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**The Role of Political Economy in the Early
Development of the Irish Economy: The
Debate Leading up to the Enactment of the
Irish Poor Law in 1838.**

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THE ROLE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY IN THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF THE IRISH ECONOMY: THE DEBATE LEADING UP TO THE ENACTMENT OF THE IRISH POOR LAW IN 1838.¹

I.

INTRODUCTION

It has been suggested that social control lay at the core of classical political economy. Samuels (1992) argues that classical political economists were aware of the necessity of a docile workforce in ensuring economic development. Because of the importance they placed on laissez faire principles, classical political economists could not advocate the use of legislation to guarantee the level of security required to ensure the smooth transition from agricultural to industrial production. Instead, they placed emphasis on morals, religion and education; these were the only means whereby social control could be exercised and further industrial development facilitated (O'Brien 1975:272).

Similarly, Boylan and Foley see the need for social control as lying behind classical political economy as it was applied to Ireland in the nineteenth century. However, they suggest that, in Ireland, social control was an end in itself for political economy, rather than as a means for further economic development.

Political economy was partisan, prescriptive, tendentious. Claiming to be non-sectarian and non-political, it performed a vitally important ideological function for the political and religious establishment in defending existing socio-economic relations, including landlordism, property rights and in attacking trade unions (1992:2).

This paper challenges Boylan and Foley's assertion by focusing on the debate leading up to the introduction of the Poor Relief (Ireland) Act in 1838. The main participants in this debate were Nassau Senior, J.R.McCulloch, George Poulet Scrope and Robert Torrens in England. In Ireland, the main participant among political economists in the debate was Mountifort Longfield. Richard Whately was involved in the political debate through his appointment to the Commission for inquiring into the condition of the poor in Ireland in 1833. Isaac Butt also participated in the debate but since the significant part of his contribution was after the

establishment of the Poor Relief (Ireland) Act in 1838, it falls out of the time period under consideration here. This research is based almost exclusively on primary sources, including publications and other papers of the aforementioned and other contemporaries that time has since rendered “minor,” as well as relevant parliamentary papers and select committee reports.

This paper examines the arguments made by these leading contemporary political economists as to the causes of increasing pauperism in Ireland in the context of their analysis of the causes of the increasing pauperism also being experienced in England in the same period. This examination is based upon the premise that unexplained differences in their mode of analysis across the two countries might indicate evidence for Boylan and Foley’s argument. In addition, their analysis of the causes of Irish poverty is considered in the light of their subsequent policy prescriptions for dealing with this growing problem. This consideration is based upon the premise that a lack of internal logic between arguments over the causes of Irish poverty and policy prescriptions for its alleviation might also provide evidence for Boylan and Foley’s argument.

The paper concludes that in the context of the poor relief debates, there is nothing to support the argument that political economy was used in order to protect the Irish establishment. The political economists reviewed here were certainly prescriptive, and political in the sense that they were concerned with the actions of government, but their arguments betray no trace of sectarianism. Far from defending the status quo, they *were* concerned with the future development of the Irish economy. It was this concern that directed their analysis of increasing Irish pauperism.

II.

THE NATURE OF POOR RELIEF

The legislative arrangements made for the relief of the poor diverged markedly across the different countries of the British Isles. In England, a comprehensive system of rates existed by the early eighteenth century in order to provide funding for workhouses which were to provide relief to the aged and infirm poor (Innes 1999:193). Providing for the poor in workhouses was called “indoor relief” to distinguish it from “outdoor relief”, namely, the practice of providing support for the able-bodied poor by giving them employment on public works but no lodgings.

Rates were collected, and poor relief was administered, on a local parish basis. A less comprehensive version of this system also existed in Wales. The English Poor Law was overseen by a group of commissioners who in turn appointed regional assistant commissioners whose job it was to act as an inspectorate, gathering evidence on the numbers of poor and the provisions made for their relief in each parish. The bulk of this evidence was qualitative in nature, garnered from interviews with local magistrates, town clerks, police superintendents, church representatives and the like. Along with some limited data on numbers of poor in each parish, this evidence was presented to central government on annual basis.

In Scotland, a well developed system of voluntary contributions collected and distributed through the 'kirk-sessions,' Presbyterian parish councils, had sustained indoor poor relief since the seventeenth century. Because poor relief was based upon voluntary contributions and administered by the church, there was not the same emphasis on reporting on the numbers of poor in Scottish parishes. However, as was the case with Ireland, select committees were periodically established to enumerate the extent of Scottish pauperism.

Apart from differences in the nature of funding between Scotland, and England and Wales, there were also differences in entitlement to poor relief. In Scotland, only the aged and infirm were entitled to workhouse places. In England and Wales, however, indoor relief had been extended to cover the able-bodied poor under the Elizabethan Poor Law of 1795. The Elizabethan Poor Law of 1795 also established more firmly than previous poor laws, the *right* of the poor to relief in England and Wales. Many parishes in all three countries provided outdoor relief whereby local overseers would be charged with the task of finding employment for the indigent of the parish. Employment could also be found through local Boards of Works who oversaw the building of roads and railways, drainage of land, and so on.² In addition, local funding was forthcoming to assist with emigration and to purchase cheap food from abroad on an ad hoc basis when economic conditions necessitated. There were also localised, non-legislative schemes to increase labouring wages when they fell to a level below subsistence, known as "allowance" or "labour rate" schemes. These schemes were particularly prevalent in the Southern, agricultural counties of England.

After the Irish Act of Union in 1800, it was initially decided by government that the Scottish model of poor relief was most appropriate for Ireland, and consequently, no poor law was enacted (Innes 1999:194). It was widely believed at the time that the extension of provision of indoor relief to the able-bodied poor by the Elizabethan Poor Law had greatly increased pauperism in England and Wales, and that the much more restricted Scottish system, in contrast, explained what was perceived as the lower rate of pauperism there. It was decided that, for Ireland, a poor law would only exacerbate the pauperism problem as it had done in England. Thus, in Ireland, the aged and infirm poor were to be supported through indoor relief financed by voluntary contributions on a parish by parish basis. Some provision for the able-bodied poor would be made through the borough corporations. These had been established in 1771 and had the power to establish “houses of industry” which aimed to provide work for the unemployed. By 1835 only nine houses of industry existed.³ By far the biggest of these was the Dublin house of industry which, in 1835, had 1,849 inhabitants. The provision these houses offered remained localised and limited.

While charitable organisations, such as the Mendicancy Association in Dublin, managed to raise considerable funds, they tended to be located in urban areas where the numbers of poor were small in comparison to rural areas. Rural parishes, on the other hand, had great difficulty in raising the funds required to look after the significantly higher numbers of aged and infirm poor these parishes tended to have. Infirmaries, asylums, and fever hospitals also existed as places of refuge for the destitute, but, again, their capacity to alleviate the growing problem was severely limited.

By the 1820s, it was becoming increasingly obvious that poor relief based upon voluntary contributions was inadequate to deal with the problem of pauperism in Ireland. Despite the fact that there was no poor law in Ireland, various governmental committees supplied reports to Government on the state of the Irish poor from the late 1810s which pointed to the growing problem of vagrancy and destitution. Calls began to appear for the introduction of a more formalised system of poor relief for Ireland.

The leading political economists of the time entered into a debate as to whether a rates system should be introduced to Ireland in order to finance a poor law, and if so,

how extensive such a poor law should be. The next section considers the main points of this debate. Their arguments in respect of Ireland were hugely influenced by what they believed to be the effect the right to poor relief granted by the poor laws had had on the rate of pauperism in England. Thus, their arguments over poor relief for Ireland are analysed, not in isolation, but in the context of their experiences with poor relief in England.

III

CONTEMPORARY ANALYSIS OF POOR RELIEF FOR IRELAND

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, the rising rate of pauperism was a prominent issue across the British Isles. It was blamed for the increasing civil unrest in England throughout the 1820s and 1830s. McCulloch expressed a common concern that the unrest observed among labourers in the agricultural counties of the South of England would spread to the industrialised North: 'would such a spirit to arise among the manufacturers of Lancashire as has recently prevailed in the southern counties, national bankruptcy and ruin would be the result...so mighty a mass cannot be dragooned and coerced into obedience' (1831:62). Contemporary political economists debated the ways in which the problem of pauperism could be overcome, believing that once pauperism was under control, the threat of widespread civil unrest would recede and industrialisation would continue.

From the middle of the eighteenth century, Ireland was viewed as being particularly subject to crime and disorder. As with England, this unrest was largely due to agrarian unrest. It was felt that the problem in Ireland was more acute than in other parts of the British Isles and, for this reason, government established an armed police force for Ireland (Connolly, 1999:201). Contemporary English political economists were quick to point out the economic impact of such lawlessness on the development of the Irish economy. 'The want of security, the unsettled state of the country, the dread of outrage and destruction to property, the secret combinations and nightly trainings of the peasantry' (Scrope 1831: 529) had curtailed the flow of capital investment into the country. Scrope argued that Ireland was in a 'vicious circle' (1831:529). Without security, there would be no capital investment, and without capital investment, there would be no employment and therefore no security.⁴

The mounting civil unrest had intensified the debate in both countries over what to do about increasing pauperism. The question considered here is whether political

economy was concerned with eliminating that civil unrest as a precursor to further economic development, as Samuels (1992) suggests, or whether, in the case of Ireland at least, it was used as a means of protecting the existing political and religious establishment, as suggested by Boylan and Foley.

Causes of Increasing Pauperism in England and Ireland

Several arguments were put forward to explain the rise in pauperism in England. The three principle causes suggested were: that Irish, and to a lesser extent, Scottish immigrants made up the vast portion of paupers in England; that the practice of consolidation of farms had destroyed a class of self-sufficient cottagers and turned them into vagrants; and finally, that the extensive poor relief offered to the able-bodied poor under the Elizabethan Poor Law of 1795 had led to greater numbers of labourers choosing to accept poor relief rather than find employment. While the first two explanations gathered support in the popular press, contemporary political economists argued that they were in fact consequences of the extension of poor relief to the able-bodied poor under Elizabethan Poor Law 1795.

Contemporary political economists focused upon the extent to which the extensive indoor poor relief on offer had acted as a disincentive to labourers to seek employment. In 1828, McCulloch outlined what was a general consensus among political economists:

It is almost universally admitted that in their [the Poor Laws] practical operation, they tend to render the poor idle and improvident; that they teach them to depend on parish assistance, instead of trusting to their own exertions (1828:303).

The generally accepted argument was as follows. Labourers should want to better themselves by adhering to the socially acceptable codes of conduct which included a strong work ethic and a desire to raise themselves above subsistence level. If this were the case, they would be willing to supply the labour required to expand the industrial base, as well as demanding the goods that the industrial base would produce. The labour productivity born out of a strong work ethic would stimulate further capital investment and ensure the continued expansion of industry.

Virtually all contemporary political economists argued that poor relief to the able-bodied was in danger of preventing the further expansion of industry by creating an underclass of paupers who were not prepared to work when they could receive poor relief instead (for example, Ricardo 1973:134-35, 248; McCulloch 1828, 1829, 1831; Senior 1831; Scrope 1832a, 1832b, 1834; Longfield 1834). This decision to avail of poor relief rather than to work was referred to as indolence. In addition, it was generally believed that poor relief to the able-bodied poor encouraged them to increase the size of their families; since they could rely on poor relief, they did not have to worry about how to support their offspring. The conclusion was that this underclass of indolent paupers would only increase in size, thereby increasing the numbers who were dependent on rates.⁵ These conclusions were supported by the evidence supplied by annual Commissions and Select Committee reports into the extent of pauperism.

Since Ireland had no poor law, it was obvious that the explanation for English pauperism would not fit the Irish circumstances. Initially, it was thought that Ireland might be displaying the Malthusian overpopulation effect. However, it is interesting to note that Malthus himself did not subscribe to that view. Having completed a tour of Westmeath, Kerry and Limerick in 1817, he wrote to Ricardo commenting that while the population seemed 'greatly in excess above the demand for labour', it was 'not in general not much above the means of subsistence on account of the rapidity with which potatoes have increased under a system of cultivating them on very small properties' (1817 (1952), vol.vii:174).

Analysis of the causes of poverty in Ireland gathered momentum in 1828, when Sadler asserted that he had refuted the Malthusian overpopulation hypothesis for the case of Ireland using data from the 1821 census. He claimed that Ireland could not be considered overpopulated once she continued to export agricultural produce. If the Malthusian hypothesis held, he reasoned, then Ireland would not be able to feed its own inhabitants, never mind those of neighbouring countries.

McCulloch (1829) questioned the validity of Sadler's claim on several grounds although he agreed that Ireland was not overpopulated in the Malthusian sense. He disputed Sadler's argument that Ireland's export of agricultural produce was evidence that the country was not overpopulated. He countered that these exports reflected the desire of middle and upper classes for luxury items. Since these were

not manufactured in Ireland, they had to be imported in exchange for agricultural exports. Ireland was not, in McCulloch's opinion, exporting a surplus agricultural production.

By the time McCulloch's retort to Sadler appeared, there was a developing consensus over the cause of Irish poverty – subtenantry. It is ironic that the very fact of subtenantry which Malthus held was preventing overpopulation in Ireland was put forward ten years later as the primary explanation for the increased pauperism and lack of development of the Irish economy. With regard to the English economy, McCulloch (1828) argued that the actions of landlords in preventing subtenantry was having a dampening effect on the rate of growth of the poor. He argued that any move towards creating a class of self-sufficient cottiers would simply fuel pauperism since at some stage these cottiers would find that they could no longer produce enough to keep themselves. He stressed that 'nothing, indeed, has done more to multiply the number of paupers than the encouragement that has thus been held out to the improper increase of cottages' (1831:59). He argued that it was no coincidence that the counties with the fewest paupers, 'Durham, Northumberland and the Lothians,' were also the counties with the largest farms (1831:60).

For McCulloch, the cause of poverty in Ireland was solely due to the practice of subtenantry. He welcomed the Subletting Act of 1826 as a means of reversing the damage done to the productivity of Irish agriculture by breaking up land into smaller and smaller plots. He denied criticisms by Sadler that the Act was 'an engine of oppression on the part of landlords' (1829:312). He concluded that the policy should be stepped up and continued 'until the land has been cleared of the superfluous tenants, and consolidated into farms capable of being properly managed' (1829:313).

While most contemporary political economists agreed with McCulloch's analysis of the cause of Irish poverty, they did not share his sentiment that the Subletting Act had in fact been quite slow in clearing lands of cottiers. Senior argued that 'almost all the evidence shows that the progress of clearing errs in being too rapid and too general' (1831:32). Scrope argued that the lack of government response to the hardship caused by the Subletting Act underlined a stark contrast between how the Irish and the English poor were being treated. The English poor had recourse to both indoor and outdoor poor relief while Irish poor had to rely on sporadic and meagre

poor relief funded by voluntary contributions. Scrope argued that, given this unequal treatment, it was not surprising that Ireland was heading for insurrection. For Scrope, it was evident who was being protected. He argued that the government was using 'our law and our army to protect the Irish landlord in the exercise of his despotic power' (1831:515). The Subletting Act, he held, 'has given every landlord a ready and cheap power of ejecting his pauper tenantry from the hovel and the land, the occupation of which to them is a sine-qua-non of existence' (1831:513).

It had not been McCulloch's intent that the increased pauperism generated from the Subletting Act not be dealt with. He acknowledged the necessity of a change of policy on the part of government towards poor relief in Ireland:

And hence, it is obvious, that the object of those who really wish to promote the prosperity of Ireland, ought to be to provide such an outlet for the poor, whether by emigration or otherwise, as would enable every landlord to set vigorously about clearing his estate the moment he has the opportunity (1829:314-5).

He suggested that existing tenants be granted a legal claim to land they rented, in order to prevent a landlord from allowing 'a parcel of mud huts to be erected on some neglected portion of his estate' (1829:314).

Despite this recommendation, it is clear that nearly ten years later, little had been done to alleviate the problem of pauperism arising out of the land clearances. In 1838, Torrens described the ongoing practice as 'inhuman...dangerous...and impracticable, unless adequate provision be made for the outgoing tenantry' (1838:10-11). This would suggest that no significant steps had been taken in the intervening period to alleviate the increasing poverty that land clearances were generating.

The political economists were in an awkward position. In respect of England, they were arguing that the Elizabethan Poor Law had resulted in increasing pauperism and indolence and should be restricted to only the aged and infirm. Yet, at the same time, the policy of land clearance in Ireland seemed to necessitate exactly that level of extensive poor relief which had been so disastrous for England, if social control was to be maintained and increasing productivity of Irish agriculture was to be

ensured. It was thought unlikely that industry would soak up the excess supply of labour created by the land clearances: Torrens felt that it would be 'long before her [Ireland's] native manufacturers become so flourishing as to give employment to the hands no longer required upon the land' (1838:10).

It is obvious that the land clearances, however justified their long term effect, were causing severe political, social and economic problems in the short term. Scrope, once again taking an anti-landlord stance, pointed to the fact that England was bearing the cost of these problems: 'we, simple fools, in Britain, are paying enormous taxes for an army to enable a handful of Irish landowners to grind to the earth the unfortunate denizens of their own soil' (1831:545). The political consequences were, for Scrope, quite predictable. He argued that it was not surprising, given the government's reluctance to provide poor relief, that 'Mr O'Connell can make his unhappy land ring with the cry for the repeal of the Union' (1831:545). Mountifort Longfield also advocated a poor law for Ireland on the grounds of security, despite an acknowledgement of the difficulties experienced with the English poor law: 'the experience of England may inform us, that it is impossible to raise the pauper without depressing the labourer' (1834:35).

There was broad consensus among the English political economists that while in England being poor was the fault of the poor themselves, in Ireland poverty was due to landlords' tolerance towards the practice of subtenantry. However, there was no such consensus over how to deal with the growing numbers of paupers generated by the Subletting Act. Four main issues were discussed in this context: the provision of indoor poor relief, emigration, the provision of outdoor poor relief, and funding for poor relief.

The Legal Provision of Indoor Poor Relief in England and Ireland

Despite the growing problem of pauperism in Ireland throughout the early decades of the nineteenth century, some commentators were consistent in their argument against a poor law for the able-bodied in both England and Ireland. Ricardo recommended the removal of poor relief for the able-bodied in both countries. In respect of England, he argued that 'everything would go on well if we could rescue the lowest labourers with families from a habitual reliance on the rates. By doing so, we should better the condition of all above that class' (Ricardo, (1817)1952, vol.vii: 134-5). Ricardo acknowledged that, in certain circumstances, poor relief might be

necessary. However, he held that such poor relief should be financed by the poor themselves. He proposed a system of enforced savings upon the labouring classes in order to 'provide for those casualties to which they are exposed from occasional variations in the demand for particular manufactured goods' ((1818)1952, vol.vii: 248). An enforced savings scheme assumed that the labouring class operated in a monetised labour market. This was not the case for most of Ireland.

Ricardo argued that an extensive poor law for Ireland would lead to the widespread choice of leisure over labour. The central problem for Ireland was the 'indolence and vice of the people, and not...their inability to procure necessaries' ((1816) 1952, vol.ii:48). Thus, Ricardo reasoned that poverty in Ireland had been generated by the poor themselves, as it had been in England.

Senior, while acknowledging that the root of pauperism in Ireland was very different from that of England, also held that a poor law which extended relief to the able-bodied poor would only result in the same problems that the Elizabethan Poor Law had produced in England. He felt that the Irish were particularly prone to indolence. It is important to note that only Senior and Ricardo drew distinctions between the Irish and the English labourer in this way. Scrope went so far as to reverse the argument by asserting that 'neither Englishman or Scotchman will surpass the Irishman in close and patient toil, frugality, and providence' (1831:523). Wrightson, drawing on his experience as a Commissioner in respect of investigating the extent of poverty in Ireland, also argued that the Irish did not suffer from the indolence of the English:

Her people, low as their condition is , are in no such perverted and unnatural position. Much as they may have suffered at the hands of statesmen and magistrates, they have happily never been brought up to depend on any bread but that of industry. They are ready to go all distances in search of employment, and undertake any work, however alien from their habits (1837:190).

Senior insisted that 'the experiment in England has produced a state of things which, if not immediately remedied, threatens the destruction of society' (1831:28). He was convinced that Ireland would suffer the same fate if a legal right to poor relief for the able-bodied poor was established. Yet, when asked to participate in the drawing up of a new poor law for England, Senior proposed that indoor poor relief should

continue to be provided. On the face of it, there was a glaring inconsistency between Senior's poor relief recommendations for England, and those he favoured for Ireland.

How could Senior argue that workhouses were appropriate for English, but not for Irish, paupers? It had been argued that the workhouse system in England could only be depended upon not to increase indolence if the level of subsistence offered in them was far below the level of subsistence labourers could expect to get from employment. This argument was formalised in the "workhouse test," extensively proposed by George Nicholls who assisted in the drafting of the English New Poor Law of 1834, the Poor Relief (Ireland) Act of 1838, and various poor laws for Belgium and the Netherlands. The problem in applying the workhouse test to Ireland was that the level of subsistence afforded from labouring wages was so low (if indeed, employment could be found at all), that it would have been impossible for workhouses to undercut it. No matter what level of subsistence workhouses offered, it was unlikely that they could undercut the level of subsistence among the labouring poor. Following this logic, Senior argued that there was no way of preventing an extensive workhouse system from increasing indolence in Ireland.

It was not the case that contemporary political economists were all agreed that a Poor Law was inappropriate for Ireland. While most had reservations based upon their experiences with the English Poor Law, they conceded that Irish poverty was of a different character and therefore warranted an alternative solution. By 1831, Scrope stressed that all commentators, with the glaring exception of Senior, were in agreement that rates-funded poor relief had to be introduced to Ireland on a large scale: '[McCulloch] has, since that time, together with many others – we believe we may say all the political economists – wholly reversed that opinion' that poor relief would generate more poverty in Ireland (1831:517).

In 1834, in Ireland, Mountifort Longfield supported a poor law and called for the application of the workhouse test in the provision of indoor poor relief. This was in spite of the fact that it had been conceded by Senior and others that the level of subsistence in Ireland was so low that it would be very difficult for any workhouses to undercut it. In general, Longfield's discussion seems oddly incongruous with the Irish situation. For example, he wrote extensively on the evils of the allowance schemes. This was a moot argument in respect of Ireland, since such schemes did not operate there and were unlikely to be introduced. It is evident from Longfield's four lectures

on poor relief, that his main concern was the mounting civil unrest in Ireland. His analysis of the Irish situation seems to have been muddied by his fears in this regard.

By the beginning of the 1830s, there was considerable support for the introduction of poor relief in Ireland by contemporary political economists. However, it was generally conceded that pauperism in Ireland was so extensive that the provision of indoor poor relief alone could combat it. Other means of dealing with Irish pauperism were considered, principally emigration and outdoor poor relief.

Emigration⁶

Nearly all contemporary English political economists argued that recourse to emigration would ease the situation in Ireland. The obvious destination for Irish paupers was the closest one – England. This was not a popular choice in England. The popular belief in England was that Irish paupers were flowing into England, availing of poor relief and taking jobs from English labourers.⁷ These sentiments were supported by the minutes of evidence gathered as part of annual Select Committee and Commission reports on the English Poor Law. In 1828, the report from the Select Committee on that part of the poor laws relating to the employment or relief of able bodied persons from the poor rate put the causes of increased poverty and unemployment as being principally the existence of allowance schemes, but it also cited minutes of evidence from vestry and parish clerks in various parishes who pointed to how Irish immigrants arrived in great numbers to parishes such as Liverpool. However, the minutes of evidence also report that Irish immigrants rarely stayed long: ‘we often return them immediately; we have daily means of sending them across the water’ (1828:59). They were given some bread and returned to Ireland on the next sailing.

In the same year, the report from the Select Committee on Irish and Scottish Vagrants gave estimates of the numbers of immigrants: ‘the numbers passed through the county of Lancaster, amounted in the last five years, to 22,045, of which, 20,414 were Irish, and 1,631 Scotch’ (1828:4). J.A. Powell, town clerk of Liverpool, reported that many of the Irish were ‘professionally beggars (sic)’ who would come to him for postal orders to send money back to Ireland year after year (1828:9). He argued that in his opinion the reported number of Irish immigrants to Lancaster was

exaggerated as the estimates “double-counted” immigrants who came to the county from Ireland twice or three times a year.

Despite the lack of reliable data on the numbers of Irish immigrants, calls were made in certain quarters for a restriction on the freedom of movement between Ireland and England. Senior was ‘inexpressibly disgusted at the wish to deprive the Irish labourer of his resort to England’ (1831:50). His disgust was on both economic and political grounds. He talked about the ‘improvements in habits, tastes and feelings, introduced by those who have visited England’ (1831: 50); this would instill a desire to improve their standard of living, encouraging a stronger work ethic among the Irish labouring class. He also argued that if there was an excess demand for labour in particular counties in England, there would be an inflow of labour from somewhere else, be it Ireland or not. This inflow would have the same impact on wages, he asserted, regardless of its origins. Finally he asked:

Can the Union have more effective enemies than those who would consider Great Britain and Ireland as one country when we are to gain by it, and two when we fancy that we are to lose (1831:51).

McCulloch believed that Irish immigration was a serious problem for England: ‘Great Britain has been overrun by half-famished horders, that have, by their competition, lessened the wages of labour, and by their example, degraded the habits and lowered the opinions of the people with respect to subsistence’ (1828:327). Irish immigration was fueling the already growing indolence of English paupers. Both Scrope and McCulloch argued that one of the benefits of an Irish poor law would be a reduction in the numbers of Irish paupers coming to England to look for work.

Senior countered that Irish immigration was not damaging the English labour market. Once the Irish labourer was not paid above his productivity, ‘he must increase instead of diminishing the general fund for the payment of wages’ (1831:47). He argued that, in addition, most Irish workers were seasonal workers in the agricultural counties, and, they tended to ‘perform the laborious and most disagreeable services’ (1831:47). Irish labourers were meeting a demand for labour that would not be met by English labourers. The solution to Irish immigration, for Senior, was not the legal provision of poor relief in Ireland, but rather the removal of this provision in England.

This would reduce indolence among English paupers and they would compete more effectively with Irish immigrants for employment.

Not surprisingly, proposals of emigration schemes to the colonies of Canada and Australia did not generate the same political problems as emigration to England. In general, McCulloch saw emigration as being 'advantageous to all classes, by drying up the most copious source of internal commotion' (1831:53). While he conceded that no one should be forced to emigrate, he did advise that parishes should reduce inducements to the poor to stay. He used the same argument in favour of emigration from Ireland.

In 1838, Torrens published a report which proposed the construction of an emigration fund for Ireland through the establishment of a joint stock company. He argued that 'the expense of locating the able-bodied poor in the Colonies would be less than that of maintaining them at home' (1838:13). The company would purchase land, principally in Australia, and emigrants would get free passage and two acres at a rent of 5s per acre rent for 21 years, as well as a 'guarantee that they shall employment upon the public works at 1s per day' (1838:24). In comparison to supplying workhouse places for the Irish poor, this seemed a cost effective way of dealing with the problem. McCulloch had long since disposed of the argument that it would be inhumane to force the impoverished to leave their homes:

When the non-employment, squalid poverty, and wretchedness of the Irish poor are universally admitted, it is really farcical to talk of the 'cruelty' and 'atrociousness' of encouraging their emigration to Canada or the United States; countries where labour is in great demand (1829:311)

There was a general consensus among leading commentators that emigration to the colonies was an effective safety valve for eliminating excess labour across the British Isles. Interestingly, however, emigration schemes were not proposed as a major feature of the Poor Relief (Ireland) Act in 1838 on the somewhat dubious grounds that these schemes would precipitate a brain drain.

The Provision of Outdoor Poor Relief

Outdoor poor relief under the English Poor Law involved the provision of employment or "parish work" for the unemployed. Overseers were appointed in each parish,

whose responsibility it was to find work locally for the unemployed. This usually involved persuading landlords and large farmers to hire more labourers. Wages for such work were paid out of parish rates. In some parishes, where wages fell below subsistence level, labourer's wages would be added to from poor relief funds. The additional wage was determined by the number of dependents each labourer had. This process of topping up labouring wages when required was known as the labour rate or allowance scheme. This scheme also fell under the heading of outdoor poor relief.

There were problems with outdoor poor relief. Not surprisingly, the system was seen by many landlords as a means of subsidising their labour costs. Scrope argued that, under parish work, the unemployed were only 'nominally set to work' (1832:322). McCulloch (1828) had criticised, in addition, the practice whereby unemployed labourers were rounded into gangs and moved from parish to parish as work became available. Since these "roundsmen" were working for subsistence, they squeezed 'regular labourers' (1831:48) out of the market and reduced the average labouring wage. McCulloch concluded that 'labour is a commodity; and, as such, an article of commerce, and ought to be left, like everything else, to find its own fair value in the market' (1831: 51). Wrightson went so far as to describe the labour market operating in England as 'totally deranged' (1837:189), as a result of the distortions the outdoor poor relief created.

Nearly all commentators argued against the permitted continuation of the labour rate or allowance schemes. McCulloch argued that they had been 'productive of an extent of mischief that could hardly have been conceived possible' (1828: 319). They acted as 'premium on idleness and profligacy' (1828:320), and encouraged farmers to pay less for labour: 'the farmers are led to encourage a system which fraudulently imposed a heavy burden upon others' (1828:322). Likewise, Scrope saw the allowance scheme as 'an illegal and fraudulent device of the larger farmers, for shifting a portion of the necessary wages of their labourers in the small farmers who hire little or no labour, the tradesmen, householders, and clergymen of the Parish' (1832:324). He argued that the scheme made it impossible to measure the extent of 'surplus labour existing in any parish' (1832:324). The removal of the allowance schemes was recommended by several Commissions, most notably, the Select Committee on that part of the poor laws relating to the employment or relief of able bodied persons from the poor rate (1828).

It was widely believed that the provision of outdoor poor relief in Ireland would also result in the generation of “fictitious” employment for surplus labour. Senior (1831) argued that any rates would quickly run out if it was spent on outdoor poor relief since the work generated offered no real return. Scrope countered that if rates were spent on public works, it would lead to greater private capital investment and would ‘repay fourfold the expenses of cultivation’ (1831:527). Not all the funding had to come from rates. Once large scale investment was begun, funding for public works could come in part from stock markets such as London, Paris, Vienna and St. Petersburg, all of which, he held, were ‘glutted’ with funds for investment (1831:533). He pointed to the positive impact public works had had on Scottish labourers in the 1810s when agricultural regions faced famines and manufacturing went into a decline.

In part, Senior did agree with Scrope that public works were required if the Irish economy was to develop but he held that these were ‘measures of slow operation’ (1831:20) and that in the meantime, poverty would persist. Despite this, he persisted in his argument that any indoor poor relief would simply make matters worse.⁸ However, by this stage, Senior was very much in the minority among political economists in his poor relief recommendations for Ireland. For the vast majority of commentators, there was no question that some form of poor relief had to be extended to Ireland; the issue was who should pay. If political economy was being used to protect the Irish establishment in this regard, one would imagine that policy recommendations would invoke schemes designed to minimise the cost to the Irish establishment.

The Funding of Irish Poor Relief

While Senior did not approve of a rates-funded poor law for Ireland, he did not oppose the introduction of a system of poor relief funded by voluntary contributions along Scottish lines: ‘I anxiously wish to prevent the existence in Ireland, not of a legal provision for charitable purposes, but of a legal provision for the able-bodied poor’ (1831:44). Senior pointed, not to any responsibility on the part of landlords to their tenants, but to the fact that the Scottish system restricted poor relief to the aged and infirm. He viewed the Scottish system as ‘nearly perfect’ (1831:28).

The role of the Prebyterian Church in the successful operation of poor relief in Scotland was widely acknowledged. It is perhaps partly the reason behind Ricardo's argument that the Catholic Church in Ireland become part of the establishment:

Surely no reasonable man can apprehend danger to the United Kingdom from according the catholic claims in Ireland – I believe that the church establishment in Ireland would be more secure, but I should not see much to regret if Ireland had a catholic establishment, in the same way as Scotland has a presbyterian one ((1821) 1952, vol.viii:350-51).

Writing on the contentious issue of church tithes in 1831, Senior expressed his support for a government provision for the Catholic Church in Ireland: 'as an act of justice to the Catholic population...I am most anxious to see a public provision made for the Catholic clergy' (1831:68). Torrens, too, despite being an Irish landowning Protestant, lent 'valiant support' to the cause of Catholic emancipation (Spiegel, 1992:347). John Bicheno, a political economist who was appointed to the Commission for inquiring into the condition of the poor in Ireland during the preparation of its second report in 1835, also favoured the strengthening of the Catholic Church. He acknowledged the 'inconvenience experienced from the political character of the priests' (1830:194), but argued that they were well aware that widespread civil unrest would not further the case of Catholic emancipation. For that reason, Bicheno held that 'they are, on the contrary, the best check that exists to moderate the wild career of ignorance and passion' (1830:195).

This support for the Catholic Church does not sit easily with Boylan and Foley's contention that political economy was sectarian.⁹ On the contrary, there is no evidence of an anti-Catholic bias on the part of any of the English political economists considered here. Indeed, most seemed to accept that a better funded Catholic Church could aid in the process of education that they held to be vital to the development of a sustainable economy.¹⁰ Bicheno pointed to the remarkable level of funding which the Catholic Church managed to raise 'considering the drainage that is constantly going on by the landlords, and that there is another church to be supported with a prodigal allowance' (1830:176). A formally established Catholic Church could have been expected to fund a significant amount of poor relief.

Boylan and Foley seem to suggest that sectarianism and a desire to preserve the Protestant Establishment went hand in hand. In fact, many of those who supported Catholic emancipation also favoured the continuance of the Union. This was true of Catholics as well as Protestants, most notably, Dr. James Doyle, Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, who worked with McCulloch on the Select Committee for the Inquiry into the Poor in Ireland (1830). Nor were landlordism and support for Catholic emancipation mutually exclusive; O'Connell provides a salient example of this.

For those commentators who advocated a Poor Law, the question as to who should pay was easily answered. In his evidence to the Select Committee for the Inquiry into the Poor in Ireland (1830), McCulloch proposed a rates-funded poor law for Ireland along the lines of the existing English legislation. He had previously stated his change of mind over the issue of Irish poor relief. He acknowledged that this contradicted his earlier stance that such extensive poor relief would lead to greater poverty and indolence. He had previously justified his change of mind by arguing that 'the experience of England has proved, that the efforts of the landlords, and of the wealthier classes of the community, to keep down the rates, more than counterbalances these tendencies' (1829:314). He argued that if landlords were forced to pay out rates to finance poor relief, there would be an incentive for them to reduce the amount of rates they had to pay by investing in their lands and generating employment.

It was also held by some that landlords should foot the bill for emigration. Bicheno stressed that 'the only guarantee England can have against the repetition of the evil [subtenantry], is to make the land itself bear the expenses of the transportation' (1830:274). If emigration were to continue to be funded by government rather than by rates, there would be no disincentive to landlords to prevent subtenantry and a subsequent rise in pauperism at some stage in the future.

Scrope reviewed the proposed plans for Irish poor relief, and noted that 'in all the plans that have been proposed for applying a poor-rate to Ireland, it has been thought right to throw a considerable portion of its burden on the landowner' (1831:531). Scrope felt that this was appropriate since 'the Irish landowners do not spontaneously invest the surplus of their incomes in the mode which would be so beneficial both to themselves and their country' (1831:532). He also argued that a rates-funded poor law would force absentee landlords back to Ireland, 'threatened on

the one hand by the assessment of their property and induced on the other by the improved system of society at home' (1831:533).

Scrope, McCulloch and Bicheno were critical of the Irish absentee landlords, but not because of their absenteeism per se. Bicheno pointed out that Ireland was not the only country where absenteeism could be found. It was rife in France, Germany and Italy, too, yet the same problem of widespread destitution did not exist there to the same extent (1830:104). Bicheno put this down to what he saw as the unique relationship between landlord and tenant which existed in Ireland.

In Ireland, any kindness which is shewn to the tenantry, depends upon the generosity of the individual, and not upon any general feeling which prevails among the class. There are many liberal landlords in the country; but still, as a class, they are needy, exacting, unremitting, harsh, and without sympathy for their tenants (1830:123)

Bicheno contrasted this to the situation in England, where 'kindnesses' were 'expected by the tenant, on an understanding, hardly amounting to a right, yet not far short of it' (1830:122). Both Bicheno and Scrope had a paternalistic view of the role of the landlord in ensuring social stability. They argued strenuously that Irish landlords had reneged in their duties and should now be forced to pay for the alleviation of Irish poverty.

McCulloch, in contrast, did not point to any particular moral obligation on the part of Irish landlords. He was particularly concerned with the popular argument that absentee landlords were a major source of Ireland's failure to develop. He argued that a return to Ireland by absentee landlords would not reduce agricultural exports. They would still demand English-produced luxury goods regardless of where they resided, and would have to export agricultural produce to England in order to pay for these goods. Bicheno argued in a more general sense that 'whatever would induce the gentry to reside on their estates, would obviously be productive of great good' (1830:168). However, he also pointed out that residence in Ireland would encourage landlords to invest in their lands. Scrope, too, criticised Irish landlords for failing to engage in capital expenditure. He complained of Irish landlords preferring instead to invest in 'English funds' (1831:532).

Both McCulloch and Scrope argued that a poor rate would force landlords to invest in their lands in order to reduce the rates burden; Scrope believed that this would be all the more likely if Irish landlords were resident on their estates. All the main commentators who favoured poor relief for Ireland proposed that the lions share of the burden should fall on Irish landlords. It is difficult to justify Boylan and Foley's argument that political economy was being used to further the cause of landlords in Ireland, at least in the context of this debate.

It is clear from this review of the main English contributors to the debate over poor relief for Ireland that their central concern was the further development of the Irish economy. Even those who opposed a poor law for Ireland did so in the belief that such a law would simply increase the problem of pauperism and indolence and slow down the rate of progress of the economy, as they believed it had done in England. By 1830, all political economists, with the sole exception of Senior, advocated rates-funded poor relief for Ireland. There were several reasons for this recommendation. It cannot be ignored that McCulloch and Scrope believed that a poor law in Ireland would stem the flow of paupers from Ireland to England and ease the situation there. However, their arguments in favour of a poor law for Ireland were predominantly set in the context of economic development in Ireland. Torrens and McCulloch, in particular, stressed the importance of continuing the pace of land clearance if Irish agriculture was to develop. This policy could only be continued without insurrection if poor relief was made readily available. Scrope pointed to the fact that poor relief would do much to ensure stability in the country and could be expected to prompt increased capital expenditure. There is little evidence of Boylan and Foley's assertions in respect of the leading political economists who participated in the debate on poor relief for Ireland. However, it would appear that they were to have little influence on the content of the Poor Relief (Ireland) Act. Indeed, despite the numbers of contributors to the Irish poor relief debate in the previous decade, the Act was largely the work of a single man, George Nicholls.

IV.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A POOR LAW FOR IRELAND

On 25th September, 1833, a Commission for inquiring into the condition of the poor in Ireland was established.¹¹ The Commission's first report did not appear until 1835, a delay which was seen by many commentators as unacceptable given the severity of the situation. Assistant Commissioners had been appointed to collect evidence on a

parish by parish basis, supplemented by a questionnaire which was sent to 'the clergy of each persuasion, to the Magistry, to the heads of the Police, and to such educated persons as had been named as able and willing to give us assistance' (1835:viii). The aim of the first report was to give estimates of the numbers of paupers based upon minutes of evidence supplied by the above as well as data from the 1831 census, but the Commissioners stressed their desire to go beyond this narrow brief. They wanted not only to propose schemes to cope with the increasing numbers of poor, but also to 'prevent the existence of destitution' altogether (1835:xii).

The Commissioners presented two further reports in quick succession.¹² The second report deals with the institutions already existing for poor relief, principally the houses of industry. The third report estimated the number of agricultural labourers in Ireland to be 1,131,715, compared to 1,055,982 in England (1836:3). In addition, 'the cultivated land of Great Britain amounts to about 34,250,000 acres and that of Ireland only to about 14,600,000' (1836:3). This produced an excess supply of agricultural labour in Ireland which forced the average wage down. The average wage in Ireland was '2s to 2s 6d a-week or thereabouts' compared to the average wage in England of 'from 8s to 10s a-week' (1836:4). The Commission reasoned that Irish wages could not rise to the English level unless the productivity of Irish agricultural labour rose, but that given the relative shortage of land in Ireland, this was not likely to happen. They estimated that there were 585,000 unemployed people in Ireland.¹³ If one added to this figure the numbers dependent upon the unemployed, the total figure estimated by the Commissioners of paupers in Ireland came to 2,385,000. The Commissioners put the cost of supplying indoor poor relief to cater for these numbers at £5,000,000. The Commissioners argued that, given the numbers that would have to be catered for, indoor poor relief would be too expensive. They estimated landlords' net income to be £6,000,000. If landlords were to pay rates to the amount required, this would leave them nothing to reinvest in their lands.

The Commissioners held that, in any case, Irish paupers would refuse to remain in workhouses whatever the consequences: 'our conviction is that the able-bodied in general, and their families, would endure any misery rather than make a workhouse their domicile' (1836:5). The Commissioners also argued against the provision of 'out-door compulsory employment... considering the number of persons for whom

work must be found' (1836:5). They argued that forcing farmers to employ unemployed labourers would 'reduce the wages of all to a minimum' (1836:6).

The Commissioners had no such problem with the provision of employment on public works and recommended that extensive public works be established, for the same reasons that Scrope (1831) had advocated. They pointed to the importance of the development of infrastructure, in particular land reclamation and drainage systems,¹⁴ and argued that the remit of the Board of Works be greatly extended. This programme of public works would take care of the demand side of the labour market, but what of the supply side?

The Commissioners argued that while subtenantry existed, labouring wages were viewed as an additional means to increase subsistence. However, land clearances meant that the labouring wage had become the main source of subsistence for labourers. Hence, the Commission argued that the labouring wage had to be increased. The main innovation in the reports of the Commissioners was their proposal that the average wage in Ireland be increased to 4s 6d per week. This would increase the wage bill for landlords, but the Commissioners argued that landlords alone should have to pay. If labour was more expensive, landlords would be forced to engage in capital investment to make that labour more productive.

It is unlikely that many political economists would have supported such interference in the Irish labour market. There was little commentary on the Commission's proposals among political economists. It seems that the report of the Commission was also ignored by government: 'it would appear from the discussion in Parliament, as well as from the publications of Mr George Lewis and others, that this document has entirely escaped observation' (Wrightson 1837:201).

The poor relief proposals of the Commission were turned down by the Chief Secretary for Ireland, Lord John Russell. One might speculate that the main reason for this rejection was the expense of the schemes proposed. After the presentation of the first report of the Commissioners to Parliament, Russell enlisted George Nicholls, the English Poor Law Commissioner, to investigate the possibility of a 'practical solution' for poor relief in Ireland (1836). Nicholl's brief was essentially to come up with a cheap solution which would have an immediate and highly visible

impact of pauperism in Ireland. He reported back to Lord Russell making ample use of the minutes of evidence and the estimates provided by the Commission's three reports, as well as drawing on his own impressions following an eight week tour of the country in 1836. Nicholls accepted the estimate of 2,385,000 paupers calculated by the Commission. Yet, he proposed a workhouse scheme which would supply indoor poor relief for 80,000 aged, infirm and able bodied poor. Isaac Butt's sentiments, in a letter to Lord Viscount Morpeth, HM principal secretary of state for Ireland (1837), reflected the reaction of many commentators, when he wrote: 'the people of Ireland have not food enough to eat...here is the evil, and you take 80,000 of the people and you shut them up in workhouses' (1837:19).

One might have expected Nicholls to propose emigration as a means of making the substantial shortfall. However, he argued that emigration should in fact be a last resort as it would generate a brain drain: 'a continual draft of its best elements lowers the tone and reduces the general vigour of the community' (1837:56). This is a somewhat moot argument, given that emigrants were overwhelmingly from the labouring classes (Mokyr and O'Grada, 1982).¹⁵ He did suggest that land drainage and reclamation might be engaged in but it is not clear who he envisaged should pay for these schemes.

Nicholls did accept that the workhouse test could not be applied to workhouses in Ireland: 'the standard of their mode of living is unhappily so low, that the establishment of one still lower is difficult, and would, I think, under any circumstances be inexpedient' (1836:24). However, he justified the building of workhouses that offered a level of subsistence in line with that gained from employment on the grounds that the Irish 'have never been enervated by a dependence upon a misapplied system of parish relief' (1836:25). Workhouses would not cause indolence in Ireland because of the nature of the Irish. Yet, Nicholls went on to contradict himself by blaming the rising pauperism on the 'indiscriminate alms-giving' of the existing houses of industry (1836:11). In essence, Nicholls confused the causes of English and Irish poverty and attempted to come up with one policy for both countries.

Several political economists acknowledged the gross inadequacy of Nicholl's analysis of Irish poverty and his proposals for its alleviation, most notably Torrens. Torren's 1838 letter to Lord Russell pointed not only to the limited usefulness of

Nicholl's proposal in dealing with existing paupers, but also estimated that if workhouses were the only palliative offered, the numbers of paupers could be expected to rise to over 5 million in just a few years (1838:55). Butt was incensed by the limited scope of Nicholl's proposals, given the numbers of paupers reported by Whately's Commission: 'it is difficult, my lord, to suppress a feeling of astonishment that any ministry should have based a legislative measure on such a document as this report of Mr Nicholl's' (1837:22).

Despite the negative views of contemporary political economists on Nicholls' proposals, they were to form the basis for the Poor Relief (Ireland) Act of 1838. In September 1838, Nicholls moved to Blackrock in Co. Dublin to supervise the implementation of the early stages of the Act. This proved more difficult than had been anticipated by Nicholls due to continuing opposition to the Act in and out of Parliament. He remained in Ireland until November 1842.

O'Grada (1993:126) holds the view that 'the impact of economists on public opinion and on economic policy, through their parliamentary spokesmen and the media, was certainly against government intervention in Ireland' as a means of alleviating poverty in Ireland. While the policy outcome was a relatively benign one of limited rates-funded poor relief and could be described as involving minimal government intervention, this can hardly be said to be as a result of the influence of the majority of commentators on the Irish situation who were in fact arguing in favour of extensive government intervention.

V.

CONCLUSION

There was a marked consensus over the cause of Irish pauperism among the political economists who participated in the poor relief for Ireland debate up to the enactment of the Poor Relief (Ireland) Act in 1838. The practice of subtenantry had encouraged the development of a self-sufficient cottier class, had diminished returns to agricultural investment, and had stunted the development of a monetised labour market. Thus, when famines occurred, there was no alternative means of support open to the cottier class and they became destitute. Increasing pauperism was already causing widespread agrarian unrest, and this would severely limit the interest in capital investment in Ireland. The solution was quite simple: reduce the number of tenants and consolidate farms.

It was clear to all commentators that this policy would produce untold hardship for the Irish labouring classes. Initially, leading figures such as Senior and McCulloch drew on their perceptions of the damage that the Elizabethan Poor Law of 1795 had done in England and recommended that no rates-funded poor relief be introduced into Ireland. However, by the beginning of the 1830s, it was generally conceded that the nature of Irish poverty differed substantially from that seen in England. This prompted the vast majority of commentators to recommend some form of poor relief for Ireland. In general, indoor poor relief was seen as an inappropriate response given the numbers of destitute. No system of workhouses could cater for the volume of paupers. Contemporary political economists emphasised that any system of indoor poor relief would have to be supplemented by other forms of relief. They emphasised the importance of public works in alleviating poverty in the short term and in ensuring the development of the Irish economy in the longer term. Emigration was also considered as a method of reducing the excess supply of labour in the country.

Senior outlined a vision shared by political economists of the scope of development of the Irish economy once land clearances had achieved their goal:

The extension of farms, and the consequent conversion of cottiers into hired labourers; the opening up of roads and canals, and, in time, it may be hoped, of rail-roads, events which, from the testimony of almost all the witnesses, are rapidly taking place, and which may be assisted by Government, if money is advanced for public works and to facilitate by emigration the consolidation of farms, will prevent the evils which arise from a bad agricultural system, and imperfect means of communication (1831:20).

Boylan and Foley imply that the development of the Irish economy was not part of the agenda of political economy as it was applied to Ireland in the nineteenth century. Robbins, on the other hand, has argued 'that the classical economists were concerned with growth, and that their concern was especially orientated on the possible effects of growth in redeeming the conditions of the majority of the people stands out in any just appraisal' (1976:102). The evidence with respect to the debate on poor relief for Ireland in the early nineteenth century would certainly favour Robbins' interpretation over that of Boylan and Foley.

Boylan and Foley argue that political economy was used as an ideological tool in the nineteenth century. This would suggest a discipline that was highly cohesive. However, in the context of the debate considered here, while there was a significant degree of consensus over the nature of Irish poverty, this consensus evolved over the early decades of the nineteenth century through debate and the inspection of empirical evidence as it became available. This developmental nature of the arguments with regard to the poor relief issue suggests that it would not have had the cohesiveness required for an effective ideological tool.

Boylan and Foley suggest that political economy supported the Irish Protestant establishment and level the charge of landlordism. On the contrary, contemporary commentators blamed landlords for the growing poverty in Ireland. Among those who advocated poor relief for Ireland there was no suggestion that landlords should not have to pay. Implicit in Boylan and Foley's assertions is the notion that political economy was sectarian. The evidence shows the opposite to be true. The political economists involved in this debate favoured the establishment of the Catholic church on the grounds that it could aid in reinstating stability and facilitating education.

Boylan and Foley argue that political economy was used to maintain existing socio-economic relations in Ireland. Black argues that 'at least up to the time of John Stuart Mill, the classical economists were agreed that no change in the system of landed property was necessary to the improvement of Ireland' (1960:86). This might be taken to imply that they considered other possibilities and rejected them. This was not the case. The political economists who participated in this debate worked within a system which was almost exclusively concerned with the distribution of output between landlord, capitalist and labourer. They did not consider alternatives for any country. To imply that the stance taken on the system of landed property was part of a plan to preserve only Irish socio-economic relations is to suggest a partisan agenda that simply did not exist.

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ENDNOTES

¹ I would like to acknowledge the useful comments of David Jacobson, Kathy Monks, Gary Murphy, and Eunan O'Halpin on earlier drafts of this paper. Errors remain my own.

² Employment in public works did not fall into the category of outdoor relief. Thus, political economists who supported the removal of outdoor poor relief frequently also supported the extension of public works. Senior was a significant case in point.

³ These were in Belfast, Clonmel, Cork, Dublin, Ennis, Kilkenny, Limerick, Waterford and Wexford.

⁴ Stack points to the central role capital plays in Scrope's 'curious mixture of paternalism and political economy' (2000, 558). Scrope's arguments with respect to Ireland exemplifies his version of paternalism. Shades of Scrope's paternalism are also evident in Bicheno (1831).

⁵ The concern with population growth in the annual reports of the Poor Law Commission was not a Malthusian fear of overpopulation. This is compatible with Blaug's assertion that 'the Malthusian theory of population underwent a total eclipse in the 1830s' (Blaug 1958:44).

⁶ The practice of transportation of vagrants, as convicts, principally to America began in Ireland in 1650s. Irish counties were permitted to raise rates to fund such transportation (Innes, 1999:188-190).

⁷ In fact, the majority of Irish emigrants headed for Australia and Canada rather than England (Fitzpatrick, 1984:5).

⁸ Senior's stubbornness over the poor relief issue nearly cost him his long friendship with Richard Whately who, as head of the Royal Commission into the poor in Ireland, advocated extensive government intervention.

⁹ There was growing support for the Catholic cause in Ireland from many quarters throughout the early part of the nineteenth century. As Foster points out, 'Irish Catholics had become dramatically better off than those in England, who were not enfranchised until 1829' (1989:262). Foster also stresses that middle class Catholics had become members of the Irish Establishment, if only informally, by the 1820s (1989:296).

¹⁰ Support for the Catholic cause by political economists in Ireland is evidenced by the criticism of several of the Whately Professors of Political Economy at Trinity College, Dublin, in 1863, to the attempt by the Provost and his supporters on the Board of the college to remove eligibility of Catholics from the competition for the Professorship.

¹¹ The Commissioners were Richard Whately, Archbishop of Dublin and founder of the Whately Professorship of Political Economy at Trinity College, Dublin, in 1832, James Carlisle, John Corrie, Fenton Hort, Richard More O’Ferrall, Daniel Murray, Charles Vignoles and William Battie Wrightson. By the time the second report appeared, three more commissioners had been added: M. Killeen, A.R.Blake, and J. Bicheno.

¹² The second report of the Commissioners did not appear in the Parliamentary Papers until after the publication of the third report.

¹³ Unemployment was defined by the Commission as being out of work for a period greater than 30 weeks in a year. Cullen argues that the Commission ‘lumped together’ 567,000 smallholders with 567,000 agricultural labourers, assuming both categories to be equally susceptible to destitution (1987:110).

¹⁴ A Commission was established in 1837 to consider the expansion of the railway in Ireland, but the significant developments in this regard only came in the late 1840s.

¹⁵ Localised schemes for emigration were developed periodically from the 1820s, such as the one which removed 2,300 destitute families from Munster to Canada (Fitzpatrick, 1984:18). Funds were supplied by individual landlords rather than by the State. The ‘brain drain’ argument in the context of Irish emigration only gathered momentum in the later decades of the century, with the development of ‘chain migration’ whereby future emigrants were selected and financed by previous emigrants (1984:21).