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# **The Construction of Irish Social Policy (1953-2003)**

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## INTRODUCTION

*Administration* has served as a crucial public forum for debates about the direction of Irish social and economic policy over the last half-century. The selections in this reader reflected the mood of the times when they first appeared even when, as was often the case in later decades, they evaluated past achievements. The journal emerged alongside, and reflected, a distinct state technocratic project of modernisation. This was formally instigated by *The First Programme for Economic Expansion* in 1958 but had been honed by T.K Whitaker's influential study *Economic Development*, published the same year and, as outlined by a number of contributors, by the earlier groundwork of a number of civil servants, politicians and others who advocated shifts in fiscal and social policy in the years after the Second World War. The articles reproduced here are fragments of an ongoing and shifting debate, over the last half-century, about social policy and social change in Ireland.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter examines economic, social, political, and organisational aspects of the Irish welfare settlement as this evolved during the last half century. The idea of a welfare consensus in society, articulated through politics and shifting over time, has been a much-used device in explaining the historical changes that have emerged in social policy at international and national levels. For instance, the notion of a post-war consensus about the direction of British social policy has been employed in discussions of the emergence of the 'welfare state'. Some recent approaches to social policy have related such political and economic settlements to processes of societal change through an examination of the ways in which social policy is constructed and

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<sup>1</sup> Contributions cited from elsewhere in this reader are referenced in *italics* by author surname and by the original year of publication.

reconstructed through shifts in dominant ideas about the nature of social problems (what social policy should do) and dominant constructions of social membership (who social policy is for). Within such perspectives social settlements are seen as crucial to understanding political and economic settlements. To these three headings a fourth, the idea of an organisational settlement, is added. This is employed to discuss the ways in which social policy is delivered with particular emphasis upon relationships between users and providers of welfare (Hughes, 1998: 3-38)

## OUTLINE OF THE READER

The reader consists of four overlapping strands. The first of these, *The Pursuit of Growth*, contains a number of selections that collectively offer an account of the relationship between economic development and social policy in Ireland from the early 1950s when the Irish economy was poorly served by isolationist policies to the era of the 'Celtic Tiger'. The selections reflect, and reflect upon, shifting economic orthodoxies over time and, in number of cases, offer critical analysis of past achievements or failures. They reveal, to an extent, the shifting preoccupations and concerns of policy makers over the last fifty years, as an era of isolationism was superseded by Keynesian economic orthodoxies and then by post-Keynesian globalisation.

The second strand is entitled *Health and the Mixed Economy of Welfare*. The role of the state in Ireland, as elsewhere, in securing the welfare of its citizens is one that has developed over time but it is not the case that all welfare is provided through the actions of the state. A mixed economy of welfare has persisted within contemporary society even if the balance of welfare has shifted towards a formal role for the state as provider or regulator (Fanning, 1999: 51). This is particularly the case with respect to health care in Ireland where many services were established by the religious voluntary sector and subsequently became subject to regulation by the state. Some selections in the reader examine the development of provision (*Robbins: 1960: Duffy: 1993, Tormey: 1992/3*). Others emphasise inequalities within the mixed economy of Irish health care in terms of the distribution of the burden of care, on the basis of socio-economic status, or within relationships between users and providers of services

(*Cousins, 1994, Tormey, 1992/3, O'Sullivan, 1998*). Some selections, here and elsewhere in the reader, examine political and ideological debates that impacted on the development and control of health services (*Barrington 1987, Duffy 1983, Kavanagh, 1978*).

The selections in the third strand, *Social Change and Social Citizenship*, examine some debates on and shifts in social policy relating to gender, the family and child protection. These reflect changes in dominant understandings of social citizenship over time. This term was coined by T.H Marshall to describe how social rights became woven into the fabric of citizenship through the development of universal welfare entitlements (Hughes, 1998: 10). Critiques of this concept have emphasised how some citizens experience lesser or differential rights and access to welfare goods and services for example, on the basis of gender, race and ethnicity (Hughes, 1998: 29). The section begins with an account of gender inequalities in the civil service during the 1950s (*De Paor, 1955*). There is an examination of the work of the First Commission on the Status of Women which instigated reforms in the areas of employment, social welfare and taxation (*Beere, 1975*). The final article in this strand initially appeared in a special issue of *Administration* on child protection in the wake of mounting evidence of child abuse as social problem in Ireland (*Ferguson, 1996*).

The fourth strand, *Conflicts and Debates*, reflects some of the shifting academic debates about and understandings of Irish social policy that have emerged over time. These included critiques of the relationships between church and state (*Kavanagh, 1978, Taylor 1995*), a preoccupation with underdevelopment and the crisis of the welfare state during the 1980s (*Garvin, 1986, Lavan, 1990*), and an engagement with the impact of neo-liberalism on Irish social policy during the following decade (*Taylor, 1995*). The final selection in the reader offers a critical analysis of social partnership and political accountability against the backdrop of recent corruption and administrative scandals (*O Cinneide, 1998*).

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF IRISH SOCIAL POLICY

In Britain welfare possibilities and debates are constructed in relation to, or in opposition to, the idea of the welfare state. British welfare discourses remain clustered along a left-right ideological axis. Attempts to reshape welfare politics in recent years, such as the idea of a 'third way', speak to the notion that social policy was predominantly a matter of left or right and state or market. By comparison left-right distinctions remain less clear within Irish welfare debates. Many of the major preoccupations and cleavages of Irish social policy have historically been articulated along an ideological continuum of responses to social change. At one end of the spectrum might be placed a range of traditionalisms articulated within Catholic conservatism. At the other end might be placed individualism and secularisation. A number of key social policy events and debates are more easily placed along such a continuum than along a left-right continuum. These include the 'Mother and Child Scheme' (a universal health scheme for pregnant and nursing mothers and children under 16 years) crisis in 1951, the referendum on abortion in 1983, the divorce referenda in 1986 and 1995 and the 1998 Education Act which reduced direct Church control in primary education.

The British welfare state, as established in the immediate post war era, has been depicted as a 'growth and security' consensus where the political settlement reflected an economic settlement based upon economic growth and expansion of state provision through manipulation of the economy to retain full employment. However, other factors have to be taken into consideration (Hughes, 1998: 27). These include a consensus about 'how' and 'for whom' welfare should be provided. British welfare practices were characterised by forms of bureaucratic and professional organisation that emphasised a passive role for welfare subjects. This organisational settlement emerged within a mixed economy of welfare within which the state was the dominant provider of welfare. The post war welfare settlement reflected and reinforced dominant social constructions of the 'normal' family, of gender distinctions between public and private domains, of the norm of permanent and secure male employment and of exclusionary conceptions of social membership with respect to race and ethnicity.

Ireland, by contrast, did not experience a 'big bang' welfare resettlement after the Second World War. Change was characterised by a gradual expansion of a state role

in the provision of welfare in some areas. The 1958 *Programme for Economic Expansion* marked a turning point in Irish economic policy from an emphasis on protectionism and self-sufficiency to agricultural and economic development. It emphasised that any welfare expansion must be dependant upon economic growth (Kaim-Caudle, 1967:103). A belated Keynesian settlement emphasised growth rather than security. The pursuit of economic growth was prioritised over welfare and infrastructural growth notwithstanding the interrelationships between these. Collectivisation was problematic given the influence of Catholicism in areas such as health and education. Welfare rights within the Irish mixed economy of welfare fell short of the Marshallian ideal of social citizenship. There were no universal rights to voluntary provision. Yet there were many similarities between post-war Irish and British social settlements around welfare. Both were rooted in developments which pre-dated Irish independence from Britain. Welfare entitlements were socially constructed with reference to ideals of social membership rooted in nation-building ideologies. This was the case both where welfare rights were formally linked to citizenship and where, as in the Irish case, voluntary sector providers continued to be able to choose their own clients according to ethnic-religious criteria. In both cases the state institutionalised dominant constructions of the family and gender roles within the allocation of welfare.

Many present day Irish welfare institutions are derived from the Poor Law of 1838 and the new-liberal welfare legislation of 1909 and 1911 which supplemented poor law provision for paupers with social insurance linked to paid employment.. Irish institutions at the time of independence had been shaped by a nineteenth century colonialist liberal project of modernisation and reform. The institutional and ideological legacy of the nineteenth century within twentieth century Irish modernity should not be discounted. Other aspects of present day provision are rooted in the parallel development of Catholic controlled educational and health provision. To a considerable extent, pre-independence demarcations within the mixed economy of welfare have persisted.

Liberal welfare entitlements based upon paid employment rarely came into conflict with the principle of subsidiarity which underpinned Catholic social teaching. Subsidiarity, as outlined in the 1931 Papal encyclical '*Quadragesimo Anno*', was a

strategy to ameliorate the worst features of capitalism while resisting state interference within the sphere of civil society. In simple terms, it held that the state should not usurp the relationship between Catholic institutions and the family. The resultant welfare settlement was characterised by demarcated roles for both the state and voluntary sector in the provision of welfare.

Conflicts between both spheres did not emerge until the State became seen as advancing collectivist principles during the early 1950s. These conflicts were characterised, to some extent, by a common cause between the principles of free enterprise and Catholic social teaching (Fanning: 1999: 29). The liberal welfare subject, a male breadwinner, embodied a similar conception of gender roles to those emphasised in Catholic social teaching. As put in what was perhaps the most complete statement of Catholic social policy in the decades after the Second World War:

That the husband is the final authority in the family is clear on natural grounds; every community must have a head, and the father being the breadwinner and the primary provider of the family is that natural authority (Kavanagh, 1966: 40).

Liberalism as a moral welfare discourse had considerable affinity with Catholic principles of subsidiarity. Catholic social teaching held that the state should only act when the male breadwinner was proven to have failed to provide for his dependants. Both liberalism and Catholic social teaching as such contributed to an official ideology of the privatised family. Reforms to the National Insurance Act (1911) extended the entitlements of men and continued to give lesser entitlements to women in paid employment than those given to men until, in the case of single men and single women, the Social Welfare Act (1953). Women continued to be regarded as a distinct and residual category within the welfare system. As more and more men came under the umbrella of unemployment assistance, forms of welfare entitlement not linked to paid employment such as outdoor relief (reformed as home assistance in 1923) became increasingly feminised. The construction of women as dependants within welfare practices was compounded by overt discriminations that prevented

married women from working in the civil service until this 'marriage bar' was lifted in 1973 (*Beere, 1973*).

The welfare economy of the Irish Republic was to some extent shaped by aspirations for a Gaelic-Catholic Ireland adopted by those influential in shaping the ideology of the new Irish state in 1922. The newly independent Irish state was characterised, for its first few decades, by a concern with economic and cultural sovereignty (Hardiman and Whelan, 1998: 67). A dominant Gaelic and Catholic construction of nation and citizenship precipitated the marginalisation of the Protestant minority in areas such as education and health. The laws of the new state were not directed 'against Protestants' but the state came to embody the dominant construction that Ireland was fundamentally a Catholic society in that the moral teaching of the Catholic Church became institutionalised within the civil code through legislation on censorship, divorce, adoption and contraception (Fanning, 2002: 37).

The Catholic Church possessed a 'non-decisional' form of power. It had the capacity to mobilise politically in defence of its interests but rarely had to do so because these interests could be anticipated and addressed in a 'non-political' manner. As good Catholics, legislators and voters were deeply committed to expressing their faith in the laws and institutions of the country. This was particularly evident in the area of health care where the principle of Catholic denominational control over health services for Catholics coincided with a Catholic ideological control over health care provision as a whole. At times, Catholic politicians supported discrimination in favour of Catholics in state positions to ensure that Catholic moral sensibilities were not endangered (Bowen, 1983: 36). Growth in state involvement in health funding was accompanied by the supremacy of a Catholic ethos in the system as a whole.

This ethos also informed economic policy processes. Economic expansion and welfare development since the 1950s has been, to some extent, managed by a compact between unionised labour, employers and the state. This 'social partnership' has allowed for corporatist negotiation of societal goals by the most powerful groups in society much along the consensual lines advocated by Catholic social thought (*O' Cinneide, 1999, Pellion, 1995b: 368-376*). It has expressed a conservative pluralism



that excluded marginal groups in society even if it purported to represent a societal consensus (Allen, 1999, O’Cinneide, 1999).

### A BELATED POST WAR CONSENSUS

Irish welfare reform since independence has been characterised by gradual institutional development and reform and the gradual extension of welfare rights and entitlements. For some theorists underdevelopment itself has been the key factor in explaining such gradualism (Pellion, 1995a: 184). In the Irish case underdevelopment has been explained as the result of colonialism (Crotty 1986 cited in Garvin, 1986). Both shaped the very societal base from which welfare possibilities might be understood to emerge. A lack of resources inhibited the expansion of universal welfare rights and entitlements. Aspirations for welfare expansion emerged within a context of economic underdevelopment. Class politics were moribund, partly because of industrialisation. Other forms of welfare ideology, such as expressed within Catholic social theory, also fell on fallow ground. Fahey argues that the impact of Catholic social thought on social policy in Ireland was limited because it emerged to counter extremes of *laissez faire* capitalism and state socialism that were not to be found in Ireland:

Outside the industrialised north-east of the Island, capitalism had failed to take off and the socialist movement scarcely developed beyond the embryonic stage. The main targets of attack for Catholic social teaching were thus either weak or absent in Ireland (Fahey, 1998: 418).

In the absence of real possibilities for rapid welfare expansion in the post-war era welfare did not become politicised to the same extent as in Britain. In this context major debates on the restructuring of the mixed economy did not occur. Catholic social thought was better at rejecting than at advocating change (Fahey, 1998: 418). The persistence of the Irish mixed economy as an organisational settlement was signalled by the paucity of demarcation disputes between the state and the voluntary sector since independence.

Efforts to expand the role of the state during the early 1950s were influenced by the Beveridge Report. A health act first proposed in 1949 was implemented, following considerable opposition from the Church, in 1953. Opposition to proposals for a mother and child scheme resembled opposition to proposals in the National Insurance Act (1911) to provide maternity insurance with the added argument that such proposals contravened Catholic social thinking. What was important perhaps was that this was the first time that such Catholic social ideology had to be marshalled against proposals by Irish politicians and civil servants to extend the role of the state in welfare provision. It was also the last time that such opposition was politically viable (Deeney, 1989: 176).

There were a number of reasons for this. Church interference prompted considerable resentment. Increased access to education undermined the power of the Church as intellectual and cultural arbitrator (Garvin, 1982: 23). Education, economic and social change precipitated processes of secularisation similar to those which had occurred in other western countries. Furthermore, an ideological shift occurred from the 1960s within the Church whereby the state was more likely to be criticised for doing too little rather than too much in areas such as income maintenance (Fanning, 1999: 57). In this context the 'Mother and Child controversy' could be interpreted as a last hurrah of Catholic hegemony within Irish welfare debates. The Catholic voices which were marshalled against welfare expansion in the early 1950s were to a considerable extent displaced by the social changes which occurred after that decade.

Secularisation precipitated gradual institutional reform as the numbers of lay workers in Catholic voluntary organisations and schools increased (McCashin, 1982: 204). Secularisation in itself had little impact upon the mixed economy of welfare or indeed on predominant assumptions that service users were Catholics. The state took an increased role in funding voluntary welfare without acquiring control. That said, from 1960s the voluntary sector was characterised by secular expansion, such as in the area of urban and rural community development (Rush, 1999: 167).

The emergence of a distinct post war era could be dated from as early as 1958 when the *Programme for Economic Expansion* ushered in a technocratic role for the state. It could also be dated from the mid-1960s when political parties broke with the

tradition of viewing all state intervention as an outsider's intrusion into the family and the voluntary sector (Conroy, 1999: 27). Certainly, the 1960s was an era of heady social change. As put by Garvin: 'economic take-off, cultural revolution and the ecclesiastical upheaval sometimes labelled as Vatican II all occurred together and had devastating effects' (Garvin, 1982: 23). At the same time welfare reforms were slow and piecemeal. By the 1960s there was still no national health service, secondary education was fee-paying and industrial training was unknown (Conroy, 1999: 37). Proposals emerged to reform the Poor Law health system of dispensary doctors by a means tested right to obtain prescriptions from chemists and to choose doctors and through slum clearance legislation. Free secondary education was introduced in 1967.

**Fig 1: Post war settlement circa 1958**

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>Political</b></p> <p>Coexistence of liberal and Catholic ideologies within mixed economy of welfare.</p>                     | <p><b>Economic</b></p> <p>Limited Keynesian Settlement; growth (without universal security) as a precondition for welfare expansion.</p>       |
| <p><b>Organisational</b></p> <p>Bureau-professionalism, authoritarianism &amp; subsidiarity within a mixed economy of welfare.</p> | <p><b>Social</b></p> <p>Social citizenship envisaged in terms of a male-breadwinner welfare subject. Emigration as implicit social policy.</p> |

The resultant welfare settlement, notwithstanding the gradualism of actual reforms, resembled those of other western countries. Welfare expansion was founded upon Keynesian economic orthodoxies and developed through technocratic process of social planning. Public spending and taxation rapidly expanded (*Rottman and O'Connell, 1982:82-3*).

### GROWTH, SECURITY AND EXCLUSION

The Irish 'growth and security' consensus that accompanied social and economic modernisation was the outcome of a very different social and political settlement to that which emerged in Britain. Keynesism provided the basis for gradual welfare expansion. However, expectations of economic growth were coupled with selective security of employment. Growth and security were underpinned by emigration. As

Lee puts it: Few people anywhere have been as prepared to scatter their children around the world in order to preserve their own living standard (Lee, 1989: 522).

Emigration of surplus labour was constructed as a 'useful safety valve' and a panacea for unemployment in Ireland. Around the same time that deValera's 'dream' speech in 1943 extolled an agrarian variant of the Irish-Ireland ideal officials discussed, behind the scene, the savings to the exchequer on welfare expenditure bought about by emigration (Lee, 1989: 227). Over half of school leavers in the 1950s had emigrated by 1961. Between 1951 and 1961 net emigration totalled 409,000. On average four percent of the labour force emigrated each year. (Blackwell, 1982: 43). The net outflow of emigrants totalled 130,000 for the years 1983 to 1988. By 1994, some 650,000 people born in the Republic of Ireland lived in the United Kingdom. 590,000 of these were still Irish citizens (Ardagh, 1994: 313). The safety value of emigration was also a brake on social and political change.

Employment security and high wages for some without the necessity of economic growth became possible through an acceptance of emigration (*Rottman and O'Connell, 1982*). Between 1980 and 1982, United Kingdom wage rates were slightly less than 10 percent higher than Irish rates even though output per head of population was 76 percent higher in the UK. Crotty argues that such high wage rates were possible because of the effectiveness of Irish trade unions in securing the interests of their members:

People made unemployed by trade unions forcing wage rates above the level at which people would be willing to work rather than remain unemployed, have not remained in Ireland. Neither have those made unemployed by the substitution of livestock for people. Emigration has given to Ireland, for over a century, conditions approximating to 'full employment' with no large pool of unemployed labour to form a source of competing non-unionised labour, working either as self-employed persons or for non-union firms. These virtually 'full employment' conditions bought about by mass emigration, have been fundamentally different from the normal conditions of massive, growing labour surpluses in the former capitalist colonies (Crotty, 1986: 84).

The Irish 'Keynesian' settlement in effect linked citizenship as well as welfare entitlements to paid employment insofar as emigration was the lot of the many who were unable to access the socially insured workplace in the first instance. The differential experiences of citizenship which often precipitated emigration were accompanied by the social construction of emigrants as outsiders. The act of emigration was often associated with social constructions of moral transgression, as defined by the dominant social conservatism, through which emigrants could be defined as outsiders. After the Second World War, in an era when female migration rates exceeded those of men, emigration was constructed as a threat to the sexual morality of women. In 1959, James Dillon, the leader of Fine Gael called for restrictions to be imposed on female emigrants unless they could prove they were proceeding to relatives (Lee, 1989: 377). In subsequent decades efforts were made by the state and Catholic voluntary sector to prevent the migration of women seeking abortions in Britain through the courts, by means of various forms of social control and through the censorship of information and advice. Emigration served as a safety valve to exclude people who differed from the citizenship ideals of the nation on the basis of gender or sexuality. There is some evidence to suggest that emigrants included disproportionate numbers of lesbians and gay men (Smyth, 1995: 225). In this sense welfare entitlements were, to a degree, constructed on the basis of moral criteria rather than citizenship.

### UNSETTLING IRISH WELFARE

From the 1970s globalisation undermined Keynesian economic policies. In Britain, a neo-liberal critique of the welfare state (Thatcherism) became institutionalised. Neo-liberal thinkers such as Von Hayek opposed the linking of social rights to welfare and as such offered an ideological basis for unravelling the welfare state (*Taylor, 1995*). An economic and political unsettlement was accompanied by social unsettlement in the face of increasingly visible patterns of social diversity and welfare need. These critiques found expression through the dominant ideological cleavages of left and right with their respective emphasis on the state and the market in debates about the relationships between users and providers of welfare (Hughes, Clarke, Lewis and Moroney, 1998: 162). Many of the changes that precipitated the reconstruction of the British welfare consensus have similarly impacted upon Ireland. In Ireland, as in a

number of other western countries, the backdrop for this was a perceived need for financial rectitude and public expenditure cutbacks during the 1980s (*Fitzgerald, 1990*).

In Ireland, urbanisation and secularisation have to an extent unsettled the Catholic conservative consensus within which Irish welfare practices had been framed. Gradual reforms occurred to the (lesser) welfare entitlements of women. These extended rights to social assistance to some single parents (the Unmarried Mothers Allowance (1973)) and to other groups. In essence, women's welfare was extended within separate gendered categories which envisaged women remaining in the home. Following the Employment of Married Women Act (1973) married women could be employed in the civil service. After 1984 married women became entitled to the same rates and duration of unemployment benefits as men. However, women continued to experience differential social citizenship; for example, with respect to pension entitlements linked to duration of paid employment,

The budgets of the Fianna Fail led government from 1997 onwards were characterised by ideological assaults on past hegemonic conceptions of gender in Irish welfare debates as articulated in the in the 1937 Constitution, which defended differential welfare citizenship. As stated Article 41:

In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.

The state shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home.

The contestation of gender inequalities from the 1970s onwards had led to some welfare reforms as women entered paid employment in ever increasing numbers and, as such, the differential welfare citizenship they experienced became more prominent. Catholic welfare reformists, such as the Conference of Religious in Ireland (CORI), advocated the introduction of a basic income which would not be based upon paid employment as a means of valuing work in the home. Here, the emphasis was upon

revitalising subsidiarity in the face of social change in gender roles and the increasing economic necessity of dual income families. This thinking contributed to family policy proposals that emerged during the late 1990s. For example, the report of the *Commission on the Family* (1998) was concerned that women not be forced to take up paid employment and childcare provision was, to an extent, depicted as a minority need. The report depicted a societal consensus very compatible with provisions within the 1937 Constitution:

Many submissions expressed concern about women in low paid employment who were only marginally better off after their childcare and going to work expenses had been taken into account. Most submissions on this issue took the view that many women, given a choice, would prefer to take time out of the workforce to be at home with their children. The dominant view was that parents should be assisted in that choice. In addition to the concerns about pressures on parents balancing work and family life, submissions looked for support for mothers in their important job and for right to further education and opportunities to take on training (Commission on the Family, 1998: 62).

The Commission advocated the introduction of a basic income - a single payment to all citizens replacing all social welfare payments and financed largely by a flat rate income tax - or, at least, the 'individualisation' of social welfare entitlements so that the tax allowances for married couples would be twice the individual rate rather than approximately 1.6 times the individual rate as at the time (Commission on the Family, 1998: 60). There was also an emphasis on income support policies taking account of previously unacknowledged costs of rearing a child.

The report was sidelined within the tax reforms that were proposed in the 1998 and 1999 budgets and supported by the social partners. These challenged the presumption that tax allowances for a single income married couple should exceed those of an individual taxpayer. A cleavage rather than new consensus emerged with some retrenchment from proposals in both budgets due to the opposition of the constituency, including women's groups, which had supported the recommendations put to the *Commission on the Family* (1998). All this indicated an unresolved tension

between the family, or more specifically the Catholic single male breadwinner family, and the individual as welfare subjects within Irish social policy (*Figure Two*).

**Figure Two: Gender and Social Policy**

| Catholic/Liberal Settlement(s)<br><i>A woman's place is in the home</i>   | Secular/Neo-liberal Contestations<br><i>'Right to remain in the home' challenged</i>   |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• gendered distinctions between the welfare entitlements of women and men from the Poor Law onwards</li> <li>• benefits for women in paid employment less than those to men in comparable employment</li> <li>• benefits aimed at reinforcing the notion that a woman's place in Irish Society was in the home</li> <li>• differential social citizenship</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• broader welfare debate linked to needs of economy</li> <li>• participation of women in labour market rising/ emergence of women as a reserve army of labour</li> <li>• loss of male breadwinner wage</li> <li>• welfare for women increasingly linked to paid employment</li> <li>• persistence of differential social citizenship</li> </ul> |

The role of the Catholic Church in welfare debates has shifted in recent decades. An ongoing disengagement by religious personnel from the mass production of welfare, if not always its control, has combined with a new emphasis upon social justice and activism directed at the state (Fahey, 1998: 422). This has led to a reconstitution of aspirations for subsidiarity often bound up with an emphasis on social rights and with bottom up community development. The former has included an emphasis upon welfare rights that would support the choice of women to withdraw from paid employment. It has also advocated extending constitutional rights to housing, health and education (Irish Commission for Justice and Peace, 1998, *Taylor, 1998*). The latter has included arguments by CORI on the potential role of welfare programmes to reconstitute voluntarism as a 'right to useful unemployment' (*Taylor, 1998*).

These aspirations have since been displaced, to an extent, by the influence of neo-liberalism on Irish social policy debates. For example, in 1998 the Minister of Enterprise and Employment began to restrict eligibility to community employment schemes following the publication of a report which evaluated such programmes purely upon their ability to lead to employment in the market (Deloitte and Touche, 1998). As in Britain, social inclusion policies have increasingly focused upon



'welfare to work' measures within an essentially neo-liberal thesis (the individualisation of risk) that poverty can only be addressed by employment.

## RECONSTRUCTING IRISH SOCIAL POLICY

At the beginning of the new century, a number of interrelated challenges to past welfare settlements resulting from social change might be identified. They include (1) the ever increasing non-viability of gendered social citizenship, (2) the potential unravelling of existing forms of welfare solidarity (3) increased social diversity and (4) a growing focus on accountability linked to a growing focus on social rights. These challenges are interrelated. They find expression within a specific Irish context where the role of the state but also that of other providers of welfare comes under scrutiny.

In the past, the pursuit of growth was partly underpinned by emigration. The exclusion of emigrants was justified within an ideological discourse that has subsequently contributed much to anti-immigrant discourses at the current time. These drew upon a narrow construction of social membership historically bound up with land ownership or employment that allowed emigrants to be constructed as outsiders. It was bound up with an acceptance of emigrant remittances and emigrant tourism but with a 'zero sum' anxiety that returning emigrants would take jobs from the 'Irish'. The aforementioned Keynesian settlement, in effect, linked citizenship as well as welfare entitlements to paid employment insofar as emigration was the lot of the many who were unable to access the socially insured workplace in the first instance.

The pursuit of growth is now underpinned by immigration. This has been factored into economic planning (Government of Ireland: 2000). Past 'zero sum' constructions of emigration have been supplanted by a neo-liberal ideology of growth within which large scale immigration has been constructed as unproblematic. However, pronounced welfare stratifications (different levels of rights and entitlements) and divisions of labour on the basis of ethnicity have become increasingly evident. Many immigrants from non-EU countries, as non-citizens, have lesser social and economic rights. The exclusion of non-citizens from social citizenship will have profound implications for

Irish social policy as the percentage of immigrants within the composition of Irish society rise.

The last decade has also witnessed a cascade of scandals and controversies relating, in one way or another, to accountability within politics, the state, the market and the Catholic voluntary sector. For example, the Beef tribunal, The Flood Tribunal and the Moriarty Tribunal have documented forms of political and administrative corruption specifically related to economic development and growth. The Hepatitis C crisis and ongoing disclosures of child abuse have revealed institutional failures within both the statutory and voluntary sectors (*Ferguson, 1996, O' Cinneide, 1999*). More positively, there has been a growing emphasis on rights based approaches to social policy on a number of fronts. This has included policies such as *The National Children's Strategy* (2000) designed to meet Ireland's obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1991). It has also included a growing role for judicial activism in seeking to secure the constitutional rights of marginal groups of who have not had their rights secured through the Oireachtas (*O' Cinneide, '1999, Whyte, 2002: 9-57*). However, it must be emphasised that these rights based approaches have emerged in the context of profound ongoing inequalities. One example (the Sinnott case) has been an unwillingness of the state to secure adequate rights to education for people with intellectual disabilities. Collectively, these issues suggest a legitimacy crisis in Irish public life with profound implications for social policy that necessitates a new organisation settlement and the reformulation of the relationships between users and providers of welfare goods and services. A number of these themes are addressed in the final selection of the reader (*O' Cinneide, 1999*).

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