social reform may be seen in the context of the combination response of relief programmes for farmers coupled with deficit spending on public works, an approach pioneered by Denmark in the relief of distress during the depression.

⁶⁰ Norby Johansen, 'Denmark' in Peter Flora (ed.), *Growth to limits*, vol. 1, p. 300.

Despite the taint of collaboration with the Nazis during the Second World War, and a significant communist challenge, the Social Democrats still remained an important force in Denmark after the war, forming a single party government from 1947 to 1950, a position it held for a further fifteen years from 1953. The post war period also witnessed a more decisive shift from agriculture to industry, manufacturing exports surpassing agricultural exports for the first time in the late 1950s, the period from 1957 to 1965 being known as the 'second industrial revolution'.⁶¹ It coincided with a period of unprecedented economic growth, the average annual growth rate for the three decades following 1952 being 3.5%.⁶²

In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War the Social Democrats published their party manifesto, 'The Future of Denmark', which contained a significant emphasis on social legislation. Among other things, it called for a non-contributory income-tested old age pension scheme, a significant shift from its 1892 position when the party had voted against the pension scheme then enacted because of its means tested basis. Going one step further, the Radical Liberals called for a universal scheme at the same time. In 1948, two years after the previous government had substantially increased the levels of old age and invalidity pensions, the Social Democratic government established a Commission on Old Age Pension Insurance, consisting of politicians, civil servants and other experts with the purpose of developing a system based on a contributory social insurance model. Following the commission's denunciation of the idea of a contributory, social insurance based old age pension system, the Social Democrats proposed the idea of

⁶¹ Kari Salminen, *Pension schemes in the making: a comparative study of the Scandinavian countries*, p. 31.

⁶² Norby Johansen, 'Denmark' in Peter Flora (ed.), *Growth to limits* vol. 1, p. 345.

a full national pension, *den fulde folkepension*, the subsequent reform of 1956 providing for a flat rate minimum pension granted to everybody of retirement age (increased to 67 years of age in 1956) who satisfied residence and nationality tests, and including many income tested supplements, being a first step towards this ideal.

The post-war period also saw the introduction of income tested tax credits being introduced for families with children under 16 years of age, coupled with means tested cash benefits for groups such as single mothers and the unemployed in 1952, while in 1955 the Public Assistance Act was reformed, extending special assistance to, among other groups, widows with children and certain groups of single women.

Summary

We can see from the foregoing that, in fact, little was learned by successive Irish governments from the experiences of countries which faced relatively similar problems in the area of welfare legislation and which shared relatively similar structural make-up. This was most noticeable in the case of Denmark which, as we have seen, was scrutinised by the Irish government for its agriculturally- rather than industrially-based social insurance scheme. Despite the collation of comparative material in the mid 1940s, including detailed notes on the Danish sickness insurance scheme, the white paper of 1949 maintained the industrial base of social security in Ireland:

A ready criticism to be anticipated is that the scheme [outlined in the white paper] is more suitable to a country which is largely industrial than to a country which is largely agricultural. It is true that the insurance methods which are suitable for industrial groups are not easy to apply to the agricultural community. Having regard to this, it is preferable not to apply insurance generally, but to continue the assistance schemes for classes unsuitable for insurance. There is no sound argument however, for abandoning insurance where it is suitable, even in the interests of uniformity.

The proposed scheme is suitable for the large industrial, commercial and agricultural employee groups in the community.⁶³

If of marginal relevance for their direct influence on Irish legislation, however, the three countries we have studied demonstrate the underlying factors which influence the pace and extent of development of welfare legislation. It is clear that most of the underlying factors influencing development in Finland, Norway and Denmark were at work in Ireland, and placing these factors in this cross-country analysis is crucial in understanding Ireland's development as a welfare state.

The first crucial factor in the development of welfare policies from all four countries was the coming of democratic, parliamentary politics. In Finland and Norway this stemmed from vigorous but peaceful nationalist movements, resulting in independence in the early years of the twentieth century, while in Denmark the political change was marked by the move from absolute to constitutional monarchy. An important part of this change to democratic, parliamentary politics was the institution of universal franchise.

The introduction of universal franchise was followed by the rise of Labour parties, another crucial element influencing the timing, pace and extent of welfare legislation. The fact that the social democrats were weaker in Finland than in either Norway or Denmark provides part of the explanation for Finland's relative slowness in becoming a typical Nordic welfare state, while in Norway itself the Labour Party only came to power after the First World War. The parallels with Ireland, which was without a Labour member of government until 1948 are clear, the divisions in Norway's Labour Party being mirrored by those in the Irish Labour Party.

⁶³ Department of Social Welfare. *White paper containing government proposals for social security* (Dublin, 1949), p. 43.

Two further trends are evident from the comparative studies: the importance of individuals as catalysts in the historical development of welfareism (i.e. Bismarck and Beveridge) and the importance of what social scientists term structural functionalism. Underlining the importance of the latter is the clear correlation between the shift from agriculture to industry and the concomitant development of welfare legislation. A phenomenon of industrial society is large scale unemployment, the emphasis on curbing unemployment, particularly in the 1930s and again in the 1950s in the countries examined being an important stimulant for social welfare legislation.

The comparative studies bring to light a number of other factors influencing the timing, pace of development and extent of welfare legislation which can be equally applied to Ireland in order to place developments in Ireland in an international context. Among these factors were the predominance of other issues on the political agenda. In Denmark in the 1890s 'social reform was subordinated to other political issues', namely the 'constitution struggle, *'forfatnings-kampen'*'.⁶⁴ In Finland in the 1930s much energy was expended on the language debate, while a characteristic of the post World War II period was the growing cross-party consensus on the benefits and necessity of social policy. The following comment on Finland of the 1960s may equally be applied to Norway, Denmark or Ireland: 'political parties no longer offer clear cut alternatives; differences are in appearance only'.⁶⁵

While the above comparisons offer explanations and insights into the development of the Irish welfare state, the extent to which developments in other countries directly or positively influenced Irish

⁶⁴ Norby Johansen, 'Denmark' in Peter Flora (ed.), *Growth to limits*, p.299.

⁶⁵ Onni Rantala, 'Changing features in the Finnish party system from the 1960s to the present: an overview' in Juhani Mylly and R. Michael Berry (eds.), *Political parties in Finland: essays in history and politics* (Turku, 1987), p. 41.

legislation is difficult to measure accurately. Perhaps this crux was most cogently stated in the 1949 white paper:

How can the new scheme be fairly judged? Should this depend on its relation to the schemes it is intended to supersede, or should it be measured against the schemes in other countries or should it, perhaps, be required to stand or fall by comparison with some ideal scheme which each one may fashion for himself? There is no simple answer to these questions because there is no simple way of measuring the worth of a complex social experiment which will, directly or indirectly, affect every person in this country.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Department of Social Welfare, *White paper*, p. 42.

CONCLUSION

FROM STATE WELFARE TO WELFARE STATE

From the foregoing chapters it is clear that social welfare policy in independent Ireland falls into five separate phases of development that may be described as an evolution from 'state welfare' to 'welfare state', from individual and restricted policies dealing with specific social problems and with a minimum of cross-referencing to a set of co-ordinated policies, centrally administered, national in application and comprehensive in character. The phases of development marking this evolution may be categorised as follows:

- pre-1922: A period which saw the introduction of the first income distribution policies in the form of the poor law and, more importantly, the Old Age Pensions Act, 1908 and the National Health Insurance Act, 1911;
- 1922-32: A period of marked conservatism and retrenchment in social welfare policy;
- 1932-42: The first period of expansion in social welfare legislation followed by the return of conservatism in the late 1930s;
- 1942-8: A period when British developments precipitated new and prolonged debate in Ireland on the whole area of social security resulting in the final abandonment of poor law ideologies for more progressive social thinking;
- 1948-52: The period when the changing ideologies subsequent to the publication of the Beveridge report were given vent to in legislation. This legislation institutionalised the welfare state in Ireland by providing a co-ordinated, consolidated and expanded set of welfare policies.

While it is unnecessary here to draw detailed conclusions about each of the periods, as this has already been done on a chapter-by-chapter basis, it might be useful to draw together the main strands of development which resulted in the institutionalisation of the welfare state by 1952.

The ideological and practical foundation of Irish welfare legislation was the poor law of the nineteenth century. In retrospect it can be seen as setting a precedent for implementing policies in Ireland which were unsuited to solving native social problems, a characteristic of much welfare legislation even after independence in 1922, with Britain, a largely industrial country, remaining the well spring of legislative ideology. Certainly George Nicholls' report, upon which the poor law of 1838 was based, was unsuited to Ireland, a fact recognised not only in retrospective analyses but by contemporaries. In the nationalist debate towards the end of the nineteenth century it was to become a major tool in the fight for self-government. However, while certain that the poor laws were alien, nationalist politicians, when provided with the opportunity of replacing them after 1922, seemed unsure as to what constituted native, a point underlined by the Department of Local Government and Public Health, the first report of which criticised the workhouses solely on the grounds that they failed 'to provide separate accommodation for the classes requiring special attention'.¹ The philosophical bankruptcy when it came to social policy was emphasised by the fact that the county homes, established under the Local Government (Temporary Provisions) Act, 1923, to replace the workhouses, were described in a government-commissioned report of 1927 as housing 'aged and infirm of both

¹ Department of Local Government and Public Health, *First report*, p. 56.

sexes, lunatics, idiots and imbeciles of both sexes; unmarried mothers and their children, in some cases married mothers and their children, and orphan and deserted children' together with 'advanced tubercular disease and also cases of cancer'.²

This disparity between pre-independence pronouncements and post-independence actions was striking. In a period which stressed financial orthodoxy rather than social reform, James Connolly's vision of 'a united social democracy'³ seemed irrelevant. The opportunity to influence our own affairs was forfeited in favour of emulating developments in Britain. The gap between the rhetoric and the reality was particularly striking in the context of the Democratic Programme of 1919, promulgated by the first Dáil just three years prior to independence. While the aspirational rhetoric of the Democratic Programme continued in government circles for a number of years after independence, Richard Mulcahy claiming in 1925 that 'the same spirit that filled our people who entered the Dáil in 1919...is still there today,⁴ its great social and cultural promises were simply ignored. In the area of social legislation it is clear that what made a far greater impression on Irish approaches were not the aspirations of the Democratic Programme or of thinkers like Connolly, 'the pioneer of social conscience in Ireland',⁵ but rather the operation of the poor laws in the nineteenth century.

There is little doubt but that the poor law mentality was ingrained in the thinking of Cumann na nGaedheal politicians in particular. Many of the ministers viewed the provision of welfare as

² *Report of the Commission on the Relief of the Sick and Destitute Poor, including the Insane Poor* (Dublin, 1927), p. 1.

³ James Connolly, *Labour in Irish history* (Dublin, 1910), p. 216.

⁴ DD vol. 12, 30 June 1925, col. 1815.

⁵ Robert Lynd, 'Introduction' in James Connolly, *Labour in Ireland* (Dublin, 1917), p. xix.

little more than the provision of charity. The ministers with direct responsibility for welfare legislation were to the fore in expressing this view. Patrick McGilligan, Minister for Industry and Commerce from 1924 until 1932 ruled out the possibility of legislating for increased unemployment insurance benefits as such a move would be providing 'nothing more or less than complete charity'.⁶ James Bourke, Minister for Local Government and Public Health from 1923 to 1927, explained the reduction in old age pensions in 1924 in the context of the state not being in a position 'to distribute charity on that extremely liberal scale'.⁷ Similarly Ernest Blythe was clearly of the opinion that, as was the case under the poor laws, receipt of any benefits ought to be made as unpalatable as possible: the loose application of qualification rules by pension officers led, according to Blythe, 'to persons taking outdoor relief who would have been reluctant, and perhaps ashamed, in the past' to do so.⁸ Both Bourke and Blythe had been members of the First Dáil which promulgated the Democratic Programme, while McGilligan had served as secretary to Kevin O Higgins.

A valid argument explaining the lack of progressive social legislation may well have been that in the first decade of independence public finances simply could not afford to provide any extension in the welfare services already in existence and in fact justified the reduction of old age pension in 1924. However, it is clear from the rhetoric that, apart altogether from the lack of finances to facilitate the expansion of social services, there was a fundamental lack of appreciation or acceptance of the basic tenet of welfare legislation, namely that the state had a duty to ensure the economic and social well-being of its citizens.

⁶ DD vol. 12, 30 June 1925, col. 1770.

⁷ DD vol. 7, 25 June 1924, col. 3054.

⁸ DD vol. 3, 18 May 1923, col. 1119.

Because this philosophical hurdle was never crossed by Cumann na nGaedheal in government, the question of whether or not the Free State could afford measures of social legislation was largely irrelevant. The argument of lack of financial resources pales further into insignificance when it is noted that expenditure alone is not a measure of the success or otherwise of welfare policies: a willingness to innovate and the effectiveness and suitability of innovation are the key elements in the success of welfare legislation.

This persistence of poor law approaches to social policy in the first decade of independence was by no means unique to the government party. Even Thomas Johnson, leader of the parliamentary Labour Party from 1922, was not anxious that further unemployment benefit should be provided without attaching a duty to the receipt of such benefit.⁹

The period up to 1932 was, therefore, one of stagnant and at times regressive social policy, lacking insight or radicalism and cloaked in an all-pervading conservatism. Had the government even 'slavishly'¹⁰ followed British models in the areas of economics and finance which dealt with social legislation, as Hoppen suggests, the results would have been far greater.

The extent to which Fianna Fáil sentiments differed from the poor law rhetoric and grudging attitudes of Cumann na nGaedheal was refreshing, if not radical. From its inception the party had stressed the importance of social reform, seeing independence as being more than an end in itself. The rhetoric was followed by definite progress in the area of welfare legislation in the years following Fianna Fáil's accession to power in 1932. The reforms, as has already been argued,

⁹ DD vol. 1, 20 Oct. 1922, col. 1864.

¹⁰ K. T. Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800: conflict and conformity* (London, 1987), p. 208.

owed little to the initial dependence of the Fianna Fáil government on the support of the Labour Party. The most important initiatives were the introduction of unemployment assistance in 1933 and widows' and orphans' pensions in 1935. The spirit in which these reforms were introduced was as important as what they achieved in practice. Seeking cabinet support for the introduction of unemployment assistance, Sean Lemass, Minister for Industry and Commerce, described the dependence of many unemployed people on 'home assistance funds and private charities' as 'altogether inadequate'.¹¹ On seeing the bill passed into law, Lemass specified that unemployment officers were to 'take for granted' that 'unemployed persons generally are only too anxious to obtain work and they are genuinely seeking it',¹² a marked change in emphasis to the grudging manner in which welfare was distributed up until then.

However the initial enthusiasm of Fianna Fáil was replaced in the late 1930s by a return to a more conservative approach to social policy, reminiscent of the early days of Cumann na nGaedheal. This can be attributed in large measure to a change in personnel in the departments directly involved in welfare legislation. From September 1939 to January 1947 Sean MacEntee had responsibility for either Industry and Commerce or Local Government and Public Health. Having been Minister for Finance from 1932-9, MacEntee was an instinctively cautious and increasingly conservative politician. He very much lacked the social understanding and sympathy of Sean Lemass whom he replaced as Minister for Industry and Commerce in September 1939. The legislative innovations of the early 1930s were neither part of nor

¹¹ Memorandum from Minister for Industry and Commerce to President, 14 Nov. 1932 (N.A., D/Fin., Economic and Financial position of Saorstát Éireann, f200/25/25).

¹² Department of Industry and Commerce, Assistance Circular 2/5: Unemployment Assistance Act, 1933.

followed by a sustained, thought-out plan for the restructuring and rationalisation of Irish social welfare legislation. Calls for the co-ordination of social welfare policies, dating from as early as 1933,¹³ were sympathetically listened to but quietly ignored. This lack of any underlying philosophy or plan was clearly shown by Sean T. O Kelly's pronouncement in 1937 that pressure of day-to-day business in running existing services left only limited time for thinking about the larger question of structuring or co-ordinating social welfare policy.¹⁴ It is little wonder that Clann na Poblachta, the first political party in independent Ireland that attempted to bring together the political traditions of nationalism and socialism, claimed, with a large degree of accuracy, that:

the old castle machine, the old poor law machine, etc., were taken over after the Treaty and have been creaking along in more or less their original mould ever since.¹⁵

It is unlikely that any substantial examination of the whole corpus of welfare legislation would have been undertaken were it not for the publication of the Beveridge report in 1942. The Beveridge report was the single most important influence in the formation of a co-ordinated and expanded set of social policies leading to the institutionalisation of the welfare state in independent Ireland. While the Fianna Fáil government was vehemently opposed to it, it precipitated a prolonged and fruitful discussion in Ireland from which was forged the modern welfare state. Apart from the discussion it precipitated, the Beveridge report also provided Ireland with a blueprint for change, Ireland becoming in time a Beveridge-type

¹³ William Norton, *Sláinte*, vol. 1 (1935), p. 42.

¹⁴ DD vol. 65, 11 Mar. 1937, col. 1623.

¹⁵ *The Clan*, 14 Dec. 1949.

welfare state. The extent to which its influence in the shaping of Irish social legislation has been virtually ignored by historians is remarkable.

It was largely due to the Beveridge report that the decade from 1948 saw the institutionalisation of the welfare state in Ireland. This was very much facilitated by the establishment of the Department of Social Welfare in 1947 in response to a perception that 'the state is entering an era in which there will be an increasing demand for the development and expansion of social services'.¹⁶ 'Welfareism' was seen as both acceptable and desirable. No longer was it seen as necessary to apologise to any section of Irish society for the introduction of new and expanded measures of social policy.

While the Beveridge report and the subsequent discussion in Ireland modified and modernized ideologies, the 1952 act was of crucial practical importance. The act co-ordinated the three social insurance schemes in existence until then while effecting improvements in both these schemes and the existing assistance legislation. For the first time the same rate of benefit was provided for sickness, unemployment, maternity and widowhood. A reduction was no longer effected in the rate of sickness/disability insurance by reason of prolonged illness, and it could be drawn for an indefinite period of time, a significant improvement on the previous maximum period of twenty six weeks. This co-ordination also provided for the payment of dependants' benefit for those in receipt of disability benefit, hitherto confined to recipients of unemployment benefit. In both cases, the 'waiting days' (six in the case of unemployment and three in the case

¹⁶ Report of Inter-departmental Committee on Social Services appointed by the Minister for Finance on 15 May 1945 (U.C.D. Archives, MacEntee Papers, P67/361).

of disability) during which the claimant received no benefit, was standardised to three days.

The significance of both this act and the 1948 Social Welfare Act and the protracted lead up to it lies in a number of areas. Firstly, the attention to detail in the 1952 act was impressive. Under the new regulations the fees for birth, marriage and death certificates, necessary for the claiming of benefits, were reduced from 6/- to a maximum of 1/6.¹⁷

Facilitating the introduction of the Social Welfare Act, 1952, was a cross-party consensus on the desirability of welfare legislation. The three major and enduring parties were committed to welfare state legislation as evidenced by successive general elections. Following the coming to power of the first inter-party government, for example, Dr James Ryan expressed confidence that 'any party that comes into power in this country is going to progress in the way of increasing and not decreasing these [social] services'.¹⁸ This was a sea change in comparison to the mood from the foundation of the Free State to the mid 1940s, when Cumann na nGaedheal/Fine Gael were hostile to any state-centralised social policy, very much towing the line of the Catholic church (indeed Dr James Ryan accused them and the other opposition parties of advocating the Dignan plan simply because it was published by a Catholic bishop¹⁹), when the Labour Party was in such a weak position that its advocacy of such policies had almost no impact, leaving Fianna Fáil in a position to claim credit and call 'progress' for even the most minor of reforms. Now consensus about the need for progressive welfare legislation underpinned developments, James Ryan

¹⁷ Statutory Instrument 384 of 1952: Social Welfare (Certificates of Births, Marriage and Deaths) Regulation, 1952.

¹⁸ DD vol. 116, 23 June 1949, col. 1331.

¹⁹ DD vol. 120, 29 March 1950, col. 229.

assuring William Norton, a few months after Norton took office, of 'my wholehearted support in his endeavour to bring the social standards of our people into alignment with those of progressive peoples throughout the world today'.²⁰ It should be noted however that Lemass rejected suggestions in Spring 1951 that Norton's social welfare bill ought to have been passed in the Dáil without a division, as such a course of action would have created in the minds of the public the idea that 'the bill represented the best that the combined wisdom of members of the Dáil could produce' and would 'make a better scheme subsequently more difficult'.²¹ The cross-party consensus was to become a characteristic of political approaches to social policy in subsequent decades, political parties out-bidding each other in promising innovation and reform.

Of wider significance was the acceptance in principle of developing Ireland as a modern welfare state in the European context. It is obvious that some politicians and many more senior civil servants were becoming increasingly *au fait* with developments in social policy in western Europe, a process facilitated by Irish involvement in the International Labour Organisation and the International Social Security Association, the committee of experts of the latter meeting in Dublin in January 1949 and attended by delegates from Belgium, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, France, Denmark, Italy and the Netherlands. One concrete example of the real impact of this comparative reference may be seen in the white paper of 1949. In content and structure it fitted in very much with the *genre* of the time. Its orthodox weighting of insurance as against assistance schemes, its acceptance of prevailing

²⁰ DD vol. 112, 21 July 1948, col. 1068.

²¹ DD vol. 125, 11 April 1951, col. 61.

European principles in welfare policy, and its appeal to history made it very much a document of its time.

The only institution which did not share this enthusiasm for state-centralised social welfare legislation from the late 1940s was the Catholic church. While it is unnecessary here to reiterate the arguments outlined in chapter two of the present work, there was a clear move from the Christian pragmatism which welcomed the Beveridge report in 1942 to a more dogmatic conservatism in response to the Irish white paper on social security of 1949. This change was illustrated by the changing opinions of Dr Cornelius Lucey, one of the most prolific and respected of Catholic writers on social and economic issues. In response to the Beveridge report Lucey, applying the principles of the report to Ireland, said that 'we must plan for a still more comprehensive and unified system of social security in the near future'.²² However, when such a scheme was proposed, in the form of the 1949 white paper, Lucey 'subjected [it] to strong criticism'.²³

The evidence related in chapter two would suggest that it is now time for a reappraisal of the role of the Catholic church in independent Ireland in a consistent and balanced manner. The role of the church in independent Ireland has been over-simplified: its presentation as having a monolithic influence on politics is inaccurate. So too is its portrayal as singularly conservative when it came to social policy. Underlining both the diversity of opinion within the church together with the progressive social doctrine of individual members of the hierarchy and other Catholic thinkers, was the response of the official church to the 1949 white paper on social security and the subsequent legislation of the early 1950s. John Dignan, Bishop of Clonfert, criticised the white

²² Cornelius Lucey, 'The Beveridge report', *Studies*, vol. 32 (1943), p. 43.

²³ *Evening Mail*, 17 July 1950.

paper for what it did not do,²⁴ while Bishop Neil Farren of Derry implied that the Fine Gael bill of 1951 which emanated from the white paper, was taken from 'the worst principles of both Nazi and Russian imperialism'.²⁵ Neither is it easy to judge the actual practical influence of the Catholic church on the course of legislation. While Fianna Fáil governments from the late 1930s quoted at length from the pronouncements of Catholic writers to bolster their lack of desire to innovate in the area of social welfare, it would appear that such recourse was a front, not for Catholic-induced conservatism, but rather for a political, social and financial conservatism, an unwillingness to innovate.

The reason why it was the mother and child scheme of 1950-1 and not the 1949 white paper or the subsequent legislation which sparked a major church-state debacle is more difficult to assess. Most likely it lies in the fact that the spirit if not the content of the white paper enjoyed broad social and political support leaving the church as a lone opposing voice and therefore with little power to influence its course directly. Perhaps it was the absence of independent support which staved off a church-state conflict as developed in the case of the mother and child scheme: in the latter instance the opposition of the Irish Medical Association greatly bolstered the opposition of the Catholic hierarchy.

The evidence collated in writing the present work has raised a number of other issues. This use of British developments as a model in Ireland has already been emphasised, the white paper going so far as to paraphrase the Beveridge report on occasion.²⁶ Indeed the

²⁴ Dr John Dignan, 'The government proposals for social security', *Christus Rex*, vol. 4 (1950), p. 107.

²⁵ *II*, 18 Apr. 1955.

²⁶ See chapter six of the present work.

international feminist criticism of welfare legislation may be applied to Ireland where Beveridgean ideologies became pre-eminent.. Beveridge's report was based on social security for the worker rather than the citizen, the worker always being defined in terms of 'him' rather than 'her'.

As outlined in the previous chapter, reference to countries other than Britain in the discussion and preparation of legislative change in Ireland became increasingly important as time went on. From the 1933 Committee of Inquiry into Widows' and Orphans' pensions, it became a standard part of inquiring into and developing Irish social legislation to look to existing structures in other European countries and beyond. In this case developments in Denmark, Canada, forty-five of the United States, New Zealand and New South Wales were examined in depth. In the same year, 1933, the provisional committee of management of the National Health Insurance Society visited Yugo Slavia to learn from the experiences of the equivalent insurance society there.²⁷ The inter-departmental committee on family allowances, established in November 1940, collated information regarding similar schemes in a number of European countries. Dr John Dignan's plan of 1945 was heavily influenced by developments in Denmark and Sweden while the white paper on social security of 1949 was framed in 'the light of modern developments in other countries'.²⁸ This level of reference to other countries by senior officers in the civil service in particular calls into question what has been described by others as the insularity of civil servant thinking up to the late 1950s. Civil servants were not as 'intellectually isolated'²⁹ as has been suggested. The

²⁷ *Sláinte*, vol. 1 (1935), p. 16.

²⁸ *White paper*, p. ii.

²⁹ J. J. Lee, *Ireland politics and society, 1912-85* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 261.

importance attached to comparative analysis and the depth and extent of that analysis uncovered in researching the present work would suggest that a reappraisal is necessary.

A unique aspect of the development of the Irish welfare state was the absence of a strong and united social democratic party. Across Europe the role of social democratic political parties has been stressed as an essential ingredient in ensuring the institutionalisation of the welfare state: its absence in Ireland would suggest that such an ingredient was not so much important in the evolution of the welfare state but rather in the pace of evolution. Having fallen victim to the over-riding importance attached to nationalist politics, the Irish Labour Party never commanded an influential position in political life. Its position was further weakened by divisions from 1943-50, the politics of personality rather than ideology playing a pre-eminent role.

The centrality of 'the national question' to the detriment of social issues was best encapsulated by Sean MacBride in 1949 when he commented that:

Since we obtained control over our own affairs in this part of the country, political and economic questions have mostly been coloured by issues that aroused heat and passion, often leading to virtual civil war conditions...

One of the results of the turmoil of the last quarter of a century has been that we took over, without very much examination, the political, economic and legal framework which had been imposed upon us by Britain.³⁰

In turn the 'national question', specifically the desire to create a unified Ireland, provided its own impetus for welfare legislation: an early reaction to the Beveridge report was a fear that 'the application of the British government's proposals to Northern Ireland might cause an

³⁰ Lecture by Sean MacBride, 13 Oct. 1949 (Labour History Museum, Norton Papers, Item 90).

unfavourable comparison between the two portions of the island'.³¹ This secondary social effect of partition on legislation in independent Ireland has been largely ignored by writers on the period.

It is this ignoring of what are essentially central themes in the course of twentieth century Ireland that has made the present work not only possible but an essential contribution both to understanding independent Ireland and to the way we perceive the history of independent Ireland. It offers three separate levels of analysis. Firstly, it is intended not only to sketch the evolution of the welfare state, a process eschewed in other studies of independent Ireland, but to analyse the reasons for the rise, pace of development and extent of development of Irish welfare legislation. Secondly, this analysis of the impetus and influences behind the Irish welfare state has led to a re-appraisal of the role of certain key players in the political, social and cultural life of independent Ireland. As underlined right through the present work, the role of the Catholic church, of social democratic politics and of administrative officials is far more complex when examined in the context of social, and not just political, developments. Thirdly, the present work has underlined the vast amount of work still to be carried out in order to come to a comprehensive picture of the history of independent Ireland. Chief among these in the context of social developments is the role of 'the invisible welfare state',³² the unofficial welfare services provided mostly by women and upon which much official welfare legislation is dependent.

If studies focused solely on the political, or the economic, or indeed the social, lead to incomplete and at times inaccurate

³¹ Considerations attending the problems of extending social insurance in Ireland with special reference to the rural community, [c1945] (U.C.D. Archives, MacEntee Papers, P67/361).

³² Merja Manninen and Päivi Setälä (eds.), *The lady with the bow: the story of Finnish women* (Helsinki, 1990), p. 144.

interpretations as suggested above, then the necessity of inclusive history is beyond question. The present work is offered not only as a synthesis of social, political, economic and administrative history in its own right, but as a starting point for inclusive historical studies of twentieth century Ireland.

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1.7 Works of Reference

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