

IRELAND, EMIGRATION AND THE NEW INTERNATIONAL DIVISION OF LABOUR

Proinnsias Breathnach

*Department of Geography
St. Patrick's College, Maynooth*

John A. Jackson

*Department of Sociology
Trinity College Dublin*

INTRODUCTION

Migration has been a significant feature of the Irish demographic experience for at least three hundred years. During this period, up to ten million people left the island to live elsewhere (Fitzpatrick, 1984; Coward, 1989). The sustained nature of emigration over such a long time span, combined with its high level relative to the population of the island, have conferred on Ireland a unique status in the modern history of emigration.

The distinctive nature of Irish emigration may be attributed to the continued failure of the island's economy to provide acceptable employment opportunities in sufficient quantities, allied to the geographical and cultural proximity of regions where better opportunities were both available and accessible. This paper argues that Ireland's emigration experience is profoundly related to the island's integration, from the nineteenth century onwards, into an international economic system based initially on commercial, but increasingly on industrial, capitalism. A fundamental feature of this system has been the generation of inter-regional and international economic relationships based on functional complementarity, giving rise in turn to the idea of an international division of labour involving a set of underdeveloped peripheral economies with limited economic functions and oriented, in a dependent fashion, to serving the needs of a set of developed, diversified and dominant core economies. These needs have been served primarily by the global periphery acting as a reservoir of primary materials and (particularly in the late twentieth century) of cheap labour for manufacturing industries based in the global core. The core has also benefited consistently from unequal trading relations with, and profitable investments in, peripheral regions (Breathnach, 1988).

Apart from the north-eastern part of the island, which followed a separate development path which saw it emerging as part of the global core (a status it was to lose in the twentieth century), Ireland became firmly embedded from the seventeenth

century among the underdeveloped economies of the global periphery. For most of these underdeveloped economies, their narrowness of economic function, allied to the systematic extraction of economic surplus, has tended to generate a chronic condition of widespread un- and under-employment, leading to very low standards of living. We would argue that only the availability of the emigration option on a massive scale has prevented the reproduction of a similar situation in the case of Ireland.

This paper identifies three general phases of international specialisation since the emergence of capitalism as the world's dominant socio-economic system in the seventeenth century: mercantilism, followed firstly by the "old" and then by the "new" international divisions of labour (Breathnach, 1988). The nature of Ireland's dependent development in the first two of these phases is briefly described; then the paper focuses more specifically on Ireland's position within the new international division of labour which has emerged over the last thirty years or so.

It is argued that each of these phases coincided with distinctive corresponding epochs in Ireland's emigration experience. While Ireland's involvement in the new international division of labour initially seemed to offer the prospect of a reversal of the country's long-established pattern of substantial net emigration, this was to prove illusory as basic structural elements of Ireland's position within this division of labour came to be reflected in a resumption of heavy emigration in the 1980s. This latest phase of emigration, however, has exhibited distinctive new characteristics reflecting fundamental differences between the new international division of labour and its historical precursors.

IRELAND'S INCORPORATION INTO THE INTERNATIONAL DIVISION OF LABOUR

The initiation of sustained emigration from Ireland coincided with the beginnings of Ireland's systematic incorporation into the emerging international system of commercial capitalism in the seventeenth century. This century marked a major watershed in Ireland's economic history, involving the almost total replacement of the old feudal Anglo-Norman and Gaelic landholding aristocracy by a new class of commercially oriented landlords of British origin, following Ireland's political subjugation by England in this period.

However, virtually from the beginning, the commercialisation of the Irish economy was constrained by a series of restrictions imposed by the English government (Regan, 1981). These included the prohibition of cattle, sheep and pig exports to Britain and an outright ban on the export of woollen goods. Such measures were typical of the mercantilist policies pursued by colonial powers at the time, which sought to circumscribe economic activities in the colonies which competed directly with established interests in the colonial home countries (Magdoff, 1978). The Northern linen industry escaped such restrictions, and its subsequent unfettered growth eventually laid the basis for full-scale industrialisation in the Belfast region in the nineteenth century, as a result of which this region was to become an integral part of the global economic core.

Nevertheless, the Irish economy did succeed in developing markets overseas (especially in the Americas) during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the contact systems resulting from these trade links, allied to the restricted nature of

economic development at home, helped generate the first streams of sustained, although numerically limited, emigration from Ireland.

THE "OLD" INTERNATIONAL DIVISION OF LABOUR

The emergence of industrial capitalism in the late eighteenth century led to the creation of a new global order, succinctly identified later in the century by Karl Marx (1961: 451) in the following celebrated passage:

"A new and international division of labour, a division suited to the requirements of the chief centres of modern industry, springs up, and converts one part of the globe into a chiefly agricultural field of production, for supplying the other part which remains a chiefly industrial field".

Economic relations between Britain and Ireland (apart from the industrial North-east) were to fit neatly into this model, especially after the Act of Union of 1800 exposed Ireland's weakly developed industrial structure (linen again being an exception) to competition from its much more powerful British counterpart. Henceforth, as Marx (1961: 711) further observed, Ireland's destiny was to be "that of an English sheep-walk and cattle-pasture". Thus, between 1841 and 1922, the total number of sheep and cattle in southern Ireland almost doubled, while the number of people was more than halved (Meenan, 1970). Of those remaining, a mere 10% were engaged in manufacturing activity, of whom only a half were working in establishments employing three or more people.

In essence, the growing orientation of the Irish economy to the production of labour-extensive pastoral products, and the lack of alternative forms of economic diversification, had the effect of marginalising a large proportion of the Irish population, who were surplus to prevailing labour requirements. This process of marginalisation was, of course, a common experience among colonies at this time. What was unusual in the case of Ireland was that geographical and increasingly cultural proximity allowed the marginalised population to leave in large numbers and move to two of the main core economies of the world - the USA (predominantly) and Great Britain. Emigration from Ireland began to grow rapidly from the 1820s, reaching a peak of about a quarter of a million annually during the Great Famine and immediately afterwards; the exodus cleared away most of the surplus workforce which had been created by the sharp contraction in tillage agriculture and the mechanisation of the linen industry in the previous decades. Emigration then settled down at an annual average of over 60,000 up to the First World War (Fitzpatrick, 1984). Throughout this period, newly arrived Irish immigrants with little or no education made up a corps of unskilled labour in the USA and Britain, working predominantly in the construction industry, manufacturing and personal service.

Political independence in 1922 had little impact on Ireland's status as a peripheral economy and source of emigrants (Table 1). The first ten years of self-government produced little in the way of new economic policies, while the attempt at independent development via protectionism and economic nationalism pursued by the Fianna Fail government between the early 1930s and the late 1950s, despite some initial success, ultimately failed to come to grips with the basic structural disadvantages which had

Table 1
Migration trends (Republic of Ireland) 1926-1990

Period	Total Population (end-period)	Net Migration	Migration Rate (per annum)
1926-36	2,968,420	166,751	16,675
1936-46	2,955,107	187,111	18,711
1946-51	2,960,593	119,568	23,914
1951-56	2,898,264	196,763	39,353
1956-61	2,818,341	212,003	42,401
1961-66	2,884,002	80,605	16,121
1966-71	2,978,248	53,906	10,781
1971-79	3,368,217	-108,934	-13,617
1979-81	3,443,405	5,045	2,523
1981-86	3,540,643	75,300	15,060
1986-89	3,515,000*	105,000*	35,000
1990	n.a.	31,000*	31,000

Note: *Central Statistics Office estimates

Sources: *Census of Population 1986*, Vol. 1; *Economic Review and Outlook 1989*; Breen et al. (1990); *Irish Times*, 4th August 1990.

grown out of Ireland's colonial experience (Walsh, 1981). Thus, with a resumption of very high levels of emigration (mainly to Britain) in the 1950s (during which decade the equivalent of one seventh of the entire population left), the decision was made to re-engage Ireland fully in the international capitalist economy, but on a different basis than previously.

THE NEW INTERNATIONAL DIVISION OF LABOUR

The new approach to economic development was based on the attraction of foreign manufacturing investment to Ireland. This, it was thought, would simultaneously bring capital, modern technology, and access to export markets to the Irish economy. Generous tax incentives and capital grants were the principal formal devices employed in pursuit of this policy. The new policy coincided with an unprecedented period of economic expansion, and growth in employment in manufacturing and services. As Table 1 shows, emigration rates were greatly reduced in the 1960s and there was substantial overall net immigration in the 1970s, partly as a result of earlier emigrants returning from a stagnating British economy (although even during this period there was net emigration among younger males and females). It is clear that foreign investment was mainly responsible for this major upturn in the Irish economy: by 1980, some 800 foreign manufacturing plants had been established, accounting for 34% of manufacturing employment, over half of industrial production, and 80% of non-food manufactured exports (Breathnach, 1988).

However, basic defects become increasingly apparent in the foreign investment based development model in the 1980s, as manufacturing employment dropped, service employment stagnated, unemployment soared (from 74,000 in 1980 to 232,000 - almost 18 per cent of the labour force - in 1987) and high levels of emigration reappeared once again (Table 1), despite continuing high levels of growth in industrial output. A government-sponsored review of industrial policy by the Telesis Consultancy Group, published in 1982, succinctly summarised these defects as follows:

"Foreign-owned industrial operations in Ireland with few exceptions do not embody the key competitive activities of the businesses in which they participate; do not employ significant numbers of skilled workers; and are not significantly integrated into traded and skilled sub-supply industries in Ireland" (Telesis Consultancy Group, 1982: 151).

In other words, foreign firms located in Ireland are mainly involved in low-skill assembly and testing operations with minimal research and development, little independent marketing capacity, limited decision-making functions, and limited supply linkages with the rest of the economy. As a result, the local employment spin-offs - particularly in the area of sophisticated services - of foreign firms in Ireland are very restricted. This is further exacerbated by the high level of profit outflows generated annually by these firms: in 1989, these outflows amounted to over 10% of GNP.

These findings locate very clearly Ireland's position within the New International Division of Labour (NIDL) which has emerged as a worldwide phenomenon in the postwar period, and particularly since 1960, when Ireland first began to pursue its current industrial policy in earnest. Essentially, the NIDL has involved a reorganisation by multinational firms of their international operations in order to create integrated global production systems. According to this system, different components of overall production systems are located in different countries in order to maximise the overall benefits to the companies concerned.

Perhaps the outstanding feature of the NIDL has been the location of labour-intensive activities in Third World countries where labour costs are particularly low. Meanwhile, the more knowledge-intensive activities are invariably retained within the advanced economies, and particularly in the home countries of the different multinational firms. These include research and development, management and marketing - by far the most highly-remunerated activities within the overall corporate system. Accordingly, the NIDL, while moving away from the simple industrial/agricultural dichotomy of the earlier IDL identified by Marx, nevertheless involves a structure which maintains a permanent development gap between the dominant and dependent economies in the system.

It is clear that Ireland continues to occupy a subservient position within the NIDL, corresponding to that occupied under the earlier "old" IDL. It is acknowledged that Ireland's principal function within the system is as a low-tax base which allows multinational firms to maximise their overall profits through the manipulation of transfer prices. Hence the truncated nature of the foreign industrial sector in Ireland, with a highly-developed set of material and service linkages with other parts of the firms concerned located elsewhere.

The limited employment spin-offs of the form of industrialisation which

Ireland has pursued over the last 30 years have inevitably led to a resumption of Ireland's historic role as a systematic source of substantial emigration. The net immigration experienced by Ireland in the 1970s may be seen as an aberration in this context, deriving from a sudden surge of foreign investment following entry to the EC in 1973, allied to a parallel surge in EC subsidies and a build-up of foreign borrowing by the Irish government. As these phenomena have levelled off in the 1980s, more normal conditions have reasserted themselves. Net emigration from Ireland reappeared in 1979 and gradually built up in the 1980s to a peak of 46,000 in 1988/89 - a level on a par with the worst years of the late 1950s. This high level of emigration reflects the population boom engendered by the buoyant conditions of the 1960s and 1970s, combined with the inability of the Irish economy to absorb the growing flow of new entrants to the labour market from the late 1970s onwards.

THE DISTINCTIVE NATURE OF RECENT IRISH EMIGRATION

The lack of higher-level service jobs in the Irish economy which has derived from the nature of foreign investment, allied to the much more sophisticated level of educational attainment among the Irish workforce over the last twenty or thirty years, has meant that the more recent stream of Irish emigrants has taken on characteristics which differ in key respects from earlier streams (Sexton, 1987; King and Shuttleworth, 1988). Thus, there has been a marked growth in the numbers of educated and trained young people leaving Ireland to find work elsewhere. This is reflected in the fact that the latest stream of Irish emigrants is predominantly of urban origin, whereas the mainly unskilled emigrants of previous generations were, for the most part, from rural backgrounds. Furthermore, the majority of males apparent among recent emigrants is also a new feature, attributable not just to growth in services employment in Ireland, as King and Shuttleworth (1988) suggest, but also to the fact that much of the unskilled manufacturing employment being provided in Ireland by foreign firms is targeted specifically at women.

By 1988, a quarter of primary degree recipients in Ireland were leaving the country within a year of graduating¹, a proportion which had more than tripled in six years. The corresponding figure for those leaving full-time education at secondary level has also risen during the 1980s, from 2.2% in 1980 to a peak of 7.3% in 1988 (Department of Labour, 1985-88). From an analysis of UK Labour Force Survey data, Hazelkorn (1989) found that, of the Irish-born who entered England and Wales (still by far the major destination of Irish emigration) in the period 1980-83, over one fifth were graduates, while only one quarter had no qualifications at all. This can be compared with a proportion of graduates of only 2.3% among those emigrants to England and Wales who arrived before 1955. These figures have to be interpreted with caution because, although the UK Labour Force Survey is a large sample, when disaggregated by age, period of arrival, etc. the numbers become rather small. However, these data serve to support earlier findings (Jackson, 1986a) that the occupational and skill profile of recent Irish immigrants to Britain is much more diverse than the rather homogeneous picture presented by popular imagery.

In the past, the so-called "culture of emigration" was largely defined in relation to the lower social classes in Ireland. However, data prepared and soon to be

published by the National Economic and Social Council show very similar emigration rates across occupational categories for 1987/88². This is corroborated by a survey carried out by Shuttleworth (this volume), which found a much higher preparedness among Irish university students to emigrate on graduation than their Scottish counterparts, even though both groups had similarly pessimistic views of their employment prospects at home.

While conventional explanations of skilled emigration from Ireland have tended to emphasise a lack of employment opportunities and high personal tax rates in Ireland, Murray and Wickham (1990) have pointed instead to lack of job satisfaction and poor career prospects associated with the kinds of employment generally available in Ireland, a consequence of the nature of the industrial structure which has been established in Ireland over the last thirty years. This is corroborated by the existence of shortages of workers in several areas such as computer software, financial services and construction, while large numbers of people who are qualified in these areas continue to emigrate.

This argument corresponds with the view that, under the NIDL, the most sophisticated (and best remunerated) forms of employment (research and development, financial management, administrative control, marketing, etc.) are heavily concentrated in the core economies, with the periphery confined to more routine operations with lower rewards for particular skills. This inevitably leads to a draining of skilled personnel from the periphery to the core. In the Irish case, an unknown proportion of this movement is channelled through the branch plants of multinational firms, while direct recruitment by such firms of new Irish graduates for work abroad has also taken on some significance in recent years (King and Shuttleworth, 1988). However, given the traditionally close integration of the British and Irish labour markets, many Irish skilled workers, like their unskilled forbears, rely on speculative movement to London (one of the main core cities of the global economy) in search of appropriate employment, frequently working upwards from modest beginnings once they are there.

Although the latest indications are that emigration from Ireland in 1989/90 has contracted significantly from the peak reached in the previous year, in the long term it seems likely that the trend for Irish skilled workers to move abroad will continue to strengthen, given the growing shortages of indigenously produced labour in the core European economies due to a secular decline in birth rates in these countries. Already, Irish graduates are beginning to move to the European mainland in significant numbers (a trend likely to be accelerated by moves to further integrate EC labour markets after 1992), while similar movements from Britain will create further openings for Irish emigrants in the latter country. As Murray and Wickham (1990) have noted, this movement of expensively-educated personnel from a relatively poor country constitutes a financial strain of considerable proportions on the Irish economy. This leads to the proposal that the costs of Irish education be subsidised by the core EC economies which benefit from the outflow of skilled Irish emigrants. However, this is to avoid the more fundamental question as to whether the structurally peripheral nature of the Irish economy is inescapable, or whether alternative economic policies could be pursued which, through a programme of basic structural reform, could offer a more adequate range of employment opportunities at home for the young skilled Irish workers of the future.

CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to sketch, in a very broad way, the changing structural parameters of the international capitalist economy which have shaped the nature of Ireland's long historical experience of emigration. It also suggests a change in the way we conceptualise the process of emigration (Jackson, 1986b). Moving away from models of migration based simply on decisions to move by individual actors, the aim has been to see the migration process within the broader structural constraints and opportunities offered by both the old and new international divisions of labour. This involves taking account of movements of capital (both human and financial) as well as labour. It also involves paying attention to the characteristics of local and sectoral labour markets both at home and abroad.

For Ireland, the sources of emigration have shifted from rural to urban areas in tune with corresponding changes in the structure of Irish society and in the spatial distribution of the Irish population. The factors underlying the decision to migrate increasingly have more to do with levels of education and technical qualification than possession of viable landholdings. Those with few or no qualifications still predominate among the new emigrants of the last decade; these represent a corps of marginal workers whose employment status is heavily dependent on fluctuating market trends. For many of these, a recurring choice will be between unemployment at home or work (or unemployment) abroad. They are, however, rapidly being superseded by a new corps of workers armed with technical and professional qualifications offering the prospect of relatively secure, challenging and well-paid employment. These are the "new Europeans" proffered by the Industrial Development Authority as an enticement to foreign investors; in fact, they are increasingly unlikely to be offered, or to accept, a job in Ireland.

Emigration remains as a major issue on the popular political agenda in Ireland. However, faced with existing high levels of unemployment, a massive national debt, and growing numbers of young people entering the labour force into the late 1990s, sustained emigration seems pragmatically essential to the political well-being of the Irish state for the foreseeable future. We have here a reprise of the situation obtaining in the 1950s which moved the historian T. Desmond Williams to observe at the time³ that emigration "...has been a godsend to the politicians. It is the great safety valve which prevents the emergence of a politically conscious working class". Thus, a population long accustomed to being lectured on the evils of emigration has more recently come to hear increasingly from public figures about its advantages. This paper has attempted to demonstrate that sustained emigration from Ireland is not a "natural" phenomenon, as some would have us believe. Rather, it is the product of historically created structures which, at least in principle, are susceptible to fundamental rearrangement.

NOTES

1. This figure includes those going on to further education, and non-nationals returning home after completing their degrees in Ireland.

2. See the article by Fintan O'Toole in the *Irish Times*, 6th April 1990.

3. See *The Spectator*, 20th April 1956.

REFERENCES

- Breathnach, P. (1988) Uneven development and capitalist peripheralisation: the case of Ireland, *Antipode*, 20 (2), 122-141.
- Breen, R., Hannan, D.F., Rottman, D.B. and Whelan, C.T. (1990) *Understanding Contemporary Ireland*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan.
- Coward, J. (1989) Irish population problems. In Carter, R.W.G. and Parker, A.J. (Eds.) *Ireland: A Contemporary Geographical Perspective*. London: Routledge, 55-86.
- Department of Labour (1985-88) *Economic Status of School Leavers*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.
- Fitzpatrick, D. (1984) *Irish Emigration 1801-1921*. Dublin: The Economic and Social History Society of Ireland, Studies in Irish Social and Economic History 1.
- Hazelkorn, E. (1989) Socio-economic profile of contemporary Irish emigrants and immigrants in the UK. Dublin: Dublin Institute of Technology, Rathmines (unpublished paper).
- Jackson, J.A. (1986a) The Irish in Britain. In Drudy, P.J. (Ed.) *Ireland and Britain since 1922*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 125-138.
- Jackson, J.A. (1986b) *Migration*. London: Longmans.
- King, R. and Shuttleworth, I. (1988) Ireland's new wave of emigration in the 1980s, *Irish Geography*, 21 (2), 104-108.
- Magdoff, H. (1978) *Imperialism: From the Colonial Age to the Present*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Marx, K. (1961) *Capital*. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House.
- Meenan, J. (1970) *The Irish Economy since 1922*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- Murray, P. and Wickham, J. (1990) Irish graduate emigration and the Single European Market, *Studies*, 79 (313), 56-62.
- Regan, C. (1981) Economic development in Ireland: the historical dimension, *Antipode*, 12 (1), 1-14.
- Sexton, J.J. (1987) Recent changes in the Irish population and in the pattern of emigration, *Irish Banking Review*, Autumn, 31-44.

Telesis Consultancy Group (1982) *A Review of Industrial Policy*. Dublin: NESC.

Walsh, F. (1981) The structure of neo-colonialism: the case of the Irish Republic, *Antipode*, 12 (1), 66-72.

GENDER AND RECENT IRISH MIGRATION TO BRITAIN

Bronwen Walter

*Department of Geography
Anglia Higher Education College
Cambridge*

INTRODUCTION

Gender is a prime consideration in all studies of migration. At the simplest level the danger of averaging two very different categories of migrants must be avoided; many migration studies continue to mask fundamental differences by referring to emigrants and immigrants as though they had no gender. Much more important is the active contribution of gender relations to the migration process, both economically, in the use of female and male labour in the economies of sending and receiving countries, and socially, in the wider opportunities available to women and men to have their needs met in different societies. Gender relations operate in the migration process in specific and changing contexts, involving two societies in which patriarchy and capitalism combine in different ways. In this paper the concern is with migration as a response to conditions in the Republic of Ireland and Britain in the post-war period. Three sets of issues are addressed. First, consideration is given to the gender balance in the migration flow and the extent to which this reflects social relations in Ireland. Secondly, the destinations of women and men leaving Ireland are examined, indicating the differential opportunities available to women and men. Finally, occupational change amongst Irish-born women and men in Britain provides one measure of the outcome of the immigration experience.

GENDER BALANCE OF IRISH EMIGRANTS

The pattern of Irish migration over time can be viewed in light of R.E. Kennedy's (1973) thesis of a norm of greater female emigration between 1871 and 1971, broken only by exceptional events. Three intercensal periods (1891-1901, 1911-26 and 1936-46) represent major British overseas wars when large numbers of Irish men joined the British army. If the military numbers are removed, women continue to predominate. The other aberrant decade was the 1950s when there was a massive decline in male agricultural employment in the Irish Republic. Overall men's employment fell by 35% compared with 12% for women. Kennedy argued that women's low status in Ireland accounted for emigration greater than would be predicted by economic factors alone. An index of this was the unusually small gap in life expectancy between women and men.

The relevance of this explanation to the post-war period can now be considered,