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# New Perspectives on the Irish Famine

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Fifteen years ago a respected historian described the Irish famine as no more than a detail in European history: '[E]ven the scale of the great famine was not unique when seen in the context of contemporary European experience'. Even then a little research would have shown the opposite to have been true: a comparative perspective on the famine makes it stand out, not only in nineteenth-century European history, but in the world history of famines. Much closer to the truth is economist Amartya Sen's throwaway remark a few years ago that 'in no other famine in the world [was] the proportion of people killed as large as in the Irish famines in the 1840s'.<sup>1</sup>

George Boyce's baffling claim reflected the tendency in the 1970s and the 1980s to talk down, if not to hush up, the famine in lecture theatres and in history books. Recent research has tended to talk it back up. It finds that the Irish famine was much more murderous, relatively speaking, than most historical and most modern famines, that it lasted long beyond when most general accounts used to end, and that its impact spread across all counties, classes, and creeds. It also denies the inevitability of the famine and is less inhibited about pointing to policy failures. Here I offer a selective review of some of the perspectives and findings of what could be called the 'new famine history'.

## *Winners and Losers?*

In general accounts the million or so who perished and the million or so who emigrated are often treated together as the main victims of the famine. This is understandable, but it glosses over three important points about emigration. First is the likelihood that the emigrants were self-selected by economic status: the poorest died while the not-so-poor (by the standards of the day) left. Emigration required capital either in the form of savings, or connections, or good will that could be converted into cash. In practice this meant that labourers were trapped, while tenants might, if lucky, receive compensation for quitting or use the rent due to abscond. Many contemporary accounts refer to small farmers leaving or planning their departure. In west Kerry, for

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example, farmers swapped their holdings with their more prosperous neighbours for the passage money to America. In the words of the inimitable Peig Sayers, '*nach shin é a thug na feirmeacha móra do dhaoine mar éinne go mbíodh an tógaint cinn aige agus aon phingin airgid thiocfadh fear des na comharsain chuige agus thabharfadh sé dó a chuid talún ar chostas Mheiriceá* [isn't that how the people got the big farms around here, since all those who had any standing left would find neighbours willing to trade their land in return for passage to America]'. Around Skibbereen 'a good many' were giving up their land and preparing for departure; these were the 'substantial farmers, who still have a little means left'.<sup>2</sup>

Second, analysis of passenger lists suggests that the typical emigrant fared better than populist 'coffin-ship' rhetoric would have it. This is not to deny the horrors of Grosse-Isle and other places, but in general, emigration to the New World and emigration to the next world were not the same thing. Thirdly, emigration almost certainly reduced the number who died in Ireland and in Britain. There is a perverse sense in which some at least of the famine Irish were fortunate to have had emigration to a better place as a safety-valve; compare the lot of poor Rwandans or North Koreans in 1997.<sup>3</sup>

The heavy blow inflicted on landlords by the famine is a recurrent theme in the historiography. Typical is F.S.L. Lyons, who linked the demise of 'many of the old landlords' to 'the crushing burden of paying vast sums in poor relief at a time when rents drastically diminished'. The creation of the Incumbered Estates Court in 1849, Lyons suggested, forced many such landlords to sell out to 'a new type of owner who knew the value of money'. The overall impression given by such accounts is that much – if not most – of the early business of the Court was famine-inspired. In Lindsay Proudfoot's summary, 'up to one-quarter of all land changed hands as a result of Famine-induced bankruptcy among landowners'.<sup>4</sup> However, there is a strong element of *Post famem ergo propter famem* about this view. The trouble is that the timing of the Court's creation – a measure that had been on the cards in any case – has made several historians forget that the famine can explain only a small fraction of the debts of landlords forced into the Court in its early years. The average sum owed by such landlords was about fifteen times the gross rental due; on about one estate in four the ratio of debt to annual rent was twenty-five. Rents foregone and increased outlays after 1845 would have accounted for a few years' income at most. The landlords hauled before the Court were thus quite atypical. The majority who had been living within their means before 1845 survived the famine a little bruised, but that is all.<sup>5</sup>

Alas, as an institutional remedy the Court came too late. When the famine struck many Irish estates were chronically insolvent. Quite how many remains somewhat unclear, but roughly one owner in twelve had ceded management to the Court of Chancery. Estates in Chancery represented the extremes of

indebtedness; they do not include heavily indebted estates still in proprietorial control before the famine. Naturally landlords in such dire straits were poorly placed to help their tenants when disaster struck in 1846. Nor were they likely to have engaged in proper maintenance and improvement before 1846.

Evictions and clearances are an important part of famine history, but confusing and incomplete statistics make estimating their number difficult. In new work on the topic Tim O'Neill argues that evictions were far more frequent than earlier accounts had suggested. O'Neill's best guess at the number of ejectments in 1846-8 alone is almost 80,000 families, compared to Mary Daly's 19,000 for the same period, and W.E. Vaughan's 70,000 for 1846-54 as a whole. A key corollary is that evictions peaked sooner than hitherto believed, in 1848; O'Neill implies that the number of evictions in 1849-54 was only half that in 1846-8. This new research also promises to revise our understanding of the geography of famine evictions.<sup>6</sup>

If the earlier literature painted too bleak a picture of the famine's impact on landlords, it had virtually nothing to say about another important socio-economic group embracing merchants, traders, shopkeepers, bankers, and moneylenders. Whenever and wherever famines occur such people get more than their share of the blame; those who are hungry invariably believe that traders have driven prices higher than warranted by supply. By implication traders gain during famines. Economists in the tradition of Smith and Malthus tend to be sceptical of such populist claims, arguing instead that markets tend to minimise the damage done by harvest failures. Others, like Amartya Sen, would counter that markets can exacerbate crises by allowing food to seek more cash-rich markets.

Famine research on this topic in Ireland has scarcely scratched the surface. My own tentative findings suggest that market failure was the exception rather than the rule; though some profiteering was inevitable, traders as a group did not prosper during the famine. Potato markets continued to be reasonably well integrated regionally while there were potatoes to distribute. An unusual and particularly rich source of data on potato markets in Cork city suggests that farmers and merchants did not hold back supplies when the blight struck; on the contrary the proportion of the crop sold in the months after the harvest was much higher after 1845 than before. Nor, in the wholesale grain trade, are the gaps between prices in different towns and cities that profiteering would have produced evident in the data. Price series tend to track one another in a way that could not have been produced by collusion on the part of traders in places quite far apart. However, the evidence is not all one way.<sup>7</sup> None of this rules out the likelihood of some profiteering at retail level and in remote places. This is still a neglected research area, perhaps in part because so little archival material on shopkeepers and moneylenders has survived. However, there is a good deal of data in the Blue Books on the allied

trade of pawnbroking. Its message is of an initial rise in business, followed by big rises in the proportions of unredeemed pledges, forcing caution and a reduction in both the number of pledges and the average amount allowed per pledge. Indeed, as early as mid-November 1846, a correspondent from Miltown in Kerry remarked that 'The Pawn offices are so stocked with Goods that 10 shillings could scarcely be raised on the value of five Pounds'.<sup>8</sup>

In sum, while the suffering was very unequally spread, it is not easy to identify any big group in the economy who gained *during* the famine. Once a new normality had been restored, most survivors were better off. But that is another story.

### *Local Perspectives*

In recent years local studies have thrown up a good deal that is of interest. Sometimes local evidence corroborates what one might have expected to find from more aggregated data, as in the case of Goleen in west Cork, which had 'the highest mortality rate, the lowest emigration rate, the lowest Poor Law Valuation and the remotest location' of a group of seven parishes studied by Patrick Hickey.<sup>9</sup> However, researchers with an eye to local detail have also produced evidence of parishes or regions or groups that seem to have fared 'better' than might have been expected. Perusal of the statistical evidence reveals significant and sometimes perplexing variations in population decline across contiguous parishes or electoral divisions, lending plausibility to claims that plentiful fish here, a bad landlord there, or an energetic relief committee or board of guardians somewhere else, may have made a difference. Such studies also remind us that the famine ended unevenly.<sup>10</sup>

In the workhouses congestion bred contagion, but again new local research suggests that their record in the spread of infectious disease is mixed. In early 1847 Tralee's medical officer repeatedly warned the local guardians of the risks of an overcrowded workhouse; by early March the master was in bed with typhus and 'the progressive increase of mortality in the house, as dreaded by the medical officer in his previous reports' was minuted. In Ballina the situation was much worse. In mid-March there were 230 cases of 'a malignant kind of fever' in the workhouse, and for several weeks the *weekly* death rate in the house ranged between 5 and 10 percent. Nor was high mortality restricted to the west. In February 1847 the death rate in Lurgan workhouse matched that in Ballina, with dysentery the major killer, and disease and overcrowding forced the temporary closure of the workhouse. More than half the 600 or so people dying in Lurgan workhouse between October 1846 and March 1847 had entered it in a 'healthy' state – a scandalous record which provoked an official inquiry. On the other hand the evidence from North Dublin Union at the height of the famine is that the great majority of those dying there had been in poor health when admitted. Deaths in the

North Dublin Union between February and May 1847 were three times as high as they had been a year earlier, but conditions outside the workhouse, not inside, were to blame for this.<sup>11</sup>

The local record offers a corrective to over-generalisation based on sometimes dubious and unrepresentative aggregate data. But one of the drawbacks of local history is that its insights can be like blobs of paint in an Impressionist painting: one needs more blobs and one needs to stand back before one can really appreciate what is going on.<sup>12</sup> Often, county- and province-wide patterns override local variations. There *were* broad regularities in the patterns of suffering and mortality, and these too require explanation. No manageable model of the famine can explain *all* the variation observed in the record; accounting for the broader patterns and the local 'anomaly' should be seen as complementary tasks.

### *Folk Memory*

Last year the controversial journalist Eoghan Harris wrote that 'If we fail to teach history, the vacuum will be filled with racist folk lore'.<sup>13</sup> Harris's remark is out of tune with the renewed interest in oral tradition or folk memory as a window on what happened in the 1840s and how it shaped attitudes later. Here I will make two points about memory as a source for famine historians. The first is that it is less populist than suspected. The perspective of the majority of those offering information on crime and thieving during the famine offers a good illustration of this. The eighty-six-year-old woman from Ballykilcline in Roscommon, who in 1957 remembered her father saying that he had kept his family alive by stealing food during the famine, represented the standpoint of the starving: '[H]is mother made a big pocket for him inside his coat and he used to steal oatenmeal and put it in this big pocket and bring it home and that's how he kept his family from starving and he was only a very young lad at the time'. In a similar vein is the confession of a sixty-five-year-old Wicklow woman that her grandfather stole a leg of mutton from a 'well-to-do farmer' during the famine because his family was hungry.<sup>14</sup> Such accounts of kin as thieves are very rare, however. In a majority of cases – such as that from Meelick in Clare that 'people had to take in turnips, otherwise all would be stolen', or that from Tuamgraney in the same county that 'the people remained up all night in turn minding their turnip crop', or another from outside Westport where people made sure that they travelled in daylight and 'in considerable strength' when returning home laden with flour – the perspective would seem to be that of the 'haves' rather than the 'have nots'.<sup>15</sup>

My second point is that while as a source on measurable events or data, oral memory is weak and untrustworthy, its very limitations can raise interesting issues. Wage levels on the public works provide a good example. In

almost two-thirds of the quotations reported in Cathal Póirtéir's excellent compendia of folklore material, *Glórtha ón nGorta* and *Famine Echoes*, the rate of fourpence is mentioned. This, of course, is far below the average on the works at their peak in late 1846 and early 1847. One account from west Kerry doubled the confusion: '*Toistiun sa lá a bhí dhóibh agus do thuilleadar a lán pingíní airgid ann. Thuill cuid acu oiread is a thug to Meiriceá iad* (Fourpence a day was what they got and they earned a fair penny. Some of them earned enough to bring them to America)'. But in this instance the very consistency of the oral record in its inaccuracy prompts us to think and dig a little deeper. Presumably it is a reminder of the low wages paid on the public works in 1847-8 or even later.<sup>16</sup>

Another instance of the oral record's fallible numeracy is its tendency to argue that the ravages of the famine were far less severe in parish A or region B or townland C than suggested by censal evidence. One might have expected the opposite from such a potentially 'emotive' source. Why this bias? One possibility is that folk memory erred in equating famine deaths with starvation. Thus there is a local tradition that there were no deaths from starvation during the Great Famine in Killaloe in east Clare. The claim, repeated by Roy Foster in his mould-breaking *Modern Ireland*, creates the impression that Killaloe escaped lightly, an impression strengthened by the accompanying reminder that 'some local landlords behaved well'. Maybe so, but the claim ignores the 113 deaths recorded in Killaloe's temporary fever hospital, which did not open until November 1847. It also ignores the hefty drop in the town's population from 2,783 in 1841 to 2,218 in 1851, and in the parish's rural hinterland from 2,948 to 1,666. Killaloe's defective baptismal records also bear the scars of the Famine, and the harrowing account of his daily routine left behind by the local curate offers ample corroboration.<sup>17</sup> Might these frequent contradictions between folk memory and the statistical record reflect a deeper contradiction between what happened and what survivors wished to remember happened?

#### 4. Medicine and Disease

Over the last few years, Laurence Geary has produced several useful studies of medical-historical aspects of the famine. Like Sir William MacArthur and Peter Froggatt before him, Geary stresses that most Irish famine victims, like most famine victims throughout history, succumbed not to literal starvation or exposure but to diseases such as typhoid fever and dysentery.<sup>18</sup> The micro-organisms responsible for such diseases were not identified or understood for another half century. Physicians, we must remember, could not even immunise or cure themselves, and indeed mortality rates in the medical profession seem to have been higher than in the population as a whole.<sup>19</sup> What proportion of Irish famine deaths might have been avoided by better medical knowledge, in particular the revolutionary diagnoses of Louis

Pasteur and Robert Koch? Like questions about the marginal cost of saving lives through more generous relief, this question cannot be answered with any precision, but again a comparative perspective adds some insight.

A re-analysis of the impressive, if flawed, cause-of-death tables in the 1851 census suggests that, roughly speaking, half of famine mortality was caused by diseases that were the result of bad nutrition and the other half by diseases due to the indirect effects of the famine on personal behaviour and social structure. Less detailed but probably more complete cause-of-death records from famines in nineteenth-century India and early twentieth-century Russia are available for comparison. Data from the south Russian district of Saratov in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution paints a picture uncannily similar to that in the Irish census. Moscow and Petrograd provide poorer quality data, but they too stress the overwhelming part played by infectious diseases. In the case of the great Indian famines of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, infection rather than starvation accounted for most deaths. This was also true in Bengal in 1943-4, where malaria was the main killer. The main difference between India in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and Ireland in the 1840s is the reduced role of diarrhoea and dysentery in the latter.<sup>20</sup>

A very different picture is offered by cause-of-death evidence on a series of smaller, well-documented European famines in the 1940s. Data on the causes of death in Warsaw's Jewish ghetto before its destruction by the Nazis in July 1942 shows that as the death rate there quintupled between 1940 and 1941-2, the proportion of deaths attributed to starvation rose from one in a hundred to one in twenty five. Typhus's share remained miniscule, however. In the towns and cities of the western Netherlands famine killed about ten thousand people during the starvation-winter of 1944-5. Here also starvation accounted for a significant share of the rise, while infectious diseases counted for relatively little. The same holds for the famine that hit parts of Greece, including the cities of Athens and Piraeus, in 1941-2.

The nosologies of the Indian and Russian famines have much more in common with Ireland's than with those of famine-affected regions of Europe in the 1940s. Why? The outcome suggests a variation on a pattern described by the medical historian Thomas McKeown. In a series of publications dating back to the 1960s McKeown maintained, controversially, that medical science had contributed little to life expectancy before the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>21</sup> He argued that in the developed world the decline in mortality from several infectious diseases had preceded effective science-based medical treatment. In those parts of today's less developed world most at risk from famine, however, health lags rather than leads medical science. The economic and political progress which are preconditions for modern health technologies playing their part in improving the health of the masses are lacking.

Before World War II the people of Warsaw and the Netherlands had

enjoyed living standards beyond the dreams of the Irish poor a century earlier. Their greater prosperity meant, among other things, hot water, adequate cooking facilities, clean bedding, and clean clothes – items beyond the reach of most of the pre-famine Irish poor. Famine conditions widened these contrasts, and Ireland's disadvantage was worsened by the mobility of its population. In sum, the gap between conditions in Ireland in the late 1840s and the preventive measures implied by the findings of Pasteur and Koch was enormous. The new insights could not have done much for the very poor. Greater care with food and water might have prevented deaths from dysentery in institutions such as the workhouses in Ballina and Lurgan, and an appreciation of the danger of lice as carriers of fever might have led to some preventive action on that score. But for those who were better off, the benefits of understanding Pasteur and Koch probably would have been greater. In terms of total lives saved, such an understanding might not have had a major impact, but it would almost certainly have made Irish famine mortality more class-specific.

The emergence of antibacterial medicine and effective fluid and electrolyte replacements came too late to have played a role in any of the famines mentioned. In famine relief nowadays, such aids are deemed as important as food. Though deaths from malaria and diarrhoeal diseases persist, there can be little doubt but that this second, curative phase of the Pasteur-Koch revolution goes some way towards explaining why modern famines are less murderous than the Irish famine.

### *Climate and Weather*

Ireland's climate is moist and temperate. Before the blight this made the potato less vulnerable to the rain or lack of sunshine that would seriously reduce grain yields, and that is why the Irish became Europe's 'potato people' *par excellence*. The demand for farm labour was also influenced by the climate. It was lowest between November and February, when there was little for labourers to do, with little growth and the ground either too wet and heavy or too hard for digging and ploughing. The evidence in the Poor Inquiry is emphatic on the point that there was little work for agricultural labourers between December and March. The reports from Clare, the focus of much controversy in the early stages of the famine, are unanimous, and worth repeating in part. In the parishes of Abbey and Oughtmanagh in the north of the county 'the greater number of labourers [were] altogether out of employment for more than half the year'; in Miltown Malbay in the west 'from the month of December until March there [was] nearly a total cessation of agricultural labour'; in Kildysart in the south 'from the digging of the potatoes in autumn, and the setting of them in spring, and during the sowing of corn, there [was] little or no employment for the labourer'; and likewise for all other places offering evidence.<sup>22</sup>



The constant criticism of the public works in the early stages of the famine, that they were crowding out private employment on the land, overlooks this key fact. Commentators unfamiliar with Irish work routines were liable to misunderstand why 'the period [for work] had not yet arrived [though] here we are in the middle of January, the land untilled and choked with weeds and no preparation in the way of seed'. A good example is Edmund Wynne, the demented public works inspector who declared that the thousands he had struck off the welfare lists in west Clare in November 1846 'have now gone quietly to till their farms'.

The weather exacerbated the famine in two different ways. First, in Ireland the potato had escaped relatively lightly in 1845, but in 1846 the weather caused *phytophthora infestans* to inflict far more damage on the potato crop there than anywhere else in Europe. Bad weather had delayed planting, drought in the early summer affected the growth of the tubers, and then continuous and heavy rainfall in late July and early August destroyed virtually the entire potato crop.

Second, though Irish winters are mild by European standards, rain and damp makes working outdoors for prolonged periods during this season unpleasant and unhealthy. The combination of hand-me-down clothing, cheap fuel, and a limited demand for labour explains why the pre-famine poor spent the coldest and wettest part of the winter indoors in semi-hibernation. Perhaps this represented what development economists call a low-level equilibrium or poverty trap. But the point that needs making here is that the Irish climate made the choice of public works under the elements (the main channel for relief during the winter of 1846-7, and to a lesser extent in 1847-8) a disastrous mistake. The weather during the famine of the 1840s was as cold as it had been during the last catastrophic famine in 1740-1, when '*a mbeatha go léir gur léirscrios uathu an sioc* (all their fare the frost destroyed)'. But the winter of 1846-7 was a particularly cold one, with average temperatures in Dublin in between December and February nearly 4° F below the 1830-50 average. January 1848 was also exceptionally cold.

Being forced to work or even to feign work in the open in the depth of winter was more damaging than exceptionally cold or wet weather *per se*. Some officials admitted as much at the time. In mid-December 1846 a humane relieving officer reported from Nenagh that the snow represented 'a frightful aggravation' to the surrounding misery, and urged that workers continue to be paid for merely clearing the snow where necessary. A Board of Works inspector attributed deaths in north Mayo at the height of the famine to inadequate food and 'exposure to the inclemency of the weather', explaining that the practice of the Irish peasantry before the potato failure had been 'to sit over the fire the entire winter rarely leaving their cabins'. In Kilrush the medical attendant attributed the rise in admissions to the fever hospital in late

1846 to 'disease engendered by cold and exposure on the Public Works at this inclement season of the year, the poor being ill and not sufficiently clad to sustain them'. A few years later a notorious landlord from the same area would dismiss complaints about the cold in Kilrush workhouse with the remark that the inmates had been used to sitting 'in very large chimneys'. An account from Carrickallen in south Leitrim in February 1847 described 'the great want of clothing at present felt among the poor, many of the labourers on the Public Works being almost in a state of nudity, to which may be attributed the great prevalence of dysentery and fever now existing'. In Clare a poor man confided that 'cold and exposure on the public works, with Indian meal bread and water, was sapping his life up'. A west Wicklow landlord's wife noted of the poor that 'their rags [were] hardly coverings for decency'.

Donegalman Hugh Dorrian's assessment is more vivid than most. His interpretation of official intent, committed to paper a few decades after the event, may have been misguided, but the narrower point about the weather and the famine holds.<sup>23</sup>

Here is where the government advisors dealt out the successful blow, and it would appear premeditated, the great blow for slowly taking away human life, getting rid of the population and nothing else, by forcing the hungry and the half clad men to stand out in the cold and in the sleet and rain from morn till night, for the paltry reward of nine pennies per day. Had the poor pitiful creatures got this allowance, small as it was, at their homes it would be relief, it would be charity, it would convey the impression that their benefactors mean to save life, but in the way thus given, on compulsory conditions, [it] meant next to slow murder.

### *'Did England Sleep?'*

The new famine history refutes the genocidal interpretation of the 1840s still current in certain quarters in the U.S. As already noted, it argues that within Ireland the incidence of the famine was quite unequal, and that Irish people themselves could have done more than they did. But it also supports a more critical assessment of what economists Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen call 'public action' in the 1840s.<sup>24</sup> A lacuna in the new history is its lack of attention to economic conditions in Britain at the time. Didn't Black '47 coincide with months of monetary and fiscal crisis across the water? Wasn't this a time too of poor grain and potato harvests all over Europe? How badly were Britain's income and public finances squeezed? British economic historians have supplied some answers.

First, a well-known historical analysis by Harvard economist Robert

Barro<sup>25</sup> of the effects of budget deficits on interest rates in the United Kingdom between 1700 and 1918 provides a partial, unintended answer. Barro suggests that only twice in peacetime over this long period – in 1836-7 (due to the cost of slave emancipation in the West Indies) and in 1909-10 (the product of legislative stalemate about fiscal reforms) – did fiscal pressure cause real interest rates to soar. Significantly, this particular dog did not bark during the famine. Data on public expenditure confirms that expenditure on Irish relief had little impact on the overall budgetary situation, though the numbers are a reminder too of the small size of the public sector in those days.

Second, a classic study of the monetary crisis of 1847 by the late C.N. Ward-Perkins<sup>26</sup> maintains that it had little impact on the real economy. Ward-Perkins concluded from movements in food imports, the tonnage of sea-coal entering London, and the home consumption of such semi-luxuries as tea, sugar, coffee, and tobacco that 'national income cannot have fallen off unduly in 1847-8'. His case is supported by later estimates of macroeconomic trends. The dramatic fall in bank note circulation in Ireland between 1846 and 1849 (41 percent) dwarfed that in either England (12 percent) or Scotland (8 percent), and underlines the bigger and more protracted fall in real incomes there.

Finally, how far did exchequer spending on famine relief go in plugging the gap left by the blight? Given the potato's lowly status before the famine, even relative to maize, putting a value on the missing potatoes offers a lower-bound answer. Comparing the average pre-famine harvest of about 13 million tons with the outcome between 1845 and 1850 indicates a cumulative shortfall of over 50 million tons over those years. Discounting by one-half in order to allow for some 'fat' in the economy and the reallocation of labour to other crops after 1846, and calculating at a deliberately low price of £2 per ton, still implies a shortfall worth about £50 million in money. Given the higher cost of substitute foods and the inevitable leakages in distributing them, it is very doubtful whether expenditure of even that order, appropriately spread over the period, would have staved off all excess deaths. Probably even a Joseph Stalin could not have extracted the necessary sum from Ireland's middle classes and landlords in the 1840s. Nor should the burden of such a transfer, an annual 2 percent or so of British national income or 20 percent or so of public expenditure over the six-year period, be underestimated. But in a catastrophe in which all the stops should have been pulled out, the political arithmetic never even nearly added up. Public spending on the Irish crisis between 1846 and 1852 totalled £9.5 million, and much of this was originally granted as a loan, and hemmed in by constraints. Amartya Sen's claim that modern famines reflect 'a severe indifference on the part of the government' has a broader resonance.<sup>27</sup>

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> D.G. Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland* (London, 1982), p. 170; A.K. Sen, 'Starvation and Political Economy: Famines, Entitlements and Alienation', address to the NYU/Ireland House Conference on Famine and World Hunger (New York, May 1995).
- <sup>2</sup> *Freeman's Journal* (12 Mar 1847); Cathal Póirtéir, *Glórtha ón nGorta* (Dublin, 1996), pp. 241-2, 243.
- <sup>3</sup> C. Ó Gráda, 'The Great Famine and Other Famines', *Famine 150: Commemorative Lecture Series* (Dublin, 1997), pp. 147-50; C. Ó Gráda and K. O'Rourke, 'Mass Migration as Disaster Relief: Lessons from the Great Irish Famine', *European Review of Economic History* Vol. 1, No. 1 (1997), pp. 1-23.
- <sup>4</sup> F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland since the Famine* (London, 1972), p. 26; Lindsay Proudfoot, *Urban Patronage and Social Authority* (London, 1996), p. 43.
- <sup>5</sup> Andrés Eiríksson and C. Ó Gráda, 'Bankrupt Landlords and the Irish Famine' (typescript, 1996).
- <sup>6</sup> Tim O'Neill, 'Famine Evictions' (typescript, May 1997); Vaughan, *Landlords and Tenants in Mid-Victorian Ireland* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 28, 230-1; Mary Daly, *The Famine in Ireland* (Dundalk, 1986), p. 110-1.
- <sup>7</sup> For more details see C. Ó Gráda, 'The Great Irish Famine: Winners and Losers', UCD Centre for Economic Research Working Paper No. 97/12.
- <sup>8</sup> 'Bloodlines: Letters by James and Elizabeth Prendergast', *Boston College Magazine* Vol. 51, No. 1 (Winter 1996), p. 28.
- <sup>9</sup> Patrick Hickey, 'Famine, Mortality and Emigration: A Profile of Six Parishes in the Poor Law Union of Skibereen, 1846-7' in Patrick O'Flanagan and Cornelius G. Buttimer (eds.), *Cork: History and Society* (Dublin, 1993), p. 910.
- <sup>10</sup> Richard Roche, 'The Famine Years in Forth and Bargy', *Journal of the Wexford Historical Society* No. 15 (1994-5), pp. 1-14; Kieran Foley, 'The Killarney Board of Guardians and the Famine 1845-52' (unpublished M.A. thesis, National University of Ireland, 1987); Séamus Ó Canainn, 'An Gorta i nDún Fionnachaidh' in Cathal Póirtéir (ed.), *Gnéithe den nGorta* (Dublin, 1995), pp. 176-91; Ó Gráda, *Ireland before and after the Famine*, 2nd ed. (Manchester, 1993), pp. 133-7; Hickey, 'Famine, Mortality and Emigration', pp. 910-1.
- <sup>11</sup> The results reported here are based on inspection of the relevant minute or admission books and on F.X. McCorry, 'The Famine in the Montiaghs' (forthcoming).
- <sup>12</sup> The analogy is Deirdre McCloskey's.
- <sup>13</sup> Cited in Arthur Aughey, 'Rescuing History' *Fortnight* (June 1996), p. 33.
- <sup>14</sup> Irish Folklore Commission Archive (IFCA), Ms. 1480, pp. 383-4; Cathal Póirtéir, *Famine Echoes* (Dublin, 1995), p. 72. For further reflections on memory and the famine see C. Ó Gráda, *An Drochshaol: Béaloideas agus Amhráin* (Dublin, 1994).

- <sup>15</sup> IFCA, Ms. 1086, p. 286 [Meelick]; IFCA, Ms. 1068, p. 329 [Tuamgraney]; Póirtéir, *Famine Echoes*, p. 78 [Westport].
- <sup>16</sup> Póirtéir, *Glórtha ón nGorta*, pp. 162, 157-65, and *Famine Echoes*, pp. 151-65.
- <sup>17</sup> R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland* (London, 1988), p. 330; Seán Kierse, *The Famine in Killaloe* (Killaloe, 1984); *Census of Ireland 1851* Vol. 5, No. 2, p. 31; Ignatius Murphy, *Diocese of Killaloe* (Dublin, 1992), pp. 222-3.
- <sup>18</sup> See, for example, Laurence Geary, 'The Late Disastrous Epidemic: Medical Relief and the Great Famine', in Chris Morash and Richard Hayes (eds.), *Fearful Realities: New Perspectives on the Famine* (Dublin, 1996), pp. 49-59; 'What People Died of during the Famine' in Ó Gráda, *Famine 150*, pp. 95-112; P. Froggatt, 'Sir William Wilde and the 1851 Census of Ireland', *Medical History*, Vol. 9 (1965), pp. 302-26. The following paragraphs are based on ongoing work with Joel Mokyr. See Mokyr and Ó Gráda, 'Famine Disease and Famine Mortality: Lessons from the Irish Experience, 1845-1850' (typescript, UCD).
- <sup>19</sup> P. Froggatt, 'The Response of the Medical Profession to the Great Famine' in E.M. Crawford (ed.), *Famine: The Irish Experience* (Edinburgh, 1989), pp. 148-9. During the Great Finnish Famine of the mid-1860s medics were also more likely to perish. See Oiva Turpeinen, *Nälkä Vai Tauti Tappoi? Kauhunvuodet 1866-1868* (Helsinki, 1986), p. 307.
- <sup>20</sup> Arup Maharatna, *The Demography of Famines* (Delhi, 1996); S.G. Wheatcroft, 'Famine and Epidemic Crisis in Russia, 1918-1922: The Case of Saratov', *Annales de Démographie Historique* (1982), pp. 329-51; M. Livi-Bacci, *Population and Nutrition: An Essay on European Demographic History* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 43-7.
- <sup>21</sup> See, for example, Thomas McKeown, *The Role of Medicine: Dream, Mirage, or Nemesis?* (Princeton, 1979).
- <sup>22</sup> These examples are taken from CLASP, *Poverty before the Famine: County Clare 1835* (Ennis, 1996).
- <sup>23</sup> My thanks to Breandán Mac Suibhne for showing me a typescript of Dorrian's memoir.
- <sup>24</sup> S.J. Connolly, 'Revisions Revised? New Work on the Irish Famine', *Victorian Studies* Vol. 39, No. 2 (Winter 1996), p. 216.
- <sup>25</sup> R.J. Barro, 'Government Spending, Interest Rates, Prices, and Budget Deficits in the United Kingdom, 1701-1918', *Journal of Monetary Economics*, Vol. 20 (1987), pp. 221-47.
- <sup>26</sup> C.N. Ward-Perkins, 'The Commercial Crisis of 1847', *Oxford Economic Papers*, n.s. 2 (1950), pp. 75-92.
- <sup>27</sup> A. Sen, 'Nobody Need Starve', *Granta* Vol. 52 (Winter 1995), p. 220.