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Social Democracy and the Irish Left: An Assessment of the Failure of Ireland's Left-Wing Parties and its Consequences

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I have calculated that I have read over 6,700 pages of texts and research articles, multiple newspapers articles and political party manifestos to try to make sense out of what may be Europe's most complex political system and the policy emanating from it. While many answers have presented themselves to me in my research, a number of other questions about how Ireland's political shortfalls and lack of social aid programs coincides with problems in other nations (including our own) have come to light. Social inequality even in the presence of wealth is a major issue that must be addressed worldwide, and the political choices made in societies throughout the world determine the overall well-being of individuals in those societies. While this thesis only may be an infinitesimally small contribution to the research on this subject, my ultimate hope is that world leaders will make the conscious effort to work towards assisting the least fortunate members of societies through intelligent and socially-conscious policy decisions.

Abstract Summary

The Irish political system has been characterized as one of the most unique systems in Western Europe, primarily due to the nature of political parties in Ireland. The major Irish political parties, such as Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Irish Labour Party, and many “minor” political parties, including Sinn Féin, the Irish Green Party and an array of socialist parties, could all be characterized as leftist parties in a comparison with European and other world political parties. (The Progressive Democrats, currently in coalition with Bertie Ahern’s Fianna Fáil party, are Ireland’s only successful *self-proclaimed* socially and economically right-wing party.) With such a great number of parties claiming to fall into the left side of the political spectrum in Ireland, one would expect that politics in Ireland would be decidedly socialistic in nature (such as the political systems in the Scandinavian countries). However, the reality of Irish politics today is that its predominant political parties have failed to bring about socialist economic programs and social modernization at the levels seen elsewhere in Europe. The failure in establishing a social democratic state, along with programs generally accompanying such a system, can be attributed both to the traditionalism and conservatism of the revolutionary parties (Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael) and to many limiting influences placed upon the other left-wing parties in Ireland.

This thesis will begin by examining both the socialist tendencies of Ireland’s political parties that allow for them to be assessed as leftist, and the tendency towards traditionalism that has acted simultaneously to counteract these leftist influences. In order to accomplish this, an examination of the historical formation and development of the political party system of Ireland must be undertaken. The formation of the Pro- and Anti-Treaty branches of Sinn Féin (who would become the modern Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil political parties, respectively) in the early 1920s established a framework for political competition outside of the general left to right

spectrum seen in most European political systems, especially as it pertains to the two major opposing parties in these systems. As a result of this focus on nationalist political traditions over the more prevalent ideological competition in other countries, today's Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael parties are, for lack of a better term, "schizophrenic" insofar as their placement on an ideological spectrum is concerned. While members claim to be "leftist" in their orientation, both parties cater more to voters concerned with maintaining both traditional social values (based in Roman Catholicism) and conservative, pro-agrarian economic policies than to the young, urban electorate generally sought after by leftist parties elsewhere. What leftist policy does emanate from Ireland's governing parties tends to come less from party orientation and more from the fact the Ireland is a European country. As such, the political spectrum creates an environment where even conservative countries on the spectrum are more willing to promote social welfare policies than other non-European parties, making some ideological concessions in order to fulfill voter expectations of certain "entitlements." Nevertheless, the persisting rural, Catholic, conservative mindset of most Irish voters and of the two major Irish parties has effectively offset other tendencies towards socialistic policies.

Such conservative predispositions can be seen in the election platforms of both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, especially when compared to Ireland's range of socialist parties. Fianna Fáil has received especially harsh criticism from leftist parties on their hesitancy towards change from the Irish left. This fact opens Ireland to comparison with the rest of Europe, revealing that its governments under the nationalist parties have ignored the opportunity to use Ireland's current economic status to promote social democratic changes, opting for the maintenance of the status quo and corporatism instead.

Aside from these conservative tendencies in Ireland, other factors continue to weaken the left-wing parties on Ireland's own ideological spectrum and allow the Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael

parties to dominate the political system. Even the Irish Labour Party, the most electorally successful of these parties, finds itself at a disadvantage in a system where traditional “left versus right” competition falls secondary to Ireland’s traditional model of opposition with little ideological separation between the two predominant parties. Labour’s reliance on the coalition system as an avenue to participate in the leadership within the Irish government has further reinforced their role as a secondary party, making them torchbearers for the Irish left and social democrats only in a supporting role to more conservative parties.

Aside from ideological concerns, leftist parties in Ireland also continue to be hindered by a wide range of other obstacles seen in the operational mechanics of Irish government. For instance, fractionalization in the party system has also had a negative impact on the ability of the left in Ireland to function optimally. The sheer number of left-wing parties operating in the Irish political system guarantees a high level of vote splitting. Such fractionalization stems from the brand of personality politics seen in Ireland, where individual or small groups of politicians can easily break away and form smaller parties with little or no ideological variation from the original party solely due to personal disagreement between party leaders. Aided by the proportional representation (PR) voting scheme seen in Ireland, these small break-off parties can get elected to the Dáil Éireann but can act as only minor players competing against the larger (and, as discussed before, more conservative) parties. Not only does Labour, the largest left-wing party, lose these voters at election time, but the left as a whole loses its chance to increase its collective influence and implement its social programs in the Dáil. The weakness of the presidential executive of Irish government, one of the few areas Labour has been able to secure a foothold with the elections of Mary Robinson (1990-1997) and Mary McAleese (1997-) to that position, has meant that Labour’s influence in the government via the presidency has been minimal at best. Similarly, the limited role of the Seanad Éireann (the upper parliamentary

chamber of the Oireachtas) means that the Dáil Éireann is effectively a unicameral legislature, dominated mostly by Fianna Fáil. The combination of these mechanical obstacles and the predispositions of the average Irish voter to favor the conservative policies of Ireland's two republican parties continue to impede the progress of the Irish left.

Many social and economic consequences have arisen as a result of the political realities in Ireland that have hindered its socialist parties. Social welfare programs in Ireland are inferior to those of Great Britain, France, Scandinavia, and most of the other nations of the European Union. While Ireland's economy has not always had the strength that it does in today's "Celtic Tiger" environment, the Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael governments in power since the early 1980s have not been able to perform on the level of its European neighbors even with the great economic gains of the last two decades. This reluctance on the part of Ireland's two parties of power to implement a larger degree of social programs in Ireland have created massive levels of class inequity, homelessness and poverty in what would otherwise be a climate of unprecedented economic success. Labour's election manifesto for the Summer 2002 election concisely expressed the dissatisfaction of the Irish left for government public spending: "Never has an Irish government had such resources. Never have such resources been met with such little action." (Labour Manifesto 2002, p. 1). While the Labour Party and the other socialist parties of Ireland criticize the complacency of the two largest parties, the circumstances inherent in the Irish political system have given these left-wing parties little ability to take actions to implement their own policies in an attempt to repair Ireland's social problems attributable to poor funding of public services. Thus, the government and opposition compete only superficially as it relates to their ideologies, and those parties that do advocate differing policies and agendas are effectively sidelined.

The Irish left faces a number of challenges that it must overcome in order to mobilize itself and become effective in Ireland's political environment. First and foremost, the excess number of socialist and left-wing parties must work to consolidate into a larger and more formidable entity that can compete with Ireland's two largest parties. While reducing the number of superfluous parties is the left's most important task, it is also the most difficult when the need to overcome the identity/personality politics inherent in Ireland is taken into consideration. Effectively, the left must overcome party labels (of which there are many) in order to focus on ideology so that parties become more concrete. Second, the Labour Party must abandon the coalition strategy that it has relied on in past years and work to establish itself as a party that can govern independently. To date, the Labour Party has only been able to participate in the government through coalitions. Irish voters believe that Labour could not govern effectively outside of a coalition, and Labour has only been able to operate as such. The Labour Party's ability to establish itself as a viable independent political actor begins with its ability to prove to the voters that it can operate effectively in government. This would lead to increased votes for Labour from liberal voters in the Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael camps, as well as from the other leftist parties. Furthermore, Labour has often had to "curb" its agenda in order to participate in these conservative governments, forcing the social democratic agenda of the Labour Party into the background solely in order to claim a larger role in Ireland's governance. In short, Labour must prove that it is more than a "third party" to succeed. Irish left-wing parties must also use caution in their criticism of the "Celtic Tiger" economy. Though socialism dominates the economic ideology of the Irish left, the successes brought about as a result of Ireland's "Celtic Tiger" economic boom must be acknowledged and greeted with open arms. Labour and the other left-wing parties of Ireland should work to advocate the correction of those

shortcomings associated with policies of Ireland's traditional parties since the economic boom, using the revenue obtained from Ireland's success to improve social welfare programs in Ireland.

Ultimately, the mobilization of the Irish left wing is in the hands of the leftist parties. Their choices and ability to bring about change in spite of Fianna Fáil's dominance may mean either great successes for advocates of socialist policy in Ireland or the continued decline and possible extinction of those parties. This thesis ultimately attempts to make sense of the often contradictory behaviors and mechanisms seen in the politics of Ireland, at the level of the individual voter extending upwards to the macrocosm of the Irish political system itself.

Introduction

The political party system in Ireland is markedly different from any other system seen in Western Europe or, in fact, Western democracies in general. Perhaps the most notable difference between Ireland and other Western democracies is the overall weakness of left-wing parties in both participation in government and implementation of social welfare policies. The reasons for the weakness of the left are numerous, forming a complex set of obstacles that must be overcome in order for Ireland to overcome past shortcomings in attempting to establish a social democratic state comparable to its European neighbors. Especially striking in the situation of Ireland is a continued failure to provide social welfare even after the economic breakthroughs associated with the “Celtic Tiger” phenomenon, which creates an exception to the hypothesis held by some political scientists that economically successful nations naturally shift to the left both in policy and political orientation¹.

The term “Celtic Tiger” is a nickname given to Ireland’s rapid economic growth in the 1990s. According to economists using neoclassical economic theories, this growth came about as a result of Ireland’s “ability to achieve high levels of productivity and maintaining cost competitiveness with its trading partners.”² Industrialization and moves away from agrarian production as the primary source of revenue have played a crucial role in economic growth, along with the introduction of high levels of foreign investment into the economy and various subsidies and grants from the European Union. The growth is above and beyond the growth seen at any other point in the history of Ireland as a nation, averaging 7.9 percent annual growth in real GDP in the 1990s compared to increases of only 3.2 percent annually only a decade before.³

¹ Kim, HeeMin and Richard C. Fording, “Voter Ideology, the Economy, and the International Environment in Western Democracies, 1952-1989,” *Political Behavior* (forthcoming) 11.

² Kirby, Peadar, *The Celtic Tiger in Distress: Growth With Inequality in Ireland* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002) 72.

³ Kirby 30.

In spite of the unparalleled levels of economic growth associated with the Celtic Tiger, generally accepted as beneficial to all of Ireland's citizens by those who do not fully understand the phenomenon, Ireland's poorest people have not witnessed any marked improvement in public services provided through taxation or any increases in quality of life. While some would argue that with such economic growth the "rising tide would raise all ships," levels of unemployment, homelessness and inequality still present in the Irish system show that such a rising has not occurred. Ireland's overall failure as a distributive state is partially to blame for lingering poverty in the midst of the great economic gains in other segments of the population. Paul Sweeney's statements about Ireland's failures as a social welfare provider are profound: "A society cannot be proud of itself with such a wonderful economic success as Ireland's if it excludes such a large minority of its citizens. The failure to address poverty...is no credit to the Irish people."⁴ Ireland's leading poverty researcher, Brian Nolan, also addresses the problem, stating "we have so far failed to use our new-found wealth to make serious inroads into poverty, to ensure that everyone has enough to live with dignity and participate fully in our society."⁵ The question of why Ireland should deviate from this accepted norm of social welfare stemming from economic success is naturally raised, and the most logical answer to this question comes in the form of the diminished status of left-wing parties who would introduce such a social democratic agenda to Ireland.

This thesis addresses the specific reasons for the failure of left-wing parties in Ireland, both in establishing political power and promoting social welfare in a European environment where the presence of a dominant left-wing party apparatus is generally commonplace. Beginning with an overall history of the political party structure in Ireland and a description of

⁴ Sweeney, Paul, *The Celtic Tiger: Ireland's Continuing Economic Miracle* (Dublin: Oak Tree Press, 1999) 207.

⁵ Kirby 79.

major parties like Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, the Irish Labour Party (the most electorally successful leftist party) and various third parties that have existed in Ireland since the formation of the Republic, the thesis establishes the single-party dominance of Fianna Fáil in historical terms. Section II places Ireland into its European context, examining the role of left-right orientation in European politics and comparing Ireland to “classic” examples of social democratic nations like those of Scandinavia. In this section, specific correlations are pointed out between Ireland and these other European nations, and the deviance of Ireland from the European norm is addressed.

Sections III and IV look at the two levels which present the greatest number of obstacles for the Left, the overwhelmingly conservative Irish voter population and the political institutions that create obstacles for the Irish left in their attempts to increase the standing of leftist parties in government. Both individuals and institutions are responsible for the Left’s (and especially Labour’s) inability to increase its governmental influence in the Dáil Éireann (Ireland’s upper parliamentary house). The examination of voters includes a look at specific groups as well as the overall tendency of Irish voters to favor conservative policy. The contradiction between this conservatism and the expectation for social welfare programs is also discussed. Section IV moves into an institutional-level analysis of left-wing party failure. Some specific institutional obstacles include Ireland’s Proportional Representation voting system as well as the historical weakness of the lower house of the Oireachtas (parliament), Seanad Éireann, and of the Irish president, or Uachtarán.

Section V of the thesis focuses on the consequences of left-wing party failures in establishing themselves in Ireland, and more specifically discusses the lack of funding for social welfare in spite of Ireland’s great economic success over the last two decades. Increasing rich-poor gaps and the minimal funding of many public services are noted, and the full effect of the left’s governmental failures comes to light. The section concludes with a discussion of the

changes the Irish Left must make before the trend of abysmally poor public services in the presence of economic growth and wealth can be overcome. The changes constitute what is ultimately a restructuring of the way Irish politics is thought about and operated, but such changes may indeed be possible should Ireland's left wing be willing to work towards them for the sake of the public good.

I. The Origins of Ireland's Political Parties

Irish Nationalism

The claim that Ireland's political party structure rose solely out of the contradictory opinions surrounding the 1920 Anglo-Irish Treaty creating the Irish Free State ignores the fact that Ireland's governmental structure stems directly from the parliamentary system of Great Britain. Initial ties of members of Parliament (MPs) from Ireland to the British Tory and Whig parties throughout the Nineteenth Century are often ignored, but these ties are a crucial first step in explaining Ireland's deviation from opposition politics based on a model of leftist versus right-wing ideology. While these parties were the precursory parties to Britain's modern Conservative and Labour parties, the lack of conservative-leftist polarization within these earlier parties and their focus on specifically non-ideological issues (such as conflicts between the monarchy and parliamentary power, as well as religion and secularism) parallel the lack of ideological definition seen in the modern Irish political party structure. The issues observed in Irish politics in the Twentieth Century, and especially in modern-day Ireland, have transitioned into discussing new conflicts while maintaining a lack of left-right party alignment.

Ireland's tendency towards nationalist politics became the norm as early as the late Nineteenth Century, as what William Coakley calls "the birth of modern mass politics" came

about.⁶ Irish politics prior to the formation of the Irish Free State in 1922, beginning with the pivotal election of 1885, focused on party alliances based on religious associations with either Catholicism or Protestantism. Coakley cites the importance of politics based in competition “between Ireland and the United Kingdom, between Catholics and Protestants, and between tenants and landlords.”⁷ While the influence of Britain (as well as the influence of “Protestant landlords”) would decrease as a result of nationalist revolution in Ireland and Britain’s subsequent eagerness to allow Ireland a greater degree of self-rule, Irish nationalism and the specific anti-British sentiment associated with it would continue to play a crucial role in Irish politics as Britain vacated Ireland. In fact, the “Nationalist Party” dominated the 1918 Election in the south and acted as a final indicator that the Irish citizenry desired independence from Britain.

Perhaps a more notable party operating at that time and pursuing a nationalistic agenda was Sinn Féin (literally, “ourselves”), founded in 1905. The most “radical” elements in early Twentieth Century Irish Society, revolutionaries like James Connolly, Padraic (Patrick) Pearse, and even a very young Eamon de Valera, were all members of what was at the time a small political movement in Ireland. Prior to the later developments that would come as a result of British reaction to the 1916 Easter Rebellion, Sinn Féin was nothing more than a fringe movement. With the rise of paramilitary activity on the part of nationalists prior to the rebellion, most notably the Irish Volunteers who led the 1916 rebellion, harsh British crackdowns upon perceived political radicalism created increased support for Sinn Féin and for their calls to separate from Britain entirely. This sentiment and the British resistance to it led to great electoral success for Sinn Féin in the 1918 election, the creation of the Dáil Éireann in 1919, and

⁶ Coakley, John, “The Foundations of Statehood,” in John Coakley and Michael Gallagher, eds., *Politics in the Republic of Ireland*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 1999) 9.

⁷ Coakley, “The Foundations of Statehood,” 11.

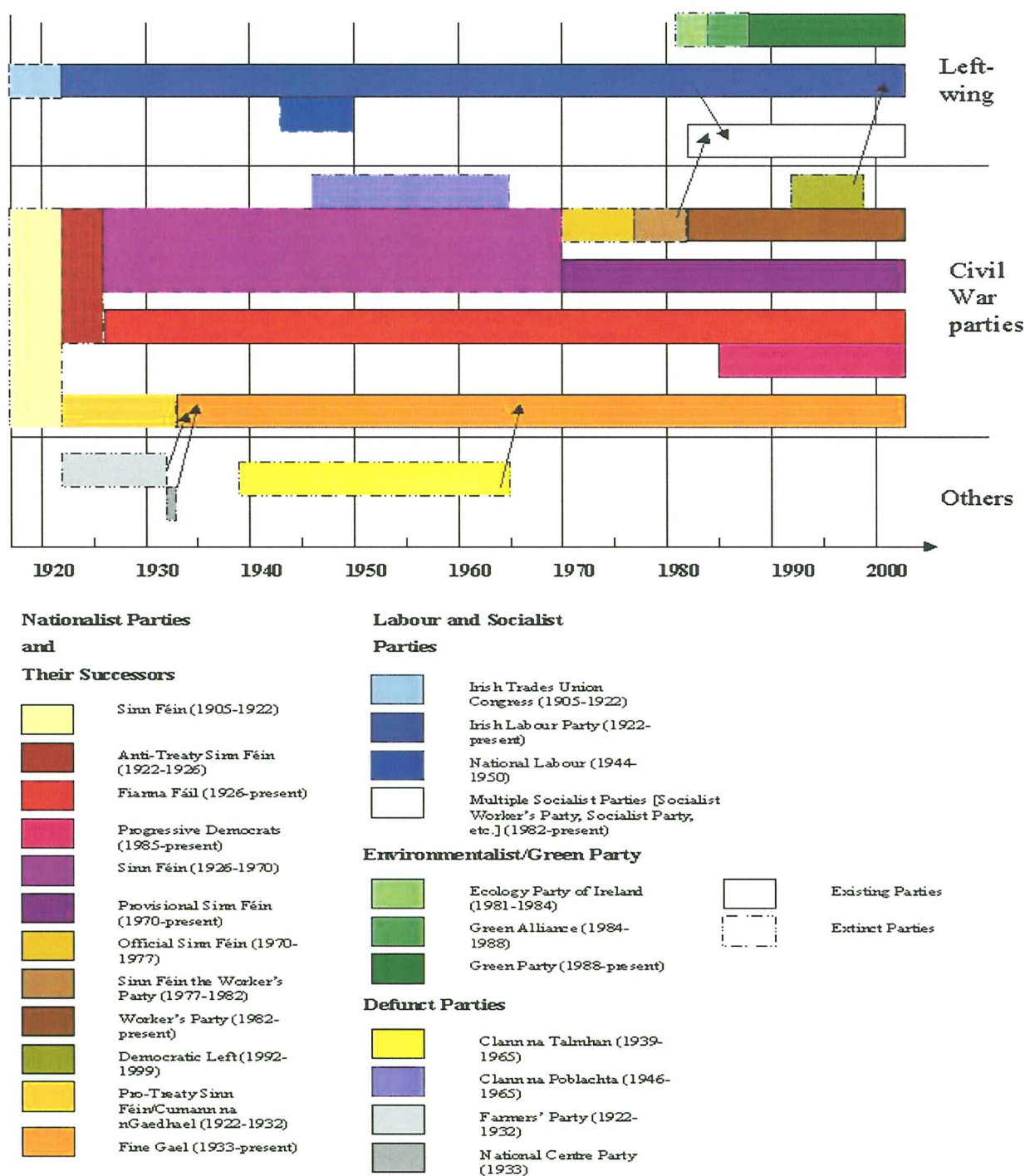
the Anglo-Irish War from 1919-1921 pitting the Sinn Féin-supported Irish Republican Army (IRA) against British security forces.

Historians commonly acknowledge that rebellion is a common part of the Gaelic tradition. Small insurgent groups throughout the centuries have resisted foreign invasion of the island of Ireland (Éire), and especially the “weighty machinery of British Administration” that “continued to operate uncertainly and with violence.”⁸ Generally, however, the rebellions led by figures like Wolfe Tone in 1798, Robert Emmet in 1803, Daniel O’Connell in 1848, and those involved in the takeover of the General Post Office in April 1916 had little in the way of popular public support. It was the Anglo-Irish War and the violent attempts by the British to suppress Irish rebellion and assassinate the rebellion’s (and consequently Sinn Féin’s) leaders that permanently changed the mindset of the Irish public, making them more favorable to Sinn Féin and the notion of independence from British rule as a whole. Amazingly, the miniscule Sinn Féin party would eventually become the origin of a majority of the political parties in Ireland during the Twentieth Century (See Figure 1), and anti-British sentiment would quickly become a major factor in Irish political behavior.

Not surprisingly, the nationalist party system stemming from 1922 has created an entire political system stemming from only a very few parties. While Labour and the Green Party have independent roots, most of Ireland’s parties claim a single party as their ancestor. This phenomenon is seen in Figure 1. This has a major bearing on how the entire political system of Ireland operates, since rather than revolving around ideological competition, other non-ideological factors such as clientelism and nationalism are prevalent. This phenomenon is discussed further below.

⁸ Macardle, Dorothy, *The Irish Republic* 29.

Figure 1. Irish Political Parties, pre-1920 – present



Information compiled from: Sinnott, Richard, *Irish Voters Decide: Voting Behaviour and in Elections and Referendums Since 1918: A Geographic Perspective*, 27; Busteed, M.A., *Voting Behaviour in the Republic of Ireland*, 7; Sweeney, Paul, *The Celtic Tiger: Ireland's Continuing Economic Miracle* (Dublin: Oak Tree Press, 1999) 106.

Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael

From these earlier historical circumstances came the Irish Civil War and the formation of the Pro-Treaty and Anti-Treaty factions of Sinn Féin. These two factions in the civil war vied for political control over the newly independent Irish Free State. They also created the initial and commonly acknowledged framework for politics in the Irish Republic, based predominantly on nationalistic attitudes. The Pro-Treaty Sinn Féin faction reorganized into Cumann na nGaedheal in 1923, and established a conservative platform based on the Party's close association with the Catholic church. It was not until 1933 that Cumann na nGaedheal, combined with the Farmers' Party and the National Centre Party, renamed itself Fine Gael (meaning "Irish Race"). The initial leadership of the party included such notable figures as William T. Cosgrave, who assumed leadership only after the deaths in quick succession in 1922 of Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith (the joint socialist-minded leaders of the party, who ultimately failed in imparting their ideological beliefs onto the party they were instrumental in forming).

Anti-Treaty Sinn Féin also underwent changes beginning in 1926, when Eamon de Valera and a group of supporters who refused to take the oath of allegiance required to sit in the Dáil Éireann as a matter "not of principle but of policy," broke with the group that thereafter continued to work under the title Sinn Féin.⁹ This new alternative republican party took the name Fianna Fáil ("soldiers of Ireland"), and by the election the following year garnered the popularity to win forty-four seats to Sinn Féin's five.

It was only after it was forced into a secondary position in polling by the newly formed Fianna Fáil party that Cumann na nGaedheal reformed as Fine Gael. Thus, both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael developed into their modern identities within eleven years of the formation of the Irish

Free State. Insofar as Ireland could ever be considered a “two-party system,” Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael would be the two predominant parties in the Irish system. Polling numbers throughout the Twentieth Century have shown that Fianna Fáil is the more dominant of the two “original” nationalist parties. Claims of Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael as leftist parties, however, are discounted by the rhetoric of TDs of both parties. One Fianna Fáil TD even went so far as to accept gladly the label of socialist so long as such a label would not involve “talking about wealth, capital, millionaires, [and] downtrodden workers.”¹⁰ The Labour Party would be better considered a “leftist” party in comparison.

The Irish Labour Party

The Irish Labour Party officially came into existence in 1922, evolving out of the Irish Trades Union Congress. As a result, Labour is the oldest political party still operating in Ireland today. The Labour Party existed even as early as a decade prior to its official formation as a political party. Its initial primary objective was to pursue “a moderate policy of defence of workers’ rights,”¹¹ primarily through attempts at establishing socialist-based notions in Ireland such as a minimum wage, improved blue-collar working conditions and a proliferation in the number of social welfare programs. Rather than focusing on nationalist issues, Labour “focused principally on matters of more immediate concern to its working class constituency, made up of both urban trade unionists and farm workers.”¹²

The Irish Labour Party has held positions in multiple governments (See Appendix 1) as a result of coalitions with other parties, mostly serving in a secondary role in coalitions led by Fine

⁹ Coakley, “The Foundations of Statehood,” 19.

¹⁰ Gallagher, Michael, *The Irish Labour Party in Transition, 1957 – 82* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1982) 11.

¹¹ Crotty, “The Foundations of Statehood,” 22.

¹² Mair, Peter, “Party Competition and the Changing Party System,” in John Coakley and Michael Gallagher, eds., *Politics in the Republic of Ireland*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 1999) 133.

Gael. Labour acted as the official opposition until Fianna Fáil's entry into the Dáil in 1927. Thereafter, and in spite of the leadership of William Norton (who would lead the party for twenty-eight years beginning in 1932), Labour took its secondary position to Fianna Fáil both because Labour's rhetoric "had more in common with a nationalist-inspired socio-economic radicalism of the Fianna Fáil type, rather than with socialist theory" and because "little or no effort was made to broaden the base of the party" outside of the traditional following in urban Dublin.¹³ Michael Gallagher points out that "Labour's absence from the fray" by not taking a definitive stance on Irish nationalism "meant that it was thereafter attempting to wean voters away from attachments they had already found" with Sinn Féin-based parties.¹⁴ Labour finally overcame its trend of mimicking Fianna Fáil in 1938, when it combined with a number of left-wing socialist parties and earned enough votes to have the determining votes in the government leadership of the Dáil. Soon after their gains from a change in ideological strategy, however, a reversion to coalitions with the more conservative Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil parties in the 1950s and acquiescence to conservative government policies like reductions in welfare aid in that decade's economic crisis brought "severe electoral retribution"¹⁵ from core Labour voters. Basil Chubb summarizes the Labour Party's activity in coalition as "pulled this way and that by its leaders in their attempts to satisfy both its moderate and its socialist supporters."¹⁶ A return to socialist policies in government during the 1970s and in the 1980s under leader Dick Spring brought another rise in voter support, additional power in the affairs of government and, once the party finally resolved itself against a coalition strategy with the two major conservative parties, freedom from the fear of contradicting the policies of their coalition partners with Labour's advocacy for social democratic ideology.

¹³ Sinnott, *Irish Voters Decide*, 54.

¹⁴ Gallagher, *The Irish Labour Party in Transition*, 124.

¹⁵ Sinnott, *Irish Voters Decide*, 55.

Clearly, many of the problems of the Labour Party stem not from its adoption of socialist policy platforms over the last eighty years, but rather the abandonment of those policies in order to participate in a secondary role in government formation. Labour has participated in coalition government on seven occasions since the formation of the republic (1948, 1954, 1973, 1981, 1982-2, 1993 and 1994), and only after the 1948 coalition did the party actually gain voter support. Rather, the norm for post-coalition performance has been substantial drops in voter support. The most notable example of this trend were the slumps in support after the coalitions of 1993 and 1994, which ultimately led to a 9 percent drop in voter support in the 1997 election. In spite of these data showing decreases in support as Labour abandons its role as an opposition party and acts instead as a coalition partner, the appeal of participating in coalitions (and, consequently, the mandatory abandonment of certain policy positions that come with such coalitions) has been traditionally strong in the minds of Labour leaders. Thus, the argument could be easily made that Labour must break the cycle of coalition involvement in order to establish itself more soundly in the Irish political system. There are a variety of ways in which this could be done, which will be discussed in more detail in Section V below.

Other Third Parties in the Irish System: Policy Differentiation and Third Party Fractionalization

A number of third parties other than Labour exist in the Irish political system, and most of them fall on the left wing of the political spectrum. While Sinn Féin is the most famous of these parties (mostly due to its activities in Northern Ireland and through the Irish Republican Army), and parties like the Green Party, Socialist Party and Christian Solidarity are seen in other European states, Ireland also has a number of other unique third parties. (See Figure 1 for a

¹⁶ Chubb, Basil, *The Government and Politics of Ireland*, 2nd ed. (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1982) 109.

timeline of political parties in Ireland since its independence from Britain via the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1920.)

The name Sinn Féin has been a constant in Irish politics, founded as early as 1905 and (in spite of many shifts, break-ups and reconfigurations) still existent today in a much altered form. It is no surprise that Sinn Féin, known for its strong and at times militant pro-nationalist stance, stands as the forerunner of both of Ireland's revolutionary-era parties.

The initial split in Sinn Féin in 1922 over the Anglo-Irish Treaty marks the beginnings of opposition parliamentary politics in Ireland, with Cumann na nGaedheal having the stronghold in the Dáil and various opposition groups vying for the position of official parliamentary opposition. Sinn Féin, pledged to create a united Ireland of 32 counties, led the opposition. The other two parties opposing Cumann na nGaedheal were Labour and what would become Fianna Fáil. With the acceptance of the oath earlier refused by Fianna Fáil in 1927, argued by Mair to be “the most crucial single event in creating the party system as it exists today,”¹⁷ Fianna Fáil effectively became the dominant party and parties like Sinn Féin and Labour were marginalized in the Irish political system. Sinn Féin, consistently pushing for socialist policy and a united Ireland, continued to exist in spite of party factioning based in the desire of certain party elements to promote militant action via groups like the Irish Republican Army (IRA). As a result, Sinn Féin has earned the popular reputation of being the political wing of the IRA.

Independent agricultural and nationalist parties have played a major role in the Irish party system since the Republic's formation, but their strength has only been seen in spotted periods in the timeline of Irish political parties (See Figure 1). In spite of their periods of strength, all of these parties have consistently met the same fate of being reassumed into the labels of the two major political parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. Some of these parties include the Farmer's

Party, National Centre Party, Clann na Talmhan (Party of the Land) and Clann na Poblachta (Party of the Republic). Sinnott discusses the phenomenon of the short lives of such parties, as well as dips in the support for Labour as it has adopted the philosophies and platforms of the major parties over the years, by saying that if these parties could identify with major parties like Fianna Fáil then there is no reason why voters “could not do likewise.”¹⁸ Sinn Féin’s constancy in the Irish political system is the exception to the rule of short-lived third parties, but this continuous presence is more attributable to the continued influence of radical nationalists and to changes in Sinn Féin’s structure (as shown in Figure 1) than to the strength of its social democratic policy platform. These changes in structure have prompted the formation of break-off socialist parties like the Worker’s Party, Democratic Left, and (with far-left defectors from Irish Labour) an array of smaller socialist parties.

The Environment of Political Marginalization and Single-Party Dominance

Coakley argues that Labour’s initial marginalization in the Irish political system, making it the “third party in a three-party system,” came about in its decision not to “adopt a distinctive position” on the “national question.”¹⁹ In other words, the strong positions taken on the 1920 Treaty by what would become Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael isolated the Labour Party in a period where the sole issue on the minds of voters was that of Irish independence. Coakley also argues “in the absence of a classic revolutionary left, the consistent weakness of Labour has been remarkable in a European context.”²⁰ Fianna Fáil, on the other hand, has gained and kept a consistent following among Irish voters on little else than its initial nationalistic policy outlook. Labour’s ability to act as a major competitive party against parties like Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael

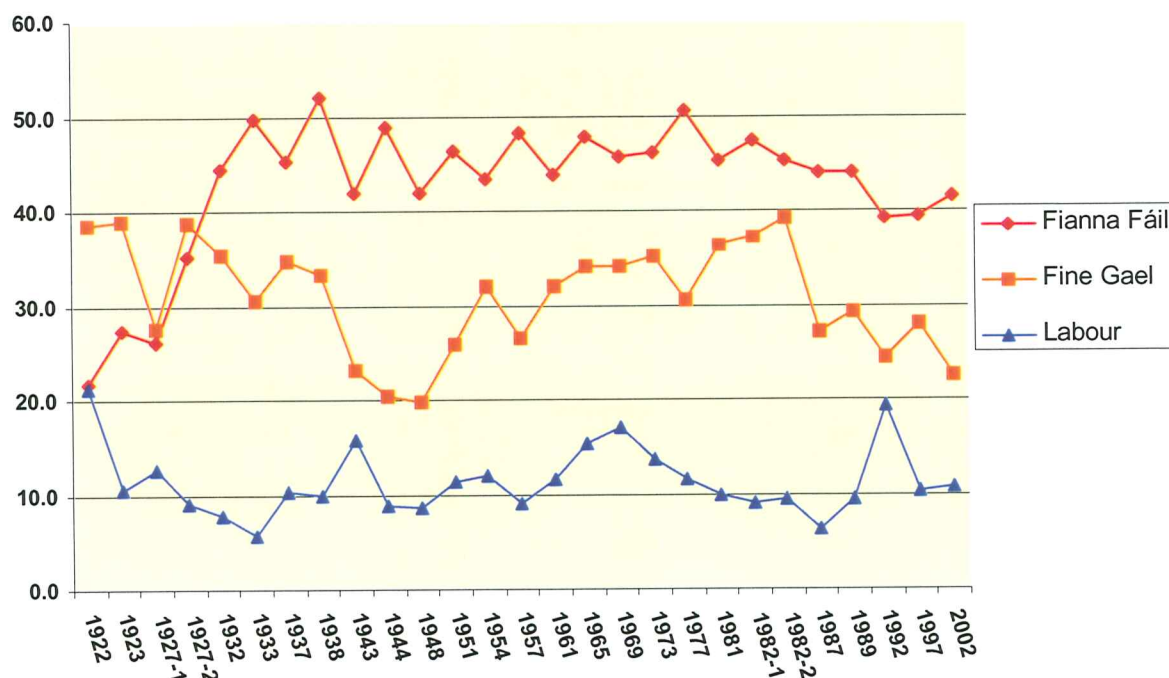
¹⁷ Mair, Peter, *The Changing Irish Party System* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987) 15.

¹⁸ Sinnott, *Irish Voters Decide*, 54.

¹⁹ Coakley, “The Foundations of Statehood,” 22.

While Labour has been able to form coalitions with Fine Gael and other third parties, the overall effect of Fianna Fáil dominance has been consistently low polling results for Labour with very few exceptions. Figure 2 shows the percentage of votes earned by Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Labour, and shows specifically how Fianna Fáil has maintained dominance in the Irish political system. Only as a result of coalitions (mostly with Fine Gael and smaller third parties) has Labour been able to participate in the Dáil Éireann in a ministerial role. As Kieran Allen succinctly puts it, “the only time [Labour] has seen government office has been in administrations where right-wing politicians were dominant.”²¹ Thus, Labour’s “successes” at obtaining positions as ministers in the government via coalitions have come only with the negative effect of having policy positions marginalized and diluted by the primary coalition partner that it associated with to gain those posts.

Figure 2. First-Preference Voter Support for Major Irish Political Parties, 1922-present²²



²¹ Allen, Kieran, *Fianna Fail and Irish Labour: 1926 to the Present* (London: Pluto Press, 1997) 2.

²² Data points are graphed with each election period weighted equally, reflecting equidistant electoral outcomes instead of support over time. This more accurately shows drastic changes in electoral support in each election.

	Fianna Fáil	Fine Gael	Labour
1922	21.7	38.5	21.3
1923	27.4	39.0	10.6
1927-1	26.1	27.5	12.6
1927-2	35.2	38.7	9.1
1932	44.5	35.3	7.7
1933	49.7	30.5	5.7
1937	45.2	34.8	10.3
1938	51.9	33.3	10.0
1943	41.9	23.1	15.7
1944	48.9	20.5	8.8
1948	41.9	19.8	8.7
1951	46.3	25.8	11.4
1954	43.4	32.0	12.1
1957	48.3	26.6	9.1
1961	43.8	32.0	11.6
1965	47.7	34.1	15.4
1969	45.7	34.1	17.0
1973	46.2	35.1	13.7
1977	50.6	30.5	11.6
1981	45.3	36.5	9.9
1982-1	47.3	37.3	9.1
1982-2	45.2	39.2	9.4
1987	44.1	27.1	6.4
1989	44.1	29.3	9.5
1992	39.1	24.5	19.3
1997	39.3	27.9	10.4
2002	41.5	22.5	10.8

Information Compiled From: Coakley, John and Michael Gallagher, eds., *Politics in the Republic of Ireland*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 1999) 367; "Elections in Ireland," *Election World*. 22 February 2003. Online. Internet. Available: <http://www.electionworld.org/election/ireland.htm>.

An examination of elections where Labour avoided the use of coalition strategy shows improved results over those where coalition strategy had been employed prior to the election. The 1992 election, for example, showed a 9.8% increase in electoral support for the Labour Party from the 1989 election, led by Dick Spring and with the momentum of the new Labour-affiliated Uachtarán (president) Mary Robinson. The Labour Party's strategy was to abandon its long-held coalition strategy and attempt to gain seats through its policy proposals rather than the promise of obtaining ministerial positions in government. The abandonment of coalition was successful, as Labour drew 25% of its votes from former Fianna Fáil voters and 15% from previous supporters of Fine Gael. Voters polled cited their primary reason for supporting Labour was "the

desire for change.”²³ Labour did not learn from the lessons of its own history, however, and returned to coalition with Fianna Fáil in January 1993 and Fine Gael in December 1994. As discussed above, voters again saw Labour as a secondary party; Labour’s support plummeted to 10.4% in the June 1997 election. The one exception to the phenomenon of decreasing voter support after coalitions, the election of 1951, saw Labour’s first-preference votes rise 2.7 percentage points from 8.7% in 1948 to 11.4% in 1951. This exception is easily explained away when compared to the percentage point increases of other parties; Fianna Fáil saw a 4.4% increase and Fine Gael one of 6.0%. The dissolution of the National Labour Party in 1950 led to a distribution of that party’s voters to remaining parties in the political system. What must be noted is that Labour did not solely regain the support of the voters from this ideologically similar party, and former National Labour voters redistributed support not on the basis of ideological ties but rather on non-ideological factors.

Ultimately, Labour’s success comes about primarily when it is able to separate itself from the two major parties ideologically, not through merely securing ministerial positions through coalitions. The failure of Labour leaders to realize this has led to further problems in policy implementation. This is one of the problems most pressing for Labour leaders to overcome if they hope to further the party’s ability to implement policy.

II. Ireland and the European Environment

Ireland as a Western European Democracy: The Unique System in Context

Modern western European politics stands out as markedly more socialistic, on the whole, than politics in most other regions of the world. It would therefore make logical sense for Ireland to have many of the social democratic characteristics and programs seen in other European nations. While the two nationalist parties have implemented some social welfare

²³ Collins, Stephen, *Spring and the Labour Story* (Dublin: The O’Brien Press, 1993) 192.

programs, a number of factors have historically led to only a limited number of social welfare programs being implemented in Ireland in comparison to Ireland's other European counterparts.

What stands out in the Irish example is its rapid progression from an agrarian socio-economic structure to an industrial structure, much later than neighboring Britain (as a result of its colonial status to Britain even eighty years after Britain's own Industrial Revolution first began). Since 1996, Ireland has overtaken the United Kingdom in GDP per capita and ranks highly in per capita GDP among EU and western European nations (See Appendix 2). Regardless of this, Ireland still is best described as a notably rural and agrarian nation, as 41.9 percent of the Irish public still are classified as "non-urban" as of 1996, and as of 50 years ago 70.7 percent could be classified as "non-urban."²⁴ In contrast, most developed nations have non-urban populations around 24 percent, and the E.U. average is 26.7 percent rural.²⁵ Dublin, which is home to 30 percent of the people residing in Ireland and the primary base for left-wing parties like Labour, the Worker's Party and the host of other socialist parties promoting social democratic policies, does not hold the predominant political and social opinion in Ireland. That predominant opinion, based in the three "C's" of conservatism, Catholicism and capitalism, instead resides in the Irish countryside and has been trumpeted by the predominant Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael parties. Thus, in spite of a degree of urbanization in Ireland, Labour and the other left-wing parties of Ireland continue to be at a disadvantage in an Irish political system so reliant upon the rural vote.

As a full participant in the European Union since its passage of a referendum approving the Maastricht Treaty in June 1992, Ireland has continued to extend its role in the EU and receive the benefits that have accompanied its membership. The *Eurobarometer*50 poll conducted in Autumn 1998 revealed that eighty-five percent of Irish voters believe Ireland's membership in

²⁴ Coakley and Gallagher 364.

²⁵ PRB 2002 *World Population Data Sheet*. Online. Internet. Available: <http://www.data.worldpop.org/datafinder.htm>.

the EU has benefited the country, an astonishing number considering the average agreement with this sentiment for EU member nations was only forty-nine percent. Only five percent of Irish voters stated the belief that EU membership either did not benefit or was detrimental to Ireland.²⁶ Ireland has, to the surprise of the “major players” of the European Union, become not only a major player in European politics but also a model for late-industrializing nations hoping to increase their involvement in the EU. In addition, modern Irish citizens have embraced their roles as Europeans even in spite of Ireland’s traditional nationalist tendencies.

Even Bertie Ahern, the current Taoiseach and leader of Fianna Fáil, stresses the importance of the European label; “Irish people increasingly see the European Union not simply as an organization to which Ireland belongs, but as an integral part of our future. We see ourselves increasingly as Europeans.”²⁷ In some respects, mostly for the sake of improving economic interests, modernization and the chance to improve foreign relations with Europe (including Great Britain), the nationalist parties have embraced the opportunity to latch themselves to the EU. In doing so, these parties ultimately sought to “[appeal] to the old concern of Irish nationalism – ‘how to deal with Britain’, and the new concern – how to make Ireland prosperous.”²⁸ What must be noted is that Ireland’s involvement in the EU under Fianna Fáil’s leadership has brought little in the way of European-style social democracy for Ireland, since the party has instead opted to focus on an increased “economic growth path.”²⁹

Niamh Hardiman points out that even other late-industrializing EU nations such as Greece and Portugal have overtaken Ireland in their alleviation of poverty via government programming, in spite of their lack of any sort of “Celtic Tiger” phenomenon. While these countries have used the EU as a means to increase the welfare of citizens back home, Ireland opted instead to continue to use EU funds to draw increased numbers of businesses to Ireland

²⁶ Coakley and Gallagher 341.

²⁷ Laffan, Brigid, “Ireland and the European Union,” in William Crotty and David E. Schmitt, eds., *Ireland on the World Stage* (Essex: Pearson Education Ltd., 2002) 85.

even after the Celtic Tiger phase was well underway. The ultimate result for Ireland has been lingering poverty without social aid, as “contrary to the liberal optimism once again in evidence in the 1990s, the ‘rising tide’ [did] not ‘lift all boats’.”³⁰ Instead, inequality in Ireland is exceeded in Western democracies only by that of Britain and the United States, according to a cross-national study undertaken in 1987. The fantastic tool that brought about Ireland’s acceleration economically, the EU, has only created an environment where that economic growth “clearly outstripped the progress made in reducing inequalities and in distributing the fruits of that growth more equitably.”³¹

Fianna Fáil governments have been almost “schizophrenic” in their insistence that they remain a social democratic party in favor of increased public funding while simultaneously refusing to take steps that would aid Ireland’s poor. Compared to parties in other European nations, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael’s behavior comes to light as quite conservative in spite of their claims of pursuing social democratic welfare support.

Affluence and Social Democratic Policy: A Comparative Analysis

What does Ireland’s “European-ness” ultimately mean for its political structure and ideological makeup? Most importantly, every party (with the lone exception of the Progressive Democrats that separated from Fianna Fáil in 1985) has made the claim that it falls into the political spectrum as a “leftist party.” While the label of “leftist” is very readily claimed by the parties, out of tradition or more likely non-uniform opinions about party policies by members of the Oireachtas, the reality is that Ireland’s nationalist-based political parties have shifted more towards concern for increasing foreign investment and less towards giving assistance to Ireland’s poorest citizens, as discussed above.

²⁸ Laffan 86.

²⁹ *Fianna Fail Manifesto 2002*. Online. Internet. Available: <http://www.fiannafail.ie/manifesto.pdf>. 9.

The behavior of Ireland's major political parties reflects the pattern of "economic success, social failure"³² in Ireland that has ultimately led to an absence of social programs. Even in the affluence of the Celtic Tiger economy, a lack of increases in the number of social services provided, gross disparity in the quality of life for various socioeconomic groups and comparatively slow increases in the quality of life for Irish citizens have been seen. Specific failures in policy are discussed in Section V, below. As Labour's manifesto from the 2002 election states:

This Government stands condemned, above all, however, for its negligence, and for its sheer lack of ambition. More often than not, when this Government has had choices, it has chosen to do nothing. Never has an Irish Government had such resources. Never have such resources been met by such little action.³³

Labour's claim is reinforced by data gathered by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in the form of its Human Poverty Index (HPI) for industrialized nations. (See Table 1) Clearly, Ireland's progress has been slower than what Labour and the other socialist parties either desire or have expected from the promises made by the ultimately conservative government of Ireland today. Ireland ranks 17th overall in the index, between the United Kingdom and United States. Ireland ranks below the EU countries of Germany (6), Luxembourg (7), France (8), Spain (10), Italy (12) and Belgium (14).

Table 1: UNDP Human Poverty Index (HPI) for Industrialized Countries, 2000³⁴

<i>Country</i>	<i>Low Life Expectancy</i>	<i>Functional Illiteracy</i>	<i>Poverty</i>	<i>Exclusion (out-group)</i>	<i>HPI value %</i>	<i>HPI Rank</i>
Norway	8.9	8.5	5.8	0.3	7.3	1
Sweden	8.5	7.5	8.7	2.7	7.6	2
The Netherlands	9.2	10.5	6.2	1.9	8.2	3
Finland	11.1	10.4	3.9	3.1	8.6	4
Denmark	12.7	9.6	6.9	1.5	9.3	5
Ireland	9.8	22.6	9.4	4.4	15.0	17

³⁰ Hardiman, Niamh, "Inequality and the Representation of Interests," in William Crotty and David E. Schmitt, eds., *Ireland and the Politics of Change* (Essex: Addison Wesley Longman Ltd., 1998) 128.

³¹ Hardiman 130.

³² Kirby 5.

³³ *Irish Labour Party Manifesto 2002*. Online. Internet. Available: [http:// www.labour.ie/policy](http://www.labour.ie/policy).

³⁴ Kirby 59

Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats have held pro-business policies during their coalition governments since 1997, and as a result the tax burden has fallen upon the Irish citizenry rather than the corporate sphere. Furthermore, Peadar Kirby states that tax reductions have overwhelmingly been biased towards Ireland's higher-income citizens, with lower-wage earners seeing "no obvious and decisive move in the direction of a more egalitarian tax system."³⁵ In addition to the high tax burden on the less wealthy, Fianna Fáil has also failed to use tax revenues to increase social welfare in Ireland to a level comparable to other E.U. members. While Fianna Fáil has claimed to have "implemented the largest series of social welfare increases in the history of social welfare in this country,"³⁶ opposition parties have more accurately pointed out that the Fianna Fáil/Progressive Democrat government "Not only have they spent excessively, they have spent badly." They add, "often, despite massive spending, there has been no visible improvement in services."³⁷

While Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil's primary opposition in the Dáil, put forward the loudest complaints about the government's failure to promote social welfare, in reality they have been just as derelict in their past promises to Irish citizens in their election manifestos. It should be noted here that in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Fine Gael did shift decidedly to the left while in a coalition with Labour, prompting the perhaps overly confident Labour Party to adopt the slogan "The Seventies will be Socialist."³⁸ While both parties had adopted a common social democratic platform, they were not able to form a joint government until March 1973 under long-time party member Liam Cosgrave, Jr. (whose father was Taoiseach from 1922-1932). The Oil Crisis that arose in 1977 ultimately brought an end to the hopes of the Irish left to establish a social democratic state in Ireland. Fine Gael slowly withdrew from its social democratic policy

³⁵ Kirby 63.

³⁶ *Fianna Fáil Manifesto 2002*. 56.

³⁷ *Fine Gael Manifesto 2002*. Online. Internet. Available: <http://www.finegael.ie/manifesto2002.pdf>. 4.

positions, reverting back to support of “presentation of the package to a public still dominated by rural, peasant standards on property and wealth...still not acclimatised to the supposed threats of a socialist party dominated by intellectuals sharing power with the more traditional Fine Gael of Liam Cosgrave.”³⁹ As Mair states, as Fianna Fáil once again assumed power “the common political agenda which had been forged by Fine Gael and Labour had become little more than a matter of historical memory.” Mair adds Fine Gael’s “well-to-do electorate” soon thereafter abandoned their leftist stance, while Labour “witnessed the gradual erosion of electoral support during the coalition period.”⁴⁰

Saying that coalitions have been historically disastrous for Labour would be a gross understatement, as the aforementioned example and others (like the Fine Gael withdrawal from the extensive welfare program known as the “Mother and Child” program, bringing a scandal that toppled the coalition government in 1951) show that “the political conservatism of the Irish is, then, undoubted” even if it “coexists ambiguously with a rather pragmatic attitude towards economic development and an egalitarian attitude towards the distribution of resources.”⁴¹ Ireland’s major parties have made the choice to pursue status quo policies, refusing to jeopardize their placement in the power structure for the sake of increased social care of Irish citizens.

In spite of two decades of ever-increasing wealth and resources for the Irish, which Fianna Fáil continues to this day to claim as the results of their own work, Fianna Fáil governments under Taoisigh Charles Haughey, Albert Reynolds and Bertie Ahern have taken only limited steps to improve the number and scope of social welfare programs, instead focusing on continued emphasis on drawing businesses to Ireland. While this has guaranteed what seem to be the never-ending economic successes in Ireland, Fianna Fáil has not increased social welfare and has even gone so far as to make cutbacks in many areas (amidst harsh criticism from

³⁸ Mair, “Party Competition and the Changing Party System” 140.

³⁹ Arnold, Bruce, *What Kind of Country: Modern Irish Politics, 1968-1983* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984) 101.

⁴⁰ Mair, “Party Competition and the Changing Party System” 141.

the left-wing parties represented in the Dáil). Governments where Labour has been included in coalition with Ireland's two largest parties (most notably with Albert Reynolds in 1993 and Fine Gael's John Bruton from 1994 – 1997) have also been unsuccessful in implementing and maintaining increased numbers of social programs. Kirby points out that Labour's decision to become involved in government while reducing the force with which it pursues social policy implementation has produced an overall slump in social aid when most would expect increases in funding for social programs. Even when Labour has managed to secure a place in government, it has never effectively put its policy forward in any notable way. Furthermore, with shifts by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael to the ideological right, the chances for Labour to carry out its social democratic agenda without severe changes in the Irish political environment seem miniscule.

The Importance of Left-Right Orientation

Oddbjørn Knutsen argues the importance of left-right orientation, stating “the left-right schema functions as a generalized mechanism for understanding what is going on in the political realm, helping to reduce the complexity of the world of politics.”⁴² Most political scientists in the field use left-right orientation as the primary determinant of party strength and policy output.⁴³ HeeMin Kim and Richard Fording put forward a number of facts showing why the left-right ideological dimension is an ideal way to examine the political systems of Western democracies. First, the left-right dimension, while not always the difference between a system's primary political parties, “can be found in most industrialized countries.”⁴⁴ Second, voters in

⁴¹ Coakley, John, “Society and Political Culture,” in John Coakley and Michael Gallagher, eds., *Politics in the Republic of Ireland*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 1999) 61.

⁴² Knutsen, Oddbjørn, “The Strength of the Partisan Component of Left-Wing Identity: A Comparative Longitudinal Study of Left-Wing Polarization in Eight European Countries,” *Party Politics*, 4 (January 1998), 5-31.

⁴³ Notable scholars favoring the orientation-based approach for examining political activities are Inglehart and Klingemann (1976), Lijphart (1984), Castles and Mair (1984), Knutsen (1988), and the comparative study put forward by Kim and Fording (1998, 200).

⁴⁴ Kim and Fording *Political Behavior* (forthcoming) 2

these industrialized countries use party ideology as their “primary determinant of vote choice.”⁴⁵ Finally, the prevalence of ideological competition in industrialized nations and the weight which voters place in ideology allow for ideological comparisons to be drawn between the political parties of these countries. Altogether, these established facts allow for not only the comparison of Ireland to other similar countries, but also shows how voter preferences and ideologies play a crucial role in the overall success (or failure) of a party in carrying out particular policies.

The work by Kim and Fording successfully draws together ideological pictures of not only Irish political parties, but also parties in other “Western democracies” throughout the world, by analyzing manifesto data collected by previous comparative political scholars and forming certain conclusions about which policies are generally promoted by left-wing parties. They constructed a list of the major policy markers that ultimately determine, at least in the manifesto documents distributed by parties in many European nations in periods of elections, the position of the parties. The 13 policy markers indicated by Kim and Fording are:

- Regulation of Capitalism
- Economic Planning
- Protectionist Policies for Foreign Trade
- Controlled Economy
- Nationalization of Industries
- Decolonization
- Demilitarization over Increased Military Spending
- Promotion of Peace over Militarism
- Internationalism
- Democracy
- Expansion of Social Services
- High Levels of Funding for Education
- Favorable Support of Labor Groups.⁴⁶

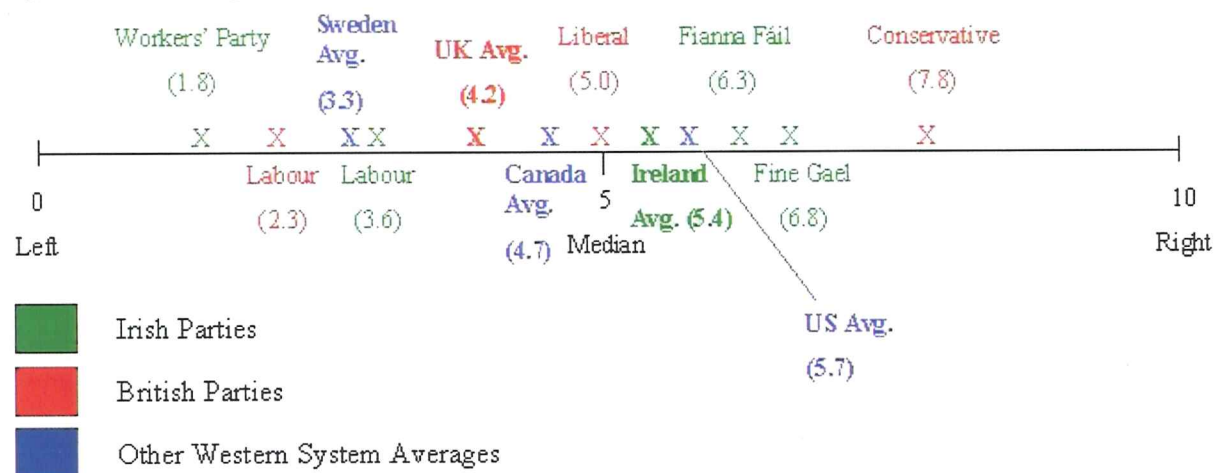
Using manifesto data, Kim and Fording were able to determine overall placement of various Western democracies on an ideological spectrum. Manifesto research by William Crotty

⁴⁵ Kim and Fording *Political Behavior* 3.

⁴⁶ Kim and Fording *Political Behavior* 7.

of which have held positions in government either in coalition or (in the case of Fianna Fáil) alone (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Left-Right Orientation of Parties and Western Party Averages, post-1980



Information Compiled from: Crotty, William, "Democratisation and Political Development in Ireland," in William Crotty and David E. Schmitt's *Ireland and the Politics of Change* (Essex: Addison Wesley Longman Ltd., 1998) 23; Sinnott, *Irish Voters Decide*, 67.

The figure reveals a few interesting points that should be discussed. First, Ireland's average ideological placement falls to the right of the spectrum (5.4). Labour's placement on the scale (3.6) is to the right of the average placement of both its predecessor party in the UK (2.3) and Ireland's own Workers' Party (1.8). As Figure 1 shows, the Workers' Party's break with the traditional, nationalist parties stemming from Sinn Féin has allowed it to (albeit with relatively low electoral success) aggressively pursue social democratic programs. While Labour has been able to establish itself within the governmental system of Ireland, the compromising of certain left-wing policies to do so have left a rift between Labour and other socialist parties like the Workers' Party. While Labour under differing circumstances outside of its common coalition strategy could easily move further left on the political spectrum, many of its party leaders' choices on how to operate the party have led to weaknesses in the overall structure of the Irish left. In fact, Ireland "records the lowest level of electoral support for left-wing parties" out of all

strategy could easily move further left on the political spectrum, many of its party leaders' choices on how to operate the party have led to weaknesses in the overall structure of the Irish left. In fact, Ireland "records the lowest level of electoral support for left-wing parties" out of all Western European democracies.⁴⁷ Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael's claims to be a leftist party are shown to be false when compared to other European parties and those in Ireland on the basis of those factors characterizing a leftist party, as argued by Kim and Fording. In many ways it is not surprising, then, that these parties have been so inadequate in their attempts to implement social welfare policies in Ireland.

Stuart Thomson discusses the case of the successful social democratic parties of Scandinavia and compares them to the Labour Parties of Great Britain and (as they were formed out of similar circumstances) Ireland. Thomson asserts that the success of Scandinavian social democratic parties (especially Socialdemokratiet i Danmark [Denmark], Arbetarepartiet – Socialdemokraterna [Worker's Social Democratic Party – Sweden] and Det Norske Arbeidaparty [Norwegian Labour Party – Norway] has come about "because of the coalition built in the 1930s between workers and farmers."⁴⁸ The British Labour Party, on the other hand, is characterized solely by "a unique organic link between the trade unions and the Labour Party"⁴⁹ without any definitive ties to farmers' parties, as seen in the discussion of Labour's formation and recombination of farmers' parties and Fine Gael in Figure 1. More than any other reason, the sheer number of voters lost by Labour's non-association with Ireland's (large) agrarian population has been one reason for poor electoral performance and, as a result, policy implementation. Agrarian voters have traditionally thrown support to Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael,

⁴⁷ Mair, "Party Competition and the Changing Party System," 129.

⁴⁸ Thomson, Stuart W.J., *The Social Democratic Dilemma*, Proc. of the Political Studies Association (UK). Belfast, 1996. Online. Internet. Available: <http://www.psa.co.uk/cps/1996/stho.pdf>. 1.

⁴⁹ Thomson 1.

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while agrarian support for Labour reached its highest point in 1993 at 8 percent.⁵⁰ The importance of this is discussed in more detail in Section III.

The lack of support for Labour from the farmers of Ireland has had the effect of creating a chain reaction of reduced support in other demographic areas as well. Those labeling themselves as “working class” throughout polling data in 1969-1997 supported the Labour Party only on a level of 28 percent at its highest (1969), and 5 percent at its lowest (1985). During the same period, Fianna Fáil was supported by between 34 and 50 percent of the working class, and Fine Gael between 15 and 28 percent.⁵¹ Labour has literally lost its base of support from this key demographic group, obviously crucial for any social democratic party. A comparison with vote totals for Sweden’s Worker’s Social Democratic Party shows the obvious lack of support for the Irish left in terms of voting, as vote totals for all Irish left-wing third parties “[averaged] around 14 per cent of the vote, as against an average of more than 40 per cent in the other west European countries” in the 1980s and 1990s.⁵² The performance of the British Labour Party, Irish Labour’s precursor, also presents a remarkable contrast and shows how such a party operates in a more ideal political environment. A comparison of voter support for social democratic and Labour-based parties in Ireland, Great Britain and Sweden is expressed graphically in Figure 4.

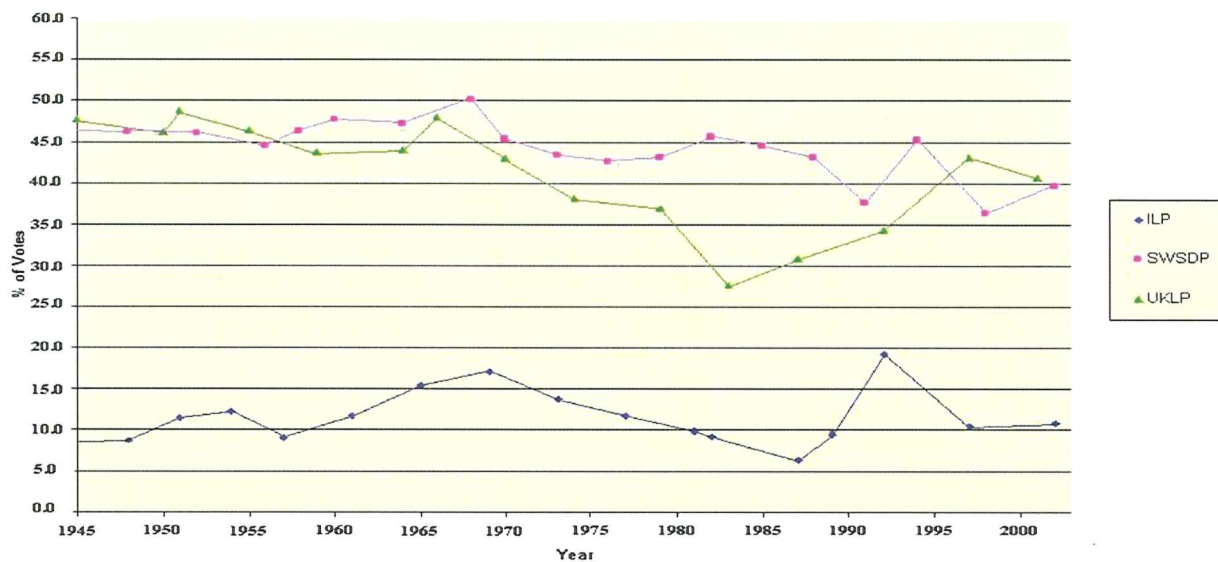
Orientation is crucial insofar as it determines policies that will be pursued by the parties holding the ideology. The combined effect of false claims to leftist orientation by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, the marginalization of true left-wing parties like Labour and the many socialist parties in Ireland, and the gravitation of Irish citizens towards more conservative parties have ultimately brought about Ireland’s continued shortfalls in implementing the reforms and social welfare programs seen in other areas of Western Europe. In order to be able to implement social

⁵⁰ Coakley and Gallagher 373.

⁵¹ Coakley and Gallagher 373.

⁵² Mair, “Party Competition and the Changing Party System” 129.

Figure 4: A Comparison of Voter Support for the Irish Labour Party and the Swedish Worker's Social Democratic Party⁵³



Information Compiled From: Coakley and Gallagher, *Politics in the Republic of Ireland* 367; Caramani, Danielle, *The Societies of Europe: Election in Europe since 1815* (New York: Grove's Dictionaries, 2000) 571-603, 886-903, 978-982;

III. Irish Voter Behavior and Expectations

Voter Behavior in Ireland: Trends and Predispositions

Ireland's political parties would not be able to maintain their conservative policies if it were not for continued support by voters which places these parties into positions of policymaking. Insofar as these voters play the crucial role in deciding which party will govern Ireland, the attitudes and predispositions of the Irish public also partially explain the failures of the Irish left in forming a successful social welfare system.

The Irish citizenry is notoriously conservative in its social outlook, especially by European standards. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael voters, when asked to characterize themselves as either left- or right-wing parties, show an especially high tendency to lean to the right. For example, a 1989 survey shows that the electorate was, on the whole, even further right of center than was indicated in later manifesto studies (having a median placement of 6.41 out of 10 in the

⁵³ Data for ILP in 1982 and UKLP 1974 computed as an average of both elections from that year.

either left- or right-wing parties, show an especially high tendency to lean to the right. For example, a 1989 survey shows that the electorate was, on the whole, even further right of center than was indicated in later manifesto studies (having a median placement of 6.41 out of 10 in the scale used in Figure 3).⁵⁴ Voters for Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael fall into the spectrum at 7.65 and 7.27, respectively, in their self-placement. Labour voters, a much smaller group than the two dominant parties, have an average self-placement of 3.47 in 1989. The presence of the Progressive Democrats (6.5 placement) and a proliferation in the number of parties for voters to associate with between the years 1976 and 1989 had the effect of shifting the political system to the right overall, according to Sinnott. In fact, the Progressive Democrats occupied the position held by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael voters (60.0 and 62.5, respectively) in a similar poll conducted in 1976, prior to the formation of the new party. While third-party associations have shifted overall voter placement farther to the right in the traditional Irish parties, fractionalization on the left (in combination with the tendency to compromise in Labour discussed previously) has come about because more extreme left-wing voters have drifted to parties like the Workers' Party (2.18 placement) and other socialist parties because of dissatisfaction with Labour's decision to moderate its policy positions in order to participate in government.

In terms of the policies that Irish voters want pursued by governments in power, contradictions exist between the maintenance of traditional social norms based on the strong presence of Roman Catholicism in Ireland and the desire for a working welfare state economically. Three issues in particular, divorce, contraception and abortion, provide an example for the hesitancy in Ireland by voters to support the "secular" and open policies in social matters seen in other social democratic Western European democracies. Fianna Fáil's conservative position is reaffirmed indirectly by voters that insist "the Government should ensure that the policies they adopt on matters such as divorce and contraception are in line with the

⁵⁴ All placement data from Sinnott 160-164.

teachings of the Catholic Church”⁵⁵ supporting the party 49 percent of the time, and all other parties only 24 percent of the time. Fianna Fáil’s adoption of all things Irish and Catholic in Ireland as far as the party’s policies are concerned strikes a chord with a population that at present is more than 95 percent Roman Catholic.⁵⁶ Labour, as expected, has a high level of support from less socially conservative voters (along with other leftist parties and, as a result of its recent adoption of more secularist policies on these issues, Fine Gael). Fianna Fáil has even been able to garner support from 16 percent of those who strongly disagree with the Church’s teachings on these three issues, showing that they may not always be the primary concern of voters in choosing which party to associate with and support. Sinnott argues the importance of factors such as localism, non-“moral” issue concerns (i.e. taxation and unemployment levels) and governmental stability may, in the more secular “Celtic Tiger” environment of Ireland today, be slowly overtaking moral issues as the primary party determinant for voters.

In spite of Ireland’s newfound secular outlook on some levels, individual voter mindsets on traditional influences in Ireland cannot simply be dismissed as unimportant. Due to the official antipathy of British officials to the Catholic Church in Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century Ireland, ties developed between the Church and “the more peaceful, parliamentary side” of the nationalist movement predominated by Sinn Féin. As a result, “many came to see Catholicism as a badge of Irish national identity.”⁵⁷ As Sinn Féin began to develop factions in Ireland’s early republican history, the Church played a role in policymaking and quickly formed ties with Eamon de Valera and Fianna Fáil that were formally cemented in the Bunreacht na hÉireann (Irish Constitution) of 1937. While M.A. Busted cites modernization and subsequent voter displeasure with the unsatisfactory “introverted policies of self-sufficiency which had

⁵⁵ Sinnott, *Irish Voters Decide*, 166.

⁵⁶ Collins, Neil and Terry Cradden, *Irish Politics Today*, 4th ed. (Manchester, Manchester UP, 2001) 45.

⁵⁷ Busted 81.

determined the course of Irish life since 1932,”⁵⁸ ever-increasing levels of emigration and even dissatisfaction (albeit to a much smaller degree) with the “special position” of the Church in the Bunreacht, politicians and parties who promoted anything contradictory to church teachings [except in the furthest left-leaning areas of Dublin] could expect backlash from the predominantly rural and conservative public. This was the case even after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and modernization in the Catholic Church, where acceptance to the changes in Ireland were “gradual and patchy.”⁵⁹ Even as Ireland has moved towards becoming a “secular state,” the maintenance of Catholic conservatism by Irish voters has been a boon for Fianna Fáil and a hindrance for the ideological, secular Irish left. The conservatism of the Irish people has led Labour to “[adopt] essentially the same pragmatic style as its larger opponents and [shift] its values to match those of a conservative Catholic peasantry.”⁶⁰ (This policy shift is discussed earlier in section II.) Michael Gallagher further discusses the Church and its anti-socialist biases, but states that “even though, until the 1960s, the powerful and conservative Catholic Church consistently identified communism as the greatest threat to Irish society, it may seem with the benefit of hindsight that Labour was unnecessarily timid.”⁶¹ Shifts back toward socialist policies in the 1960s and 1970s were then only cancelled out by returns to coalition, and conservative policy dominated as Labour feared allegations of extremism, radicalism and communism from its more conservative rivals, all of which would all but guarantee total abandonment by Irish voters.

Two subjective criteria for voter choice warrant further examination. First, governmental stability has arisen as a new concern for voters in choosing which party to support. 1992 polling data reveal that 38 percent of Irish voters stated that the primary factor in party choice was the party’s ability to form a stable government. Fianna Fáil “has frequently resorted to the argument

⁵⁸ Busteed 87.

⁵⁹ Busteed 94.

that it alone could provide stable government.”⁶² Insofar as this concern for voters remains salient, Labour’s participation in coalition and minority governments (which, as shown in Appendix 1, are generally less stable and therefore shorter) has created the idea in voter’s minds that Labour performs less successfully in government than Fianna Fáil. The “fragmented state of the opposition camp,”⁶³ brought about by a lack of unified voter support, has ultimately meant Fianna Fáil’s dominance has been guaranteed at the expense of the political left.

The desire of voters to choose candidates (and parties) who will “look after the needs of the constituency” plays a crucial role in party choice, with 37 percent of voters citing it as their primary criterion for voting in 1992. Such localism and clientelism takes precedence over voter concern for the overall welfare of Ireland. R. K. Carty’s comprehensive study of this phenomenon in Ireland characterizes it by “particularistic, ascriptive, and individualistic orientations to action rather than by the values of universalism, achievement, and collectivism generally associated with modernity.”⁶⁴ This type of party system has distinct consequences on Ireland’s politics. First and foremost, ideology of individual voters no longer stands as the primary determinant of party choice, as it does in other Western democracies. Parties are held together not strictly by ideological uniformity, but rather each party’s performance in appeasing the voters in various constituencies. Carty writes “inevitably, a system rooted in community breeds a conservative politics....The political party, resting uniquely on a geographical base and reflecting geographically organized community forces, [is] an especially appropriate vehicle for conservatism.”⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Carty, R.K., *Party and Parish Pump: Electoral Politics in Ireland* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 1981) 43.

⁶¹ Gallagher 25.

⁶² Sinnott, *Irish Voters Decide*, 179.

⁶³ Carty 145.

⁶⁴ Carty 9.

⁶⁵ Carty 141.

Euro-Barometer opinion surveys indicate the Irish “have Europe’s most parochial expectations of their elected representatives.”⁶⁶ By catering to the voters’ expectations, “politicians, responding to local electoral pressures, find themselves preoccupied with attempting to manipulate specific governmental outcomes for insistent constituents rather than engaging in the policy-making process.”⁶⁷ Voter party ties are therefore very tenuous, and Labour’s focus on national issues over those of particular voter constituencies have brought about losses of both votes and seats to clientelist parties like Fianna Fáil. In fact, 73 percent of seats lost by Labour went to Fianna Fáil, 18 percent to Fine Gael, and 9 percent to other parties.⁶⁸ Thus, while the retreat of Labour voters to other left-wing parties is present, the clientelist desires of voters in Ireland has brought them to the traditional parties to a much greater degree. The argument can be made that both clientelism and its tie to conceptions by voters about party stability plays a crucial role in Ireland’s failures in the realm of social democratic modernization, which focuses on the national-level issues (such as those laid out by Kim and Fording, above) more than the local-level constituency aid.

Regardless of the tendency of Irish voters to conservative social policy, a contradictory desire for social democratic programs is also present in the Irish citizenry. This desire is obviously much more recent than the social policies of Ireland, and was further postponed until the “Socialist Seventies” due to effective attempts by Fianna Fáil and the Church to create a “red scare” and form extreme sensitivity to “radical” socialist ideals.⁶⁹ It was the Catholic Church that was initially expected to fulfill “many of [the state’s] educational and social welfare responsibilities.”⁷⁰ Such a situation created in the Irish public contradictory opinions about social welfare, since the relatively conservative and traditional public became accustomed to certain social assistance. The traditionally conservative parties of Ireland, and Fianna Fáil in

⁶⁶ Carty 144.

⁶⁷ Carty 141.

⁶⁸ Carty 117.

particular, espouse “socialist” policies that are in reality little more than constituency programs. Carty is especially critical of Fianna Fáil:

The country’s governing Fianna Fáil party, in its guise as a national movement, attempts to embody the aims of the Irish people, but in doing so only binds the future with the echoes of the past. Organizationally and spiritually, parties remain tightly tied to the immediate concerns of local communities; there is no mechanism, no incentive, and little opportunity for them to discover or express the needs and claims of the larger society.⁷¹

While Labour and other left-wing parties do promote national policies, voters prefer the pseudo-social welfare programs of Fianna Fáil in combination with that party’s more Catholic, conservative social policies.

The ultimate conclusion that can be drawn is that “while the political conservatism of the Irish is...undoubted, it coexists ambiguously with a rather pragmatic attitude towards economic development and an egalitarian attitude towards the distribution of resources.”⁷² Coakley states that the Church’s role in social welfare, adopted by Ireland’s largest parties and propagated simultaneously with hesitancy towards socialist government systems, has created these two dueling expectations for Irish citizens. Even as the Church has taken a more favorable stance towards government control of social welfare programs over the last two decades, it “has probably come too late to have much of an impact on deeply ingrained popular values” that make the Irish fearful of socialist policy under the label of “socialism.”⁷³

Irish Farmers and Workers as Voters: An Overview

The two key groups of voters discussed above that generally provide the primary base of support for social democratic parties are farmers and workers. As seen in Figure 4, the lack of ability in the Irish Labour Party to gain support from both of these groups has been the difference

⁶⁹ Carty 43.

⁷⁰ Crotty 14.

⁷¹ Carty 141.

⁷² Coakley, “Society and Political Culture,” 61.

⁷³ Coakley, “Society and Political Culture,” 61.

Labour's role as a marginal third party and the role of a primary party seen in similar leftist parties based in Scandinavia. Determining why voters in these two groups have either not supported the Irish left or withdrawn to non-dominant leftist parties or the two primary conservative parties sheds even more light on the reasons for the left's failure in Ireland. (See Appendix 3 for information about percentages of voters from these groups supporting particular Irish parties.)

Ireland's predominant rural geography creates a situation where farmers would be a large segment of the population. Aside from the high population in rural areas cited earlier, data from as recent as 1996 reveals that 15.1 percent of males in Ireland were employed in agriculture.⁷⁴ Simply put, any party that can get a large proportion of votes from Irish farmers has a notable advantage in the polls overall. What is notable about Ireland's rural population, however, is that farmers see themselves more as members of the upper and middle class than of the working class, on a 5 to 1 ratio.⁷⁵ Labour's policy focus on the working class over the middle class has meant the farm vote for Labour has been abysmally small, never surpassing 8 percent (as shown in Appendix 3). The strongest support of Labour amongst farmers is in the southwest section of the island (mostly in Munster and Leinster), home to the "remnants of the landless proletariat" and "the remaining concentrations of farm labourers" in Ireland.⁷⁶ Carty points out Fianna Fáil "received particularly strong support among small farmers in the west."⁷⁷ Furthermore, the emergence of "flash parties" such as Clann na Talmhan (1939 – 1965) have further drawn potential support away from the other established left-wing parties like Labour in rural Ireland, making a model of agrarian-labor support as seen in the Swedish social democratic model discussed earlier impossible to bring about. While these flash parties have enjoyed very brief moments of support and caused increased evaluation of leftist policies by the major parties in the

⁷⁴ Coakley and Gallagher 364.

⁷⁵ Gallagher 21.

⁷⁶ Carty 54.

hope of reassuming them once they feel their issues have been addressed, they have historically done little in terms of implementing leftist programs and policies. Carty's evaluation of Clann na Talmhan concludes with the assertion that "exploiting short-term dissatisfactions, the party was little more than one large electoral protest against the conservatism and stability of Irish political life."⁷⁸ Flash parties ultimately have similar effects as the multitude of socialist parties currently in existence in Irish politics; while remaining marginalized and ineffective, they siphon votes away from Labour and inflate the success of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael.

What is more notable and more important relating to Labour's political performance is that it, the party initially setting out to bring about "the establishment in Ireland of a Workers' Republic,"⁷⁹ has failed to garner the support of the majority of Ireland's working class voters. Appendix 3 again shows how voters have gravitated towards Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael instead of Labour, with Labour not earning over 20 percent voter support from either skilled or unskilled workers since 1970. Compared with the performance of British Labour and other parties in Europe having the support of labor unions, the Irish Labour Party's low support levels seems counterintuitive. Why have workers abandoned the party they initially had the integral part in creating, choosing to support Ireland's civil war parties or, secondarily, smaller socialist parties?

Polling data from the early 1970s does confirm that more than three-quarters of the support that Labour did receive prior to 1973 were working-class,⁸⁰ but many of these supporters were farm laborers focused mainly in the extreme south of the island. Urban union workers, who formed the primary base of support for Labour's sister parties across Europe, were heavily influenced by the "red smear" campaigns perpetuated by the Irish Catholic Church and the Irish parties of power, especially after Labour's ideological shift towards socialism in the 1960s. The abandonment of Labour by the workers came as a result of party transitioning, which "had

⁷⁷ Carty 20.

⁷⁸ Carty 58.

⁷⁹ Gallagher 12.

created a party riddled with internal contradictions.”⁸¹ One of the strongest criticisms initially leveled against Labour by the leadership of the civil war parties, almost immediately taken up by working class voters, was the created perception of the Labour Party’s inextricable ties with the British Labour Party. Though Irish Labour has made great efforts to distinguish itself from its British counterpart, the historically anti-British quality of socialism in Ireland has meant Labour has come under attack for its failure to adopt a position on the Anglo-Irish Treaty, as well as for its continued “ties” with British Labour in terms of ideology and rhetoric. An accusation against Labour by Liam Mellows, an anti-Treaty socialist executed in 1922, expresses this mindset: “The official Labour Movement has deserted the people for the fleshpots of the empire.”⁸² Similarly to anti-Communist rhetoric being used to demonize what would otherwise be a strong political movement, appeals to anti-British sentiments in the Irish population and portrayal of the Labour Party as a non-Irish and intrusive entity have harmed the party. Unlike the British Labour Party, where a working class voter consistently and strongly supports the party “not so much [because] he *agrees* as [because] he *belongs*,”⁸³ the prevalence of the issue of Irish nationalism which supercedes all other social ties has meant the Irish Labour Party has remained weak (as initially discussed in Section I). Thus, working class voters have turned to Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael instead of Labour, for the most part, because of the lingering importance of the issue of Irish nationalism. As Basil Chubb concludes, trade unions and other worker-based organizations have “experienced an important phenomenon of Irish politics: at elections, citizens tended to remain loyal to the party they previously supported, even when they held views on individual issues that were not those being advocated by their party. It was the overwhelming salience of nationalist issues that inspired this loyalty.”⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Gallagher 21.

⁸¹ Gallagher 105.

⁸² Gallagher 125.

⁸³ Carty 80.

⁸⁴ Chubb 132.

The exception to this phenomenon in Ireland has only come about since Labour's ideological transition in the 1960s and 1970s. A set of extreme socialist groups, criticizing all three of Ireland's largest political parties for being inadequate in their efforts to improve the lot of Irish workers, have added to anti-British rhetoric a more general anti-capitalist rhetoric, attacking both the British as economically imperialistic and the Irish parliamentary leadership as interested "in maintaining both the state structures which guarantee their rule and the division of the working class which weakens any movement against it."⁸⁵ While specifically singling out Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, the extreme left also abandons the Labour Party because of disagreement with its coalition strategy with these two parties. Calling for action by Irish workers, the left has seen a proliferation in parties (the Workers' Party, Democratic Left, Socialist Party, Socialist Worker's Party, etc.) claiming to represent workers' interests better than Labour or the civil war parties. Similar to other "flash parties" in Ireland's history, however, these parties have seen minimal support from voters, had only limited time periods of effectiveness, and have boosted Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael support by drawing away what would otherwise be viable Labour Party voters.

The inability of Labour to maintain a consistent level of support has directly affected the party's ability to be in a position to implement its policies. While certain voter predispositions, such as the precedence of nationalism over all other issues, can only be overcome with the passage of time, others may be resolvable through direct action by the parties constituting Ireland's political left. These possible actions will be examined in Section V below.

IV. Mechanics and Structure in Irish Government: Further Impediments for the Irish Left

In addition to the historical and voter-imposed obstacles faced by the Irish left, a number of institutional obstacles also exist that have made Labour's attempts to increase its influence in

⁸⁵ Bambery, Chris, *Ireland's Permanent Revolution* (London, Bookmarks, 1987) 87.

Proportional Representation: Pros and Cons for the Irish Left

Only Ireland and the tiny European nation of Malta use the system of elections known as Proportional Representation through Single Transferable Vote (PR-STV) in national elections. This particular electoral system has substantial consequences for both the number and, as a result, overall effectiveness of third parties for the political system in which they are being used. As has been previously discussed, almost all third parties in the Irish system are left-wing parties. Thus, while the left has been able to gain parliamentary representation through the PR-STV voting system, the sheer number of parties represented and those parties' refusal to work in conjunction with each other has rendered them ineffective.

The ultimate goal of proportional representation as a voting system is to eliminate the degree of electoral disproportionality seen in plurality systems, which Arend Lijphart argues has the effect of increasing the number of viable political parties. Giovanni Sartori also believes the PR system plays a role in creating a multiparty system, adding PR is "hardly conducive to two-partyism."⁸⁶ Plurality systems are expected to "systematically advantage the larger parties and disadvantage the smaller parties,"⁸⁷ and PR-STV is generally chosen in electoral systems where smaller parties hope to gain a degree of representation in parliament. The Irish proportional system has had to contend with the dominant Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael parties already in place, meaning that while the system has allowed for a proliferation in the number of parties the hegemony of the civil war parties has yet to be broken. For example, after the 2002 Dáil election seven political parties and a host of independent candidates earned representation in parliament, with a combined vote total for all parties other than Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael of only 37 percent. The three largest leftist third parties comprise 21 percent of these votes, smaller left-wing parties and independents a combined total of 12 percent of the vote and the Progressive Democrats the

⁸⁶ Sinnott, Richard, "The Electoral System," in John Coakley and Michael Gallagher, eds., *Politics in the Republic of Ireland*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 1999) 115.

⁸⁷ Lijphart, Arend, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance on Thirty-Six Countries* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1999) 167.

other 4 percent. Fianna Fáil's 41 percent surpasses the combined total of the leftist third parties in the Irish system for the previous election easily, but Fine Gael's 22 percent is lower than the combined total of all left-wing third parties. However, the vote totals for these left-wing third parties appear weaker as a result of party fractionalization that divides the left's percentage of the votes amongst many parties.

Ireland's system of PR-STV lends itself to the creation of a multitude of parties, many of which have similar if not identical ideological leanings. The electoral system in Ireland also creates an environment where personalistic intra-party competition is rampant, another factor which "hinders unity and cohesion"⁸⁸ and creates rifts for the Irish left. The need for party discipline becomes obvious as comparisons are made between Fianna Fáil and left-wing third parties. Fianna Fáil has had only one major schism in its history, that of its current coalition partner the Progressive Democrats in 1985. In all practicality, this party split-up was only in name, as Fianna Fáil has participated in coalition three times with the Progressive Democrats without loss of support necessitating a change in government. The left wing, however, has seen a host of parties split away, initially from Labour and later from these socialist breakaway parties themselves. Bolstered by the high probability that they will be able to have representation in the Dáil under the PR system, the parties maintain their own separate identities and names. In reality, however, Fianna Fáil is able to maintain its dominant position in government as the left remains in a state of disarray.

The problems of the Irish left with PR stem from many unanticipated circumstances unique to the historical party structure of Ireland. Sinn Féin initially introduced PR to Ireland at the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921, and only Fianna Fáil has made attempts to replace the system with a "first-past-the-post" plurality system in 1959 and 1968. While Fianna Fáil hoped to turn Ireland into a full-fledged two-party system through the institution of plurality

⁸⁸ Sinnott, "The Electoral System," 116.

voting, the great irony is that these attempts came in a political environment of single-party dominance for Fianna Fáil. Fianna Fáil's already strong voter support coupled with "bonus" seats obtained while translating vote totals into number of seats (these additional seats are more prevalent in a plurality system, but are not entirely eliminated in more proportional systems) had already placed that party firmly in power. The real reason Fianna Fáil would call for the elimination of PR is its adoption of "strictly competitive electoral and parliamentary strategies,"⁸⁹ further securing their dominance by eliminating the many (leftist) third parties in the system.

The PR system has not been totally detrimental to the Irish left. The fact that so many parties have been able to gain representation in the Dáil in spite of such a conservative political environment shows the benefit of the PR system. Nevertheless, the strategy (or rather lack of one) that has created the multitude of parties has also created little unity in the left's attempts to implement social welfare policies. While the PR system is not entirely negative for the Irish left, a reexamination of the way leftist parties should perform in this type of electoral system must be undertaken if the left is to increase its political viability.

PR also plays a crucial role on the reliance of parties to form coalitions in order to create a government. Even Fianna Fáil, a party that once vowed not to enter into coalitions, has paired up with the Progressive Democrats after the past two elections in order to secure power. With the traditional instability of coalitions for Fine Gael and Labour, the question of whether combining leftist parties either through strict ideological coalitions or by a merging of parties would aid the success of the left is raised. Both the fractionalizing effects of PR and the exhibited failure of Fine Gael and Labour in maintaining functioning coalitions pursuing unified policy support R.K. Carty's argument that "one key to Fianna Fáil hegemony has been the

⁸⁹ Chubb 147.

fragmented state of the opposition camp.”⁹⁰ Revising the strategy of cross-ideological competition and replacing it with a unified left-wing ideological opposition would give the Irish left the ability to act as an organized opposition movement in government, as well as successfully allow for more ideological debate and accountability to occur. Such a strategy would ultimately allow the left to use PR to their full advantage and rally behind ideology rather than party label once elected.

Executive Dominance and Other Institutional Obstacles for the Left

While the PR system has given Fianna Fáil minor advantages institutionally through the fractionalization of the left and bonus seats in parliament, other characteristics of the Irish government system have created even more of a boost for Fianna Fáil and additional difficulties for Labour and other parties of the Irish left. These institutional advantages, as previously hinted, stem mainly from Eamon de Valera’s involvement in the drafting of Ireland’s 1937 constitution, the Bunreacht ne hÉireann. Insofar as electoral systems and political institutions can be used to allow those in power to maintain power, Fianna Fáil under de Valera sought to cement its power in the establishment of these institutions through the Bunreacht.

Perhaps the most important factor in the left’s continued weakness is the collective power of the Taoiseach (as chief executive) and the government in the Dáil in comparison to all other persons and/or “branches” of the government. This fact shines especially true when comparing the power of the Dáil to Ireland’s upper parliamentary house, the Seanad Éireann, and the president, or Uachtarán. The weaknesses of the Seanad can be seen in the constitution in many ways, even if some powers are shared equally with the Dáil. The Seanad can only delay any piece of legislation for up to ninety days, and Article 23 of the Bunreacht allows the Dáil to simply overrule any failure of a money bill by the Seanad. The Seanad has been “dismissed as a

⁹⁰ Carty 145.

mere ‘talking shop’”⁹¹ by some politicians in the Dáil, a claim that is only reinforced by the fact that the Taoiseach appoints eleven members to the body without any outside approval. Some have even called for the abolition of the Seanad, thereby making Ireland a unicameral legislature like that of Denmark, New Zealand or Sweden.

Labour has been able to elect both the previous and current presidents of Ireland, Mary Robinson (1990-1997) and Mary McAleese (1997-). While the Bunreacht states that the Uachtarán takes “precedence over all other persons in the state” in Article 12.1, in reality the office of the president is one of the weakest by comparison of all European nations. The predominant reason for the weakness of the office is the method by which candidates for Uachtarán are selected by Dáil party elites from Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Labour. The candidate has generally been chosen “from amongst the second-ranking set of politicians, rather than senior – as opposed to retirement-age – figures with a strong political base. In this way, presidents have come to office either without ambition or without the party political means to achieve what few goals they might have set themselves in the first place.”⁹² With very few powers to employ (most of which are rarely if ever called upon) and little expectation for the Uachtarán to actually strive for any political agenda, the presidency has historically been little more than a figurehead role. Mary Robinson’s attempts to activate the office were met by harsh criticism even up to the leadership of the Labour Party itself:

Dick Spring, who was Tánaiste for five years from 1992-1997 and the person who had proposed Mary Robinson for the presidency, was in particular rumoured to be put out by the President’s active role in areas which he felt were the prerogative of government or by actions of her which, in his view, complicated the conduct of government policy.⁹³

⁹¹ Gallagher, Michael, “Parliament,” in John Coakley and Michael Gallagher, eds., *Politics in the Republic of Ireland*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 1999) 200.

⁹² Elgie, Robert, “Political Leadership: The President and the Taoiseach,” in John Coakley and Michael Gallagher, eds., *Politics in the Republic of Ireland*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 1999) 232.

⁹³ Horgan, John, *Mary Robinson: A Woman of Ireland and the World* (Niwt, Colorado: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 1997) 173.

Moves have also been made to further reduce the political role of the Uachtarán, thereby eliminating all political powers that could be exercised by him or her.

The weakness of the Seanad and the Uachtarán has hindered the Irish left because, in all honesty, they are the only areas where Labour has been able to establish a relative level of power in the government of Ireland. Both of these institutions have been praised not because of their political ability to bring about positive changes, but rather for their non-political nature. In spite of any inroads that Labour (and, consequently, the Irish left) may have made in government through successes in election to these posts, it is the Dáil where all of the legislative power truly lies in Ireland. Labour and the Irish left must find a method to increase their presence in the Dáil if they are to have a chance to implement their social democratic policies, since successes in all other branches of government really amount to very little politically.

V. Policy Effects in Modern Ireland: “Progress” with Costs and Expectations

Social Welfare and the Celtic Tiger: Opportunities Lost

With the reasons for the failure of Ireland’s left-wing parties and the need for the left to improve its strategies for getting elected to and operating within the Dáil established, the consequences of political shortfalls for the Irish people in terms of the availability of social welfare programs can be determined. Simply put, political volatility, instability and disorganization in Ireland’s left wing have meant a continuance of conservative, nationalist politics “congenitally unsuited to deal with the demands of a modern European society.”⁹⁴ As a result, all of the social democratic programs seen in other modern Western European democracies are either smaller in scale or entirely nonexistent.

Fianna Fáil’s methods for campaigning for office, besides anti-communist rhetoric designed to appeal to Ireland’s “great national tradition to ward off the foreign communist

⁹⁴ Carty 144.

menace,” included attempts to usurp the ideas of the left and present the traditional conservative party as “The Social Welfare Party.”⁹⁵ This attempt to increase the image of Fianna Fáil as a caring party has been contradicted by the party’s own policies and actions time and time again. One blatant example of Fianna Fáil’s approach is the use of its house-building program to pay back loyal Fianna Fáil supporters in the construction industry. As Minister for Local Government Kevin Boland examined after a meeting with Fianna Fáil’s allies in the program, “the extraordinary thing about my table was that everybody at it was in some way or another connected with the construction industry.”⁹⁶ Other measures to increase wages, especially for women, were openly opposed by Fianna Fáil’s leadership and TDs. Even with the increased desire for social welfare in the 1960s, with Fianna Fáil firmly in power through the entire decade, Ireland’s party of power took every opportunity to focus on aiding private corporations rather than the poor and working classes of Ireland. Kieran Allen adds that the economic boom had a further effect of bringing “brash businessmen who began to occupy cadre positions in Fianna Fáil,”⁹⁷ only increasing the party’s tendency to assist corporations at the expense of the social welfare state. While Labour and the left may have been able to point out these failures, its failure to do so has pointed out weaknesses with Labour’s leadership and political strategies.

The corporatism of Fianna Fáil only increased with the advent of the “Celtic Tiger,” as the party shifted its focus to introducing international corporations into Ireland. Such a focus has led to a continuous cycle of economic growth in Ireland, as the corporations pay taxes at a rate of approximately 10 percent and government continues to collect taxes and fund further industrial development. What has been left out in this equation of economic growth, averaging 8 percent per year in real GDP during the 1990s, is the “fundamental criterion of evaluation” of the Celtic

⁹⁵ Allen 137.

⁹⁶ Allen 138.

⁹⁷ Allen 147.

Tiger, “its impact on people’s lives.”⁹⁸ Though Fianna Fáil’s manifesto promises “to ensure social progress including the ending of consistent poverty in [Ireland]...and the development of world-class public services,”⁹⁹ the party’s track record has proven otherwise.

Fianna Fáil’s housing policies have been disastrous for lower- and middle-income families in Ireland. Due to inflation, the cost of housing has increased 104 percent as a nationwide average and 136 percent in Dublin and its surrounding areas (1994-2002 data). As a result, the cost of a mortgage “is now limited to joint mortgage holders with combined incomes considerably higher than national average wages.”¹⁰⁰ The situation that has resulted from this is those who would otherwise depend on the government for housing assistance are left with “less disposable income, reduced savings and are forced to occupy the worst accommodation in terms of quality, condition and location.” While the upper classes, the major beneficiaries of the Celtic Tiger’s economic boom, have seen increases in their standard of living, “many people may not feel their living standards have improved under the Celtic Tiger.”¹⁰¹ Furthermore, the problem with housing is exacerbated by ever-increasing levels of immigration into Ireland by those hoping to get jobs in Ireland’s industrial and service sectors. Government bias has been evident in its elimination of residential property taxes in 1994 and very little emphasis being placed on rental housing for those too poor to own a home. Such obstacles to finding affordable housing have led to serious problems with homelessness, which has risen 60 percent between 1997 and 2000.

Poverty has also increased notably since the mid-1980s economic boom first began, a figure that generally would not be expected in such a burgeoning economy. Table 2 shows the percentage of Irish households living in poverty, with wages at 40, 50 and 60 percent of the national average income.

⁹⁸ Kirby 47.

⁹⁹ Fianna Fáil Manifesto 2002, 6.

¹⁰⁰ Kirby 48.

¹⁰¹ Kirby 49.

Table 2: Evolution of Household Poverty, 1987-1998¹⁰²

Poverty Lines	1987	1998
40% average income	6.2	10.5
50% average income	16.3	24.6
60% average income	28.5	33.4

This simple table shows that in spite of the unparalleled growth that was occurring as a result of the Celtic Tiger in this span of time, Ireland's least wealthy were being left behind. Though the economic situation in Ireland improved on the whole, increases in the level of poverty have come about because of factors like inflation, increased prices of necessary goods and housing, and non-increasing wages. These figures coupled with the more widely acknowledged economic success of Ireland's upper-middle and upper classes points towards the fact that the Celtic Tiger has created substantial levels of inequality, or more accurately "a shift from the bottom half of the distribution to the top half."¹⁰³ Government taxation policies have also predominantly targeted the poor, with tax breaks going mostly to corporations and independent homeowners rather than those in poverty who cannot purchase a home. Furthermore, welfare rates have lagged to a degree that "the poorest 20 percent have seen a significant decrease in disposable income."¹⁰⁴ The regressive tax structure combined with minimal wage increases, highly inflated prices of necessary goods and appalling poor welfare and social assistance programs by the government have meant Ireland's poorest citizens are all but forgotten in the midst of the country's economic boom.

Other forms of public funding also have suffered as a result of Fianna Fáil rule, most notably education, health and welfare. With education, one Irish political scientist notes "public

¹⁰² Kirby 56.

¹⁰³ Kirby 57.

¹⁰⁴ Kirby 63.

spending on education is regressive as the state spends more on the education of better-off young people, who tend to remain in the system longer, than it does on young people from poorer backgrounds, who tend to leave the system earlier.”¹⁰⁵ Such oversight perpetuates other problems down the line for these poorer students, such as lower wages, higher levels of unemployment and dependence upon a welfare system that, as discussed, is simply not up to comparable standards even with the Europe’s poorer nations. With health, a similar situation has occurred because of Fianna Fáil oversight. The Irish health system has “a divide that is much more pronounced than in most other European Union countries,” with the rich benefiting from “a structure...whereby the public health services themselves incorporate faster access and arguably better care for half the population, the half with more resources.”¹⁰⁶ Once again, the poor are assisted disproportionately to those who already have money and little need for public assistance, with Fianna Fáil doing little in terms of policy to correct the situation.

In the face of these figures and facts, Fianna Fáil still insists that it “dramatically increased investment in vital public services.”¹⁰⁷ Survey data counters this claim, with most Irish polled overwhelmingly claiming the Celtic Tiger has created “a society seduced by economic growth and devoid of a vision of a better society.”¹⁰⁸ Unemployment, especially long-term unemployment, is still widespread in Ireland. Furthermore, declining levels of agricultural unemployment (as a direct result of government emphasis on the service and industrial sectors) have left Ireland’s rural community in a greater level of poverty that remains “hidden away from tourists and urban weekenders.”¹⁰⁹ Added to a lack of tax reform, over-reliance on corporate entities and multinationals (the private sector) to address the problems of the poor and Ireland’s current housing and emigration crises, Ireland’s unemployment further adds to the woes of those unable to capitalize off of the Celtic Tiger.

¹⁰⁵ Kirby 61.

¹⁰⁶ Kirby 61.

¹⁰⁷ Fianna Fáil Manifesto 2002, 6.

¹⁰⁸ Kirby 67.

¹⁰⁹ Sweeney 77.

The absence of the Irish left from the policymaking process is evident in the lack of social welfare programs that have come about in the midst of Ireland's newfound economic success. Paul Sweeney argues "an assault on poverty would make Ireland one of the most attractive countries in the world," and other problems such as "drug dependency, alienation and crime" would certainly diminish residually as poverty is addressed.¹¹⁰ The debate for social welfare programs and public funding in Ireland has not reached the levels seen in other Western countries (i.e. America's continuing debate over nationalized health care, Britain's debates over nationalization of "vital industries" like transportation and hospitals, etc.), because the strongest advocates for these programs have been systematically and historically excluded from government. A comparison of the levels of funding for social welfare in other EU nations shows that Ireland has seen the largest decrease in funding over the period 1987-1999, and remains consistently lower than the European Union average (which hovers around 26-28 percent) and even lower than some of the EU's poorest nations (see Appendix 4).¹¹¹ Though there are different measures of social welfare expenditure (based on a variety of categories being included in some data and not others), one consistent fact in all of these measures is Ireland's lower level of funding in comparison to other EU nations, in spite of massive growth. Ireland's performance as a social welfare provider has placed it among the ranks of Portugal, Greece and even the Czech Republic (which is still in the application process for EU membership) when, with its economic successes in the last decade, a higher level of performance in comparison to EU nations would be expected. While other EU nations have also reduced their level of social welfare expenditure, none even approach the 38.4 percentage point reduction by Ireland between 1985 and 2000.

Ireland's traditional parties, and especially the dominant Fianna Fáil party, have relied primarily upon non-governmental methods to address issues of poverty when in reality Ireland's

¹¹⁰ Sweeney 169.

¹¹¹ Sweeney 193.

failure in establish social welfare is “beyond the scope of market solutions.”¹¹² Fianna Fáil has simultaneously bragged about Irish surpluses as a result of its leadership and remained idle in the expenditure of tax dollars to reduce many of the aforementioned social problems lingering in Ireland. Fianna Fáil’s behavior has proven that the party is not willing to take the steps in government to guarantee social welfare in Ireland. It therefore falls to the Irish left to enable itself in order to push for the implementation of such programs.

Can These Problems Be Overcome by the Left?

Since the Irish left stands as the largest group of advocates for policies designed to correct the problems with Irish social welfare, especially in light of the corporatist attitudes of the current dominant parties in Ireland’s parliament, the left must assume a more powerful position in the policymaking structure if a successful social welfare system is to be established in Ireland. Even if the left currently does not have vote support to take over a dominant role in government that has been held by Fianna Fáil for over seven decades, taking steps that would place an organized leftist party into a strong position of opposition without the need to waffle on policy due to cross-ideological coalitions is the most crucial challenge facing the left today. In order to successfully accomplish this, the left as a whole must make certain changes to its historical strategies for elections and parliamentary representation. While the changes that could be brought about by the left would be no less than a fundamental reorientation of the political system of Ireland as a whole, a shift from a system rooted in clientelism and nationalism to a modern European system of left-right competition, these changes are indeed possible with cooperative effort by the Irish left.

First, Irish Labour must abandon its strategy of forming coalitions with parties it does not agree with ideologically. While such a strategy has allowed them to participate in government in

¹¹² Sweeney 206.

the past, it has also caused resentment against Labour by other parties of the left because Labour was required to compromise crucial leftist and socialist policy positions in order to participate. Criticism has been strongest from the Socialist party, Socialist Worker's Party and Workers' Party, with one major socialist periodical assessing the situation as one of bitter disillusionment for leftists and the working class in particularly harsh terms: "Time and time again [Labour has] benefited from the desire of working class people for an alternative to Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. Time and time again they have squandered the opportunity, trading their every political principle for a place in government with the very parties their supporters voted against."¹¹³ While Fianna Fáil's current level of support seems unsurpassable by any groups other than a Fine Gael/Labour coalition, in reality the trend towards the left and socialism currently present in Europe has (albeit slowly) started to creep into historically conservative Ireland. Even though such sentiment has not taken a form seen in other parts of Europe (i.e. anti-capitalist protests), Fine Gael's 5.4 percent decline since 1997 and substantial gains for Labour, the Green Party, and the leftist Sinn Féin show the overall acceptance of left-wing ideology is on the rise in Ireland today. Cross-ideological coalitions for the sole purpose of overpowering Fianna Fáil have proven ineffective and have hurt Labour more than helped them. The rising strength of socialism and acceptance of leftist ideology in Ireland signal the time for the abandonment of this outdated and unproductive strategy. Such coalitions only perpetuate the non-ideological political competition Ireland has witnessed since its formation, ultimately

The second, and perhaps most critical, action the left must take to place itself into an active position in the Dáil is the reconsolidation of the multitude of left-wing parties in Ireland into a unified force. Left-wing parties received a combined total of over 20 percent of the vote in Ireland's past two parliamentary elections, rivaling or (as in 2002) surpassing the vote total of the official opposition party, Fine Gael. Labour must prove to other leftist parties that it will actively

¹¹³ Boyd-Barrett, Richard, "After the Election: Where Now for the Irish Left?," in Resistance Jul./Aug. 2002, 1.

and unwaveringly pursue the social democratic platform it has advertised since the 1960s, since the smaller left-wing parties' current attitude of resentment and disenfranchisement will not allow for any new ideologically united coalition to occur. Furthermore, calls for the other left-wing parties in the Irish system to unite and put an "end to petty squabbling and sniping"¹¹⁴ must also take place, with party reconciliation replacing personal disagreements between past leaders in these parties. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have been able to capitalize off of these rifts in the left that have created what are in fact "micro-parties" espousing identical ideology but ineffective in a parliamentary sense due to low individual vote totals. Fine Gael's role as opposition is in a way only artificial, since left-wing parties in combination would outnumber Fine Gael in terms of seats in the Dáil by a margin of 33 to 31, not even including left-leaning independents. Even if these parties remain separated in name at election time in order to capitalize off of the PR-STV voting system, some type of coalition, bloc or alliance system based on ideological similarities (as seen in parliaments of other Western democracies, such as in Canada) must be created if the left is to succeed in establishing an acceptable social welfare system in Ireland. One final benefit of this change would be an increase in the functionality of the left, discussed earlier as a reason why people voted for the two primary parties in the Irish system over Labour and other left-wing parties. By showing it can function as an effective opposition in the Oireachtas, voters would be more willing to give additional support to the left in elections.

Third, these parties should reduce the level of corporatism and corporate assistance from the Irish government, simultaneously taking care not to appear anti-corporate or "anti-Celtic Tiger." Slumping tax revenue due to corporate tax cuts by the Fianna Fáil/Progressive Democrat coalition have begun to take place as the boom of the Celtic Tiger has leveled off in the last few years in the midst of a worldwide economic recession. While these benefits for corporations were designed to draw in more international corporations to Ireland, the effect has been lower

¹¹⁴ Boyd-Barrett 3.

revenue for the government to spend on public services and welfare. The manifestos of all opposition parties criticize the government coalition for “spending the boom” unwisely and wastefully, and lowering revenues by giving tax breaks to international companies has only succeeded in exacerbating the situation. In fact, Fianna Fáil has called for even further reductions, to an extraordinarily low rate of either 10 or 12.5 percent after 2003.¹¹⁵ By advocating a restructuring of the Irish tax system to capitalize on profits made by established multinational corporations, a united left-wing coalition would reverse the trend of corporate tax breaks and over time allow for returns of revenue to the people of Ireland in the form of public services and welfare programs. The fine line that must be observed by the left, however, is that calls for increases in revenue are not wrapped in the anti-corporate rhetoric seen in socialist parties elsewhere in Europe. After all, such corporations are indeed responsible for the Celtic Tiger boom in the first place, and open criticism of corporations without specific charges is simply counterproductive. Instead, the left should focus on bringing in corporate taxes to use for not only infrastructure and attracting additional foreign investment, but “a serious concerted attack on poverty” by “a courageous and motivated government.”¹¹⁶

Finally, the left needs to imitate its counterparts in nations like Sweden by reestablishing firm ties with labor movements and setting up new ties with farmers in the rural communities of Ireland. As previously noted, the combined force of votes from these groups has elevated parties in other areas of Europe into the dominant positions in their respective political systems. While the ties with Labour are, for the most part, scattered across the various left-wing parties in the Irish system, the current level of disorganization for the left has left them greatly weakened in comparison to other groups. In the 2002 election, polling data revealed that many working class voters have turned away from Fianna Fáil and shifted towards Labour, Sinn Féin and the Green

¹¹⁵ Sweeney 190.

¹¹⁶ Sweeney 198.

Party.¹¹⁷ The working classes of Ireland appear to be prepared to vote for a viable left-wing party or coalition, and this could very easily propel the left into an active role in Irish government. As for rural farm voters, earning their trust will take time and substantial effort. Farmers, through the lobbying of the Irish Farmers Association, have become the loudest voice “engaged in demonstrating outside government offices,”¹¹⁸ and discontent has even left many farmers without a clear choice to support in Irish elections. The opportunity for the left to woo these voters is indeed great, as this vote bloc is willing to throw support to “any political actor who can bring about a favourable result.”¹¹⁹ With only minimal inclusions on their policy platform, including increased farm subsidies and other forms of support for this group previously ignored by leftist parties focusing on the urban class vote, the Irish left can build itself up to comparable levels to its European counterparts in spite of Ireland’s traditionally conservative past.

Conclusion

The ultimate reality for the Irish left is that their policies and principles are accepted by large segments of the Irish population, large enough if organized to create a major political force able to bring about substantial changes in Ireland. The government’s care for the public via social welfare programs, especially by European standards, has been poor simply because the left has not organized itself in a way that would allow for their opinions to be taken to heart by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael in their roles as heads of government. However, the left has the opportunity to form itself into a strong political presence that could bring about positive changes and, at long last, turn Ireland’s Celtic Tiger boom into something that benefits all of Irish society.

¹¹⁷ Boyd-Barrett 1.

¹¹⁸ Murphy, Gary, “The Role of Interest Groups in the Policymaking Process,” in John Coakley and Michael Gallagher, eds., *Politics in the Republic of Ireland*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 1999) 278.

¹¹⁹ Murphy 278.

Though the history and institutions in Ireland have caused Ireland's current environment of political conservatism, electoral trends in the previous two elections have shown that in spite of increases for Fianna Fáil the voters of Ireland have substantially begun shifting support towards parties advocating social democratic ideals. With the many claims of inequality that have arisen in response to the shortfalls of the Celtic Tiger, the left's chance to break free from Ireland's old model of political competition to graduate to a position more similar to European counterparts. The destiny of the Irish left is in their own hands, and only time will show whether Ireland and its citizens will be able to witness positive change for Irish social welfare.

Glossary of Irish Terms and Pronunciation Guide

Bunreacht ne hÉireann – constitution of Ireland (*bun-rokt ne hayrun*)

Clann na Poblachta – independent party from 1946-1965; “party of the republic” (*clon ne pub-lak-ta*)

Clann na Talmhan – independent party from 1939-1965; “party of the land” (*clon ne tal-oon*)

Cumann na nGaedheal – precursor party to Fine Gael; “party of the Irish” (*kum-man ne ngale*)

Dáil Éireann – national assembly of Ireland (*dawl ay-run*)

Éire – Ireland (*ay-reh*)

Fianna Fáil – “soldiers of Ireland” (party name) (*fee-an-a fawl*)

Fine Gael – “Irish Race” (party name) (*fin-a gale*)

Gaeltacht – Irish-speaking districts (*gale-tuckt*)

Oireachtas – parliament (*ih-rock-tus*)

Seanad Éireann – senate of Ireland (*sha-nad ay-run*)

Sinn Féin – “ourselves” (party name) (*shin fayn*)

Tánaiste – deputy prime minister (*taw-nish-deh*)

Taoiseach – prime minister (*tee-shuck*) [plural: Taoisigh (*tee-see*)]

Teachta Dála (TD) – Dáil deputy; member of the lower house (*tak-tuh dawl-uh*)

Uachtarán – president (*ook-ta-rawn*)

Appendix 1: Composition of Governments in the Dáil Éireann, 1922 – present

<u>Date</u>	<u>Taoiseach</u>	<u>Coalition – Type</u>	<u>Parties (number of ministries held)</u>
Jan. 1922	Michael Collins	No – minority	Cumann na nGaedheal (8)
*Aug. 1922	Liam Cosgrave, Sr.	No – minority	Cumann na nGaedheal (9)
Sep. 1922	Cosgrave	No – minority	Cumann na nGaedheal (11)
Dec. 1922	Cosgrave	No – minority	Cumann na nGaedheal (10)
*Sep. 1923	Cosgrave	No – minority	Cumann na nGaedheal (11)
*Jun. 1927	Cosgrave	No – minority	Cumann na nGaedheal (10)
*Oct. 1927	Cosgrave	No – minority	Cumann na nGaedheal (9)
Apr. 1930	Cosgrave	No – minority	Cumann na nGaedheal (9)
<hr/>			
*Mar. 1932	Eámon de Valera	No – minority	Fianna Fáil (10)
*Feb. 1933	de Valera	No – majority	Fianna Fáil (10)
*Jul. 1937	de Valera	No – majority	Fianna Fáil (10)
*Jun. 1938	de Valera	No – majority	Fianna Fáil (10)
*Jul. 1943	de Valera	No – minority	Fianna Fáil (11)
*Jun. 1944	de Valera	No – majority	Fianna Fáil (11)
<hr/>			
*Feb. 1948	John Costello	Yes – minority	Fine Gael (6) Labour (2) Clann na Poblachta (2) Clann na Talmhan (1) National Labour (1) Independent (1)
<hr/>			
*Jun. 1951	de Valera	No – minority	Fianna Fáil (12)
<hr/>			
*Jun. 1954	Costello	Yes – majority	Fine Gael (8) Labour (4) Clann na Talmhan (1)
<hr/>			
*Mar. 1957	de Valera	No – majority	Fianna Fáil (12)
Jun. 1959	Sean Lemass	No – majority	Fianna Fáil (13)
*Oct. 1961	Lemass	No – minority	Fianna Fáil (14)
*Apr. 1965	Lemass	No – minority	Fianna Fáil (14)
Nov. 1966	Jack Lynch	No – minority	Fianna Fáil (14)
*Jul. 1969	Lynch	No – majority	Fianna Fáil (14)
<hr/>			
*Mar. 1973	Liam Cosgrave, Jr.	Yes – majority	Fine Gael (10) Labour (5)
<hr/>			

*Jul. 1977	Lynch	No – majority	Fianna Fáil (15)
Dec. 1979	Charles Haughey	No – majority	Fianna Fáil (15)
<hr/>			
*Jun. 1981	Garret FitzGerald	Yes – minority	Fine Gael (11) Labour (4)
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*Mar. 1982	Haughey	No – minority	Fianna Fáil (15)
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*Dec. 1982	FitzGerald	Yes – majority	Fine Gael (11) Labour (4)
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*Mar. 1987	Haughey	No – minority	Fianna Fáil (15)
*Jul. 1989	Haughey	Yes – minority	Fianna Fáil (13) Progressive Dems. (2)
*Feb. 1992	Albert Reynolds	Yes – minority	Fianna Fáil (13) Progressive Dems. (2)
Jan. 1993	Reynolds	Yes – majority	Fianna Fáil (9) Labour (6)
<hr/>			
Dec. 1994	John Bruton	Yes – majority	Fine Gael (8) Labour (6) Democratic Left (1)
<hr/>			
*June 1997	Bertie Ahern	Yes – minority	Fianna Fáil (14) Progressive Dems. (1)
*May 2002	Ahern	Yes – majority	Fianna Fáil (13) Progressive Dems. (2)

Asterisks mark election date. Bolded names mark change in Taoiseach and start of new term of office. Separations mark changeover in primary party of government. Majority indicates 50% plus 1 seat support in the Dáil.

Sources: Coakley and Gallagher, eds., *Politics in the Republic of Ireland* (London: Routledge, 1999) 368, 376; "Members of the Government," *Parliament of Government* Web site. Available: <http://www.irlgov.ie/oireachtas/frame.htm>.

Appendix 2: Western European Gross Domestic Product and Per Capita Gross Domestic Product

	<u>Nation</u>	<u>GDP - \$billions</u>	<u>GDP per capita - \$thousands (E. U. Rank)</u>
	Ireland	\$104.7	\$27.3 (3)
E.U.	Austria	220.0	27.0 (4)
	Belgium	267.7	26.1 (6)
	Denmark	149.8	28.0 (2)
	Finland	133.5	25.8 (7)
	France	1,510.0	25.4 (9)
	Germany	2,174.0	26.2 (5)
	Greece	189.7	17.9 (14)
	Italy	1,402.0	24.3 (12)
	Luxembourg	19.2	43.4 (1)
	Netherlands	413.0	25.8 (7)
	Portugal	174.1	17.3 (15)
	Spain	757.0	18.9 (13)
	Sweden	219.0	24.7 (10)
	UK	1,470.0	24.7 (10)
Non-E. U.	US	10,082.0	36.3
	Canada	895.0	27.7

Source: CIA World Factbook 2002. Available: <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook>.

Appendix 3: Voting Intention by Occupational Class, 1969 – 1997.

<u>Fianna Fail</u>	Upper Middle	Lower Middle	Skilled Working	Unskilled Working	Large-Scale Farmers	Small-Scale Farmers	Total % Support
1969	37	48	40	43	38	53	43
1977	45	47	54	47	48	48	49
1981	34	48	46	45	35	49	44
Feb. 1982	35	45	45	52	35	59	47
Nov. 1982	32	38	42	40	37	51	40
1987	28	38	45	47	36	48	41
1989	32	42	39	41	N.A.	43	40
1992	25	34	35	37	43	42	35
1997	36	35	43	42	N.A.	48	41

<u>Fine Gael</u>	Upper Middle	Lower Middle	Skilled Working	Unskilled Working	Large-Scale Farmers	Small-Scale Farmers	Total %
1969	37	26	21	14	46	26	25
1977	36	27	20	22	42	38	28
1981	46	31	29	24	53	36	33
Feb. 1982	51	38	36	25	54	28	35
Nov. 1982	58	42	31	28	54	35	37
1987	30	24	14	17	43	23	22
1989	35	30	21	14	N.A.	39	26
1992	28	19	16	14	38	25	20
1997	28	28	23	19	N.A.	39	30

<u>Labour</u>	Upper Middle	Lower Middle	Skilled Working	Unskilled Working	Large-Scale Farmers	Small-Scale Farmers	Total %
1969	10	15	27	28	2	5	18
1977	6	7	11	16	1	5	9
1981	9	10	10	16	4	2	10
Feb. 1982	3	7	6	10	3	4	7
Nov. 1982	4	9	11	14	6	1	9
1987	3	6	9	5	4	3	6
1989	6	9	14	15	N.A.	5	11
1992	16	18	18	19	3	8	16
1997	11	12	12	15	N.A.	4	13

<u>Progressive Democrats</u>	Upper Middle	Lower Middle	Skilled Working	Unskilled Working	Large-Scale Farmers	Small-Scale Farmers	Total %
1987	22	18	15	9	17	6	14
1989	10	6	8	10	N.A.	4	6
1992	11	7	4	5	4	3	4
1997	8	7	4	2	N.A.	4	4

Workers' Party	Upper Middle	Lower Middle	Skilled Working	Unskilled Working	Large-Scale Farmers	Small-Scale Farmers	Total %
1981	1	0	2	4	1	0	2
Feb. 1982	0	0	3	4	0	0	2
Nov. 1982	0	3	5	6	1	2	4
1987	1	3	3	4	0	1	3
1989	3	2	5	10	N.A.	2	5
1992	2	3	4	5	0	1	3
1997	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Total percentage in 1997 calculated through calculation from the various subgroups adjusted to match trends of prior years. Data not available for the Workers' Party in 1997.

Source: Sinnott 182-183; Laver, Michael and Michael Marsh, "Parties and Voters," in John Coakley and Michael Gallagher, eds., *Politics in the Republic of Ireland*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 1999) 170.

Appendix 4: Social Security Expenditure in Selected European States, % of GDP.

Europe	1985	1990	1996	2000	% Change (1985 to 2000)
Austria	24.4	24.2	26.2	28.7	+17.6%
Belgium	27.5	25.6	27.1	26.7	-2.9%
Czech Republic	N.A.	16.0	18.8	19.4 ¹²⁰	+21.3%
Denmark	25.9	28.7	33.0	28.8	+11.6%
Finland	23.4	25.2	32.3	25.2	+7.7%
France	27.0	26.7	30.1	29.7	+10.0%
Germany	26.3	25.5	29.7	29.5	+12.2%
Greece	19.5	19.8	22.7	26.4	+35.4%
Ireland	22.9	19.2	17.8	14.1	-38.4%
Italy	21.6	23.1	23.7	25.2	+16.7%
Netherlands	28.9	29.7	26.7	27.4	-5.2%
Portugal	13.2	14.6	19.0	22.7	+72.0%
Spain	18.5	19.6	22.0	20.1	+8.6%
Sweden	31.1	32.2	34.7	32.3	+3.9%
United Kingdom	21.1	19.6	22.8	26.8	+27.0%

Sources: International Labour Organization, "Public Social Security Expenditure," *World Labour Report 2000*. Online. Internet. Available: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/socfas/research/stat/table14.htm>; EUROSTAT, "Share of Social Protection in GDP highest in Sweden, France and Germany." Online. Internet. Available: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/eurostat/Public/datashop/print-product/EN?catalogue=Eurostat&product=3-13022003-EN-AP-EN&mode=download>.

¹²⁰ Data from 1997.

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