Problems of Industrialisation in Ireland

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Introduction

WHEN THE IRISH FREE STATE was established in the early 1920s, it had a very small industrial sector. In 1926, only 13 per cent of the labour force was engaged in industry, broadly defined,¹ and only 10 per cent of the labour force was in manufacturing (O'Mahony, 1967: 19). By comparison, about 25 per cent or more of the labour force was engaged in manufacturing in other small European economies such as Denmark, Sweden, Belgium and the Netherlands at around that time, although the situation in Finland was more comparable to Ireland.

Since then, Irish manufacturing has grown considerably, with output growth averaging 4.5 per cent per annum in the six decades 1926–86 and manufacturing employment growth averaging 1.9 per cent per annum in the same period (Kennedy, Giblin and McHugh, 1988: 228). By the early 1980s, 21 per cent of the labour force was in manufacturing with 31 per cent in all of industry, and this proportion in total industrial employment was similar to, or even higher than in Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden.

In some important respects, however, the nature of Ireland's relatively late industrialisation has been rather different to that of earlier developers and the structure of industry in Ireland today differs from that of more advanced economies. There are also certain similarities to the experience of developing countries or newly industrialising countries.

Phases of Industrial Growth

During the 1920s there was very limited industrial growth in Ireland and there was no very strong government policy to promote industrialisation.

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¹ This includes building, electricity, gas and other non-manufacturing 'industrial' activities, as well as manufacturing.

The first phase of substantial industrial growth occurred in the 1930s and 1940s, following the introduction of strong protection against imports which encouraged import-substitution. This growth virtually came to a halt in the 1950s, however, and the second main phase of industrialisation in the 1960s and 1970s followed the introduction of new 'outward-looking', export-promoting policies. There were then further significant difficulties in the 1980s, which saw the greatest and longest sustained decline in industrial employment since the foundation of the state. In the past few years, however, since about the end of 1987, growth of industrial employment has picked up again.

In the first phase of industrialisation in the 1930s and 1940s which followed the introduction of protection, industry grew quite rapidly apart from a temporary halt caused by the difficulty of obtaining materials and fuel imports during the Second World War. Manufacturing employment more than doubled in the period 1931–51 according to the Census of Industrial Production.² This experience of considerable industrial growth beginning during the international depression of the 1930s was obviously quite anomalous among western European countries. But it corresponds quite well with the contemporary experience of some of the less-developed countries (e.g., Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Mexico) which were independent at the time and resorted to protection during the depression, thereby facilitating import-substituting industrialisation.

By 1951, 22 per cent of the Irish labour force was working in all of industry with 15 per cent in manufacturing alone. This was distinctly higher than in the 1920s but was still little more than half the level of many western European countries, although it was comparable to some Latin American countries such as Mexico and Brazil (Furtado, 1976: ch. 11). The main emphasis in industrial expansion had been on consumer goods and certain technically mature intermediate products, with only a very limited range of capital goods or technically advanced industries in general. The pattern of industrial growth had been fairly typical of what is commonly called the 'easy' stage of import-substitution in developing countries. It appears that protection helped to overcome the difficulties faced by new or small firms in competing with larger and stronger established foreign competitors, in the home market at least, in the more technically mature and less complex types of industry. But there was little progress in developing the more technologically demanding or highly skillintensive activities.

 $^{^2}$ This source exaggerates the rate of growth to some extent, however, since the coverage of the Census of Industrial Production was extended during the period. It is clear, nevertheless, that there was considerable industrial growth in the 1930s and 1940s.

There was also very little development of industrial exports as the protected industries relied very heavily on the home market. By 1951, just 16 per cent of manufactured output was exported and, if Food, Drink and Tobacco are excluded, the figure was just 6 per cent for the rest of manufacturing. Thus little progress had been made in breaking into open competition with advanced industrial countries.

The phase of protectionist industrial growth ended in the 1950s and there was virtually no increase in manufacturing employment between 1951 and 1958. The difficulties of the 1950s were basically due to the emergence of a chronic balance of payments constraint. This arose partly from the near exhaustion of the 'easy' stage of import-substituting industrialisation, which meant that there was little further replacement of imports by new domestic production. At the same time, imports of goods which had not been replaced by domestic production, including many capital goods and material inputs, had to continue to grow as long as the economy was growing. Thus the bill for imports of goods which had not been substituted by domestic production eventually grew to exceed the cost of imports before the process of import-substitution began. Since there was a continuing failure to achieve significant growth of exports, serious balance of trade deficits became inevitable, leading to a chronic balance of payments crisis and an inability to pay for the increased imports which would have been needed to accompany further growth.

Thus, the Republic of Ireland in the 1950s experienced a fairly typical conclusion to a process of import-substituting industrialisation, where rather indiscriminate protectionism was the main policy instrument used. Other developing countries using the same approach commonly ran into a similar problem eventually with a balance of payments constraint on further growth, although many of them went through the sequence rather later than Ireland since they only acquired the independence necessary to adopt protection in the 1950s or 1960s.

In view of the difficulties experienced in Ireland in the 1950s, a number of related and quite fundamental changes in policy were introduced. From the late 1950s, the emphasis shifted to developing industrial exports, and new tax concessions and grants were introduced to encourage and assist firms to develop production for export markets. In addition, active steps began to be taken to seek out and attract foreign firms to produce in Ireland for export markets. And finally, the protectionist measures against imports were gradually dismantled, opening up the home market to more direct foreign competition. This latter process began in earnest with a free trade agreement with the United Kingdom in the mid-1960s and it was taken further when Ireland entered into free trade with the EC after joining the Community in 1973. Such a switch from an 'inward-looking' to an 'outward-looking' strategy for industrialisation has since been at least partially followed by quite a large number of developing countries which ran into problems similar to those experienced by Ireland in the 1950s. However, while many of them have adopted the goal of export promotion, and have sought to attract foreign firms as one means of achieving that aim, not many have gone as far as Ireland has in entering into full free trade arrangements with major advanced industrial countries. Ireland was one of the earliest of relatively late-industrialising countries to switch from an inward-looking to an outward-looking strategy and, in the matter of dropping protection at least, it has so far gone further than most of them.

Under the new outward-looking strategy, industrial growth picked up considerably in the 1960s and 1970s compared with the 1950s. Whereas manufacturing output grew by just 1.7 per cent per annum in 1951–58, it increased to 6.7 per cent per annum in 1958–73 and 5.1 per cent per annum in 1973–79. The average annual rate of growth of manufacturing employment increased from just 0.2 per cent in 1951–58 to 2.4 per cent in 1958–73 and 0.8 per cent in 1973–79.

This phase of industrialisation was characterised by particularly rapid growth of exports. Whereas just 16 per cent of manufactured output was exported in 1951, this rose to 41 per cent in 1978 and further to 64 per cent by 1988. Naturally this trend helped to ease the balance of payments difficulties which had caused such problems in the 1950s and thus it facilitated overall growth of the economy.

In the 1980s, however, worrying new trends emerged, even though the indicators appeared somewhat ambiguous at first sight. Manufacturing employment reached its peak level in 1979 and then declined for eight consecutive years until 1987, falling by as much as one-fifth in that period. But then, for most of this period, industrial output continued to grow quite strongly, often at about the highest rate of any OECD country. The roots of these apparently paradoxical developments lie in the major structural changes which had been occurring in Irish industry and in the differing experience and performance of Irish indigenous and foreign-owned multinational firms.

Irish Indigenous Industry

Following the introduction of outward-looking policies from the late 1950s onwards, new investment by foreign-owned multinational companies made

³ The source for these data is the Census of Industrial Production.

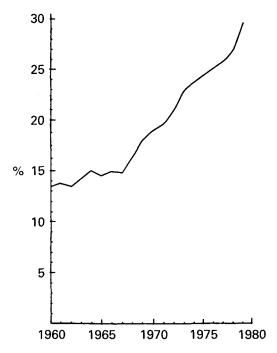


Figure 1. Competing imports' share of home consumption. Source: O'Malley (1989: ch. 6).

the major contribution to the growth of manufacturing employment, output and exports. Native Irish-owned or indigenous industry did not prosper greatly. Indigenous industry was apparently not able to take much advantage of the new incentives and opportunities to export, while at the same time it was losing market share in the home market as the protectionist measures were dismantled.

While foreign investment in new export-oriented industries began to create jobs from the late 1950s, employment also grew in the rest of industry (which was mostly Irish-owned), up to 1966. When the removal of protection began in earnest in the mid-1960s, however, competing imports began to take a continuously increasing share of the home market (see Figure 1). There was no further employment growth in indigenous manufacturing from the mid-1960s to the end of the 1970s and then in the 1980s its employment fell sharply. Essentially what happened was that Irish firms were losing home market shares while making little or no gains in export market shares. Since they were selling very largely to the domestic market, they could just about maintain their overall employment level while domestic demand was growing sufficiently strongly, thereby compensating for the loss of market share, in the late 1960s and the 1970s. But when domestic demand weakened considerably in the 1980s for a variety of reasons, their employment slumped, falling by 27 per cent in just seven years. It is very likely that the level of employment in indigenous manufacturing by 1985 was lower than at any time since the 1940s.⁴

Within indigenous manufacturing, there were some structural changes which are worth noting. First, some sectors fared relatively well and these mostly involved either basic processing of local primary products such as food, or else sheltered or 'non-traded' activities which have a significant degree of natural protection against distant competitors and do not usually enter much into international trade. Such activities can be sheltered in the local market because of high transport costs for products of low value in relation to their weight (e.g., concrete products, cement, packaging materials). Or others can be similarly sheltered because of a need for local knowledge or close contact with customers (e.g., printing and publishing, and engineering or other activities involving an element of on-site installation or construction). While indigenous firms in activities such as these were able to grow and to increase in relative importance, other more internationally traded activities declined.

A second structural change within indigenous industry was a particularly rapid decline among the larger firms in the more internationally traded activities, while there were generally increasing numbers of small firms. It seems that the larger firms were generally engaged in activities in which there are significant economies of scale (hence their own relatively large size, by Irish standards). But they were generally not large enough to match still larger and longer established foreign competitors under free trade, so that they were at a disadvantage due to inferior economies of scale and this hastened their decline.

For smaller firms, which would generally have been in activities in which economies of scale are less important, this problem did not really arise and small indigenous firms increased in numbers. In fact, the rate of establishment of new small native industrial firms in the 1970s, in relation to the size of indigenous industry, was similar to the USA and Canada in the 1950s and 1960s, and about 40 per cent greater than in the United Kingdom in the late 1960s and early 1970s (O'Farrell and Crouchley, 1984). Nevertheless, total indigenous manufacturing employment scarcely changed in the 1970s due to the simultaneous decline of larger firms. And, again, the establishment of new small firms meant that the total number of indigenous manufacturing companies changed little during the substantial fall in employment of 1980–87 when there were many closures of existing firms.

⁴ See O'Malley (1989: ch. 6) for details on these and other developments discussed in this section.

Irish indigenous industry today is relatively lacking in large-scale enterprises, and there is generally relatively little indigenous activity in those sectors in which economies of scale are most important and which are consequently dominated by large firms in more advanced European economies. For example, there are seven (NACE 2-digit) sectors in each of which large firms employing over 500 people account for more than 70 per cent of the sector's employment in West Germany, France, the UK and Italy.⁵ These seven sectors account for 40 per cent of manufacturing employment in the EC (EUR 9), but they account for only 12 per cent of employment in Irish indigenous manufacturing.

The existence of significant economies of scale, and the consequent presence of large established firms in a range of important industries in the advanced industrial economies, can be seen as presenting a significant barrier to the development of such industries by new or small indigenous firms in a relatively late-developing country which trades freely with the advanced countries. For they generally lack the resources that would be required to enter into open competition on a competitive scale of production or to survive a period of initial loss-making while building up to an adequate market share to support a competitive scale of production. Of course, a basic purpose of protection was to make it possible for Irish industries to get established, by shutting out overwhelming competition from larger and stronger firms already existing elsewhere. This succeeded to some degree but in many cases, with a rather small protected market, the Irish firms did not attain a scale of operation that was adequate to match foreign competitors following the return to free trade.

While the existence of economies of scale and large established competitors presents a barrier to the development of Irish indigenous industry in a range of important sectors, there are also some other significant types of barriers arising from the strength of established competitors elsewhere. For example, it can be very difficult for new or small indigenous firms in a late-industrialising country to match the technological strength already developed by advanced economies in sectors where technology is of key importance. Similarly, if strong marketing is a key requirement for an industry, the established marketing strength of existing firms presents an important entry barrier for new or small firms.

⁵ The seven sectors concerned are Motor Vehicles, Other Means of Transport, Chemical Industry, Man-Made Fibres Industry, Production and Preliminary Processing of Metals, Office & Data Processing Machinery and Electrical Engineering. The source of data on industry size structures is Eurostat, *Structure and Activity of Industry: Data by Size of Enterprises*—1984.

Such entry barriers which confront new or small indigenous firms in a late-industrialising country such as Ireland must comprise a large part of the explanation for the relatively poor performance of Irish indigenous industry. For most other potential explanations do not appear to be very convincing. For example, the record of start-ups of many new small firms suggests that there has not been a marked lack of a spirit of entrepreneurial initiative; it is rather the restriction of new start-up industries to generally small-scale activities, while larger firms declined, that has been the nub of the problem. Also, as is outlined below, many foreign multinational companies have found the Irish economic environment attractive and have operated successfully in it. This suggests that there can scarcely have been crippling defects in factors such as the quality of the labour force, labour costs, the infrastructure, producer services, the tax system or the political and bureaucratic system.

It is possible that the general quality of native managerial skills may leave something to be desired but it seems clear, nevertheless, that there has been a certain amount of good quality managerial talent available. For most of the foreign-owned multinational companies in Ireland have been content to recruit their local management from within the country. Also, many of the larger Irish firms, which are often in naturally sheltered or 'non-traded' types of business, have engaged successfully in international markets in the form of taking over foreign firms and becoming multinational companies.

Foreign-owned Industries in Ireland

The main source of growth of industry in Ireland after the end of the 1950s was new investment by foreign-owned multinational companies which chose Ireland as a site in which to produce for export markets.

At first, until about the end of the 1960s, new foreign investment was largely in technologically mature and often labour-intensive industries such as clothing, footwear, textiles, plastics and light engineering. As Vernon (1966) suggested, such mature industries were most capable of locating in industrially undeveloped countries because they no longer required close contacts with the specialised technologists, skills, suppliers and services found in advanced industrial centres. And since they were generally quite labour-intensive they had a motivation to move to relatively low-wage locations once they were sufficiently free from the need for such close contacts with advanced industrial areas. The international dispersal of such industries occurred quite early in relatively low-income countries on the periphery of the developed world, such as Puerto Rico and Ireland. Then, from about the mid-1960s, such mobile multinational industries increasingly went to poorer, less-developed countries with much lower wages. Grants and tax concessions which were often introduced in the host countries (including Ireland) added to the attraction of low labour costs.

From about the late 1960s, foreign investment in Ireland increasingly involved newer, more technologically advanced products, such as electrical and electronic products, machinery, pharmaceuticals, and medical instruments and equipment. Typically, these industries have involved only certain stages of production which are usually not the most demanding on local technological inputs, skills and high-quality suppliers. Again, there is some parallel here with the type of mobile industry which has been able to go to less-developed countries since the late 1960s (e.g. see Helleiner, 1973). But the industries going to Ireland include some more highly skilled activities, particularly in electronics and pharmaceuticals, even if they have usually lacked the key technological and business functions of the firm. Most foreign investment in Ireland since the early 1970s has been undertaken by US-owned companies aiming to produce primarily for European markets. As Ireland has been a member of the EC since 1973, they have selected Ireland as a relatively low-wage, virtually tax-free⁶ site which is suitable as a base for penetrating EC markets. Thus Ireland's main competitors in attracting such industries would usually be other European countries.

The new export-oriented foreign-owned firms contributed substantially to industrial growth, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s. By 1988, foreign firms accounted for 44 per cent of total manufacturing employment, 55 per cent of manufacturing output and 75 per cent of manufactured exports.⁷ However, while employment in foreign-owned manufacturing grew almost continuously in the 1960s and 1970s, it reached a peak at 88,400 in 1980 and then fell continuously to 78,700 by 1987. While this was a distinctly lower rate of decline than in the indigenous sector, it still amounted to a cumulative decline of 11 per cent over seven consecutive years.

The output of foreign-owned firms continued to grow quite strongly, even while their employment was declining, for much of the 1980s. But a problem as regards the contribution of such growth to the Irish economy was that most of the growth occurred at very high rates in a small number of predominantly foreign-owned sectors which had particularly low levels

⁶ From 1958 to 1980 there was no tax on profits arising from new manufactured exports. Since 1981, the maximum tax rate on *all* manufacturing profits has been 10 per cent, and companies established before that date still paid no tax on profits arising from manufactured exports until 1990. Combined with a number of tax allowances, these measures meant very low taxation of manufacturing profits, particularly those arising from exports.

⁷ Data from Census of Industrial Production, 1988.

of linkages with the local economy. Thus virtually all of the growth of industrial output in the period 1980–87 can be attributed to five sectors— Pharmaceuticals, Office and Data Processing Machinery, Electrical Engineering, Instrument Engineering and 'Other Foods'—while all other sectors combined had virtually no growth (Baker, 1988). These sectors import a high proportion of their inputs and expatriate very substantial profits, so that data on their output give a rather misleading impression of their contribution to the economy.

What matters from the point of view of the Irish economy is not the value of output of foreign firms, but rather how much of that value is retained in Ireland, in the form of payments of wages and taxes and purchases of Irish-made goods and services as inputs. It has been found that such 'Irish economy expenditures' are a considerably lower proportion of the value of output in foreign-owned industry than in indigenous industry, and this is especially true of the five high-growth sectors of the 1980s mentioned above.⁸ Thus, although there was quite high growth of output in foreign-owned industry in 1980–87, this does not reverse the impression, arising from its falling employment, that its contribution to domestic economic development weakened in that period compared with the 1960s and 1970s.

Part of the reason for this weaker performance of foreign-owned industry in most of the 1980s was a reduction of inflows of new foreign investment after 1981.⁹ This, in turn, partly reflected the fact that new US investment in Europe was declining or stagnating for much of the 1980s. This was due both to recession or relatively slow growth in Europe in much of this period and probably also to the fact that the marked surge of US investment in the European Community which followed the integration of substantial markets since the 1960s was slowing down. In addition to these trends, there was increasingly intense competition from other European countries which were trying more actively to attract mobile industries because they were experiencing persistent unemployment.

Apart from the slowing down of new foreign investment in Ireland in the early 1980s, it had also emerged that the longer established foreign firms already in Ireland tended to decline in employment eventually, after an initial period of employment growth. This pattern was already

⁸ Data on this have been collected annually since 1983 by the Industrial Development Authority in its Irish economy expenditures survey. Irish economy expenditures of foreignowned non-food manufacturing grew at just two-thirds of the rate of growth of its gross output in 1983–87, because of the fact that nearly all of the growth of its output occurred in sectors with particularly low levels of Irish economy expenditures in relation to sales.

⁹ See O'Malley (1989: ch. 7) for details on this and other developments discussed in this section.

established during the 1970s; for example, employment in foreign-owned manufacturing firms established before 1969 fell by 12 per cent between 1973 and 1980 while overall industrial employment was increasing at the fastest rate of any EEC country. This meant that overall growth of employment in foreign industry was being sustained only by the continuing inflow of new first-time foreign investors.

With the passage of time, the overall trend of employment in foreignowned industry was being increasingly affected by the large stock of relatively old plants with declining employment, so that an ever greater inflow of new first-time investors would have been needed to maintain a given growth rate. By the early 1980s, when new foreign investment was reduced, the result was employment decline in most branches of foreignowned industry and in the foreign sector as a whole.

Already in the early 1980s, the Telesis (1982) report to the National Economic and Social Council had made a number of criticisms of the practice of relying so heavily on foreign investment. This point was largely taken on board by the NESC itself, and the events which followed tended to give weight to the view that more had to be done to develop a stronger indigenous sector since heavy reliance on foreign industry was not producing acceptable results. In this context, there has been a good deal of debate and a number of quite significant changes in industrial policy, which are briefly outlined below.

Location of Industries

First, however, it is worth noting how the changing structure of industry in Ireland has been reflected in a marked change in its geographical concentration. Table 1 shows the location of manufacturing employment in 1961 and 1981, and it can be seen from the table that there was considerable decentralisation in the location pattern of industry between those years.

While total manufacturing employment increased by 32.7 per cent in 1961–81, it actually fell by 9.6 per cent in the Dublin area and Dublin's share of the total dropped from 47 per cent to 32 per cent. In the other three main urban areas, manufacturing employment increased by 23 per cent, but this meant a small decline in their share of the total. In the rest of the country manufacturing employment rose by 80.7 per cent and so the smaller towns and rural areas generally increased their share of the total quite significantly.

Labour Force Survey data show that industrial employment was also hit harder in Dublin than in the rest of the country in the 1980s. Dublin's

Location	Manufacturing employment		% of manufacturing employment	
	1961	1981	1961	1981
Main Urban Areas				
Dublin City and County	83,915	75,836	46.8	31.8
Cork, Limerick, Waterford Cities	17,904	22,065	10.0	9.3
Other Areas				
Rest of Leinster	32,807	57,270	18.3	24.0
Rest of Munster	28,460	47,951	15.9	20.1
Connaught	8,723	21,212	4.9	8.9
Ulster (3 counties)	7,627	13,810	4.3	5.8
Total	179,436	238,144	100	100

Table 1. Location of manufacturing employment, 1961 and 1981.

Source: Census of Population

share of employment in 'production industries' (excluding building and construction) fell from 30.8 per cent in 1983 to 27.5 per cent in 1988, thus continuing the decline in Dublin's share of industry.

This changing pattern of geographical location of industry was largely a reflection of the combination of decline among the older formerly protected firms, which had been quite heavily concentrated in the main urban areas, together with the rise of new foreign-owned industries, many of which were induced to go to smaller towns and rural areas. O'Farrell (1980) found that as much as 59 per cent of the new foreign industrial firms established in the period 1960–73 were set up in the less-developed 'Designated Areas' in the West. Similarly, four of the more peripheral western regions accounted for 31 per cent of employment in new foreign firms established in the period 1973–81, compared with 19 per cent of employment in new indigenous projects in the same period (derived from O'Farrell, 1984).

One reason for this location pattern among new foreign owned firms was that higher government grants were on offer for those which went to the less-developed regions. In addition, labour costs were often somewhat lower in those regions and the traditions of labour organisation or unionisation were relatively weak compared with the main urban areas.

But apart from these considerations, Ireland as a whole is less industrially developed than most of Europe and this was even more obviously the case in the 1960s. Consequently, multinational companies planning new investment projects would have been slow to consider any location in Ireland if they particularly required a site with ease of access to the concentrations of specialist skills, suppliers and services found in major industrial areas. This means that the foreign projects going to Ireland would have been disproportionately composed of the more 'mobile' types of operation, which are relatively free to choose locations outside the more industrialised areas. This being the case, many of them would have been relatively open to considering a location in a less developed area within Ireland, in order to take advantage of the higher grant incentives and lower labour costs.

Whatever the reason for the industrial location pattern which emerged, it meant that industrialisation since the late 1950s did not involve the development of large concentrated centres of industry. The larger towns, particularly Dublin, did grow, but this was mainly for other reasons, while the process of industrialisation itself was quite dispersed geographically.

Some Recent Developments

From the early 1980s, as was mentioned above, there was growing support for the view that more had to be done to develop a stronger indigenous manufacturing sector, particularly since heavy reliance on foreign industry was no longer producing the sort of results that it had for the previous two decades. This view was supported by the National Economic and Social Council (1982), and a subsequent government white paper, *Industrial Policy* (1984), stated that the future direction of industrial policy would 'entail the concentration of resources on internationally traded manufacturing and services, particularly Irish-owned firms'. This did not mean an end to the policy of attracting foreign investment by any means, but rather it indicated a shift in emphasis towards promoting indigenous firms and in practice this change materialised rather slowly.

The new emphasis was reflected in a reorganisation of the Industrial Development Authority (IDA) so as to give separate divisions responsibility for overseas and Irish firms, thereby recognising the distinction and ensuring that part of the organisation would give its full attention to the indigenous sector. A policy statement from the IDA in 1988 said that the proportion of its resources devoted to domestic industry was to increase from 40 to 50 per cent over the following few years.

Giving some substance to the expressed concern to focus more on indigenous industry, a number of new policy measures were introduced in the 1980s to cope with weaknesses which would be most typical of Irish rather than foreign firms, particularly as regards management, export marketing and technology acquisition. Grants are now available to help pay for costs associated with acquiring foreign technology, market research, development of export marketing and general management development. Since the mid-1980s, an increasing proportion of the state's expenditure on promoting industrial development has gone to support marketing and technological development, particularly in indigenous industry.

In addition, policy towards indigenous industry has become somewhat more 'active' and 'selective' in certain respects, rather than just passively offering grants and tax concessions to any company and waiting for them to take advantage of the incentives. Examples of this are the Company Development Programme and the National Linkage Programme, which involve state development agencies with a variety of expertise working with selected relatively strong Irish companies on identifying and implementing strategic development initiatives. The role of the state agencies in this is to act as catalysts, sharing opinions, acting as information brokers and making suggestions on how they can assist a company's development through their range of grants and services.

There have also been signs of greater selectivity in the sense of focusing attention more on certain sectors which seem relatively promising for indigenous development. For example, the IDA prepared a plan for the Food and Drink sector, *A Future in Food* (1987), which contained some quite specific details about what types of products would be eligible or not eligible for grant assistance. In addition, the *Programme for National Recovery* (1987) identified a number of specific sectors which were regarded as being promising for indigenous development, including toolmaking, automotive components, mechanical engineering, electronics and clothing. Sectoral studies and strategic development plans were drawn up for some of these selected industries, such as the Department of Industry and Commerce's (1989) strategy document on the indigenous electronics industry.

In these more selective and/or active measures, industrial policy for indigenous development has begun to attempt to identify and build on the relative strengths of indigenous industry and to take advantage of apparent opportunities arising in the market. There seems to be a recognition in this that indigenous industry is weak by international standards, and that consequently there is some need to focus the rather limited available resources on developing those companies and sectors which have the best prospects of succeeding in international competition. Given the barriers to development for new or small indigenous firms in many sectors in a lateindustrialising country such as Ireland, which were discussed earlier, this line of thinking makes sense, and indeed it probably needs to be acted on further if very significant progress is to be achieved.

Although manufacturing employment fell steeply for much of the 1980s, the lowest point was reached at the end of 1987 and since then it has grown again. And rather than occurring only in foreign-owned industries, employment growth has occurred in the indigenous sector as well, which was a distinct change from previous experience.

The return to growth of manufacturing employment would have been partly due to an improved general economic environment in 1987–90 but there were also some more specific factors having a bearing on industry. One such factor was an increased inflow of new foreign industrial investment, in the context of a general increase of American investment in Europe after 1987, which was encouraged by the perceived market opportunities arising from plans to create a single integrated EC market by 1992.

As regards indigenous industry, it seems likely that the new policy initiatives of the 1980s have begun to have favourable effects. This can be seen from the fact that, while the new emphasis of policy was on developing indigenous industry, the employment record of indigenous firms which were assisted by industrial grants has improved by more than that of grant-assisted foreign industry, although both were operating in the same economic environment, thus reversing a long-standing pattern whereby the grant-assisted foreign-owned firms used to contribute most to employment growth. This seems to show the differential impact of policy measures focusing more on indigenous development in recent years.

The focus of indsustrial policy for indigenous industry has also been on selectively developing stronger firms which would be internationally competitive and capable of exporting successfully. And in fact there has been a marked growth of exports from indigenous industry and a significant increase in the proportion of its output going to export markets since 1986, to a degree which was unprecedented for decades previously. A general improvement in the economic environment would no doubt have helped to bring about this result. But since there must have been periods in the past when general economic conditions were similarly favourable without causing such a result, it is likely that the changed emphasis in industrial policy was responsible to a significant degree.

After many years of domestic market shares being lost to competing imports following the removal of protection, which resulted in a major shake-out of weaker companies, it is reasonable to suppose that most of the indigenous firms existing now are better able to survive in conditions of international competition than was the case ten or twenty years ago. For these firms are either the survivors of many years of intensifying competition or else they are relatively young companies which were established in a competitive environment. If Irish firms are now typically more competitive than formerly, there was, of course, a heavy price paid in arriving at that situation. But it may well mean that the worst is over and that further major decline like that seen in 1980–87 is unlikely. Indigenous industry still sells most of its output to the home market but, by 1988, 36 per cent of its output was exported, which was up from 27 per cent only two years previously in 1986 and from less than 19 per cent in 1960.¹⁰ Thus Irish companies now are typically more engaged in competing in export markets than they used to be. Furthermore, quite a significant minority of indigenous industry could not be expected to export much because it is engaged in naturally sheltered 'non-traded' types of activity, and the presence of these activities reduces the overall level of export-orientation. Among the more highly traded sectors of industry which are mainly Irish-owned, it is not uncommon to find sectors which now export half or more of their output, for example, metals, meat processing, dairy products, leather and footwear, clothing, and transport equipment other than motor vehicles.

Future Prospects

The recent increase in new foreign investment has brought about renewed growth of employment in the foreign-owned sector and this could continue for some years. It seems to be, to an important degree, a response to the completion of the EC internal market by 1992. The removal of non-tariff barriers to trade between EC countries should have the effect of making it more attractive for non-EC companies to invest in production within the EC for this large integrated market. At the same time, it should make it more feasible for both EC and non-EC firms to select a small peripheral EC country such as Ireland as a site in which to produce for the major EC markets, since there will be fewer impediments to intra-EC trade. Such an effect on Ireland could last for some time, but it should not be seen as continuing indefinitely. For most of the 1980s, until about 1988, it seemed that the phase of industrialisation relying heavily on foreign investment was running out of dynamism. Such a situation could well return eventually, when multinational companies have completed their adjustment to the new conditions of the single EC market.

Thus, the problem of how to develop a stronger indigenous industrial sector continues to be an issue of critical importance. Indigenous industry now seems to be less vulnerable than it was for a long time past. Also, the further freeing of intra-EC trade which will result from the single

¹⁰ Data on exports of indigenous industry *per se* are available from the *Census of Industrial Production* since 1986. The 19 per cent figure for 1960 refers to all of industry, which at that time included a small number of highly export-oriented foreign firms, so that the true figure for indigenous industry would have been a little less than 19 per cent.

European market probably does not pose a major new competitive threat to most Irish firms, either because they are not much engaged in the types of industry where there are very significant non-tariff barriers which will be removed or else because they are reasonably strong in such sectors (O'Malley, 1990). But if the future outlook seems rather less threatening than past experience, there has, as yet, been only fairly limited progress in promoting the expansion of indigenous industry.

It seems likely that the policy changes of the 1980s are by now having a favourable effect in developing Irish companies. There is now, at least, a consciousness of the need to focus attention on the issue of indigenous development. And some aspects of industrial policy are concerned with identifying the relative strengths of Irish-owned industry and building on these in a concentrated manner. This approach could still be taken further, however, and it does seem to make sense given that much of indigenous industry is relatively weak and small in scale by international standards and therefore companies require focused support in order to expand in competition with larger and longer established firms in more advanced economies.

It could be argued that there remains a need for state development agencies or state enterprises to take the lead more in committing direct investment to starting up or developing major projects, whether alone or in co-operation with private companies. As it is, no new state industrial enterprises have been established since the 1960s. The potential of present policies for indigenous development is still largely limited to what Ireland's relatively small private firms can be encouraged or persuaded to do, with assistance from the state which is generally limited to some proportion of investment costs incurred by such firms. Compared with what should be possible with a greater degree of state initiative and participation, this must impose limits on the type of industrial projects which can be seriously considered, that is, limits in terms of the scale of investment or the time horizon required for attaining profitability.

There is also the significant difficulty that, over the past decade in particular, many of the larger and more successful Irish firms have been inclined to expand by taking over foreign companies, rather than by expanding their activity within the country. Such companies cannot be compelled to concentrate on expansion in Ireland, whereas state enterprises can be instructed to do so, subject to maintaining commercial viability.

Lessons of Ireland's Experience

Before concluding, it is of interest to consider what general lessons are suggested by Ireland's experience of industrialisation. Ireland began as an independent state with very little industry in the 1920s and, in that respect, it was comparable to many other less-developed countries which have aimed to develop industry in this century starting from a very small or non-existent base. Since Ireland tried different industrialisation strategies in different periods, its experience should be of some relevance for the general issue of industrial development policy in less-developed or newly-industrialising countries.

Much of the discussion on this issue has concerned the advantages and disadvantages of an 'inward-looking' strategy of import-substituting industrialisation (ISI) as compared to an 'outward-looking' strategy of exportled industrialisation (ELI). Ireland has attempted a version of both of these, so the results should be instructive.

Ireland's experience with the inward-looking ISI strategy in the 1930s– 1950s was ultimately unsatisfactory, since it culminated in almost a decade of virtual stagnation. The key failure was the lack of development of exports since the policy of protection did not result in development of internationally competitive industries. This experience was fairly typical of that of many less-developed countries which have tried a similar approach and it appears that protection, on its own at least, is not an adequate policy.

It should be noted, however, that before introducing protection in the early 1930s Ireland had previous long experience of a free trade *laissez-faire* approach, both as part of the United Kingdom and in the first decade of its own independence. This approach had not fostered industrialisation, and in fact the early progress which had been made in developing industry in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries had turned into a process of industrial decline (O'Malley, 1989: ch. 3). Against this back-ground, it can be seen that the protectionist policy was not the original *cause* of industrial stagnation which overtook the country in the 1950s, as might be thought by those who argue for the benefits of free market forces. Rather protection was a temporarily useful but ultimately unsatisfactory response to a long-standing difficulty in fostering industrialisation.

The 'outward-looking' or ELI strategy which was introduced during and after the late 1950s was in general accordance with the prescriptions for industrial development which are put forward by neo-classical economists, or by proponents of modernisation theory in sociology. Thus, Ireland sought to promote export growth and to encourage foreign direct investment in the country for that purpose, while it also dismantled protective barriers against imports and opened the economy to international market forces. Foreign-owned companies were also free to withdraw their profits from the country as they wished and to purchase input requirements freely from abroad. While quite a large number of less-developed countries have adopted some elements of this strategy, such as the objective of export promotion and incentives to attract foreign firms as one means of attaining that objective, few of them have gone as far as Ireland did in entering into full free trade with advanced industrial countries. For this reason, Ireland is quite an important test case for the full outward-looking free market strategy.

Under that strategy, Ireland had an increase in industrial growth rates compared with the 1950s and its growth of industrial output often compared favourably with other EC countries in the 1970s and 1980s. However, a distinctive feature of this performance was that it relied very heavily on foreign-owned industry. Up to 1987 at least, the strategy could only be considered a failure as regards the performance of indigenous industry.

Thus, Ireland's fairly strong industrial growth in the 1960s to 1980s was basically due to the fact that an exceptionally large proportion of the available mobile export-oriented foreign investment was attracted to a rather small country. Since such internationally mobile investment occurs on only a limited scale worldwide, relative to the size of all the lessdeveloped or newly-industrialising countries, this was an *exceptional* experience which could not be readily repeated by many other such countries. Thus Ireland's experience offers no general support for recommending this type of strategy. Indeed the experience of its indigenous industry serves as a general warning of the risks involved for a developing country which could not realistically expect to obtain a disproportionately large share of internationally mobile foreign direct investment.

It is also worth noting that unemployment and/or emigration persisted in Ireland in the period since the 1950s despite the degree of success which was achieved in attracting a relatively large share of such investment. Thus, even for Ireland, the results of the outward-looking free market strategy were never really satisfactory.

It might be argued, however, that the strategy was basically sound and that unsatisfactory outcomes were due to defects in the Irish economic environment, for example, a poor infrastructure, low quality labour force or a misguided tax system. In reply to this, it can be pointed out that numerous foreign multinational firms have found the Irish economic environment reasonably attractive and they have found it possible to operate successfully in many parts of the country. This indicates the existence of at least fairly suitable conditions in the physical infrastructure, the political and bureaucratic environment, the tax system, financial and professional services, and in the attitudes and productivity of the labour force. Such conditions could, no doubt, be improved on, but the performance of foreign industry in Ireland suggests that they do not represent major constraints which would explain the markedly poorer performance of indigenous industry in the same environment.

It might also be argued that the outward-looking free market strategy was the right one and that, if Irish indigenous industry did not prosper in conditions which suited foreign multinational companies, this was because of deficiencies in native Irish entrepreneurship. However, there was no great lack of indigenous entrepreneurship in the sense of a scarcity of people who were willing to start up and run industrial companies. It was mentioned above that the rate of establishment of new indigenous manufacturing companies was comparable to that of the USA and Canada and greater than in the UK. The problem was that new indigenous firms generally remained small while larger existing firms tended to decline.

It seems reasonable to conclude that the outward-looking free market strategy proved inadequate as a means of developing indigenous industry, despite the existence of general economic conditions which were not seriously unfavourable. This can be explained, as was suggested above, by the prevalence in many industries of barriers to entry, arising from the strengths of established competitors, which confront new or small indigenous firms in a late-industrialising country such as Ireland. Free market policies which do not recognise the resulting inherent competitive disadvantages of the latecomer are inadequate in this situation.

A recent analysis of Ireland's experience by O'Hearn (1989), which is highly critical of the country's outward-looking free market strategy, suggests that the strategy was rather worse than merely inadequate. O'Hearn describes Ireland as a 'classic case of "dependent" relations: slow growth and inequality caused by foreign penetration'. His argument is that Ireland had slow overall economic growth and this occurred partly because 'radical free trade . . . allowed domestic industry to atrophy', and partly because the very liberal policy towards foreign industries allowed them to import most of their input requirements and to repatriate substantial profits which meant a loss of foreign exchange.

It may be agreed that the free trade, free market policy, for a long time at least, 'allowed domestic industry to atrophy', and that foreign industry imports many inputs and withdraws large profits. But it seems clear, despite this, that foreign industry in Ireland has not in itself done positive damage by causing a net loss of foreign exchange. Foreign-owned industry in Ireland has consistently exported a very high proportion of its output, with 85 per cent of the value of its total sales being exported in 1989, and it also imports most of its inputs and withdraws substantial profits from the country. Nevertheless, foreign-owned industry does spend a certain amount in Ireland on wages and locally produced materials and services. In 1989, according to the Industrial Development Authority's annual survey, these expenditures in the Irish economy amounted to 40 per cent of the value of its sales. This left a maximum outflow from the country equal to 60 per cent of the value of its sales, in the form of payments for imported inputs and withdrawals of profits. With 85 per cent of the value of sales being exported, this means that foreign-owned industry had net foreign exchange earnings for Ireland equal to at least 25 per cent of the value of its sales, which was very much less than the value of its exports but was nevertheless positive. Even if all of the wages of employees in foreign industry were spent on imports, there would still have been positive net foreign exchange earnings equal to 12 per cent of the value of sales after allowing for this. In addition, foreign investment, when it initially occurs, involves some inflow of foreign capital which adds to the positive foreign exchange effect.¹¹

Thus while O'Hearn (1989) argues that Ireland's *overall* ELI strategy had detrimental effects, it is worth clarifying the point that it was the unsuitability or inadequacy of the free trade, free market approach for indigenous industry that was the main problem, rather than positive damage being done by the growth of foreign-owned industry. The key issue in aiming to improve matters, therefore, is to improve the performance of indigenous industry, rather than laying blame for deficiencies in the overall performance on detrimental effects of the foreign-owned sector.

While much of the discussion concerning industrialisation strategy for developing countries has been couched in terms of general strategies such as ISI or ELI, in practice there can be significant variations on these general approaches. Thus the full outward-looking free market strategy, which some call ELI, involves export promotion, freedom for foreign direct investment, free trade and an absence of selective intervention by the state in the operation of market forces. Ireland's approach from the end of the 1950s until recent years was close to this. However, it is possible to envisage export-led industrialisation without much reliance on foreign direct investment, or to envisage export-led industrialisation with a good deal of foreign investment but without free trade and with a significant

¹¹ It should be noted that O'Hearn (1989) does not necessarily argue that foreign industry actually has caused a *net* loss of foreign exchange. His argument seems to be that Ireland's ELI strategy, as a package incorporating free trade with resulting import penetration together with growth of foreign-owned industry (which has either very low positive, or perhaps negative, net foreign exchange earnings), led to overall negative foreign exchange effects on balance. While this may be so, it is worth clarifying that foreign-owned industry *per se* has had positive foreign exchange effects; if the ELI package as a whole had negative foreign exchange from free trade.

amount of selective state intervention. In practice such variations are often lumped together and described as ELI or outward-looking strategies. This practice is unhelpful since it obscures important distinctions.

Ireland, as noted above, had each of the major elements of the outward-looking free market strategy and largely failed to develop its indigenous industry. Some other countries which have had greater success in indigenous development, notably South Korea and Taiwan, are often cited as examples of the success of the ELI or outward-looking strategy but in reality their strategy was different, and the differences may well be crucial. As O'Hearn (1989) notes, these countries relied a good deal less than Ireland on foreign direct investment, and they were characterised by a good deal of selective state intervention, widespread use of selective protection rather than free trade, and a definite favouring of indigenous industry (see also O'Malley, 1989: ch. 8). Their strategies were 'outward-looking' mainly in the limited sense of aiming to develop exports from internationally competitive industries, without heavy reliance on foreign investment, free trade or unaided market forces to achieve this.

It is arguable that, since about the mid-1980s, Ireland's strategy for industrial development has been gradually evolving into a further variant with significant differences from its approach in the previous twenty-five years. While retaining an emphasis on export promotion, a liberal and generally encouraging approach to foreign direct investment, and free trade (in the context of commitment to EC membership), the present Irish approach involves concentrating greater efforts, in quite an active and selective manner, on developing internationally competitive indigenous industries. This approach to indigenous development involves selective intervention in the operation of market forces, not with the intention of resisting those forces indefinitely, but rather with the aim of ultimately providing indigenous industries with the characteristics and strengths required to survive and grow in a competitive environment.

Since about 1987, the results have been quite encouraging and the performance of indigenous industry has improved considerably. This is a very short period on which to judge the effectiveness of an industrial development strategy, but it may well be of some general interest in the future to see if the newly evolving Irish policy meets with longer term success.

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