

this volume is ultimately unsatisfying because it concentrates on how endowed things and people are moved around the globe once they appear in a given place. But it never gets around to the real brass tacks of who produces or extracts what, how, where and why (and why not).

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BRIAN NOLAN, PHILIP J. O'CONNELL and CHRISTOPHER T. WHELAN (eds.), 2000, *Bust to Boom? The Irish Experience of Growth and Inequality*, Dublin: IPA. IRE20.00, 25.39.

and

KIERAN ALLEN, 2000, *The Celtic Tiger: The Myth of Social Partnership in Ireland*, Manchester: Manchester University Press. IRE13.00, 17.76.

Amid public debate about the social impact of Ireland's current economic boom, these two books are a timely contribution to the social science literature on the Celtic Tiger and adopt a central, though not exclusive, focus on the distributional and social class impacts of the boom. The Nolan et al., volume contains contributions from economists, sociologists, political scientists and a political economist, most of them present or former employees of The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and it marks the Institute's 40th anniversary. Kieran Allen's sociological work is an explicitly Marxist account of the Celtic Tiger and as such adds to the literature on the phenomenon from a theoretical perspective which up to now has been largely absent.

The ESRI volume adopts a more mainstream theoretical approach with different contributors drawing on new growth theory, welfare regime theory, modernisation theory, and critical theoretical currents within the new political economy to elucidate aspects of the subject. Much of its contents either repeat work published elsewhere (John Bradley and John Fitz Gerald on the changes in the Irish economy) or update data and evidence on the Irish labour market (Philip J. O'Connell); on changing class structure (Richard Layte and Christopher T. Whelan); on inequality in education (Emer Smyth and Damian F. Hannan); on earnings inequality, returns to education and low pay (Alan Barrett, John Fitz Gerald and Brian Nolan); on income inequality (Brian Nolan and Bertrand Maître); on poverty trends (Richard Layte, Brian Nolan and Christopher T. Whelan); on taxation and social welfare (Tim Callan and Brian

Nolan); on cumulative disadvantage (Brian Nolan, Richard Layte and Christopher T.

Whelan); on the spatial distribution of disadvantage (Tony Fahey and James Williams); and on gender equality and fertility decline (Tony Fahey, Helen Russell and Emer Smyth).

The work of these authors is already familiar to students of Irish social change and, while the updated data in their contributions to this volume are valuable, they offer no theoretical innovations to deepen our understanding of Ireland's recent high-growth phase of development. Such innovations are limited to two chapters: one by Rona Fitzgerald and Brian Girvin (on political culture as an element in Ireland's success) and the second by Seán Ó Riain and Philip J. O'Connell (on Ireland as a developmental state). Finally, Niamh Hardiman's chapter on social partnership extends the analysis in Hardiman, 1998. Coming from different theoretical stables, the two books can therefore be read as offering alternative analyses of the nature, the social impact, the genesis and the significance of Ireland's Celtic Tiger. This review will compare and contrast their treatment of elements of these key issues and interrogate the adequacy of their theoretical approaches.

The most striking difference between the two books is their overall judgement of Ireland's economic boom. For the contributors to the ESRI volume, it marks the transformation of Ireland, a belated catching up with our western European neighbours, an economic renaissance well on the way to making Ireland one of the most prosperous states in the European Union. For Allen, on the other hand, Ireland's recent growth is "intimately linked to the way the US economy itself has grown" (28) and it has enriched a small elite while leaving the majority relatively worse off. Both disagree also on its future prospects. Allen argues that "the assumption that an 'Irish model' based on social consensus and free market economics will guarantee continued growth is blinkered in the extreme" (29) while, in the ESRI volume, Bradley, Fitz Gerald and Ó Riain and O'Connell view Ireland's success as being the fruits of a long-term development strategy and thus being solidly based. Where lie the roots of their disagreement on this key issue?

The answer to this question is more implicit than explicit, resting as it does on the authors' theoretical assumptions about capitalism. Bradley in his opening comments on Fukuyama's thesis on the end of history implies that Ireland's success validates the neo-classical case that market-based capitalism is a universal path towards development potentially available to all countries (4-5) while Fitz Gerald argues that the supply of and demand for skilled labour in the Irish economy in the favourable demographic situation which will prevail for the next 15 years or so is resulting in Ireland catching up with its neighbours economically. Allen's more critical judgement is based both on Irish industry's high levels of dependence on FDI and on his scepticism concerning capitalist cycles of growth and the predictions of neo-classical economists. Unfortunately, however, both sides of the argument are over-selective in their use of evidence to substantiate their claims and fail to engage with theoretical critics. For example, Allen's focus on Ireland's level of dependency on US FDI and its vulnerability to a downturn in the US economy is not adequately treated in the ESRI volume. Thus, Bradley rightly characterises Ireland's dependence on Britain as a "web of dependency" through which, to use Mjøset's phrase, we became a free rider on Britain's decline (1992, p. 9). However, he fails to acknowledge that the changed nature of the Irish economy may have created a new "web of dependency" particularly on the

US economy, the nature and implications of which require careful analysis.¹ Touching

on the issue of dependency and taking a comparative look at the Irish economy, one would have expected the author to engage with the leading dependency analyst of the Irish case (O'Hearn, 1998). Fitz Gerald's account rests on a supply/demand analysis of the labour market. However, he fails to refer to O'Sullivan's critique that "the Irish workforce is not generating the knowledge and developing the skills that could form the social foundation for a more sustainable industrial base" due to the fact that the operations that Irish people perform for high-tech multinationals are "predominantly low-skilled" (1995, p. 388). Even more inadequate is his resort to "cultural change" as "probably the single most important factor underlying the current Irish economic renaissance" (55) while offering no theoretical analysis of what this might mean.² Finally, both these authors claim Ireland's success offers a model for underdeveloped economies without adverting to the potential difficulties for Ireland were other countries to replicate its success in attracting US multinationals.³

Allen's account is similarly inadequate. While acknowledging the role of the state in Ireland's economic success, throughout his book he views the state simply as a vehicle for the wealthy to impose their sectional interests on the rest of society (192). This sweeping, and indeed dangerous, dismissal of the state rests on what is perhaps the core argument of his book that the boom has benefited a small elite at the expense of the majority. He fluctuates between claiming that most are worse off as a result (47) and a claim that "while the general mass of the population may have seen some benefits, they are in fact receiving a declining share of the overall economy" (68), and he concludes that "a very small and highly contented minority have gained from the boom" (69) leaving a "discontented majority" (5). There is ample solid evidence in the ESRI book to show that the reality is far more complex, with data on occupational upgrading (Chapter 4), on increased and long-range upward mobility and a decline in downward mobility (Chapter 5) and of cumulative increases in real take home pay over the period 1987 to 1999 of 35 per cent (Chapter 15), to pick just a few examples. His conclusions rest on an *a priori* theoretical case rather than on a balanced survey of the evidence.

The most convincing case for Ireland's transformation is that offered by Ó Riain and O'Connell in their chapter on Ireland as a developmental state. This focuses on the Irish state's success in continually upgrading the country's industrial base through factors such as tax incentives and grants, creating a "transnational-friendly environment, a young and co-operative labour force and (later) a world class telecommunications system" (315). These authors' account of how the Irish state upgraded in a flexible and adaptive way the national system of innovation (315-324) is the major theoretical contribution of these two volumes to our understanding of the Celtic Tiger. They identify the reform of the IDA as serving to create "an increasingly sustainable and autonomous institutional space ... within which the indigenous

¹. The implications of such dependency were recognised in a newspaper article by Garret FitzGerald (The Irish Times, December 30th, 2000).

². For a critical analysis of the role of culture in the Celtic Tiger, see Kirby, Gibbons and Cronin (forthcoming).

³. For example, Sachs mentions Costa Rica's success in attracting a major new Intel semiconductor facility, reportedly beating competition from Malaysia, Ireland and Mexico (1997, p. 62) while Clark outlines the role played by the IDA in designing Costa Rica's strategy to attract foreign investment (Clark, 1997, p. 90).

development agenda could be pursued and the task of building a national system of innovation undertaken" (323). An unintended consequence of this, they conclude was to create "a social group which would ultimately come to be the foundation of an alternative model of development ... a new class ... the socio-political force at the heart of the Irish boom of the 1990s" (324). While achieving a far more adequate "fit" between theory and evidence, this account gives rise to a number of major difficulties. A lot rests on the significance they attach to the emergence of a new Irish entrepreneurial class leading a dynamic indigenous sector. Undoubtedly there is some truth to this, though the extent of the dependence of this class on US multinationals and the continuing dualism of Ireland's industrial structure between foreign and indigenous industry requires closer analysis than it receives in either of these two volumes.⁴ For example, it is interesting to note that the former IDA managing director, Padraic White, appears less sanguine about the extent to which the MNC high-tech sector is firmly embedded in the Irish economy. He argues that the IDA must maintain its effort to keep attracting new multinationals to Ireland since "the nature of industry keeps changing – there is a continuous process of decline in some sectors (for example, textiles and mechanical engineering) and growth in others (software and e-commerce). So we can assume that a fair share of the industries we have today will decline and decay in coming years" (Mac Sharry and White, 2000, p. 313). This raises questions about the extent to which one can claim that Ireland's success is based on upgrading a national system of innovation.

However, a more fundamental and theoretical difficulty lies at the heart of Ó Riain and O'Connell's chapter with which the authors seem to grapple but never satisfactorily address. This is that the chapter treats as distinct the state's "developmental" and distributional roles. The authors do not tell us why they prefer to do this,⁵ but by doing so they present a dualistic reading of remarkable state capacity on economic issues in one section with, in the next, its poor capacity in distributional or wider social terms.⁶ Indeed, as Allen's book far more adequately captures, economic success has gone hand in hand with stark social failures (such as in housing, transport, the health service, childcare, homelessness, and children in need). Ó Riain and O'Connell seem to accept this: they acknowledge that the new dynamic of growth and improved living standards is also one of "increasing social polarisation" (315) and weakening welfare effort (338) and that social partnership "has not mobilised support for an expansion of welfare effort during the economic boom" (334). However, they fail to explore the relationship between these two apparently contradictory dimensions of

⁴ O'Sullivan's more careful analysis highlights the ambiguities that still characterise Irish industrial development. She concludes: "Without better empirical analysis, the evaluation of current industrial performance and policy will continue to be a cyclical phenomenon with waves of exuberant optimism and dark pessimism obscuring the long-term trajectory of industrial development in Ireland" (2000, p. 283).

⁵ The international literature on the developmental state defines the state's developmental nature as residing in its success in achieving growth with equity (for a survey of the growth with equity literature, see Kirby (2000a), Chapter 6; on the developmental state, see Leftwich, 1996, where on page 288 he emphasises that these states base their legitimacy on their distributional effectiveness).

⁶ For a fuller treatment of the distributional impact of state policy in areas such as housing, education, health, taxation and welfare, see Cantillon, Corrigan, Kirby and O'Flynn (2001).

the Irish state, to appreciate that distributional failure undermines the sustainability of economic success or, more fundamentally, to interrogate the validity of their classification of developmental success if it combines relative distributional failure.

It is on issues of distribution and social class polarisation that these two books find quite a bit of common ground but it is also where the dissonance between theory and evidence is most marked. Allen's view that a minority has gained disproportionately from the boom and that there has been a certain class polarisation gains substantial support from the ESRI data. In their examination of the distributional impact of changes in taxation and welfare payments, Callan and Nolan conclude: "During the period since the start of the boom, their overall impact has been to produce or permit a redistribution of income from the bottom of the distribution towards the top, though maintaining a social protection floor. The tax-cutting strategy in particular has favoured higher incomes through its concentration on cutting tax rates ..." (203). On trends in earnings distribution, Barrett, Fitz Gerald and Nolan find that the tightening of the labour market between 1994 and 1997 resulted in the bottom decile and quartile of the income distribution keeping pace with the median and, if anything, increasing marginally faster while the top decile continued to move away from the median (130). Interestingly, on income inequality, Nolan and Maître find the middle of the distribution gaining at the expense of the top and the bottom between 1994 and 1997 (152-153). In a very revealing finding, Layte and Whelan conclude that there is no evidence of increasing meritocracy in the Irish class system as educational qualifications have, if anything, declined between 1973 and 1994 as a means to mobility and that class origins have strengthened (101-104). Thus, the advantages associated with property outweigh education in achieving class position. Smyth and Hannan in their sharply focused treatment of education and inequality come to a similar conclusion in their findings of a widening gap between professional and unskilled manual groups in their access to full-time, third-level education (119) and of the fact that, controlling for educational level, social background continues to influence occupational status (124). Ó Riain and O'Connell specify that it is the new entrepreneurial and technical class that is gaining disproportionately: "Their increasing profits and wages would create rising inequality even as they became firmly embedded at the heart of the Irish economy and polity" (324) while "the bulk of Irish society has ... acquiesced to [sic] the increasing gap between themselves and the rising professional and business classes" (339).

Thus there seems a contradiction at the heart of the Celtic Tiger but it is in dealing adequately with this at the level of theory that these two books are weakest. In the ESRI volume, Ó Riain and O'Connell go furthest in acknowledging the issue but fail adequately to address it. Bradley and Fitz Gerald ignore it, viewing economic growth as an end in itself, while the other contributors limit themselves to empirical issues with rarely more than a brief theoretical comment. Allen's book centrally addresses the issue but labours to make the evidence support his pre-existing theoretical case that a discontented majority offers a new basis for radical class political action. His view that there exists a discontented majority finds poor support in the evidence and his argument that the significant class divide is that between "the majority of workers, both blue collar and routine white-collar" and "the ruling class" (45) fails to acknowledge the different interests of workers such as those in the public and private sectors, or those in high-wage MNCs and in low-wage and vulnerable service sectors. Though he criticises the ESRI view of a growing middle class, in one place calling it

"extremely vague" (41), the Institute's well-developed analysis of the Irish class structure is far more concrete and empirically supported than is Allen's. Even more bizarre is his dismissal of political action to change state policy in favour of a vaguely stated option for co-operative control by the workers of the machinery of production (192).

This failure to develop a subtle dialectical interplay between theory and evidence, the failure in other words to elaborate a theoretical view adequate to the ambiguous nature of contemporary Irish development, weakens also the wider claims being made for the Irish case. Essentially, what is being claimed in the ESRI volume is that Ireland's success shows the ability of a small state to use its power to adjust to a globalised world economy in a way that does not undermine the capacity of the state, destroy jobs, increase earnings dispersion or worsen working conditions but that allows for economic development through internationalisation (see O'Connell, p. 59). The problem with these claims is that they fail to theorise more fully what is meant either by globalisation⁷ or by development. Due to the lack of clarity about globalisation, it is not at all clear what is being claimed for the Irish case. The editors in the ESRI volume state their case as follows: "[T]he Irish growth experience and its distributional consequences is not a simple story of globalisation, forced withdrawal of the state and the promotion of neo-liberalism" (1). The notoriously slippery term "neo-liberal" seems to be introduced here as a synonym for deregulation and the retreat of the state. This, however, overlooks more recent understandings that neo-liberalism entails not so much the retreat of the state as the resituating of the state "into a subordinate relationship with global market forces" (Falk, 1996, p. 15) and "concentrating the benefits of growth upon already advantaged sectors within and among societies" (Falk, 1997, p. 19). In this "post-Washington Consensus" (Stiglitz, 1998) "institutions matter" (Burki and Perry, 1998) as they are re-shaped to embody more fully a market logic and impose this on society.⁸ The claim being made for the Irish case, therefore, rests on too crude a characterisation of globalisation and would require a more subtle political economy analysis of the changing relationship between state and market in Ireland and its impact on social well-being than is contained in these two volumes.⁹

An equally glaring theoretical neglect in these two books is any discussion of what is meant by development. Allen is critical of the attempt to apply development theory to the Irish case because it shifted the focus off class divisions within Ireland (21) while most of the contributors to the ESRI volume who use the term presuppose that its meaning is clear. The omission is particularly evident in the chapter by Ó Riain and

⁷ In these two volumes, one finds reflected each of the understandings of globalisation identified by Held et al. (1999, pp. 2-14). Bradley and Fitz Gerald reflect (to the extent to which one can judge on the basis of accounts that only mention globalisation in passing) understandings close to a weak reading of the hyperglobalist thesis, namely the privileging of an economic logic. Indeed, a quote from one of those identified as a quintessential hyperglobalist, Kenichi Ohmae, lauding Ireland as "a harbinger of the coming shift in national economies" graces the back cover of the ESRI book. Allen clearly reflects the sceptical thesis in his discussion of "the myth of globalisation" (188) while the Ó Riain and O'Connell chapter reflects the transformationalist thesis, with its view that the state can, in an innovative and flexible way, continue to play a crucial developmental and distributional role in adjusting to the opportunities of globalisation.

⁸ For a discussion of this point in relation to Latin America, see Kirby (2000b).

⁹ For an analysis of Ireland's political economy in the 1990s, see Kirby (forthcoming).

O'Connell since the adjective "developmental" is central to their case for the success of the Irish state. The only discussion of the term takes place at the beginning of Chapter 14 on political culture by Rona Fitzgerald and Brian Girvin. It is, unfortunately, an ill-informed, confused and seriously inadequate treatment. It seems self-evident to this reviewer that any claims for developmental success in Ireland require that the meaning of the term be specified.¹⁰

If globalisation is the context and development the end sought, the contributors to the ESRI volume agree that the state is a key means to get there (though the reader is left with the impression that more fundamental disagreement between contributors about the respective roles of state and market lurks beneath the surface). However, serious weaknesses are also evident in treatment of the state in both volumes. Allen's dismissal of the state has already been mentioned, while most authors in the ESRI volume equate the state with bureaucratic elites; civil society is largely missing despite the editors' contention in their introduction that "politics matter" (3).

The principal reason given for the transformation of the Irish state's capacity is the conversion of bureaucratic and political elites (ESRI authors avoid mention of corruption among these elites while Allen treats of it with unrestrained indignation¹¹). Again the Ó Riain and O'Connell chapter is the only one to acknowledge that the state is far more than a bureaucratic machine and that its form is shaped by social struggle. It presents the success of the Irish state as the outcome of a coalition forged in the late 1980s between a burgeoning professional class and a group of unionised workers, each of which held the other in check, assisted by the state: "The neo-liberal impulses of the rising class of internationalised professionals are at least partly held in check in Ireland by the continuing ability of the unions to safeguard the basic social rights guaranteed (at a low level) by the universalistic elements of the Irish welfare state and by the middle class's own self-interest in maintaining the subsidies provided to them by the pay-related welfare state" (338). This is a plausible conjunctural reading of the period from the late 1980s to the late 1990s and offers a far better analysis of the shifting class nature of Irish society than does Allen's attempt to counterpose a discontented majority against a ruling class. However, Ó Riain and O'Connell imply that the basis of this coalition is now being undermined: the unions and other social actors have less say in shaping the lead sectors of the economy, the role of the state has given way substantially to the market, and the new class of technical professionals and self-employed small businesses which have become the basis of spiralling inequality in market incomes fall largely outside the institutions of social partnership (338-339).

There is a quality of insight in Ó Riain and O'Connell's analysis which is rare in the more static institutional and policy focus of much Irish social analysis. This allows them uncover some of the fundamental contextual challenges facing social partnership. Through her more empirical examination of how social partnership

¹⁰ In a recent article Danny McCoy seemed to recognise the need for more attention to be devoted to theorising development when he wrote: "Development can be interpreted as qualitative increases in economic well-being in contrast to the quantitative increases implied by growth" (*The Irish Times*, January 5th, 2001). Echoing Naim's contention that economic thinking in the 1990s has led to the rediscovery of development (2000, pp. 521-523), McCoy added that that "continued growth can be at the expense of development".

¹¹ For a more adequate theoretical treatment of corruption in Ireland, see Kearney and Murphy (2000).

functions, Hardiman highlights the strains caused by the fact that it is not addressing the growing inequalities generated by economic success and by the limits of its embeddedness in the political system (305).¹² Taken together, these two chapters pose major questions about the sustainability of this model of “competitive corporatism” (343) in which the equality agenda of earlier corporatist arrangements gave way to an emphasis on international competitiveness and macro-economic stability and which has been seen as perhaps the single most innovative element of the Irish success. By contrast, Allen’s book, despite its subtitle, pays little attention to social partnership, dismissing it as a means of holding down wages as profits boomed.

Probing the reasons for these institutional and class outcomes requires a detailed analysis of Irish political culture. Unfortunately, Fitzgerald and Girvin’s chapter on political culture and the conditions for success is by far the weakest in the ESRI book. Adopting too static and elitist a view of political culture, it fails to weave together into a coherent account such disparate elements as the liberal/conservative divide on moral issues, swings in electoral support and Ireland’s economic success. Bizarrely, it neglects what Ó Riain and O’Connell quite rightly identify as the most salient feature of Irish political culture in blunting the state’s ability to forge a long-term developmental project, namely its clientelism (see Kirby, 1997, pp. 193-210).

The failure to follow through on the implications of some of the insights or potential of these chapters lends the ESRI volume a frustratingly unfinished quality. For example, in their conclusion, the authors argue that reversing the trend in the declining proportion of national income going on social spending will require a re-negotiation of the terms of social partnership and they also expect some reversal in the marked decline in the wage share of national income (352-353). Yet, it is far from clear how this could happen given the changing nature of class forces and the tendency of the Irish state to accommodate rather than to pursue robust redistributive politics as uncovered in these chapters. With the weakening of those class actors who might espouse such a politics, where lies the hope for a re-negotiation of the terms of partnership? Allen would respond that it lies in class struggle, but the divergent interests of workers as mentioned above seems to preclude this. Furthermore, the fact that the Irish success rests on being a low-tax, low-spend economy raises other dilemmas not mentioned in either of these two books. As Ireland’s stand at the Nice Summit illustrated, the Irish government believes its low corporation tax regime is key to its industrial policy. In the past, this has necessitated high personal taxes but, in a period of economic growth, there is now room to reduce these. However, there is a vicious circle here and some element will have to change if we are to reverse the decline in social spending relative to GDP and to some of our nearest neighbours. It is far from clear how this can happen.

The weaknesses outlined in these two books point to more fundamental theoretical and methodological weaknesses which pervade the Irish social sciences and make them blunt instruments for adequately uncovering the ambiguities and complexities of Ireland’s recent phase of development. The foreword to the ESRI volume recognises the need for a “genuine cross-disciplinary transfer of insights and ideas from one field to another” (xiii), yet there is limited evidence in these books of such a transfer. There is little here of Giddens’s expectation of a renewed synthesis in the social sciences in

¹². These are exactly the concerns raised about social partnership by the President of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, Inez McCormack, in an article in *The Irish Times*, January 25th, 2001.

which pre-existing disciplinary divisions will become progressively less sharply-defined and a theoretical synthesis will emerge marked by an interest in large-scale, long-term processes of social transformation (Giddens, 1987). Specifically, while the ESRI volume offers rich empirical evidence and data, it is far weaker in contributing to what must be the most urgent theoretical issue facing analysts of the Celtic Tiger, namely how to understand the relationship between economy and society in Ireland today and, by extension, the nature and determinants of social well-being.¹³ Most fundamentally there seems little awareness of the need to develop, through a careful dialectical interaction of theory and evidence, a fuller and more adequate theoretical understanding of the Irish case. As a result, the ESRI volume is rather too suffused in places with an “end of history” tone, as if Ireland has finally made it and the vast contradictions and injustices of contemporary Irish society are minimised. It is revealing (and, indeed, disturbing) that Fitzgerald and Girvin can write the following without apparently any awareness that a similar situation could face Ireland in 2001 as it nervously eyes a US economic downturn and faces the prospect of becoming a net contributor to the EU: “If in 1973, FDI and membership of the EEC promised to provide Ireland with a positive sum outcome, avoid distributional conflict and secure internal political stability, the onset of recession after 1973 undermined this prospect” (275).

In their introduction, the editors of the ESRI volume claim that the Irish success “holds out the prospect of prescriptions that go beyond the Irish case”, namely that “sustained development can be achieved by a combination of factors that, in principle, are available to other countries” (1). Such a claim requires a more rigorous interrogation of the theoretical accounts of the Irish case than is offered here to see if it really merits the wider significance attached to it. Until this is done, claims about “the Irish model” (Bradley, 23) and its “lessons for the periphery” (Fitz Gerald, 55) rest upon an insufficiently theorised and a partial reading of the Celtic Tiger.

¹³. See Kirby (2000a, Chapter 2 and forthcoming, Section II: Chapters 4, 5 and 6) for a fuller discussion of this topic.

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