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**BEEF BEFORE THE BALLOT: THE IMPACT OF THE COMMON MARKET ON
AGRICULTURE AND POLITICS IN EASTERN IRELAND**

City University of New York

Ph.D. 1985

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BEEF BEFORE THE BALLOT:
THE IMPACT OF THE COMMON MARKET
ON AGRICULTURE AND POLITICS
IN EASTERN IRELAND

THOMAS M. WILSON

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty
in Anthropology in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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1985

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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1985

PREFACE

After more than a decade of graduate study in anthropology there are many people I am grateful to for their aid and advice. My dissertation is based on thirty months' field research in the Republic of Ireland from 1976 to 1982 (26 of those months from September 1977 to November 1979) but owes much to scholars, friends and family on both sides of the Atlantic who helped transform my study of anthropology and Irish society into a way of life.

Ed Hansen has at all times been the best of friends, scholars and teachers, and his role both in this dissertation and my graduate career is inestimable. I am especially grateful to Mervyn Meggitt for his years of support and his tireless efforts to teach me to write clearly and concisely. Eric Wolf and John Cole's insights into the role of Irish ethnography within a comparative European perspective have informed much of this thesis. Jane Schneider and May Ebiara did much to prepare me for fieldwork. If there are any errors in this dissertation they are mine alone.

I could not have written a word of this thesis without the cooperation of the people of County Meath. I thank them all and I hope this work proves both interesting and valuable to them. I am particularly grateful to the administration, staff and elected members of the Meath County Council, past and present, but especially to Frank O'Brien, County Manger, his staff and the County Council of 1974 - 1979, many of whom welcomed me into their homes. Many other organizations opened their

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CHAPTER I

Introduction:

The Relationship of Internationalization and Ethnography to Irish Society

The political economy of the Republic of Ireland was irrevocably changed when that country entered the Common Market on 1 January 1973. Many crucial elements of Ireland's social, political and economic life have been redefined by policies decided upon in Luxembourg and Brussels. From the poorest peasant in the Connemara hills to the Kerry publican, from the farmer's wife in Cavan to the trendy Grafton Street shopper, every Irish man and woman is no longer simply that. They are now all citizens of Europe.

My thesis examines the effects of Ireland's membership in the European Economic Community (EEC) has had on the relationship between agriculture and politics in eastern Ireland. Specifically, it explores the weakening of clientilist party politics within the agricultural community of County Meath, which has followed primarily as a result of the strong economic position the farmers of Ireland have enjoyed under EEC policies. The changed relationship between farmers and politicians became apparent at both the national and local levels when, in February 1979, the Irish government proposed modifications in the national tax laws in order to include more farmers. The effects of the resulting confrontation between the farmers and the government

are still being felt today, and reflect the split that has taken place between the country's political parties and agricultural community since the advent of the Common Market onto the Irish scene.

My analysis, the first of its kind directed at these events in Ireland, explores in detail the effects of policy, with origins external to the region, on the political and economic interests of a certain group, in this case farmers, whose traditional roles in the national and local political systems has been altered due to changes in their place in the world economy. Besides adding to the literature on regionalism, my thesis also brings the growing field of the ethnology of power into the largest political economic arena in Europe, the Common Market.

The supranational policy making of the European Economic Community is but one facet of the ever-expanding process of internationalization, wherein external economic and political decisions have critical effects on the course of regional and national political and economic specializations (Wallerstein, 1974b; Hansen 1976a). In today's world, national governments have little flexibility in dealing with such international power sources as the transnational corporations, OPEC, the World Bank, and OECD (Barnet and Muller, 1974; Odell, 1979; Mytelka, 1979). National politicians and states they serve are no longer the beneficiaries of the processes of internationalization, but their victims. The powerful transnational themselves see the nation state and its nationalist ideology as their

enemies (Barnet and Muller, 1974:58-59):

The problems of 'irrational nationalism', as global executives see it, include any local official, law or tradition that inhibits the free flow of finance capital, technology, and goods on a global scale. . . . As the corporate executives see it, 'the nation state has succeeded in attracting from organized religion the basic religious impulses in man'. If the global corporation is to survive it must, in effect, establish its own religion.

Thus there now exists a basic contradiction between the aims of the politicians who must both administer their polities and satisfy their constituents' needs, and those of the transnationals who must internationalize economies and minimize political interference (Hansen 1976b:602). Indeed, state integration and alliance seem to be the only potentially viable course of action for underdeveloped countries that wish to combat the economic dictates of their multinational corporate enemies, as, e.g., the Andean Group (Mytelka 1979). The European Common Market, although initially a consortium of autonomous states created for the purpose of economic integration, is now a source of political power that competes on an international scale with powers and interests within its component nations.

The people hardest hit by the shift of power outside of national boundaries are not politicians, however, but principally those groups most often studied by the anthropologist. These are the members of the lower classes, displaced populations, and ethnic and national minorities—all of those who are marginal to most aspects of society and economy. But the anthropologist, although studying the "have-nots", has generally ignored both the "haves" and those who enforce the policies that deprive those without. The ethnographer has largely failed to deal with the exigencies of power at the regional, national

and international levels that are external to the local community. In anthropological research done in Europe since the 1960s, however, this parochial viewpoint has begun to change. The field worker now looks beyond the community to the historical and contemporary world forces that have shaped the community's forms of organization, as well as the role local society has played in regional and state development. Anthropologists have been looking at the ways social and physical environments have been exploited by communities, formal and informal interactions among communities, and their place in the national intergration of political and economic systems. Because of this appreciation of wider concerns, the region has become a significant unit of analysis in research in Europe (Cole 1977:364-365).

Regions, defined by existing and past ecological, political and economic conditions, have always been primary organizational units in Europe both nationally and internationally and, as such, are appropriate objects of anthropological research (Wallerstein 1974b; Freeman 1973). Indeed, since the early 1970s, a number of anthropologists have called for such direction in their discipline's field studies in Europe, thereby fulfilling a prediction made by Robert Redfield in 1956 (Redfield 1956:28, as quoted in Smith 1976b:3):

I think we shall come to study regional systems. We shall study such systems not, as we now tend to do, from the viewpoint of some one small local community looking outward, but from the viewpoint of an observer who looks down upon the whole larger regional system.

In fact, even then, a number of studies by anthropologists had been made, at least implicitly, from a regional perspective. Arensberg and Kimball (1940) studied familial and village social structure in

Ireland, based on data collected in the small region of West Clare. Evans-Pritchard (1949), in perhaps the first significant use of historical data in an anthropological work, analysed the development of a 20th century North African state from its segmentary lineage origins. Leach (1954) and Geertz (1963) studied regional, political and economic relationships in Burma and Indonesia respectively. Although these accounts ranged from structural-functional to ecological analyses, they all shared a regional frame of reference.

The call for regional analyses in Europe followed the development of methods for investigating networks and non-corporate groups (Barnes 1968; Wolf 1966). As anthropologists pursued the social links that stretched outside local communities, it became clear that they had to develop skills for handling data drawn from larger geographical, political and economic domains. Theoretically and logically, the region presented itself as the best locus for future research.

"Functionally defined regions represent several levels of integration, within a hierarchy of human settlements, that theoretically culminate in a single all-inclusive system—the nation, a continent, the world" (Smith 1976:4). Regional analysis facilitates the comparison of complex data from different areas of the world. Yet even as the call for such work was being made, agreement could not be reached by anthropologists as to what to actually study within the region. Freeman saw villagers' ties to outside social institutions as instrumental in forcing anthropologists to deal conceptually with regional and national culture, but still within a conceptual framework derived from village studies (1973:748). Others have viewed regions

solely as locational concepts (borrowed from economic geography and, in particular, central place theory (Smith 1976a:3-63)), useful for descriptive rather than for normative or applied purposes (Smith 1976b:6). And although these locational models may dissolve the community-nation dichotomy that characterized earlier research in anthropology, they do little to explain change within an area studied or that area's part in local or national social change.

Other anthropologists, in the tradition of studies of under-development from Latin America (Frank 1969; Stavenhagen 1975), have used regions as units of analysis in order to explain the conditions and characteristics of past, present and future forms of social organization. These anthropologists believe that causal factors in social formations can be discovered and compared across cultural, spatial and temporal bounds. In short, they believe social change can be accounted for:

Research on growth and change should define a local region as the primary unit of analysis, in order to deal effectively with social structures which transcend community boundaries. It should place this region in its international as well as its national setting, in order to deal with some of the tremendous economic and political forces which clearly do not respect national political boundaries....this means studying the region as the source, or the object, of imperialist pressures (Schneider, Schneider and Hansen 1972:330)

This view informed a number of recent European studies: on the Italian Alps and the interplay of ethnic and political identity (Cole and Wolf 1974), on Western Sicily and its role in the past and present world economies (Schneider and Schneider 1976), and on the fate of Catalan culture under Franco's authoritarian regime (Hansen 1977). All of these writers share an interest in the historical roots of past

changes and present-day life, and in identifying the political and economic forces that have shaped, and will continue to shape, the quality of life of people living in these diverse regions. Central to their understanding of the forces external to the individual and community that can control and direct local forms of social organization is the structure of the world economy.

Economic and political policies decided upon in distant centers have perhaps been the chief factors in regional development since the dawn of the modern world (Best 1976; Wallerstein 1974a). And with the increased internationalization of power and policy, wherein governments, states and groups of states are attempting (and often failing) to control international economies for both their own and their constituents' protection, it is imperative that anthropologists recognize the past and present role of regional society in the international division of labor. Just as the community-nation distinction is no longer a viable focus for anthropological fieldwork, preoccupation with the connections between local level to national level politics cannot fully explain any one locality's access to critical resources (or the lack of it). As the process of internationalization continues to affect the lives of those ethnic and national minorities with whom anthropologists live and work, anthropologists themselves must be prepared to study the many levels of power that are represented at the local and regional levels. They should also be ready to analyze the formal and informal ties that connect local power holders to their regional, national and international sources of power. My thesis is an analysis of the power that

large farmers have wielded in the local political system of County Meath in Ireland, and the ways their role has changed since Ireland joined the European Communities.

In many respects the study of power has been the major concern of most anthropological discourse in and on Europe. Anthropologists have usually studied those who have none of it. Seldom have anthropologists directly studied those who control, direct and administer political and economic power (power is here defined as "the ability to channel the behavior of others by threat or use of sanctions" (Fried 1967:13). Those few social scientists who have dealt with the organization and effects of power at a local level have usually discussed the politics of force in use either among local society members or against the minions of the state (Hobsbawm 1959; Blok 1974). In an effort to correct this situation, a few Europeanists have begun to analyze power holders in both corporate and non-corporate groups at various levels of social interaction (Schneider, Schneider and Hansen 1972; Schneider and Schneider 1976). Their attention has focused primarily on elites, whose role in local dependence or development rests on their regional and national strength as well as their relative reliance on imperial centers external to the state (Schneider, Schneider and Hansen 1972:345). These elites are not defined as the holders of absolute power. In fact, more often than not, their position depends on their actual or apparent (to clients and supporters) role in the distribution of political and economic goods and services that flow from distant decision makers. These studies of elites at least attempt to deal with the complex questions

of who directs and coerces behavior at the local and regional levels. They also point, of course, to future studies in the ethnography of power, wherein anthropologists, in order to understand better the forces that determine the quality of life of people at every level in society, must also utilize their traditional methods of kinship and network analysis to study the organization of those groups at the apex of today's capitalist societies (Hansen and Parrish 1983).

Though eminently laudable, such studies of power (and of those who create it and those who delegate it) still beg the questions of how power devolves through every level and group in contemporary societies; what actually constitutes power within the historical, ecological, political and economic reality of any one region; and in what ways can those people with few means of controlling their own political and economic future acquire the means necessary to influence, if even in a small way, the people who make the decisions that direct their lives. The answers to these questions will not be found by simply tracing the administration or structure of policy and corporate management. They can be approached, however, through the long hard process of studying groups at all levels of society from the viewpoint of their own self-defined interests. In short, to what degree can people control their own political and economic future and that of other groups in their society. With the increasing internationalization of power, in which people and groups are continuously and consciously being drawn into a world society, the means people use to improve their place in a fluid power field become problematic and a matter for empirical enquiry.

It must be remembered, however, that no one group has absolute power in any one situation. Therefore, anthropologists should use their skills to study the "haves" as often and as well as the "have-nots". Research should uncover the tangible and intangible items any group sees as necessary for its future political and economic well-being. This becomes especially important in Europe where a number of ethnic and subnational groups are demanding partial or full autonomy from the nations that have ruled them since the emergence of the capitalist world system (Wallerstein 1974a; Hechter 1975; Linz 1973). The "national" aspects of ethnicity and nationalism, that is, the interplay between opposing forces within the same state, are now a major concern for all students of European society. There are very few European countries that do not face a future of domestic unrest over "peripheral nationalism" (Gourevitch 1979). And the existence of international links among nationalist groups further emphasizes the need for research at every level in Europe into the internationalization of political and economic power.

To sum up so far, regional analysis in Europe is necessary for any understanding of the role regional society plays in political economic internationalization. Community studies alone cannot account for the sources of power that largely affect the lives of those we live with and study, but neither can regional analyses if they are committed to synchronic and descriptive accounts and are unconcerned with past and present sources of change. As the political and economic arena within which regions operate expands, anthropologists must also widen and deepen their perspective. One way to do so is

through the study of different groups' self-defined political and economic goals, within an ethnography of power.

At present, the best sociological analysis of the fate of regional minorities in the face of national policies, discussed within a truly European, cross-national context, is Franklin's The European Peasantry (1969). "Post-peasants" throughout Western Europe have had to contend with the shifting alignments of governments and economic systems that have reorganized both rural and urban life since World War II. As in many of the works mentioned above, Franklin chronicles a number of the formal and informal ties that bind classes and minorities internationally, but unlike the above studies, he also regards international policy making as a significant variable. In particular, he recognizes the importance of the European Economic Community in his macro-sociological analysis, thus making the first clear statement in modern sociology of the need to study supranational policy and its impact on local classes throughout Western Europe. Franklin is particularly concerned with the possible consequences of a Common Agricultural Policy (not fully implemented among the six member nations at the time he is writing) for those agriculturalists who would be powerless to withstand the pressures of long term high price levels, i.e., the peasantry. Franklin predicts that, within the member states, high prices guaranteed through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) would retain people in agriculture but favor the more efficient producers, thereby promoting the "differentiation" of the peasantry already prevalent in the areas of France, Italy and Germany

that he describes.

The high price level will tend to create regional and social imbalance within the farming community, which the less favored peasantry will seek to reverse by demands for more and more assistance, their electoral weight remaining relatively significant because of a failure to adopt a price policy that would have speeded their departure from the land. (Franklin 1969:176).

This prediction of the sustained electoral strength of the peasantry has been confirmed among Irish farmers, small and large, within the expanded EEC of the late 1970s, as I discuss in detail below.

The EEC is perhaps the dominant element in local, regional and state organization in Europe today. It has not only facilitated the internationalization of capital and power, but is its product as well. In fact, the literature on the Common Market is explicit on the limits that such diverse factors as the structure of the nation state, the internationalization of capital and the impact of American and Soviet presence in Europe place on the structure and organization of the Community (Warnecke 1978b:29). At all times, however, the Common Market itself is an agent of national and international interdependence; it exists to further political and economic cooperation among both member nations and external states. The international importance of the EEC cannot be minimized. It establishes parameters for member nation cooperation, it is fundamentally concerned with the maintenance of regional political and economic order in Europe, and through its internal and external policies, it has a major impact on neighboring states, the countries of the West and the world's developing nations (Warnecke 1978a:iv). The interdependence of the EEC and its closest neighbors in the Mediterranean clearly demonstrates the international

importance of this supranational organization. The non-member Mediterranean countries supply 12% of the total world imports into the Common Market, including valuable oil supplies. The EEC "reciprocates" with 52% of its total exports, is a source of technical and financial aid, and draws the overwhelming majority of the Mediterranean's migrant workers (Avi and Yannopoulos 1976:1).

The expanded Common Market of Western Europe directly affects more people than live in any other polity in the Western World.¹ The EEC's population of 258 million (1978) exceeds that of the United States (213 million) and of the Soviet Union (254 million). Its population density of 169 per sq. km. far surpasses those of the USA and the USSR (23 and 11, respectively), its total area being one-sixth of the USA and one-fourteenth of its eastern neighbor. Member nations import goods valued at more than three times the US imports and eight times those of the Soviet Union, and they export almost three times as much as does American and nine times the USSR total. In short, the economic organization of the EEC, in volume terms, reflects its population.

Size, however, does not necessarily imply distance. The member nations' populations are not divorced from the economic power of the EEC's institutions. Through a complex network of decision making and policy implementation centered in both Brussels and Luxembourg, within which national governments and both national and international interest groups have an input, the Common Market can direct the economic and political future of the individuals of each member nation. The EEC legislates Regulations that bind member states

directly and have the same strength as national laws. These take effect primarily through the European Social Fund, the Regional Development Fund, and the Common Agricultural Policy. Decisions bind any individual, corporation or political entity, and can by-pass the national government, as e.g., the organization of the elections to the European Parliament (Irish Office of the European Communities 1978). Clearly, the shift of economic and political control of most aspects of European life to the headquarters of the European Community is virtually complete. The changes in power within and among nations remains problematical, however. The analysis of power cannot stop at the borders of the state for the European ethnographer.

Although ostensibly created as a means of achieving economic integration, the Common Market has always represented a step toward European political integration, whether through mass political movement or through gradual political processes that themselves follow economic cooperation (Warnecke 1972:5). "Economic benefits were sought from the development of the European Economic Community... But these were of secondary importance to the political objectives" (Hodgman 1978: 38). The leaders of the Community themselves have been explicit about their role in European development. As Ralf Dahrendorf, member of the Commission of the European Communities responsible for foreign relations, stated in 1971 "...if we continue along this road (of economic integration) but a little further, we shall have reached the point of no return of the political association of European states" (emphasis in original, as quoted in Warnecke 1972:4). Indeed, Walter Hallstein, first President of the Commission and its head for

10 years, was quick to point out that "...we are not in business, we are in politics" (Sampson 1968; as quoted in Avi and Yannaopoulos 1976:1). Political unification through the EEC has been seen by some scholars as inevitable, precisely because of the centralized control of European policy by the political and technical elites that were primarily responsible for the Common Market's creation, and who now occupy the various seats of power in Brussels and Luxembourg (Lindberg and Scheingold 1970:22).

Given this emphasis on political integration, social scientists who have been involved in Common Market studies have largely been concerned with the role of the nation state in future European development. The belief that the autonomy of the nation-state would decline due to the breakdown in barriers to economic alliance was originally a major impetus in the formation of the EEC, especially among those in Europe who saw nationalism as a chief cause of the two calamitous world wars. Central to this belief was the view that economic and political interests within members nations could, and would, simultaneously serve their own ends as well as aid European Community consolidation. Such economic advancements as customs union and trade liberalization would weaken the national "boundaries" of economic and political interests, and do away with the national limits to the concerns of governments, banks and businesses.

As a result the power of the states would be reduced because the geographic scope of their authority would no longer coincide with the enlarged economic market in which firms operated. Consequently, it would be necessary to transfer many macro-economic and micro-economic powers from the individual member states to Community institutions (Warnecke 1978b:12-13).

The model for this political integration of Europe, based on the expansion of member nations' economies, was the origin and development of the nation state itself. The goal of a political union in Europe reflected the assumption that the supranational community was the nation state writ large (Warnecke 1972:15). Europe building was seen to be the same process as nation building in Europe, and has been studied as such (Deutch et al 1957; Warnecke 1978b:8).

These assumptions, and the bulk of European community studies based on them, do not recognize that the goals of the various political and economic sub-units of the Common Market may not necessarily coincide, or even be similar. There are differences between the legal union of national markets and the physical boundaries of the Common Market itself, just as there are among the economic, political and geographic concerns of the member nations' governments, banks, interest groups and industries. These distinctions are "crucial" given that those in favor of the development of the European Community view the policies and goals of member governments and national private sectors as being coterminous with those of the Common Market (Warnecke 1978b:4). Inevitably, however, the diverse goals of the various subnational, national and international interests must lead to complex competitive and cooperative interaction--relations that either harm or at best contradict European integration. Nonetheless, the economic successes of the European Community have overshadowed the disruptive effects within and between states due to the introduction of a truly international European political and economic arena. As a result,

both social scientists and the technical and political elites throughout Europe have been too preoccupied with the economic model of pan-European society.

Political problems arising from questions of class, region, religion, nationality and political philosophy are either transformed or reduced in magnitude by being redefined in terms of 'efficiency' from the viewpoint of production, organization, decision-making, investment and distribution. (Warnecke, 1972:14).

The failure to deal with regional and national political and economic problems that cannot be legislated or cost-accounted away has only been reflected in recent European Community studies.

Economic and political interest groups are clearly competing within and among member nations, as well as with the institutions of the EEC. By definition, the goals of such interests as businesses, governments, political parties, classes and elites must diverge based on their particular histories and their role in the contemporary political economy of nations, Europe and the world. At any point in time, the aims of these groups might well converge but it would be ludicrous to expect them to do so at all times and in all places (even given the goal of a "united" Europe). Increasing rapprochement was expected by political theorists who did not want to deal with problems that could not be solved through economic integration. Nevertheless, those problems in EEC policies at the local, regional and national levels are there. The Common Market has destabilized as well as integrated the economic and political systems within its borders.

The economic policies of the EEC have led to national and international political disruption. This is most apparent in national responses to the Community's agencies for the distribution of wealth.

The political and economic interest groups of the member nations are concerned with the maintenance of economic growth, but are perhaps most worried about how they can secure their "fair" shares of the wealth that is produced. Parties, classes and occupational interests all want to maximize their positions within their regions or states, and they use any political and economic means at their disposal to do so. The contradiction between public and private interests and the interests that are ostensibly those of the entire EEC crystallizes in the Regional Policy of the Common Market (and, by extension, in the Regional Fund and its annual allocations), a policy geared to righting regional imbalances. To date this policy has not been successful. In the EEC of the Nine, regional imbalance was striking when one considers that the area between the Pennine chain and the Rhine valley was less than one-third of the total area of the Common Market, yet supported half the population of the EEC. The Regional Policy has failed because it has ignored the political and cultural (and even some economic) factors that have maintained local and regional underdevelopment within Europe. Social scientists have been guilty of the same error of viewing underdeveloped regions as economic zones that need aid to modernize and to develop along the industrial lines that all "first world" countries have experienced (Barzanti 1965; Clout 1976). The Regional Policy has aimed to develop those agricultural regions which suffer most from unemployment, underemployment, emigration, low capital accumulation, and low incomes and to "redevelop" industrial areas that face the same difficulties. The Policy does not take account of those local, regional and state levels of political

and economic organization whose interests either are directly tied to underdevelopment (Schneider et. al. 1972; Schneider and Schneider 1976) or who view their policies as the most efficient for their particular domain (Romus 1975:122-123).

What then is one to say of a regional policy which aspires to be European but in which States are emphatic that they must be principally if not solely responsible for conditions in their regions and object to the Commission (of the EEC) having more than subsidiary powers compared to those which they themselves possess.

In fact, the same dilemma has hampered the success of the structural and price policies of the CAP, as the decision makers in Brussels and Luxembourg are constantly battling farmer lobbies and the interests of national farmers as articulated through member nation governments-- governments who view European agricultural policy as vital to their national interests (Marsh 1976:77). As I demonstrate below, the local and national political systems in Ireland are in such a position.

Thus, within the European community, there has been a divergence of political interests due to disagreements over national and international economic policy. National economic planning has increasingly had an international component for national politicians. Simply put, they must adhere to a number of Community policies, yet they must also satisfy the needs of their own constituents. In Ireland, this has resulted in what may be a long-term confrontation over taxation between the agricultural community, the national government and the EEC. Throughout the Common Market "...governments have frequently attempted to take measures to prevent their objectives at the national level from being undermined by transnational liberal economic policies" (Warnecke 1978b:31). Their national goals are their first concern.

At the same time, however, they face opposition from groups within their nations who not only want more independence from the EEC, but also from the state itself. Whereas the structure of the European Community requires a degree of centralization of power outside of the traditional domains of the states, movements for regional autonomy are seeking a greater decentralization of power (Warnecke 1978b:17). The constituent governments of the member nations of the Common Market are caught in the middle of these contradictory demands.

I believe that past research into the various forms of internationalized capital and power within the EEC has been inadequate. Most of the attendant problems in the EEC, beyond those of economic integration and a united Europe, have either been ignored or discussed in largely economic terms. This situation must change, however, as it has become increasingly apparent that new focuses for research are needed if the EEC and its members are to benefit. A recent statement by an authority on pan-Community political economy makes this need explicit (Warnecke 1978a:v). Case studies in a number of areas are called for: investigations of the role of national governments in EEC policy formulation, of the relationship among member nations, the European Community and the world economy; and of the policies of national and international interests, within both the public and private sectors, especially as they converge with or diverge from national and Community policy. This last area would include the economic and political goals of banks, businesses, unions, political parties and organized lobbies. My thesis explores the complex relations between the

farmers of eastern Ireland, whose economic position has markedly improved due to EEC policies, and the people and institutions of the local and national Irish political systems. Of special importance is the conflict inherent in the relationship, wherein the goals of the farmers, both nationally and internationally, place them in opposition to the stated national policy of the government. The issue of tax legislation in Ireland exemplifies this situation.

In no country has the political economy been more profoundly affected by membership in the European Community than in Ireland, which entered the EEC on the first day of 1973. At the macro-economic level, within which most EEC indices of change are calculated, Ireland has achieved a growth rate unsurpassed in Europe. In 1978, at the end of the official five-year transition period for new EEC members, Ireland's rate of economic growth was the highest, not only in the Common Market, but also in the entire Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD). This growth rate, the highest for the second year in a row, was about 7%, more than double the average of 2.5% Community-wide (Ireland - Government Information Service, 1979:6). This remarkable rate of growth is directly linked to the improved conditions in agricultural production and marketing that are a result of the CAP, and to the revitalization of industry made possible by the introduction of foreign capital looking for a base in the EEC, taking advantage of Irish governmental grant schemes and the low cost of Irish labor. In fact, the figures on the drop in unemployment that the Irish government made public in 1979 (due, according to the party

in power, to their "job creation" program) reflect the boom in the private and public construction industries. Employment increases also occurred in the manufacturing and service sectors (Ireland - Government Information Service, 1979:9). Throughout the 1970s, these areas of economic expansion have been the pull-factors that have reversed the trends in migration that existed since the Great Famines of the 1840s. The actual population increase in the Republic of Ireland between 1971 and 1979 was 387,000 of which natural increase (births minus deaths) was 280,000. The remaining 107,000 indicate the net immigration for that period, the first such figure in the history of the state. In the census period 1966-1971 the net emigration rate was 11,000 per year. Since the early 1970s this has been replaced by an annual immigration rate of 13,400 (Central Statistic Office - Ireland, 1979). The Irish government has been explicit about the causes of this change in population movements (Woods:1979)

Many factors contributed to the sharp reversal of the emigration trend. Significant among these were the general increase in economic activity and investment in industry, agriculture and the services which accompanied our accession to the EEC early in 1973. It is well known that many Irish emigrants returned to take up jobs and that non-nationals were also attracted to Ireland especially to fill skilled and management posts in new industries.

Perhaps the most crucial change that EEC membership has effected in Irish life has been the shift of the Irish economy away from its traditional dependence on Britain. Both industry and agriculture are no longer tied to a single market, and are thus freed from the political pressures that such dependence can entail. The value of Irish ex-

ports to the seven continental EEC nations (excluding the United Kingdom) increased by 610% from 1972 to 1977 (£103.3 to £734.0 million), that is, an increased share of total Irish exports from 16% in 1972 to 29.2% in 1977. In the same five year period, Irish exports to Britain also increased in value, from £394.4 million to £1082 million, but this reflected a drop in the overall percentage of total Irish exports, from 61% in 1972 to 43% in 1977 (O'Kennedy 1978:2-3). In short, more goods are being shipped to the continent almost doubling the pre-EEC share of continental exports. Britain's command of Irish goods has slipped, but one must still keep in mind that the Irish exports that are sent to the UK are still more valuable than those sent to the continent. The economic ties to Britain remain significant.

Within Ireland, the group whose life has been most changed by entry into the European Community has been the farmers. From 1970 to 1978 the gross farm output in Ireland increased by 35%. Irish agricultural production grew during that period at a rate three times faster than in Europe as a whole, four times faster than in Denmark, and double the Netherlands (Ireland - Department of Agriculture 1978:1). Beyond the increase in agricultural production, and perhaps more important for this thesis, the per capita money incomes of farmers in Ireland increased four and a half times in the nine year period beginning in 1970 (Sheehy 1978:4). In real terms farm incomes have increased by 75%. Allowing both for inflation and for the decline in the farm population throughout the decade, per capita incomes in agriculture in real terms have doubled since 1970 (Ireland - Department of

Agriculture 1978:1). This growth has been primarily due to the guaranteed prices and markets established by the CAP. Agricultural prices alone increased by almost 300% in the six year period from 1971 to 1976, outstripping both the rates of increase in price of materials and in consumer prices (An Foras Taluntais 1977). Relative to industrial workers, farmers and agricultural workers have considerably improved their incomes. In 1975 for the first time in Irish history the per capita after-tax income of family farm workers exceeded that of industrial workers (a gap that has since widened considerably) (Sheehy 1978:4). In the year 1974 to 1975 alone, the percentage of farms in Ireland with family farm incomes of over £5,000, the highest category in which data were collected, doubled (An Foras Taluntais 1977). Nor has the structure of agriculture in Ireland been unaffected during this period. In 1978, 10,000 new farmers entered the Farm Modernisation Scheme (a part of the Structural Policy of CAP). This influx reflected state and EEC efforts in agricultural education and nationalization, which placed considerable pressure on the small farmer to become more efficient or to leave agriculture altogether (Sheehy 1978:5). But, at least for the eastern agricultural area of Ireland as presented by County Meath, the structural policy of CAP has failed. Guaranteed prices, incentives for increased production, expansion of credit, and proximity to Dublin markets have established the farms of eastern Ireland, regardless of size, as viable, money-making concerns.

The Republic of Ireland, classified as one region for EEC funding purposes, has not benefited greatly at all from the Regional Development Fund. In 1978, the expected £17 million due Ireland from the Regional Fund represented only 2% of the total cost of the Irish public capital programme. In fact, only £11.1 million of that sum was paid. These funds, however, were to be used throughout the nation and not just in the underdeveloped regions of the country (which internally are recognized as being most in need). This nationwide allocation makes the role of the local and regional interest groups so crucial in the acquisition of funds distributed through the national political structure. Thus, it is largely due to the efforts of the Irish Farmers Association that an extensive Land Drainage Scheme, supported in part by the EEC Regional Fund, was begun in 1979 in the west of the country. But the "region" of Ireland as a whole, that is, the country itself as viewed from Brussels, has not profited greatly from its underdeveloped status. From 1975, the year the Fund was instituted, to 1977, Ireland received a total of approximately £2 million aid, less than the amount awarded to Sicily for the same period (European Communities - Commission 1977:10-14). That is to say an entire member nation has received less from the Community than has one of the regions of another member state. Many Irish people feel that they have not received their fair share from Europe. As I shall demonstrate below, their demand for EEC benefits has been a key cause of the breakdown of the traditional regional and national political systems in Ireland.

The regional organization of Ireland has been, since the dawn of modern Europe, directly influenced by strong international ties. Both before and after the consolidation of the British Isles within the British state, including the English conquest of Ireland in the 16th and early 17th centuries, Ireland's four principal regions were linked in varying degrees by trade with Spain, France, the Low countries, Wales, Scotland and the New World. Many of these ties were either broken or redefined as the power of the British state made Ireland an internal colony, creating a new role for it within the British division of labour (Wallerstein 1974b; Hechter 1975). Regional Ireland, i.e., the provinces of Ulster in the north, Connaught in the West, Munster in the south, and central and eastern Leinster, became the periphery of the expanding British state. Ireland joined her Celtic neighbors in Wales, Scotland, Cornwall, Man and Brittany to become the underdeveloped fringe of Western Europe, whose individual political economies were dependent on external centers of power. By the 18th century, regional production in Ireland was geared strictly for the English market, and continued as such until the present era. Nevertheless, within the truly national British political economy that developed over those two and a half centuries, the four Irish provinces each played a different role. Due to historical, ecological and cultural factors, Ireland's regional character was never diminished. In many respects it thrived within the British domain (for a history of the Irish regions in the 17th to 19th centuries, see Beckett 1966; Cullen 1972, 1977; Freeman 1972; Johnston 1974; McCracken 1971).

The four provinces of Ireland, since the rise of the modern world system in the long 16th century, have retained an equally important albeit redefined role within the development of the Irish and British states. Yet within social science generally, with the exception of regional histories of Ulster made topical by 20th century occurrences, there has been little research in Ireland on a regional or provincial level, and none with the region itself as the unit of analysis. In anthropology the first community study done in Ireland, which was the first published ethnographic study conducted in Western Europe, was not of a community at all, but was of a number of hamlets typical of the western "region" of Clare, a county of Munster. And these communities were chosen precisely because of their representative status within the region and the state.

In 1931, Professor Ernest Hooton directed a Harvard University team of physical anthropologists, social anthropologists, and archaeologists to County Clare, on the western seaboard of Ireland. The preliminary ethnographic research was done by W. Lloyd Warner and Conrad Arensberg. The major sociological fieldwork, from 1932 to 1934, was conducted by Arensberg and Solon Kimball. The results of this research were definitively presented in Arensberg and Kimball's Family and Community in Ireland (1940), preceded by the publications of a series of Arensberg's lectures in The Irish Countrymen (1937).

Arensberg and Kimball did not intend to conduct a single community study. Rather, their research plan took them into three small communities that were representative of social processes throughout West Clare. "The three communities...are thus samples, just as County

Clare itself is a sample, a fairly representative mean among the major social and economic conditions in Ireland upon which there was documentation in the year 1932" (Arensberg and Kimball 1968:xxvii). The American anthropologists based their approach on the ethnographic work of Malinowski and the theoretical formulations of Radcliffe-Brown. The communities were to be described and the behavior of their inhabitants examined, not simply for the sake of particular ethnographic description but also in the pursuit of a larger goal. Arensberg and Kimball found it useful "...to regard society as an integrated system of mutually interrelated and functionally interdependent parts" (Arensberg and Kimball 1968:xxx). Their functionalist Irish study was explicitly undertaken to test this "hypothesis". The units of analysis were not the individual and society, but behavior, social interaction and the minutiae of social life. Arensberg and Kimball were not interested in the history of social forms and social institutions, nor in their origins and causes. Their focus was on Irish folk culture especially as represented among small farmers, and on the functioning of family relationships within that culture (Arensberg and Kimball, 1968:xxvi):

The form of the community and the lives of its members could not be understood apart from the kind of relations among persons bound by blood and marriage which the country people exhibited. That influence, therefore, became the principal area of investigation.

This study of kinship and social structure among the Clare small farmers, and the ways in which kin ties connect the people in town and country, was in many ways an attempt to present ethnographic evidence for a theoretical view of the role of anthropologists in the study of peoples everywhere in the globe (Warner 1940). The emphasis of Arensberg and Kimball on examining norms, values and customs within the structure of kinship and descent was also an attempt to marry the young fields of social and cultural anthropology (Arensberg and Kimball 1968:xxv-xxxiii; Arensberg 1937:21-47). Although perhaps unintentionally, this study also helped establish the community as the place as well as the object of study, a concern made explicit by Arensberg in later years (1953: 1961). Implicit in the Clare study and in the Irish ethnographic research that has followed it, has been the notion that the community, at least culturally, was in many respects the nation writ small, and that descriptions and conclusions based on community analysis are essentially valid for a large part of that nation. This has certainly been the assumption among Arensberg and Kimball's successors within Irish anthropology (Wilson, 1984).

The research in Clare established a precedent for intensive fieldwork that has not been equalled in Irish ethnography. Later ethnographers confused Arensberg and Kimball's data with their theory, thereby replicating both their theoretical and methodological strengths and weaknesses. Arensberg and Kimball's findings regarding family structure, inheritance patterns, and intra- and inter-community social interactions have been retested and reevaluated wherever anthropologists have worked in Ireland. There have consequently been few theoretical or methodological advances in Irish anthropology since the

1930s, and little of comparative benefit to Western European ethnography (Wilson 1984).

Thus, in the years after World War II, anthropological community studies concentrated on various aspects of folk culture, family relationship and kinship in Ulster's Donegal (Fox 1978; Kane 1968), on the Aran Islands (Messenger 1969), and among rural immigrants to Dublin (Humphreys 1966). One ethnography was a more ecologically-based study of Clare (Cresswell 1969). A number of studies conducted in Northern Ireland dealt with many of the issues first identified by Arensberg and Kimball, but they also had to deal with the sectarian conflict inherent in local society (Leyton 1975; Harris 1972; Mogeey 1947). The Ulster studies had the added advantage of following in the fine tradition of Irish regional geography, with its specializations in material culture and folk life (Evans 1942; 1957).

Neither these studies nor the original research of Arensberg and Kimball were accepted uncritically. The weaknesses inherent in functional analysis are apparent in the work of Arensberg and Kimball. Their study is non-historical and seemingly unaware of contemporary politics and economics within the new Irish state (Gibbon and Curtin 1979). At the time the Clare study was conducted, the Irish civil war had ended only a decade before, de Valera had just brought the Republicans to constitutional power and an economic struggle was being waged with Britain. But because this study was primarily a theoretical treatise, it was only secondarily an investigation of Irish social

life, and therein lies the trouble for Irish ethnography (Gibbon 1973:497).

It was a misfortune for Irish social science that this pathbreaking, essentially theoretical work should have had an Irish rural area as its subject.... But precisely because of the theoretical import of Arensberg and Kimball's study...nobody ever dared challenge their ethnography.

Subsequent Irish sociological analyses that were critical of Arensberg and Kimball's functionalism accepted their view of the structure of Irish folk society. Both Brody (1973) and Hannan (1972) set out to analyze social change in rural Ireland following the decline of traditional society as described by Arensberg and Kimball, but they failed to question the depiction of Irish folk culture whose changes they sought to chronicle. As one author has stated, social scientists who attempt to explain "change" in terms of synchronic analyses are providing false solutions to false problems (Gibbon 1973:492).

Social changes within the domains of family and kinship have remained a concern of recent Irish sociology (Kane 1979; Hannan 1970; Symes 1972). Recent studies have examined aspects of national political and economic policy as they affect local, relatively powerless populations in rural (Kane 1978) and urban (Gmelch 1977) Ireland. The most innovative Irish studies at the local level have been those of local clientelist and familistic politics in Donegal (Sacks 1975) and Cork (Bax 1973). Running throughout these studies, however, are the themes of Arensberg and Kimball. Although the Clare study was a milestone in anthropological research in Ireland, it has paradoxically

severely limited the development of Irish social science because of its quality.

Because the descriptions of Arensberg and Kimball have assumed the status of paradigms in Irish anthropology, however sensitive Irish ethnography becomes it will still be bound by certain assumptions central to the work of the Americans--principally, the existence within living memory of a homogeneous peasantry, collectively the subject of a folk tradition (Gibbon 1973:496).

My thesis breaks those functionalist bounds by analyzing the historical and contemporary roles a regional interest group has played within the local political system in a county in eastern Ireland known for its population of large farmers. It does not assume that the various people involved are part of a homogeneous folk culture, nor part of a homogeneous land owning capitalist class. Rather, it views individuals and groups within the agricultural region of eastern Ireland form a perspective which seeks to discover the choices open to those constrained by their economic and political roles and histories.

My dissertation, then, presents a diachronic view of the structural relationships between the local political system and the agricultural community in County Meath in the 20th century. Meath, representative of the richest farming counties in Leinster province, has traditionally seen farmers enter public politics in order to champion their particular sectoral interests (those of large beef holdings, the remnants of the gentry class, small dairy farms, agricultural laborers, etc.). Their intention was also to further their own political and business careers, and to support the political party that they saw as best for their communities, county and nation. At the local level, this resulted in clientilist politics, in that the longer a voter's party and government were in power, the more likely were he and his

fellows with common interests to receive tangible rewards, such as tax relief, government employment and the improvement of services. In return, however, he and his cohorts had to supply the votes. The local politician became the broker: he supplied the voters, votes and local party cadres for the national party, he channelled local requests to people of influence in the civil service, government and party, he aided in the distribution of rewards down to local level. For the farmers of Meath, this arrangement has entailed a problem of identity. Which of the two major parties do you support, given the needs and demands of your particular form of production? As will be seen below, the Meath farming community was until recently split in their support for economic, nationalistic and pragmatic reasons. Ireland's entry into the EEC has radically changed the economics of farming throughout the country, however, and nowhere is this more apparent than in Meath. For the first time in Irish national history, farmers in Meath, Leinster and, indeed, the whole country are uniting in a common front. Within the political system they have become an interest group that demands rather than requests, confronts rather than accepts, and manipulates rather than is directed. The Irish political system has entered a new era. Because of the newfound economic strength engendered by Common Market policy, Irish farmers have largely been freed from the constraints of local and national policy patronage. They no longer simply have to support policy makers. Now they themselves seek to direct policy-making.

A study such as this, the first in anthropology of the nature of the economic and political power among various rural groups in Meath and Leinster, is important in the development of Irish social science because it rejects the view of a homogeneous folk culture, and attempts to replace it with a perspective that relates heterogeneous, regional society to national and international political economy. This analysis of Meath agricultural and political life in the 20th century indicates the error of viewing any community or group in Ireland as a political, economic or cultural isolate, as has largely been the case in Irish anthropology. An analysis of the extent and nature of regional power is overdue in an Ireland whose local political and economic structure has long been controlled by power centers external to the community, region and nation.

From an international perspective, it is imperative that the policies of the EEC be studied at the local level in the various member nations. In put into policy making in Brussels and Luxembourg is determined primarily at the national level, yet many local and regional interests may never be articulated beyond their home countries due to internal structures and organization. In order for both national and international policies to be both effective and equitable, their possible and real effects must be observed among the people who experience them. Political and economic interest groups alone are not enough of a check on both the beneficial and harmful effects of decisions reached in distant councils, especially when those interest groups represent their own sectors of society first. Only through long range, empirically based case studies can the actual

and differential impact of political and economic policy on local interests, classes, communities and regions be determined. Besides being the first analysis of regional political economy in Irish anthropology, this study represents the first in the EEC on the role that Common Market policy has played in the restructuring of regional and national politics. Furthermore, it raises issues that are vital to the national and international relations of both present and future European Community members: namely, in what ways will membership rearrange the internal structure of national political economies? In short, who will gain, who will lose, and why?

The long range study of policy impact at local level is clearly within the professional skills of the anthropologist, for it is within the informal arenas of politics and economics that policy succeeds or fails. And it is in the analysis of the non-institutionalized structures of society that the anthropologist has had most experience. In fact, the ethnography of power, cross-culturally, demands the expertise of the fieldworking anthropologist who can put flesh on the bare bones of statistics used to support or oppose any particular issue. Specifically, the study of the rich and powerful can only be successful through the identification and analysis of the truly personalistic and domestic extent of their power (Hansen and Parrish 1983). Indeed, the very nature of anthropological fieldwork lends itself to the recognition of informal relationships through the analysis of networks, strategic marriages, familial inheritance, instrumental friendship, factions and cliques, "...the very stuff of standard anthropological field inquiry" (Hansen 1976b:607). Thus, the study of the informal

sources and range of political and economic power among people rooted in place and time falls well within the anthropological domain. The long range commitment needed to untangle the complexities of policy decision making, administration, impact and feedback is precisely the methodological norm in anthropology. The general nature of skills anthropologists possess was recently summarized for the study of European society, but holds true for anthropologists working anywhere within the world economy. Anthropologists

...are trained in making close observations of behavior within a community over an extended period of time and they have techniques to record and organize their data based on an understanding of the genealogical method, of networks and coalitions, and of ecological relations. They know how to interview people and are alert to discrepancies between what people say they do and what they do.... And, of course, they have at hand the theoretical awareness of the community as a product of its past and present integration into both its local setting and regional and national processes (Cole 1977:365-366).

The following analysis of Meath agriculture and politics uses anthropological methodology in order 1) to add to the growing ethnographic literature on regional society and elite studies through a discussion of the creation and maintenance of the Meath political elite during the 20th century, 2) to break with the anthropological tradition in Irish studies by analyzing the political and economic bases for individual and group power, in a region hitherto unstudied by anthropologists, 3) to describe for the first time the effects of EEC policies on the internal political economy of a member nation by looking at their impact on a local and regional level, and 4) to describe for the first time in Irish political science and sociological

literature the direct links between farming and politics throughout the critical events since the creation of the state.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 The original signatories of the Rome treaties, which created both the Common Market and the European Atomic Energy Community (EACC) in 1957, were Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. On 1 January 1973, Ireland, Denmark and the United Kingdom became members of the European Communities. Norway had applied for membership, but the Norwegians voted by referendum to withdraw their application in 1972. On 1 January 1981 Greece became the tenth member of the Communities. The popular designation of the "European Communities" is the collective title of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the EEC and the EACC.

CHAPTER II

Irish Parliamentary and Agricultural Politics

Prior to The Great War

The political economy of the Republic of Ireland entered a new era when that country joined the European Communities in 1975. Externally, Ireland's relations with the continent have widened while its political and economic ties to Britain have shrunk in importance. Since accession to the Common Market the structure of Irish agricultural and industrial production has undergone major transformation. Exposure to international markets, European culture, and supranational means of state subsidization have caused Ireland's regional economic specializations to change, both in relation to each other and at the international level. To understand the nature and degree of such change, however, the historical dimensions to the structure of production in regional Ireland up to the modern era must be clarified.

By the end of the 17th century England's mercantile policy had taken a firm hold of the Irish economy. England, through a system of legislative checks and balances, controlled the Irish market. Throughout the burgeoning empire goods which competed with those of England were prohibited, while those which complemented her own were supported and protected. From mid-century, England's policy "...ran counter to Irish interests.... (as) England cut down on imports from Ireland, prohibiting Irish exports likely to compete with her own even in foreign markets" (MacCurtain 1972:172). English law affected all major Irish products.

Licenses were necessary for trading in wool, and they were difficult to obtain. The Cattle Acts of 1663 and 1666 forbade the export of live cattle to Britain and led to the creation of the Irish provisions trade, which was largely illegal yet extremely profitable for Restoration merchants. The long-term effects of the Cattle Acts were: to curtail regional agricultural production, to lead to the demise of the smaller ports like Galway, Youghal, and Kinsale, and to centralize trade around Dublin, Cork, Limerick, and Waterford. By the 18th century English mercantilism effectively limited all indigenous Irish industrialization and prohibited all export trade except in some strictly defined agricultural commodities.

Except in Dublin, where the volume of trade and the greater availability of capital encourage a degree of specialization, and in Cork where the dominance of the provision trade made all other enterprises secondary to it, general rather than specialist merchants were the rule (Johnston 1974:80).

In the first two decades of the 18th century, wool, linen and provisions accounted for over 70% of Irish exports to Britain (Johnston 1974:79-80). These agricultural products remained Ireland's stable exports throughout the century, and reflect Ireland's natural advantages in the production of pastoral products. In fact, the success of England's mercantile policies in Ireland in the 17th and the 18th centuries is in large part due to Ireland's strength in the regional production of animals and animal products.

Grass grows well throughout the country and throughout the year, due to high rainfall (750-1250mm), low summer temperatures (14-15 degrees C), and high winter temperatures (4.5-8 degrees C) (Freeman 1972:44-46). In the few winter months livestock can survive on

foggage. The ever-present rain leaches humus and minerals from the tilled soils, however, and wet summers favor the spread of disease and growth of weeds among cereal crops. Continental climates are much more favorable to tillage, while long harsh winters make the maintenance of large numbers of livestock on fodder all but impossible.² When the Cattle Acts of 1663 and 1666 prevented the export of Irish cattle to English markets, Ireland lost the main outlet for its principal product. Previously, Irish landholders and farmers exported lean store cattle which were fattened and butchered in Britain.³ English policy, as engineered by the representatives of the English beef-breeding counties of Westminster who wanted to stop their Irish competition, aimed at weakening the economic and political position of the remaining native Irish landowners and great Anglo-Irish landowners (Cullen 1972:16-17; Crotty 1966:10). Sheep and mutton were also forbidden to be imported into Britain. Irish farmers suffered heavily from the resulting drop in cattle prices, and many began to invest in alternate forms of production such as dairying and tillage, which were much more capital and labor intensive.

The provisions trade provided a great incentive for the Irish landholder and merchant to change from the production of lean store beef for export to Britain to an agricultural system which favored dairy and tillage. Irish cattle, after the passing of the Cattle Acts had to be fattened in Ireland, and thus kept and fed over the winter, whereas previously they had been sold on the hoof to Britain in the summer. This new system demanded an increase in hay and corn production and consequently increased labor demands.⁴ To meet his new

seasonal labor requirements, which were necessary to provide the grain and hay to keep animals in fat, the grazier had either to pay high wages to migratory labor or to introduce supplementary dairy and tillage enterprises, thus tying peasant families to his holding and providing constant employment at a lower wage. In either case the shift in Irish agriculture from extensive to more intensive forms of cattle and grain production greatly increased the need for a rural labor supply (Crotty 1966:15).

Labor demands also rose in response to increases in the processing of beef and animal products for the blossoming provisions trade of the late 17th century. Whereas drovers were the most important employees on the cattle walks before the Acts, the provision trade fattened, slaughtered, salted, packed, stored and shipped the beef. Cooperage, tanning and tallow manufacturing increased in importance as well. And as these trades expanded, so did the demand for people who worked in them, for food to feed them, and for towns and cities for them to live in. "As a result, the home demand for dairy produce, and even more for corn, was increased, which in turn helped to make dairying and tillage farming in Ireland somewhat more profitable" (Crotty 1966:15).

Cork city became the center of the provisions trade, growing in size from fifth city in Ireland at the turn of the century to the country's second largest urban area by the 1770s (Beckett 1966:170). Complementing this expansion was the centralization of regional production at, and enlargement of, Dublin, Limerick and Waterford, and the rapid development of the inland market towns of Ballinasloe, Banagher

and Mullingar. In Munster Cork's riches resulted from beef, butter, tallow and hides, which were exported to meet the ever-expanding demands of the new colonies in the West Indies and Americas, the colonial armies and navies, and the merchant and naval fleets of the continent. Irish products supplied not only British demands, but provisioned the fleets of France and the Low Countries.

Between 1721 and 1741 the French mercantilist system was specifically altered to allow, under French law though not under the British mercantilist system, French ships to call to Cork on their way to the West Indies (Johnston 1974:85).

Nonetheless, Irish provisions were especially welcomed at the home ports of Britain, which resulted in a major increase in the value of Irish agricultural exports to Britain in the century after the Cattle Acts were passed. Instead of exporting 70,000 cattle at 40s. each to England, thereby also giving the buyers all the by-products in return for £140,000, Ireland now exported beef and butter worth £220,000, 3,000 raw hides to England, 70,000 raw hides to France and Spain, and £70,000 worth of tallow (O'Donovan 1940:109 as quoted in Crotty 1966:16). Indeed Irish agricultural exports were so successful in the English market that by 1700 they were valued at three times the Scottish exports to England, at a time when Scottish trade in livestock, unaffected by the Cattle Acts, was expected to rise to meet an increased English demand (Woodward 1977:157).

Thus, Irish agriculture boomed in the century after the Cattle Acts. Whereas the equivalent of 14,632 beef cattle were exported from Ireland in 1665, the equivalent of 81,632 left Ireland in 1758. Within the same period butter exports increased eightfold, while sheep

exports declined, reflecting the fall in their production. The most striking expansion of agriculture, however, was in pig production. Bacon and pork exports increased from the equivalent of 1446 animals in 1665 to 60,004 in 1758 (Crotty 1966:16).

The phenomenal rise in pork exports is a pointer to the proliferation of small-holdings, with their emphasis, typically, on the production of milk, potatoes and corn. The basis of Irish pig production was, and is, the conversion by small holders of potatoes surplus to family requirements, of separated milk and of small quantities of corn into a marketable pig" (Crotty 1966:16-17).

Pigs, potatoes and milk became the staples of the growing peasant population needed to supply the labor for an expanding industry of corn and dairy production.

The establishment of a large Catholic peasantry was matched by increases in the economic and political power of the merchants who controlled the provisions trade, many of whom were also Roman Catholics. Commerce was often the last refuge for the Anglo-Norman Catholic families displaced after the successes of the Tudors, Cromwell, the Stuarts and William of Orange throughout the 17th century. Indeed, Roman Catholics of a growing middle-class had no alternative but to become urban merchants. Their land in most cases had been confiscated, and under the Penal laws of the 18th century Catholics could not hold any permanent interest in land, could not practice law and could not take an active role in the public service (Beckett 1966:170-171). And while the provisions trade increased, the Protestant Ascendancy became more entrenched in 18th century Ireland, enticing many Catholic merchants to undertake their businesses elsewhere in the Empire, as, for example, the Galway families whose city declined in

relation to Dublin and who sought their fortunes in the West Indies (Cullen 1977).

By 1760, the prices of cattle and provisions, which had remained stable over the preceding century, rose sharply. The previous stability of prices for provisions was largely due to the demand for beef, which seldom encountered competition from European or British markets, where-as the demand for butter fluctuated in response to expansion or contraction in European dairying. After 1760, however, demand for Irish Provisions increased markedly primarily from the imperial nations of Britain, France and Spain. In the 1760s and 1770s up to 75% of the total export of Irish beef was taken by the English colonies and France combined. As prices for beef and beef products rose throughout the British Empire, all British surpluses were readily consumed. In Britain itself in the latter half of the 18th century demand for beef far exceeded supply. Parliament was petitioned by the Home Counties for the repeal of the Cattle Acts. Thus, in 1758, the prohibition of cattle imports from Ireland was suspended, to be followed in 1759 by the prohibition of beef and butter. The Cattle Acts were repealed in 1776. As the century drew to a close, Ireland's commercial relations with the Americas and the continent declined. "By 1800 the former markets had almost all disappeared. Apart from some market for butter in Spain and Portugal, Irish livestock husbandry was not geared almost exclusively to the English market" (Cullen 1972:59). Britain did not increase its imports of live cattle, however, but instead demanded Irish salted beef and butter to meet the demands of a rising population.

What had occurred in Britain to change its relationship to Irish agriculture and commerce in Irish products? Why had the English parliament repealed the Cattle Acts? The answers lie mainly in the radical changes that occurred in Britain's role in the world economy. First, England changed from a corn exporter to a corn importer. "The repeal of the Cattle Acts was symptomatic of England's changing preoccupation from finding markets for its farmers to finding food supplies for its manufacturing and commercial consumers" (Crotty 1966:18). Second, demand for food increased throughout Europe after about 1750, making it essential for England to have a steady and reliable source of food for herself, and in some cases, for her colonies. Third, the repeal of the Cattle Acts was a product, in part, of growing liberalism in English life, wherein England's ruling oligarchy supported Irish economic development in order to add to their own wealth (they owned Irish estates, shipping concerns and banks) and to placate Irish interests so that Catholic Ireland would not again be a source for monarchical revival. Fourth, the wars for independence in America loosened England's control of Ireland's role in the economic development of Britain (Crotty 1966:17-18).

The decade from 1760 to 1770 marks a turning-point in Anglo-Irish relations. England had been self-sufficient in corn, but now demanded corn imports to feed its Industrial Revolution. Throughout the second half of the century, prices for all agricultural goods rose, but none more sharply than that of corn. As British agriculture prospered, so did landowners throughout the four kingdoms. In Ireland this resulted in a shift away from beef production to the production

of tillage for export to England. The ten years after 1760 mark a revolution in the structure of Irish agriculture, commerce and society, due to the changes demanded of them by the British economy (Crotty 1966:18-19).

By 1800 Ireland was the principal source of corn for the English market. Although live cattle exports rose immediately after the repeal of the Cattle Acts, production fell after 1770. This was partially due to decreased demand. The provisions trade in beef was dealt a heavy blow in 1783 when Britain passed a law allowing her colonies to import provisions from the United States. By the end of the Napoleonic Wars beef production in Ireland had declined in favor of tillage; all beef, salted and on the hoof, that was produced for export was sold to England. British demand for beef remained high from 1760 to the year of Waterloo. Irish agriculture was transformed from beef production to tillage because of the steadily increasing rise in prices for corn.

The fifty year period to the end of the Napoleonic Wars saw the growth of tillage and dairying in Ireland while beef production remained static or even declined. Although increased agricultural output was due in part to new legislation which allowed Catholics to hold long leases in land, it was primarily a result of rising prices, linked to the demand for corn in Britain. Although prices for all agricultural goods rose in this inflationary period, of the three principal methods of land-use (tillage, dairying and bullock-grazing), tillage gave the highest gross output per acre. Tillage was especially lucrative because it provided high profits. Irish exports of

grain, flour, meat, pigs and pigmeat rose markedly in this period (pig production being based on tillage) as did exports of butter (which more than doubled between 1758 and 1818) and calf skins (as surplus calves were killed). Tables 1 and 2 outline this reversal in the export trade of corn and livestock (Crotty 1966:19-20, 24). Thus, the decade beginning in 1760 marks the change in Anglo-Irish relations which set the stage for the development of the Irish colony up the present century. The repeal of the Cattle Acts heralded the English Industrial Revolution and the end of England's importance as an agricultural nation. England's increasing need for food established the para-meters within which all future English policy toward Ireland would have to be implemented, and within which the agricultural, political and com-mercial elites could rule. "...British policy reinforced the dependence of the whole Irish economy upon land; and it was this dependence that not only put the gentry in a position ot oppress their tenants but gave them a strong motive to do so" (Beckett 1966:168). In the years up to 1815 this Irish dependence on agriculture increasingly became a dependence on the grain trade at the expense of dairying and beef.

Irish economic and political interests, both Catholic and Protestant, were not, however, completely tied to agricultural production. A fortune was made by the great commercial houses of Dublin, Cork, Belfast and Galway. But lack of capital and skilled labor, coupled with the successful competition for land by tillage producers, prevented large-scale industrial development in Ireland. Until the early 19th century Irish industry centered on the cottage, the

TABLE 1
AVERAGE ANNUAL NET EXPORTS OF
CORN, FLOUR AND MEAL

(- = net imports)
1758, 1798, 1818

	<u>Tons</u> 5 Years ending 25 March 1758	<u>Tons</u> 5 years ending 25 March 1798	<u>Tons</u> 5 years ending 5 January 1818
WHEAT	-861	812	26,934
OATS	6,193	34,138	71,070
BARLEY & MALT	-10,644	1,581	12,714
OTHER CORN	-20	207	809
TOTAL CORN	-17,900	36,738	111,527
FLOUR	---	201	4,190
MEAL	-3,631	2,905	2,437
TOTAL FLOUR & MEAL	-3,631	3,106	6,627

Source: Crotty 1966:19

TABLE 2

AVERAGE ANNUAL EXPORTS OF LIVESTOCK AND LIVESTOCK PRODUCTS

1758, 1798, 1818

		<u>5 years ending 25 March 1758</u>	<u>5 years ending 25 March 1798</u>	<u>5 years ending 5 January 1818</u>
Cattle (Nos.)	Live	22	12,143	35,634
	Dead	81,724	60,065	52,137
Sheep (Nos.)	Live	--	--	21,990
	Dead	16	29	21
Pigs (Nos.)	Live	--	4,273	59,107
	Dead	60,004	351,758	563,240
Butter (cwts)		197,552	300,160	422,189
Cheese (cwts)		2,629	397	211

Source: Crotty 1966:20

domestic unit of production. Linen and wool were spun in homes throughout Ireland from the start of the 1700s. Huguenot immigrants were instrumental in establishing linen manufacture as the principal cottage industry in Ulster. Their success led in the 1730s to increased capital investment from Dublin which fostered the industry elsewhere in the country. An internal marketing system took shape, based on short-term credit given to rural middlemen by the rich merchants at the Dublin Linen Board (established 1711). Local bleachers bought yarn, distributed it to weavers and marketed the cloth. The spinning and most of the weaving were done in the homes of agricultural tenants and small farmers. By the 1770s two million pounds worth of linen was produced annually, 90% of which was exported. This remained a cottage industry, however, and a complement to the structure of agricultural production taking shape in the 18th century (Beckett 1966:169-170; Johnston 1974:91-94; Cullen 1972:59-64).

The woollen industry expanded as well at this time, although at first against sizeable opposition. Throughout the century Irish wool was prohibited from export to all countries except England, which itself effectively kept out woollen imports through high tariffs. Nonetheless, the high prices available in France led to a lucrative smuggling trade which lasted until late in the century. The industry was dominated by the Quakers who mainly lived in the south of Ireland, and it was based, unlike linen manufacture, in towns. Worsted cloth manufacture required large numbers of full- or part-time urban weavers. Their rate of production was faster than that of yarn spinners; it often took four spinners to keep one weaver occupied. With

increased demand in the middle of the century when the weavers of Lancashire, Yorkshire and East Anglia found Irish yarn cheaper, there was an increase in rural cottage combing and spinning. The peasant areas of Munster briefly enjoyed the fruits of the woollen trade, but by 1800 the export trade in yarn had all but disappeared. Only 20 years before, exports disposed of half the wool production. Sheep-grazing lands were ploughed up for grain (Cullen 1972:64-66; Johnston 1974:95-97; Beckett 1966:170).

Other Irish industries suffered at the hands of protected and more efficient English competitors. The brewing and distilling industries in Ireland rapidly succumbed to English legislation and industrialization, and a 1746 statute prohibited Ireland from exporting glass to any country whatsoever. In Ulster, the cotton industry grew to rival linen production with the introduction of factory-based production after 1750. By 1830 it was a principal manufacture of Belfast. Nonetheless, the technology of the Industrial Revolution in England had little impact in Ireland outside the cotton and the flour mills, for Ireland's economy was still agricultural and based on hand labor. In the late 18th century rural laborers were increasingly used to farm corn which, in turn, led to the creation of the first flour mills on the waterways of Leinster and merchants were eager to meet the demand (Beckett 1966:169; Cullen 1972:91-93; Johnston 1974:94-95).

The first half of the 18th century presented a different picture, however, Both the provisions trade and the associated rise in service occupations were a great inducement for farmers and tenants to have

either dairy or beef herds. Landlords, most of whom were absentee in fact or in temperament, fitted in well in an agricultural system that was capital extensive, and which provided for a series of "middlemen" to manage and use the land. "It suited the landlords to let their land in large parcels to financially substantial individuals who, although their rent was rather low, could at least, with reasonable confidence, be trusted to pay it" (Crotty 1965:29). In the final analysis, both landlord and middlemen were in business for profit. If the renter of landlord's estate was a grazier of beef, he worked the land himself and needed little labor. It was more profitable, however, to use the land for dairy production, which necessitated considerably more labor, daily rather than seasonal, and which was best managed with small herds. Since little capital was available for dairy stocking, the initial renter became a middleman who sub-leased to a number of tenants (farmers) by subdividing the land he was renting. Besides land, the landholder usually supplied cows to the tenant, who in turn provided the labor and a specified amount of butter as rent. For a tenant with no capital and little security of tenure, dairying was the only viable form of production. With a steady increase of population matching the rising demand for animal products, more land was put under pasture and subdivided while less land was farmed either as part of large grazing estates or as tillage farms (Crotty 1966:28-29); Beckett 1966:172-173).

Who were these middlemen, farmers and tenants? Middlemen were sometimes merchants, sometimes estate agents, but just as often gentry or farmers themselves who dealt in land. The farming tenants and cot-

tiers were native Catholics who depended on milk, butter, tillage and wages to survive on ever-contracting homesteads with no fixity of tenure. In fact, under the Penal Laws passed since 1695, no Roman Catholic could hold a lease of more than 31 years. Under these same laws all Catholic bishops were banned from Ireland, and Catholics could not inherit property, vote, hold government positions, become lawyers or jurors, have more than two apprentices in their trade, or own a horse worth more than five pounds (Kennedy 1973:20). These constraints fulfilled the Laws' general purpose "...which was not to destroy Roman Catholicism, but to make sure that its adherents were kept in a position of social, economic and political inferiority" (Beckett 1966:159). If a tenant improved his farm his rent would be increased when his lease expired, if he was not evicted. Many tenants let the farms fall into disrepair before expiration of leases in order to ensure their renewal.

Population growth created greater pressures on the land throughout the 18th century, with an increase from an estimated 2.5 million people in 1700 to over 4 million in the 1780s. Grazing farms were largely unaffected by this rise, which resulted in further subdivision of tenant holdings. As British demands for corn increased, more land was turned over to tillage production, thus reducing the number of cows. Rents rose as more capital was needed by the landlords and middlemen to finance further subdivision of their lands into tillage farms. By the 19th century the tenant's position

was weak:

...as the century progressed an even greater proportion of the population sank to the position of mere cottiers, holding a few acres of land from year to year, and dependent upon their wages to make up the rent. Wages were low and rents high, and the cottiers lived at bare subsistence level (Beckett 1966:173).

As the population rose from 1760 to 1815, the number of farms increased to meet the demand of tenants, cottiers, and laborers for places to live, and the demand of landlords and middlemen for more profit through rent. This latter demand necessitated an increased production of cereals. Unlike in the first half of the century, tenants did not need to invest in milch cattle or win the trust of a renter who would supply animals to farm, but they did have to cultivate the cereals demanded by the market to pay their rent. But if the grains were grown for the market, there was less land available for pasture, how did the peasant survive, especially when rents were rising sharply (as much as a fourfold increase in this 50 year period)? Complicating this restructuring of agriculture is the greater suitability of the Irish environment for grazing, wherein land ploughed for tillage rapidly deteriorates, yields decreasing returns and is subject to many diseases in a wet climate. The solution for the problems of transformation to tillage, maintenance of high yields, stability of produce and therefore rent returns, and the sustenance of a large population lies in the cultivation of the potato.

Before widespread adoption of the potato at the end of the 17th century, and in the absence of other root crops, land was fallowed in order to restore its fertility. In the 1700s root crops offered a quicker way to restore the land. Easily fertilized with readily avail-

able manure, root crops can be hoed while growing so that weeds can be eliminated. They also break the life cycles of cereal diseases and pests, thus ensuring safety for successive cereal crops. Most important, root crops leave the soil fertile, restoring land in much shorter time than pasture would, and allowing the high return needed from cereals to make them competitive with grazing (Crotty 1966: 25-26; Lucas 1960:8).

The potato was an excellent choice for the Irish root: first, inter-row and inter-plant hoeing cleared weeds and killed cereal diseases. Second, potatoes could be cashed by fattening pigs. Third, if people were prepared, or forced, to live largely on a potato diet, farmers were guaranteed very cheap labor indeed. Fourth, use of the potato as staple, coupled with the resultant population growth, enabled landlords and estate agents to further subdivide the land. "The more families which lived on an estate the more potatoes could be grown; this in turn meant the more cereals which could be grown and the more rent that could be paid on the estate" (Crotty 1966:27). The windfall profits that resulted from the ever increasing prices in this inflationary period were made by the landlords and agents. Competition for land by tenants, made even worse by a rapidly increasing population, left them powerless to resist either rent increases or changed leases. Most tenants, in turn, were forced to divide their holdings and rent to under-tenants at even higher rates. As the tenants, cottiers and laborers produced more potatoes on smaller pieces of land, the windfall profits on grain made the landlords both richer and greed-

ier. From 1760 to 1815 grain prices doubled, but farm rents quadrupled (Crotty 1966:27-28).

The Irish peasant's dependence on the potato cannot be underrated. During this period it is estimated that a cottier's or laborer's family of six required 22 stones of potatoes a week for food and 170 stones for seed, for a total 1,314 stones or 18,396 lbs. a year (approximately 59 lbs. per person per week). This amount of potatoes could be grown on one acre an a year. Whenever possible, this diet was supplemented by milk, butter-milk, fish, beef or bacon, garden vegetables and oaten bread (Johnston 1974:89).

In the fifty years before 1815 the Irish population growth began to soar. British demand for corn was translated into a demand for labor. Both the social system—which in the absence of fixed tenure forced young people to marry early and to set themselves up in their own homesteads rather than wait for their parents' land, to which neither they nor their siblings had any guaranteed right—and the structure of agricultural production accomodated the acceleration in the birth rate. The population kept growing at what was even then considered to be an alarming rate. Ireland had an estimated 4,753,000 people in 1791, 6,802,000 in 1821 and over 8 million in 1841. The resulting population presure ensured that people would have to live on a potato diet, and would do so without appreciably eating into the acreage of the profitable cereals (O'Tuathaigh 1972:129-130).

The tillage of grain was the means whereby the Georgian aristocracy, gentry and commercial classes made and maintained their fortunes. From as early as 1758 the Irish Parliament, composed almost

exclusively of rural landholding and urban commercial elites, established bounties on the transport of grain by road and canal to Dublin. "The idea was to stimulate grain growing in rural Ireland and to increase the domestic content of Dublin's consumption" (Cullen 1972:69). When prices began rising in response to Britain's demand for corn, the landed and commercial elites were in a position of economic and political strength in relation to their English counterparts that they had not previously enjoyed. And they were not happy about political opposition they were encountering in Britain. "The landlords shared the resentment of the commercial classes at the arbitrary restrictions on Irish foreign trade which was at that time voiced even by the absentee Irish landowners in the British House of Lords" (Strauss 1875:44). When the Irish parliament finally won the right to legislate for Irish commerce in the 1770s, Irish political and economic elites gained considerably. Ireland's claims to constitutional sovereignty climaxed with the formal constitutional independence of Ireland granted by Westminster in 1782. From that year, and the formation of "Grattan's Parliament" in Dublin (named after the popular leader of the Irish "patriot" party who was arguably the most influential Irish politician of his time), Ireland was an independent kingdom sharing the British monarchy. This political success was due principally to changes in English politics, changes the Irish could take advantage of. As one historian sees it, this was the first time that the political interests of Irish legislators became entwined with

those of English parliamentarians.

Irish politicians now found that their prospects of gaining or keeping office were affected, as they had never been before, by the state of the parties at Westminster. Thus the old distinction between "English interest" and "Irish interest" was complicated and obscured (Beckett 1966:223).

But agricultural and business interests in Ireland were not going to let political compromise stand in the way of their livelihood. In 1784 the first Corn Law (Foster's) was passed, setting a high bounty for corn exports and further supporting the grain-potato-subdivision-rent cycle that was the basis for the Irish political, economic and social systems in this period (McDowell 1967:232-235; Beckett 1966:222-223).

Not surprisingly, Irish political independence was in many ways only nominal. Although a wave of nationalism swept over Irish life (influenced by events in America and France), many people soon recognized the true meaning of such "independence". Britain still retained the right to veto any Irish bills. The king was represented by a lord lieutenant who selected and controlled the sources of Irish patronage (i.e., peerages, places, and pensions) that strongly influenced Irish parliamentarians. Members of the Irish political elite were often absent, residing in Britain where they had cultural, commercial and familial ties. Nevertheless, political power in Ireland was recognized as economic power to the point that, in 1793, Protestant legislators expanded the franchise to all those who freely held land valued at 2 pounds and over. This effectively gave Catholic tenants the vote (although not cottiers or laborers) and induced landowners to further subdivide their lands. The more "forty shilling freeholders" they had

on their land, the more votes they could control. And control the vote they did. Voting was public. To vote against the landlord's wishes ensured an eviction notice. In fact, this political tactic was so successful for the landlords that in the 35 years that followed the 1793 statute, to Catholic Emancipation in 1829, the number of forty shilling freeholders increased from 30,000 to 191,000 voters (out of a total electorate of 216,000) (Strauss, 1975:93; Freeman 1972; Crotty 1966:18; McDowell 1967:234-235).

By 1800, large numbers of people throughout the country were becoming disenchanted with the political and economic hold that elites in both Ireland and Britain had on the Irish nation. Middle class Anglicans, Presbyterians and Catholics, centered in Dublin and Belfast, and spurred on by the successes and philosophy of the Revolution of France, plotted a military takeover of the Irish government. In many of the poorest regions of rural Ireland they had many sympathizers. Although Government agents arrested most of the conspirators, the United Irishmen rose in rebellion in 1798. Badly organized and poorly coordinated, the Irish forces were defeated by English troops and local militia in South Leinster, in the Dublin area and surrounding counties (including Meath), and in Ulster. A French force landed in Mayo in Connaught but it too was defeated. The British parliament and government, faced with the war in Europe, could not afford such trouble "at home". On 1 January 1801, the Union of Great Britain and Ireland began. For the English the Kingdom was United.

The Union shifted the political center of Irish affairs back to Westminster. In return for preferential treatment of Irish goods in

England, all duties on English goods imported to Ireland were dropped. Although Ireland was increasingly the farming center for England, she had little real control over the prices set for Irish goods on the English market. In the 15 years after the Union, Ireland's national debt rose by 250%. "The economic relationship between Ireland and England after the Union was that of an agricultural colony and the manufacturing home country" (Kennedy 1973:34). By the 1820s the Irish woollen and cotton industries had all but died, although the wet-spinning process made Belfast linen one of the primary products of the country. This success of the linen industry in the northeast, coupled with the better conditions Ulster tenant farmers traditionally enjoyed, further divorced the northern region from the rest of the country.

Thus Ireland remained a country whose fortunes depended on the land. From the Union to Waterloo, it was the "...golden age for Irish landlords" (Strauss 1975:78). Irish wheat and oats fed British soldiers, sailors, citizens and steeds. Irish grain and flour exports to Britain almost tripled in value in the 20 years from 1792. But the defeat of Napoleon marked the end of this boom in the Irish grain trade, as continental suppliers immediately moved into Britain. By 1815 the bottom had fallen out of the grain trade. But landlords were loathe to lower rents and to miss the profits that could be made on the higher prices paid for cattle after 1815. The landlords' solution was to charge rents equal to the value the land represented in cattle production. The tenants, who by the nature of grazing cannot be beef

farmers, were no longer needed in grain production, and received terrible prices for their corn. They continued to subdivide land to meet rents, but both capital and land were in short supply. Their dilemma was finally solved in the Great Famines of the 1840s. "The period between Waterloo and the Famine was a true Thirty Years War for the Irish people—a war between their vital needs and the interests of the landlords and their moneylenders" (Strauss 1975:79).

The falling price for agricultural goods after 1815 led both landlords and middlemen to do all they could to cut fixed costs and to vary forms of production to take advantage of short-term fluctuations in prices. As tillage prices declined, reflecting increased continental competition on the English market, livestock prices began to rise from the 1830s. In many areas of the country, it was believed that landlords' rents and farmers' solvency both depended on farm consolidation and a return to grass. The British market for livestock was normally more profitable for the grazier than was the provisions trade because cattle, shipped as stores, cost less to process. Although gross receipts for cattle were lower than for provisions, the net returns to the grazier were higher. The small tenant dairy farmer on the other hand was put under considerable pressure by this change in agricultural demand. The beef trade declined rapidly. By 1840 the dead-meat shipments to Britain had all but ceased, and the livestock trade became the most significant feature of Irish agriculture and commerce. Besides benefitting from the repeal of the Old Cattle Acts, this trade was further enhanced by the introduction of steam shipping between the two islands, the developing railroad systems in Britain

which ensured delivery with minimum waste, and the 500% increase in corn imports into Britain from Europe in the generation after Waterloo (Grotty 1966:36-37).

A number of important factors prevented both landed and commercial interests from instituting a wholly successful policy of land clearances, farm consolidation and a changeover from tillage to grass. The population was expanding rapidly, but labor was no longer needed on the scale it had been when tillage was the primary source of rent money. Grazing is decidedly labor extensive. As landlords and farmers demanded high rents the tenants in turn relied on the time-tested response to capital shortages—subletting. As farms continued to be subdivided, however, tenants were less able to produce enough to meet their money rents. Small holdings could not produce enough beef to match their tillage output, but tillage no longer made money. Many small farmers failed, and were forced to become cottiers, subsisting on potatoes and desperately searching for any employment. For the landed proprietor also this situation was unprofitable. As an Irish Tory said in 1825: "The landlords of Ireland are at length deeply convinced that, though a stock of cattle or sheep will afford profit, a stock of mere human creatures, unemployed, will afford none" (Strauss 1975:81).

A general policy of evictions followed. "Forty-shilling freeholders", who were no longer politically important after Catholic Emancipation and thus lost their security of tenure, declined from 191,000 in 1828 to 14,200 in 1830. Leases, when granted, were shortened so that tenants could be evicted when any sudden change in market

conditions warranted it. Some landlords tried to clear their lands by encouraging emigration to North America, even to the point of purchasing land in America and giving tenants free passage (Cousens 1965:25; Strauss 1975:81-82). But most tenants, especially on the poor land of Connaught, Munster and Ulster, stubbornly held on, subsisting on potatoes and casual labor while further subdividing their painfully small holdings.

It is one of the ironies of the situation that a careless and rack-renting landlord who allowed holdings to multiply freely was almost always more popular than a more conscientious neighbour who attempted to resist or reverse a process that could only end in disaster (Beckett 1966:293).

Local society was dominated by the great landowners, directly if they were resident, but also to a great degree through agents if the owners were absentee. Property was the key to power. County Grand Juries, the seats of local government, were controlled by the property owners. The principal source of power at the sub-regional level was the estate. Tenants' lands were valued and leased through the estate. Roads were planned by the landowners. The landlord was responsible for the size and shape of peasant holdings, the facilities for the poor and sick, the availability of places of worship, and the enforcement and applications of the law in the petty sessions. The "Big House"—the Georgian mansion that was the nucleus of the big estates that had flourished since the 18th century—was the focus of social, economic and political relations, not only for the estate's residents but for the neighboring villages and tenants as well (Duffy 1977:15; O'Tuathaigh 1972:146-148).

The largest landowners--the members of the Protestant gentry who were becoming richer in the boom years before the Famine, politically more conservative in the face of Catholic moves to repeal the Union, and socially more exclusive through their cultural ties to England--were often not the immediate landlord to the increasing host of tenants. "The majority of landlords in pre-famine Ireland were not landowners: they were tenants with large holdings, typically farmers who found it profitable to sublet portions of their land to small occupiers either on a permanent or on a seasonal basis" (Clark 1978:24-25). On lands owned by Trinity College in 1843, for instance, 12,000 tenants held land yet less than one per cent rented it directly from the College. Forty-five percent held their land from a College lessee, while fifty-two percent rented their land from the tenants of the College lessees. Many of these middlemen, however, could no longer stay solvent in pre-famine Ireland. The property owners, on the other hand, in an effort to squeeze tenants out, and experiencing the drain on capital demanded by the switch to grass, did not themselves invest in agriculture or domiciliary improvements that would benefit their tenants (Cullen 1972:114-115).

Unlike the 18th century, subdivision was no longer the aim of estate managers and speculators, but of the tenant farmers who still held leases yet could not pay the rents demanded or feed their families on their farms. "Thus, in order to boost the income from his holding, the small farmer had considerable incentive to sublet plots of land to cottiers at inflated prices" (Duffy 1977:14). On one estate alone in north Armagh in Ulster, cottiers' rents paid to farmers exceeded 20% of the total due to the landlord, while their land

was less than 5% of the total area (Smyth 1974:191-192), as quoted in Duffy 1977:14). The small holder who could not pay the rent himself joined the ranks of the landed and landless laborers, the cottiers and the migrant workers.

Competition for land led to very low standards of living for the poor, while more and more rent was demanded from every level of tenantry. In a case often cited, the town of Tullahobagly in Donegal had 9,000 people in 1837, with a total of 10 beds, 93 chairs and 243 stools among them. Cottiers and landless laborers desperately tried to hold onto some kind of access to land. The "conacre" system of land hiring developed. Conacre was not a lease but the right to occupy the land in order to grow one crop (usually potatoes or corn). In most cases the laborer worked long and hard for the landlord for the right to put up a mud cabin and to grow his potatoes. In rare instances the landlord manured the land, but the hirer seeded and worked it. If he had a good corn crop, he could pay his rent (landlords did not favor this system—if the crop was lost, so was the rent). There was no guarantee of tenure, for the agreement was of limited duration (usually 11 months) and for a set fee. Nevertheless, the demand for quarter and half-acre holdings was overwhelming, and it increased drastically in the years directly before the Famine. In 1835, 75% of the laborers in Ireland had no regular employment. For 30 weeks of the year, when potatoes were not being cultivated, 2,385,000 persons (out of a population of over 8 million) were without employment of any kind. Unless a laborer could find land to grow potatoes, his family starved (Strauss 1975:82; Woodham-Smith 1977:26-30).

Not surprisingly, migration and then emigration became solutions to the problems on the land. Within Ireland, thousands of laborers took to the roads to do harvest work in the period between the end of the old potatoes and before the new ones were ready.

It was for this reason that June, July and August were called the 'meal months': there was always the danger that potatoes would run out and meal would have to be eaten instead, the laborers would then have to buy it on credit, at exorbitant prices, from the petty dealer and usurer who was the scourge of the Irish village--the dreaded 'Gombeen man' (Woodham-Smith 1977:30).

The harvest in Scotland and England also seasonally called Irishmen, but as the century wore on they migrated permanently (aided by the new steamboat service). By 1841 no fewer than 419,000 Irish people had taken up residence in Britain. Before the Great Famine large numbers of Irish were being drawn to the textile mills of Britain, the corn-fields of England and Scotland, and the cheap land of America. Most emigrants came from the heavily congested poor lands of Ulster, Munster and Connaught. In the areas of successful consolidation of holdings, like eastern Leinster, there was neither a substantial resident class of laborers nor many emigrants (Cousens 1965:18,25; 1961:284; Strauss 1975:83).

The population of Ireland was 8,175,124 persons in 1841. Only 7% of Irish holdings were over 30 acres (although this statistic from 1841's census does not give total acreage), while forty-five percent were under 5 acres. In the west of Ireland in Connaught, the holdings under 5 acres reached sixty-four percent. The least densely populated counties were those with the largest holdings: Meath and Kildare in Leinster. The large estates lived off a combination of rents and

cattles sales. The tenant farmers also rented land, but supplemented their livelihood with mixed farming which included dairying, corn and potatoes. They were to be the losers in the Irish "thirty years war" following the Great Hunger of 1845-1850 (Green 1975:268).

For five years the moist environment of Ireland enabled the spore of a fungus to turn the potatoes as black as Newcastle coal. The starvation it caused was made all the more tragic by the Whig government's insistence that Irish corn should be continued to be exported. In fact, the previous Tory government fell in 1846 when it repealed the Corn Laws which had levied taxes on Irish grain imported into Britain and had protected the profits of English agriculture. Policies of relief through public works, financed by the rate money paid by Irish landlords (in an effort by the Whigs to have the groups they considered chiefly responsible for the catastrophe to bear its costs) gave way to direct relief. It was hardly enough, as typhus, relapsing fever, bacillary dysentery, and scurvy became epidemic. As panic seized the poor on the land, emigration soared. Yet at no point was there any curb on the export of grain from Ireland, adding to the wealth of landed and commercial interests. The Whigs believed in the economic creed of laissez faire, which prevented any government interference in the workings of the market. As the head of the treasury put it: "Do not encourage the idea of prohibiting exports, perfect Free Trade is the right course" (Woodham-Smith 1977:118).

The Irish poor law unions, which ran the workhouses and soup kitchens that were the basis of direct relief, were funded by the poor rates, or taxes, which were largely paid by Irish landowners. To

minimize the costs they were incurring, landlords increased evictions. The "quarter-acre clause" of the 1847 poor law extension act aided them since it excluded all landholders of over one road from relief. By 1849 almost a million people were being maintained in the workhouses (Green 1975:270-275).

By 1851 an estimated 2.5 million people had died or emigrated. The population stood at 6.5 million. Yet despite the horror, Irish agricultural production had increased. The area cultivated had grown by a million acres, although the number of holdings had dropped considerably as grazing farms were established throughout the country. Subdivision had given way to consolidation. Holdings of five acres and less had shrunk from 45 percent to 15 percent of the total, while those over thirty acres had jumped from seven percent to twenty-six percent (with the total number of holdings dropping by 218,000). This trend continued through the 19th century. (See Table 3)

The Famine did not create the conditions for the emergence of a modern Ireland, but it did allow certain features to become more important and it aided other structures and processes to attain prominence in Irish society. Agriculture continued to change from tillage to beef. Wheat production for export dropped and more land was put into clover, while the number of milch cows remained constant throughout the Famine years. With prices rising for both store and finished fat cattle, however, dry cattle numbers doubled from 1841-1851. Although the bottom fell out of the pig market with the destruction of the corn and potato crops, their numbers began to rise in the 1850s and stayed constant in Ireland for over 100 years. Sheep were a major product

TABLE 3
 AGRICULTURAL HOLDINGS IN IRELAND
 1841, 1851, 1871

	<u>1841</u>	<u>1851</u>	<u>1871</u>
up to 1 acre	135,314	37,728	48,448
1-15 acres	563,235	279,937	246,192
15-30 acres	79,342	141,311	138,647
over 30 acres	48,625	149,090	159,303
TOTAL	826,516	608,066	592,590

Source: Strauss 1975:137

before, during and after the Hunger, but their growth was unsteady later in the century. In short, post-famine Irish agriculture centered around fewer but larger holdings which principally produced cattle, beef and beef products for the British market (Crotty 1966:46-51; Strauss 1975:134). This special agricultural relationship was to color Anglo-Irish economic relations for the next century. "The wholesale abandonment of tillage in favour of cattle rearing reflected the

complete economic dependence of Irish agriculture on the British market to the exclusion of all other considerations" (Strauss 1975:135).

Although the landowners' estates increased in wealth, size and cattle, larger family farms engaged in mixed tillage, livestock production and dairying also survived (although cash incomes still depended on the dry cattle business). Small subsistence farms declined markedly in the eastern and southern grazing counties but persisted on the peasant holdings of the northwest, west and southwest (parts of Ulster, Connaught and Munster). The Famine also had helped to establish social trends that had been a part of the rural scene for decades. In order to keep family farms intact, impartible inheritance increasingly became the norm, with a selected son being the sole heir to the land and animals. Marriages continued to be late and few, resulting in a falling birth rate. This combination of late marriage and inheritance sustained the dowry system. The sons and daughters who were no longer needed on the labor extensive grazing farms, who could not be supported through seasonal agricultural work, and who could not marry without means, had the choices of emigration abroad, migration to the cities or entering the church or the army. This situation continued in Ireland into the 1970s (and has led a number of anthropologists to suggest erroneously that its components are part of a long-standing "traditional" social structure when in fact they are rooted in the events of mid-19th century political economy).⁵ (Green 1975:274; Beckett 1966:149).

The Famine fuelled popular "...resentment against the whole system of government in Ireland" (Beckett 1966:349). Irish nationalism became even more bitter, especially provoked by the English government's refusal to prohibit grain exports from Ireland at the height of the Hunger. To most Irishmen, the Famine had proved the Union a fallacy. Hatred of the landlords became so intense that it caused the agrarian conflicts of the 1870s, which reinforced the English image of Ireland throughout the century. "Public opinion in Britain was coming to regard the Irish as irresponsible, ungrateful and treacherous, unfit to govern themselves, or even to enjoy the same constitutional rights as the rest of the United Kingdom (Beckett 1966:350). As the same historian concluded: "As the two countries approached the end of a half-century of parliamentary union, they were, perhaps, more completely estranged from one another than they had ever been before" (Beckett 1966:350).

The sixty years that followed the Famine were of the greatest importance for the development of modern Ireland. It was during this period that the wars for land and for political independence from Britain were fought. In the years immediately after the Great Hunger the first salvoes in both campaigns were fired in the British Parliament, as the class frictions of Ireland became a political issue for the various sectoral groups represented in Westminster, especially between urban and rural interests.

Ireland was an important bulwark in the position of the British landowning aristocracy which still contested every inch of ground against the encroachments on its position by the middle classes, and Ireland had, therefore, a powerful attraction for English Radical reformers (Strauss 1975:135).

These reformers, the political economists of the Whigs and Radicals, first attacked the landholders of Ireland through the Irish Poor Law (passed in 1838 and amended in 1842 during the Famine), which established the workhouse system of social maintenance. Irish landlords opposed the Poor Law because of the financial drain it made on their budgets, which had already been taxed by the loss of rents resulting from the Famine. After the famine, as population declined due to death and emigration, wages began to rise among those workers who were still in demand. Other landholders needed a sizeable inflow of cash to replace the income lost due to evicted tenants and to finance the change from tillage to the more prosperous beef industry. In short, post-famine Ireland put many Irish landowners under considerable stress. They borrowed on their land in order to adapt to the changes in the structure of agriculture, but bankruptcy was an ever-present threat in a transitional situation where capital was extremely short.

In order to save endangered landowners, and not in an effort to relieve the pressures on the landless laborers or insecure tenants in Ireland, Parliament passed the Encumbered Estates Act of 1849 (which was in the words of one historian, a "special bankruptcy law for Irish landlords" (Strauss 1975:136). This law, the product of in-fighting at Westminster between Irish landlords and London financial interests eager to secure loans made on Irish land, aimed to make landlord-tenant relations a matter of contract and not one of custom or tradition. Valid title was granted the purchasers of land while the seller or creditor was guaranteed cash. The Act of 1849 had as its primary

goal the rationalization of tenant relations, rents and land sales in which all were "subject to the play of capitalism and the market" (MacDonagh 1977:45). These economic forces soon changed a large part of the ownership of land within Ireland, but did little to rectify the injustices of the overall structure of agriculture and its system of land tenure. Thus, many of the traditional landholders and landlords, unable to finance the changeover to stock raising in the face of capital shortages, were forced to sell. Speculators, businessmen and old landed interests competed with many new owner-occupiers for the land now freed from traditional ownership. "Many estates were naturally bought by neighbouring proprietors wanting to round off their possessions, and in these cases the only change was the replacement of the bankrupt by solvent landlords" (Strauss 1975:137). The majority of almost 5 million acres sold (one-quarter of the land of Ireland), however, was sold to a new class of Irish landlord, the businessman. Land was bought as an investment by land agents, solicitors, and large shopkeepers, who continued a policy of estate expansion. By 1871, of the 32,610 landed proprietors in Ireland, approximately one-half (18,100) held just 474,000 acres (2.3% of the total), one-quarter (8,100) owned 1,956,000 acres (9.7%) while 6,500 landowners held 17,720,000 acres (88% of the total). "This handful of landlords dominated the Irish policy of the British government" (Strauss 1975: 137).

The consolidation of holdings affected all farms, not just the large estates. In the thirty years since the Famine the number of tenants with holdings of more than 15 acres increased from one in

seven to half the total. Holdings of less than 15 acres decreased markedly, while the census category of holdings of "over 30" acres jumped by 110,000 in the period 1841-1871. This change in the structure of agriculture, due in part to the actions of Westminster through the Landed Estates Court, also reflected other major changes in the 19th century agricultural life: a sharp rise in rural labor costs in the face of a decreased supply, reinforcing a shift away from tillage, an increase in the use of both an owner-occupier's and his family's labor, an increase in prices for livestock at the expense of tillage, and the accumulation of capital by farmers in the form of livestock (Crotty 1966:67-68). All of these factors were both cause and effect of the landlord's role in changing land use and rural depopulation.

Many landlords attempted to minimize their losses due to the Poor Laws by clearing as many tenants as possible off the land since they were liable for all rates on holdings or buildings of less than four pounds valuation. The cottiers were hit hardest by the evictions, as larger tenants were supported on the land due to the change in demand within the market, leading to higher prices for beef. As migrations of the displaced landless laborers and cottiers increased, Irish urban areas rapidly grew as they attempted to contain those forced off the land. Emigration to Britain and America remained steady throughout the century. Landlords made sure the evicted tenants did not return--their buildings were destroyed, regulations were enacted against any future construction, and laws were passed to forbid the lodging of strangers on farms (further supporting 19th century reliance on family labor on the farms of those who would become the owner-occupiers of

the 20th century). And as labor was separated from the land, extensive livestock production necessitated an increase in wages in order to keep some laborers on the new, larger grazing estates. In conjunction with rural depopulation, increased emigration, the rise of town populations and the development both of grazing estates and of consolidated holdings farmed by family labor, was the establishment of marriage and birth rates that were to continue for 100 years.

The loss of people from the land was directly linked both to the change in landlords, due to bankruptcy and government legislation and to the changes in the use of land, which themselves demanded the consolidation of holdings. This alteration in the dominant form of production was a decisive one. The area under wheat comprised 750,000 acres in 1847, but only 48,000 in 1910. Hay crops covered a million acres in 1847 and 2.5 million in 1910, while pasture increased over the same period by almost 2 million acres to a total of 10.5 million. The key to this transformation is to be found in the price structure of the British market, which strongly favored livestock and livestock products.

This shift in land use resulting from changes in the British economy had three lasting effects on Irish society. First, it forced a revolution in land tenure that eventually went beyond the control of the landed interests of the past. Although the consolidation of farms after 1850 created many large estates, and added to still others, it created an even more numerous class of farmers. Although in 1851 farms over 30 acres totalled 26% of those over 1 acres, 58% of that figure was composed of holdings from 5-30 acres. Thus, relatively

few grazing estates occupied a very great area, while a much greater number of small and medium-sized farms took up less actual space.⁶ During this 50 year period most of the rural population of Ireland depended on mixed farms of 15 to 30 acres, on which owners consumed most of what they grew, relying mainly upon cattle raising or dairying for seasonal cash profits.⁷ The aristocracy and the landless peasantry of pre-Famine Ireland were both rapidly becoming the dinosaurs of the new Irish society.

...whereas economic circumstances before 1850 had conspired to produce a rural proletariat, improved conditions in the second half of the nineteenth century, combined with the rudiments of education and the ability to accumulate a little capital, had begun to transform that proletariat into a bourgeoisie (Lyons 1973:50).

Second, the growing security and business acumen of the middle-range Irish farmer further reinforced the trend toward fewer and later marriages. Once the legal position of the tenant was assured (which was the case after the Land Act of 1881) he could afford to improve both his economic and social position. The farmer added to his wealth through acquired cattle, which in turn demanded more land.

The farmer, with his eyes fixed on profit and in his memory the recollection of the terrible nemesis that had overtaken the pre-Famine fragmentation of holdings, had a powerful motive not only to add field to field but to bequeath the end result to his heir. To his heir—not necessarily to his family (Lyons 1973:51).

One son inherited the farm, the daughters received their share of the farm, if possible, through their dowries, while the other sons worked the farm for their father or brother, or they emigrated.

Third, as a result of the change in the structure of agriculture, the labor force was transformed. Pasture farming demanded little labor beyond the family on middle acreage farms. Farm labor was needed on estates, but few workers were supported year-round. They were only needed seasonally. The wages that were paid rose considerably. A laborer who earned three shillings a week in the 1840s made nine in the 1870s, twelve in 1900. But some estates were reluctant to take land out of production to support laborers which forced many workers to be mobile. Most laborers who remained in the country attempted to get state subsidized cottages in the counties or districts of most frequent employment.

The Land Act of 1870 was the first step in the modernization of Irish land tenure for it limited for the first time a proprietor's power over his tenantry. This act paved the way for "dual" or "joint" ownership. In 1870, 19,000 people owned Irish farm land, but only 20% of them held four-fifths of the total cultivated area. Five classes of tenantry held the proprietors' land—leaseholders, middlemen, annual tenants, cottiers and laborers. The 135,000 leaseholders, primarily Protestants, held their land in perpetuity. Their descendents now "survive as farmers of substantial holdings" (Freeman 1972: 177). The middleman acted as landlords' agents and let the land to the other three groups. The 525,000 annual tenants were "small farmers" living on farms of less than 15 pounds valuation, who could be evicted on six months' notice. The cottiers, or landed laborers, and the landless laborers subsisted on the smallest holdings through a combination of their wits and conacre. Although the 1870 Land Act did little to

change this structure of landholding, it did manage to establish, for the first time, the legal rights of tenants.

Foremost among this new protection for the tenantry were the right to compensation for improvements done on the land without the landlord's consent, limits on the owners' power to evict, and the statutory recognition that the tenant might have saleable interest in the property (the "Ulster" custom, traditionally followed in that province but relatively unknown in the rest of the country). However, this victory against the landlords was largely in name only. Little land left the hands of the proprietors; most of the "encumbered" estates endangered after the Famine had already changed hands, but within the proprietary class. The 1870 Act allowed tenants to buy land that went on the market but they had to put up one-third of the purchase price. Most simply did not have that capital. In the decade following the Act, only 1,600 holdings changed hands, a total of no more than 100,000 acres. But the Act did establish a precedent—tenants, both Catholic and Protestant, had legal rights on another's land. This led to the truly revolutionary land reform bills passed by a British parliament for an Irish tenure system (MacDonagh 1977:48-49; Freeman 1972:177-178).

The 1870 Act was the first law to reverse, if only in part, traditional British land policy. The Prime Minister, Gladstone, faced considerable opposition in both Houses of Parliament from Irish landlords who were largely Tories and were ideologically and economically opposed to the liberal policies of Gladstone's government. The Prime Minister also faced the landlords of Britain who did not want the new-

found strength of the Irish tenant crossing the Irish Sea. These forces successfully limited Gladstone's reforms throughout the decade, and effectively prevented his efforts to forge a political opposition in Irish constituencies.

His far-seeing attempt to strengthen the political position of the Irish middle class by wringing substantial concessions from the landlords was scotched by the resistance for the landed interest in both Houses of Parliament (Strauss 1975:154).

In fact, the 1870s saw the end of a 20-year association between the Irish middle class and the English liberals as the new Republican movement, the Fenians, became stronger in Ireland, and Irish landlords began to doubt the advantages of a continued reliance on Parliament to guarantee their rights and privileges. Gladstone's allies and supporters also began to question their allegiance to the Liberals. Gladstone could not include the two most basic agricultural demands in his 1870 bill (security of tenure and judicially fixed rents) due to landed interest opposition. And his Irish Universities Bill did not meet the demands of the Irish middle class, which was largely Catholic, and of the Roman Catholic clergy, suggesting that "...the strange honeymoon between the Irish hierarchy and English Liberalism was finally at an end" (Lyons 1973:152).

The disaffected Irish landlords, who increasingly believed that their political and economic future had to be divorced from the interests of landlords elsewhere in Britain, founded, in 1873, the Irish Home Rule League, in an overt move "...to secure Irish political leadership to the landlords and the upper middle class, and to keep the dangers of English democracy away from the shores of Ireland"

(Strauss 1975:155). This intention was clear earlier, in 1870, when the Home Government Association was formed to champion an Irish parliament with full control over domestic matters. Landlords believed that "...co-operation between men of property regardless of religious differences was the best defence against revolution in Ireland and radicalism in England" (Lyons 1973:148). To achieve political and economic stability internally, the founders of this Home Rule movement agreed to support the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland, Catholic-demoninational education, and more congenial landlord-tenant relations. Whether Tory or Liberal, these men of property were disenchanted with Gladstone, and they were certain of the best course for themselves and Ireland--a national, Irish parliament, controlled by the men of property, business and the professions.

Their future in politics was assured when in 1874 fifty-nine former Liberals and Conservatives were elected to Parliament from Ireland on the Home Rule platform, in an election that saw the defeat of Gladstone and a clear-cut Tory victory. The Home Rule League and its Westminster representatives still had a difficult time, however, They were frustrated in all their efforts by the landlords from Great Britain in both Houses who feared the revolutionary beliefs of what was, in fact, a pragmatic group of conservative politicians. The period of Tory government, 1874-1880, held the moderate Home Rulers from Ireland to a standstill. The "final blow" to their initial goals came with the great changes occurring in the Irish economy at the end of the decade.

Until 1876, the farmers with large and medium holdings in Ireland prospered from the high prices paid for cattle, beef and dairy products on the British market. The prices for farm produce plummeted at the end of the 1870s, however, in response to American competition. An agricultural depression hit all of the British Isles, removing British demand for Irish beef and eliminating the seasonal agricultural employment in England, Wales and Scotland which supported migrant labor from Connaught, Ulster and parts of Munster. Throughout Ireland in 1876-1879 the value of the major crops fell by nearly £14 million. The price of butter was halved from 1870 to 1879, while that of beef dropped by a third. Many tenant families still relied on the potato as the staple, but after the crop failures of 1877 to 1879, the potato was the only crop to rise in price. "Inexorably the peasants were driven to seek credit where they could find it--the banks for the more substantial, the village money-lender or the 'gombeen man' for the impoverished majority" (Lyons 1973:165). The granting of credit itself had flourished since 1870, due both to high livestock prices and to the rosy economic future "tenant right" had created through Gladstone's Land Act. Now, with no work, no income and no food, the tenantry of Ireland were faced with extinction. Obviously, in this climate, rents could not be paid.

The landlords who used their parliamentary 1870 strength in order to vote down all amendments to the Land Act of 1870 stubbornly refused to lower their rents in step with the fall in prices, and the clash of interests between them and all classes of tenants became more violent than at any time since the famine. (Strauss 1975:159).

This clash resulted first in evictions. In 1879, 1,000 families (6,000 people) were turned out of their homes, while in the following year 2,000 families were ousted. And as evictions increased, so too did agrarian "outrages", in which cattle were crippled, farm and estate buildings were destroyed, landlords and agents were threatened and killed, and tenants fought each other over land vacated by the less fortunate. It was a time that forced a new tenants' movement into existence to defend those without the capital to protect themselves (Lyons 1973:164-165, 168; Strauss 1975:159).

In 1879, in County Mayo in Connaught, the province hardest hit by depression and evictions, the National Land League was founded by Michael Davitt, a Fenian. The League was formed to prevent rackrenting and evictions, and to make tenants the owners of their farms. The new head of the Home Rule party in Parliament, Charles Parnell, first elected to Westminster from County Meath in 1875, was asked to be president of the Land League. The fact that he was a Protestant with large landholdings in Kildare was not a political liability. The new economic crisis had "radicalized" the middle class, the tenant farmers, and to a limited extent, the laborers of Ireland. The formation of the Land League, and the so-called "Land War" that followed, was not a mass uprising of all those sorely affected by economic change. Rather, it was a movement of all those farmers and farmers' sons who for political and economic reasons believed that they had to organize to gain their objectives. The League in its first years cared for evicted families, organized popular demonstrations, and mobilized popular opinion. Its overall goal was to give the tenantry and the

peasantry both protection and self-respect. The achievements of the Land movement were keeping pace with those of the Home Rule movement in Westminster (Clark 1978:31-32; Lyons 1973:167-168).

Gladstone returned to power in 1880, ushering in five years of Liberal government which were to see the Land Act of 1881, the extension of the franchise in Ireland and the consolidation of the Home Rule Party. In 1880, Gladstone, true to the form he had established years before, attempted to quickly pass a land act, but he was just as quickly defeated in the House of Lords. This resulted in increased Land League agitation, centering around organized ostracism which was known as "boycotting" (after the name of its first major victim). The apparent power of the Land League in the rural areas of Ireland, coupled with the ties between the League and the Liberal Party's allies in Parliament, the Home Rulers, encouraged Gladstone a year later to introduce a new Land Act. He and his government had accepted the notion, based on the relative failure of their Land Act of 1870, that the power of the landlord must be further limited. The Land Act of 1881 clearly established a system of dual ownership in Ireland, making the landlord in many situations a receiver of rent and putting tenant-landlord relations on a contractual rather than on a traditional or feudal basis. The Act achieved this by giving the tenant the famous "three-F's" that were the rallying cry of the Land League: fair rents, fixity of tenure and free sale. Land courts were set up to fix a "judicial" rent which would be in effect for fifteen years (voluntarily-agreed rent would also be in effect that long). The Land

Commission was established to oversee the fixing of rents, to facilitate tenant purchase of land, and to protect the rights of all tenants who paid the rent. For their part, landlords were increasingly willing to sell their land but, although the state increased the amount it would lend the buyer (from 2/3 to 3/4 of the purchase price), payable over 35 years), the agricultural recession still prevented tenants from raising the necessary money. Moreover, the complexities of the Bill excluded more than half the tenants with holdings over an acre, who were the 150,000 leaseholders and 130,000 occupiers who were in arrears with their rent when the bill became law (Beckett 1966:389-391; Lyons 1973:172).

The tenantry of Ireland did not welcome this new Land Act with open arms, as the Liberals might have expected, except in Ulster where there was never a tradition of open hostility toward the government. The agricultural crisis of the late 1870s had shown Ulster tenants--Catholic and Protestant alike--that their rights had not been guaranteed by the act of 1870. This new act, however, made into law what had been the traditional rights of Ulster tenants. Thus, Ulster support for the Land League withered (to the point that in an 1881 by-election in Tyrone, a Land League candidate was defeated by a Liberal). After Gladstone's 1881 Act the possibility of an alliance between the tenantry of Ulster and the tenantry of the rest of Ireland no longer existed (Beckett 1966:391).

The supporters of the Land League in the south of Ireland did not cease their agitation against the landlords. The Land League under Davitt, conceding the government's acquiescence to the "three F's", now

held that peasant ownership was the ultimate goal of the Land War. Parnell, the undisputed head of Irish interests within the parliamentary system, could neither afford to alienate the predominantly Catholic agricultural electorate that was in great measure the backbone of the League (the agrarian wing of the nationalist movement), nor be seen by his more conservative landholding and urban supporters within the Home Rule movement (the constitutional wing) to condone agrarian boycott and outrage. This dilemma was solved for him when, in 1881, he was arrested by the government on charges that he was actively opposing the Land Act (which he, in fact, supported, although not openly). The Land League itself was suppressed in October of that year, and all its leaders were imprisoned with Parnell in Dublin. The agrarian movement continued, however, and the Land Act ran the risk of failure. In the period between October and April, 1882, 75 assaults took place on the land, resulting in 14 deaths, while there had only been 46 reported attacks in the previous 9 months. Gladstone compromised with Parnell, and in March, 1882, all the Home Rule and Land League prisoners were released. The Land War ended upon the government's granting of concessions for those tenants already in arrears and its admitting leaseholders to the Act's benefits. Parnell vowed to support the Act as the "practical settlement of the Land Question" and to cooperate fully with the Liberal Party. Most of the agrarian supporters of the Land League agreed with Parnell's stance. For them, upon the granting of fixity of tenure, fair rent and free sale of interest, the war had been won. Although some extremists within the Land League still believed in a fight for the nationalization of

land and wholesale peasant ownership, the League effectively lost its political power. In 1882, Irish nationalism seemed to be squarely in the hands of Parnell and the Home Rulers (Lyons 1973:172-175).

The franchise act of 1884 and the redistribution acts of 1885 established a household franchise and virtually guaranteed Home Rule Party hegemony in all of Ireland outside Ulster. Parnell used this certainty of increased support as a lever in the Commons. He made a deal with the Conservatives, who would have a better chance of getting a Home Rule Bill through the Lords, thereby forcing a change of government in 1885, before a general election. The new government, in reciprocation, passed another land act, the Ashbourne Act (1885), which significantly advanced the cause of tenant land purchase. This did not anger Tory supporters among the landlords of Ireland. In fact, most welcomed government schemes to guarantee funds for land purchase. Given the previous Land Acts and the organized resistance of the tenant farmers, all parties recognized that the landlord system as it existed was no longer viable. Landlords were quickly losing interest in an economic system that due to an agricultural recession was no longer profitable. Furthermore, the fair rents fixed by the land courts reduced rents by an average of 20%. Landlords began to welcome the sale of land rather than sharing it with tenants—if the sale price could be met. The problem had always been the lack of capital on the part of the tenant (Moody 1967:288; Beckett 1966:393-394).

The Ashbourne Act provided £5 million, enabling tenants to borrow all the purchase price of land, to be paid back over a 49 year period. The Land Act of 1888 added another £5 million to the scheme. Many tenants had to pay a terminable annual charge equally only 70% of what they had paid in rent. And although only the most prosperous tenants could take advantage of the scheme, it greatly enhanced Parnell's reputation. In the general election of 1885 the Home Rule party took 85 seats. When the Tories refused to further the cause of Home Rule, the Liberals again joined with the Irish party to defeat the government. Gladstone's third term as prime minister began with a new commitment to Irish Home Rule. Many Liberal factions including the Whigs and Radicals were not so committed, however, and Gladstone's Home Rule Bill was defeated in June of 1886 after heated and protracted debate. This defeat led to a general election the following month, resulting in the re-election of the same 85 Home Rulers, but within a conservative government. For almost the next twenty years the conservatives were in charge of Irish Affairs. The Home Rule party, having tied itself to the Liberals, was considerably weakened. When a scandal in his private life made Parnell act rashly within the Irish party in the Commons, his fellow Irish M.P.'s voted him out of the chairmanship. When he publicly denounced Gladstone and the Liberal Party and their Home Rule proposals, he divided his electoral and constitutional support both in parliament and throughout Ireland. Parnell's manifesto repudiating alliances with any British party "forced the Irish members (in Commons) to choose between loyalty to the principles that Parnell taught them, and loyalty to the man

himself; and it was along this line that the split among his followers took place" (Beckett 1966:403). Ultimately, Parnell's health failed as he vainly tried to regain his power among the Irish electorate. His death in 1891 signalled the end of an era which saw Ireland's best chance at constitutionally attaining political independence within Britain (Beckett 1966:394-404).

The dormant Home Rule movement notwithstanding, many of the goals of the old Land League and its successor the Parnellite National League were being met through successive Land Acts, supported by conservative and liberal, unionist and home ruler alike. In fact, many landlords were the most outspoken proponents of land transfer, due to the combination of social consciousness, inability to maintain large estates during a recession, and fear of agrarian outrage. The tenantry, on the other hand, always found it difficult to avail themselves of the benefits of the Land Acts due to shortages of capital. Under the Land Acts of 1870 and 1881, only a total of 1600 holdings changed hands, averaging 60 acres and 42 acres respectively. Under the 1885 Ashbourne act, 16,000 tenants bought their farms in Ireland outside Ulster, while 42,000 more became owners under the 1891 Act. In the generation between 1870 and 1896 in Ulster, 20,800 tenants bought their holdings. Before 1891, all land legislation in Ireland dealt with large holdings, averaging 32 acres. In that year, however, the Congested Districts Board (CDB) was founded to deal with the small peasant holdings in the North, West and South of the country. The Board extended its influence annually so that by 1910 it administered 7 million acres of Irish land. It also encourage cottage industries,

land improvement, the building of roads and bridges, fishing industries, and the purchase of land for resettlement. This last power came through the Land Acts of 1903 and 1909, wherein the state first subsidized prices given to landlords for whole estates, and then both the Land Commission and the CDB were given compulsory purchase power in order to resettle people from the overcrowded areas of the country on land previously held by a rapidly departing gentry (Freeman 1972:178-179; Lyons 1973:206).

Not all Irish landlords were selling out, however. Some, like Horace Plunkett, a member of the Dunsany family from outside Navan in County Meath, believed that once the issue of tenure had been settled the more important problem of agricultural improvement could be tackled. Although a Unionist, he steadfastly applied himself to social and economic reform, founding in 1894 the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society, which was the unifying body of the 33 creamery cooperatives. Plunkett himself began the cooperative movement when he opened the first co-op 5 years before in Waterford. It was just this sort of agricultural cooperation that enabled the new owner-occupied farms, which relied on mixed forms of production, to survive in the hard times of the end of the century. As Plunkett saw it, the agricultural products of Ireland could only compete against foreign products on the English market if they were upgraded for distribution and consumption. This entailed farmer cooperation at every level of production (Lyons 1973:207-214).

In general, both tenants and landlords wanted the latter to go; but because of the complicated financing involved under the 1891 and 1896 Land Acts they often were prevented from doing so. In the years after 1891, only 3,000 sales were negotiated annually. Still, for a number of reasons, the landlords were eaber to sell: they had lost control of their estates through legislation, the Ballot Act of 1872 had taken away their control of parliamentary elections and the 1898 Local Government Act removed their hold on county and local politics within Ireland. They thus demanded action from the Tory government in Westminster. The conservatives, for their part, were willing to oblige. Land sales in Ireland would weaken the Home Rule movement and would inject much needed capital into a landed class which long voted conservative. Indeed, many Tory M.P.s themselves had land or family on unprofitable estates in Ireland (Beckett 1966:406-408).

Interest in sale and purchase notwithstanding, many tenants and former tenants felt that the government and the landlords were not acting quickly enough in the relinquishing and sale of large estate lands. Impatience grew to agitation in those areas of overcrowded tenant holdings situated near large cattle farms or "ranches". Nowhere was the pressure to buy out reluctant demesne lands more acute than in Mayo in the West. In 1898, led by the Parnellite factions, the United Irish League was formed to alleviate the tenant overcrowding on uneconomic holdings by buying out ranch land. The influence of the UIL spread rapidly, in no small part due to its ties with a reunited Irish party in Parliament. It had 33,000 members in 1899, 63,000 in

1900, and 100,000 in 1901. The small movement in the West of Ireland quickly grew to 1,000 branches, wherever tenants and new owner-occupiers believed they had a right to neighboring estate land. "As it spread, so its policy developed from the simple redistribution schemes of the early days to a sustained and highly articulate demand for the ending of 'dual partnership' and the buying out of landlords by compulsory purchase" (Lyons 1973:217). Tenant boycotts, intimidation and threats, followed by police crackdowns in which tenant, farmer and politician were imprisoned, encouraged compulsory purchase orders.

As in the past, land agitation led to change, but in this case through the initiatives of the Irish landlords themselves. A series of meetings with tenant representatives led to a report which formed the basis of the Land Act of 1903, or Wyndham's Act, which made the sale of land so lucrative for landlords that, in some areas, it resulted in almost universal selling-out. The purchase prices, based on rents, were increased, and a bonus of 12% of the total sale was paid by the government to each landowner who sold his entire estate. These incentives for the landlord were matched by a reduction in the yearly charge to the purchaser attached to longer periods of repayment to the government (approximately 68 years at 3-1/4% annuities). The legal cost of transfer was also met by the state in another move to guarantee success for the scheme. And successful it certainly was. The Wyndham Act, in conjunction with another act in 1909 which instituted compulsory purchase, accounted for the purchase of 11 million acres for approximately £105 million. More than half the 500,000 tenant farmers

of 1903 bought their land within 6 years (Becket 1966:407; Lyons 1973:218-219).

The goals of the Land War were achieved in the years before World War I, but Home Rule was never to be won within a United Kingdom. The Irish rebellion of 1916, the result of a process of revolt begun hundreds of years before, was fired by a new 20th-century Ireland which saw the rise of the Gaelic revival in art, literature, drama and language, and by the founding and politicization of the Gaelic League, the Gaelic Athletic Association, Sinn Féin, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and urban and rural labor movements. The rebellion touched off a war which resulted in a nation composed of 26 of the original 32 counties; six of Ulster's nine counties voted to remain part of the United Kingdom (McCartney 1967:303). By 1923 the Irish Free State enjoyed nominal political independence. Her economy, however, still largely agricultural, remained almost completely dependent on the British market.

The agricultural depression at the end of the 19th century, the land acts of the 19th and 20th centuries, the demise of the landed classes as powerholders in the Irish political system (and their subsequent emigration from Ireland before and after the Great War) and the changing role of Irish politics within the British political system all resulted in a basic transformation of the Irish land tenure system. Owner-occupancy throughout Ireland ensured security of tenure, profitable return for improvements and reinvestment, guaranteed increases in farmers' incomes through a drop in rents equal to the difference between judicial (Land Commission) rents and competitive

"market" rents, and effectively destroyed the competitive market for land (Crotty 1966:88).

At the same time as this change in ownership, the changes in land use became complete. In the fifty years before 1900 Irish cattle increased by over 60% and Irish sheep by over 100%. Tillage acreage was halved (to 2.4 million acres) as was the human population (to 3 million). The expansion of grassland and animal population slowed around 1900, however, due to the stabilization of prices for meat on the British market and a decrease in the price margin between young and old cattle, largely due to changes in dairying and beef. In 1861 most calves were slaughtered, for they were not needed as replacement stock, and British demand was yet to affect the overall transfer from tillage to grazing. By 1901, however, all available calves were being reared. Graziers needed replacements for the stock readily sold to Britain. Consequently, they increasingly passed on their profits to calf suppliers. Although the price for finished cattle rose steadily, the increase in prices for calves in Ireland was even greater. Grazing cattle became less profitable around the turn of the century while breeding then became more so.

Dairying did not expand at the expense of tillage or grazing, however, If grassland was taken out of beef for dairying, then the demand for calves would drop while the supply would increase, thereby dropping the price. Less tillage would further reduce winter feed and greatly hinder existing dairy production, let alone aid an expansion in that area. Furthermore, Irish cattle continued to be poor milkers (low yield per cow per year) which also restricted the industry.

Dairymen refused to improve the breeding of milkers because: it detracted from calf prices, poor milkers survived on less feed over the winter than high-yielders, which was a considerable advantage on the exposed poor farms that depended on dairy herds, the heavier cow might give less milk but would represent a greater beef value at the end of the productive cycle, the high-yield cow was a greater capital investment which many farmers could not afford, and good milkers fetched top prices in the expanding British dairy industry so they were culled from the Irish herds and sold. Finally, dairying remained static in this period because of a declining rural population and farm labor supply. Thus, in 1900, Ireland's rural economy had stabilized, with tillage, grazing and dairying remaining relatively constant in relation to each other (Crotty 1966:90-92).

The new incomes which overall higher prices gave farmers, coupled with a drop in rents, gave the new owner-occupiers a capital fund which they did not have fifty years previously. But because of the equilibrium that existed in early 20th century Irish agriculture, there was little incentive to invest or expand in any form of production. After 1900 the returns to capital investment were low indeed. Farmers replied with a number of ways of maximizing farm tenure, labor and need satisfaction. Although farms could not be subdivided, money was used to support children on the farm who themselves would be landless. Dowries increased in number and value. Consumption and variety of food rose sharply on the farm, with meat, eggs, milk, butter, potatoes, tea and sugar becoming the staples. Poultry numbers rose from 8.5 million in 1861 to 20.2 million in 1914, giving a farm eggs, meat

and outside income when sold to the many local rural shops which were also a product of this period. Finally, Irish farmers' bank deposits increased markedly in the years before World War I (Crotty 1966:90-92).

The transfer of land to the occupier resulted then in an increase in farming income and in the freedom to invest surplus capital in the land, or not, as the farmer saw fit. In the late 19th century many did not reinvest in agriculture, thus stabilizing agricultural land use and ownership and enabling farmers to increase consumption and non-farm investment.

The regional structure of Irish agriculture that has persisted up to the present, and which has colored all contemporary popular and scientific analyses of farmers and farming, dates from this era. In the 19th century and at the beginning of this century Irish small farms formed the majority of landholdings in the north and west of the country, i.e., in Ulster and Connaught, while there was a great mixture of farm sizes and farm types from the midlands of Ireland south to the Munster seaboard.

Northern small farms subsisted primarily on the tillage of cereals, grass seeds, potatoes and flax, where many holdings that could not subsist on agriculture alone relied on both cottage or domestic industry and on seasonal industrial and agricultural labor. Remittances from abroad supplemented subsistence fishing and agriculture on the small peasant holdings of northwest Ulster and the Atlantic counties of Connaught. Often, however, the men of the family migrated seasonally for work in the urban areas of Ulster, Leinster and

Britain. This "uneconomic" aspect to the structure of agriculture in the North and West persisted well into the present century as many farms could or would not expand in size or productive enterprise. In 1936 the average farm size was only 8 acres in northwest Donegal and 13 acres in northwest Mayo, and it subsisted on a mixture of pasturage, peat production, poultry, pigs and butter-making (Freeman 1972: 187).

Cottage farming was also typical of the western areas of Munster where fishing and seaweed collection supplemented mixed dairy and grazing agriculture. But south of the line running roughly across the middle of the country from Dundalk in the east to Galway Bay in the west farming takes on quite a different pattern. Mixed with the small cottage farms are medium-sized ones of less than 100 acres, worked by the family and producing beef, lambs, wool, wheat, oats, potatoes, turnip and mangels. These medium farms usually rely on various mixtures in their forms of production so that they can be as generally adaptable as possible.

The holder of a medium-sized farm is, in most cases, able to turn his attention to a variety of crops according to circumstance, and is therefore in a central position in Irish farming between the small farm production and that of large farms, which are in many cases highly specialized as they prepare for meat markets or provide grazing for stores before trans-shipment (Freeman 1972:188).

Increasingly in this century, however, larger farms of over 100 acres have also turned to a variety of enterprises in an effort to make their lifestyles and businesses more viable, but in the pattern of agriculture which first emerged from the 19th century and saw the

beginning of the Irish Free State, i.e., the "large" farms of the Midlands and the East of the country specialized in the production of beef for the urban Irish and British markets (Freeman 1972:187-188).

From the early part of this century to the 1970s the structure of Irish agriculture remained remarkably stable with the brief exception of the "emergency" World War II years where almost all production turned to tillage. Increasingly a regional pattern has emerged where calves are born and sold to the market on the small cottage farms in the west, south and north of the country, fattened as store cattle on the medium to large farms in the Midlands (central Leinster and northern Munster), and fattened to beef at roughly three years of age on the beef farms of eastern Leinster in such rich "beef" counties as Meath. "Conditions have favoured that farmers who have been able to specialise best in this kind of agriculture. They have disfavoured the old style of mixed farming, which is wasteful of land and labour (Gibbon 1973:494).

This feature of 20th century Irish agriculture was radically changed, however, when Ireland entered the Common Market in the 1970s and her ties to a British market were in many ways severed. Ireland's relationship to a new continental market has altered agricultural production in an effort to meet the new market's demands. Change in Irish agriculture has also redefined the regional nature of production and has forced a number of modifications within the four provinces. Leinster province was long dominated by the large estates of the British landholders and by their successors, large farmers who specialized in beef. Provincial and county politics revolved around the

necessities of agriculture in a predominantly rural economy, in combination with the mass movements of nationalism and catholicism. But politics, too, changed upon EEC membership in ways that clearly demonstrate the modern nature of rural agropolitics in Ireland. No county is more representative of 19th and 20th century beef production, large farming and agropolitics than Meath in eastern Leinster.

FOOTNOTES

- 2 The most insightful analysis of the ecological, political and economic determinants of Irish agricultural production to date is Crotty (1966). Much of Chapter II's treatment of Irish social and agricultural history borrows from Crotty.
- 3 The time necessary for each stage of cattle development in Ireland has changed over time, depending on the time necessary to mature animals to the desired fat and weight. Roughly speaking, however, the stages of cattle development in the latter half of this century have been: yearling (less than one year old), calf (six months to a year and a half), store (one and a half to two and a half years), and fat or finished cattle (two to three to slaughter).
- 4 "Corn", in the European sense, refers principally to wheat and rye.
- 5 A valuable critique of early Irish ethnography remains Gibbon (1973). For a view upholding the early ethnographic work of Arensberg and Kimball see Hannan (1982).
- 6 For a discussion of the changing significance of Irish perceptions of "small", "medium", and "large farms", see Freeman (1972:175-182). Freeman concludes that in the early 1970s small farms were 1-30 acres, medium farms were 30-100 acres, and large farms were over 100 acres (1972:182). Unless where noted otherwise, this scheme is used throughout my dissertation.
- 7 This is the type of farm that Arensberg and Kimball (1968) suggest is "traditional" in the West of Ireland. At most, it was the farm type little older than three generations at the time of their fieldwork.

CHAPTER III

Meath, the Royal County, Prior to 1920

Travel anywhere in Ireland, and ask any countryman or city dweller where, in all the country, is the best land, the biggest farms, the driest ground, the best grass, the fattest beef or the richest farmers, and the answer will be "in Meath". Since the begining of modern Irish history, and perhaps more important, since the dawn of an Irish cultural consciousness of environmental and economic advantage or inequality, the royal plains of Meath have enjoyed the reputation of being the most fertile and productive land whether for beef, milk or corn, in Ireland. Of course such a contention, like most statements made about Irish counties is consistently qualified by all those asked the above questions. "Sure, the dairying areas of the Golden Vale in Munster provide the best cream or cheese", or "there's no better land for corn than Kildare...or Kilkenny... or Carlow...or...". But press the issue further, and the Irish people will point to Meath as the one county that embodies the best and the biggest of Irish agriculture. Such was the case when I first went to Ireland and asked academics, farmers, family and friends where I could find one place that would best represent the economic, social and poltical life of farmers who are at the top of their profession and way of life, the agricultural elite. The answer then was, and remains to this day "...in Meath".

Beyond its reputation as an agricultural paradise, which in many but not all ways is deserved, Meath is also linked with the historical events and significant people that have shaped Ireland's destiny to the present. The popular culture of Ireland dramatically associates every province, county, town, village and townland with the role that legend, literature and imagination say it played in the past. Meath is afforded an enviable place in the congeries of counties whose histories are the history of the Irish race and culture.

Perhaps more than any other county, Meath reflects the great historical changes that fashioned contemporary Ireland. It is "Royal Meath", site of the hallowed halls and the hill of Tara, fabled home of the ancient Gaelic ard-ri, or high king, whose way of life was eclipsed by the conquering Norman. The Gaels themselves replaced a Bronze Age people and culture in Ireland, whose greatest monument in the British Isles lies along the banks of Meath's principal river, the Boyne, the passage graves or tumuli at Newgrange. And the historical event that still most clearly affects Irish people today occurred in 1690 a few miles downriver at the site of the symbolic demise of Catholic Ireland, where King William defeated the Papish James in the battle of the Boyne. In the pagan age Meath was the land that first welcomed Patrick, and in the modern era it was Meath that elected both Parnell and Davitt to parliament.

But beyond its importance as a place where striking historical events occurred and legendary people lived, Meath is famous for a way of life--a way that, although in some ways peculiar to the county, in other respects is representative of the polity and economy of both Leinster and

the nation. It is a countryside with the traditions of the Pale and the traditions of those beyond the Pale, where Irish, French and the King's Own English were forced to adapt to each other. It is the land of the "strong" farmer, the "large" farmer, the "big fellow", the descendants of the Normans, the gentry, the graziers and all those who occupied the Georgian Big Houses that dot the countryside. Yet Meath is also the home of the "small" or "weak" farmers, the "small fellows" who have survived from the days of the tenant, cottier, laborer and migrant.

It is increasingly an urban and urbane county, as the city and people of Dublin have expanded beyond their own county limits, complementing a cultural and industrial life that revolved around the mills in the towns of Navan, Kells and Trim on the Rivers Boyne and Blackwater. In the 1970s and 1980s Meath remains a county renowned for its equestrian traditions of hunting, jumping and raceing, yet is notorious for its flaunting of wealth in the great numbers of Mercedes that motor along its roads. Solidly middle class and Catholic, Meath's farmers live and work with those fellow farmers and remnants of the gentry who, in varying degrees, hold to the religion, culture and way of life of a colonial past. Most important for my thesis, however, Meath is the land of beef, dairy and tillage, of farms that on the average are the largest in the country, and of farmers who by tradition, education, foresight, wealth and good luck are now at the center of local, regional and national politics and agriculture,, and who have been so throughout the modern era in Ireland. More than any other county, Meath is the home of the Large Farmer of Irish agriculture. To combine and perhaps abuse

two hoary anthropological concepts, they are truly the Big Men of the East Leinster cattle complex.

Meath, largest county in the Province of Leinster, is bounded on the east by Dublin and the Irish Sea; on the north by Louth, Monaghan and Cavan (the last two being counties of Ulster), on the west by Westmeath, and on the south by Offaly, Kildare and Dublin. It extends from 53 degrees 23 minutes to 53 degrees 55 minutes (Northern Latitude), and from 6 degrees 13 minutes to 7 degrees 19 minutes (Western Longitude), an area of 577,800 acres or 903 square miles of which in 1972 95% was under tillage or grass (which is the highest ratio of land devoted to agricultural use in both Leinster province and the nation). In 1979 the population of the county was almost 91,000. (Lewis 1837:359; Central Statistics Office 1979). (See Figure 1).

Annual rainfall in the county averages about 30 inches (760 mm), half that of the West of the country. The annual temperature range is from 40 degrees to 60 degrees F; and there is a mean of about 5 hours of sunshine a day, which is relatively high for the country (the highest being in Wexford in southern Leinster with June averages of 7 hours daily). In Meath, the eastern end of the central plain of Ireland, the landforms are low, with an average height of 200 to 400 feet above sea level, although the land gradually rises away from the lowlands of central and south Meath to the county high at Mount Slieve na Calliagh in western Meath (904 ft). This land is well drained and its soil, a product of glacial drift, is up to four feet in depth. Unlike much of the rest of the country, few rocks are exposed in Meath due to the widespread glacial and glaciﬂuvial deposits. The soil, with its heavy lime-

FIGURE 1



MAP OF IRELAND

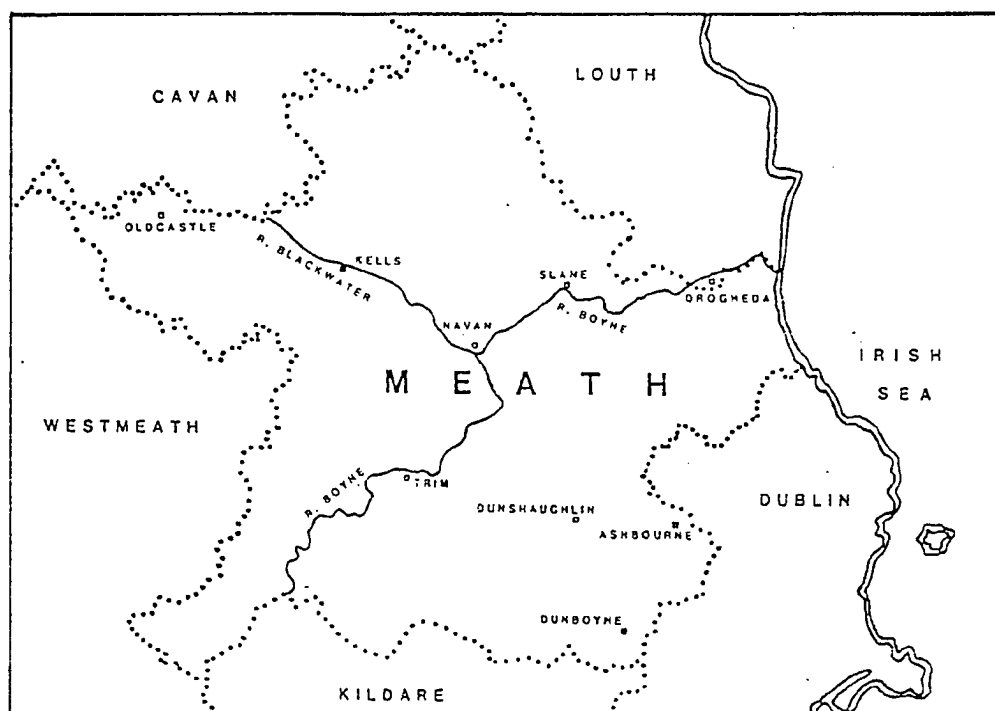
SOURCE: Rumpf and Hepburn 1977

stone content, is excellent for both tillage and grass. The terrain is undulating rather than level, and the surface swellings cover ancient earth-folds that are marked by deposits of slate, shale and granite (primarily found north of the Boyne). The county is served by two major rivers, the Blackwater, which rises in Cavan and flows southeast through Meath until it meets the Boyne, which rises in Kildare and flows north, at Navan, the principal town and the cultural and geographic center of the county. From Navan the Boyne flows to the sea. Meath's coastline stretches ten miles south from the mouth of the Boyne at Mornington to the estates of Gormanstown, north of county Dublin (Lewis 1837:359-364). (See Figure 2).

Meath is remarkable in Ireland for the ration of its total land actively used for farming. "Little trace of the natural vegetation remains in the east part of the Central Lowland: even the bogs have been grazed for centuries and their margins cleared for fuel (Freeman 1972: 273). Most of the central Irish plain that is lowland Meath consists of farmland with few patches of woodland, except on isolated demenses or estates that have remained intact into the 20th century. Although trees and shrubs are used for boundary markers between fields and holdings, and often line roads and waterways, less than 1% of the total area is wooded.

Meath, although an agricultural county, has a fine network of roads connecting large towns and villages. Meath towns conform to a national pattern in which there is a nucleated settlement at approximately every fifteen miles along main and secondary roads, this being the distance that cattle could be driven on the hoof in the past. The towns seem to radiate from the center at Navan, with a major town forming a nucleus for

FIGURE 2



MAP OF MEATH, 1979

each of the county's sub-regions (as, e.g., "east Meath", "north Meath"). Thus, Oldcastle in the west is approximately 15 miles from Kells, which in turn is within 15 miles of Navan. Trim, Kells and Navan are the primary towns in a county that from north to south extends only 40 miles and is no wider from east to west than 47 miles.

Thus, high mean annual temperature, low rainfall, fertile and deep soils, high insolation and good natural drainage make Meath not only "the richest pasture land in Ireland...but the most suitable area in Ireland for arable cultivation" (Freeman 1972:270-274). It is the heart of the cattle fattening country in Ireland, and has been since the beginning of modern agriculture, making it an integral part of the economy of Leinster and by extension, of the whole island (Fitzgerald 1925:29-34; O'Meachair 1928:16; Freeman 1972:57-58, 270-275).

Meath, or Midhe in Irish, derives its name from either Media or middle kingdom, or the Irish for plain and level county, Maith or Magh. The area that the Hill of Tara, 5 miles east of Navan, overlooks, a plain that extends from the Boyne to the River Liffey in Dublin, was known as the Magh Breagh, the magnificent plain. This plain, the eastern end of the country's central lowlands, became the nucleus of a large kingdom that developed in the early Christian era (ca. 200 a.d.) with its western border at the Shannon and its eastern border at the Irish sea. The kingdom, or province, of Meath covered the area occupied by the present-day counties of Meath and Westmeath, and by parts of Dublin, Offaly, Longford, Kildare and Cavan. For a thousand years the native Irish Kingdoms, situated primarily in the four present day provinces and Meath, battled in the central plain for control of internal trade routes, cattle

and each other. When one family or lineage, through a combination of stealth, marriage and force of arms, could lay claim to both most of the central plain and to a home province without being threatened by their neighbors, then it could claim the high-kinghip and take one of Meath's four "royal" seats as its home (Tara was but one choice). Most families did not retain the title of ard-ri for long, for Meath was itself highly vulnerable as a kingdom.

With no mountain zone capable of providing formidable strongholds, and therefore unlike each of the other four principalities, the lowland domain of the high-kings was, on account of its geographical position, at the mercy of the hillsmen of the north, west and south east so long as the latter maintained their defiant independence (Fitzgerald 1925:35).

When in the 12th century an Irish chief, in an effort to gain power in the absence of local allies, invited Normans into Leinster and Meath, the middle kingdom's end was near. Although none of the kingdoms outlasted the Anglo-Norman settlement, only Meath was divided up so as not to become an administrative province. "Though political supremacy passed from Meath the economic and commercial advantages of this district remained" (Fitzgerald 1925:36).

Most of the present day county of Meath was within the Pale--the zone around Dublin which was colonized and controlled for 700 years first by the Normans and then by the English. The western and northern boundary of the Pale ran along the banks of the Boyne. To this day there are great cultural, linguistic and physical differences between Meath people south and north of the Boyne--the anglicized Meath the home of the "wild Irish" respectively. Meath was made a county (shire) in 1297, but was subdivided into Westmeath and (East) Meath by Henry VIII in 1541.

The Elizabethan wars, the English civil war, and the English revolution culminated in the Battle of the Boyne (1690), which left Meath open to the control of English soldiers, planters and merchants. The great Norman Catholic families went into decline. Many of the old nobility emigrated. Others converted to Church of England and held onto their estates. One famous family in Meath had converts to Protestantism in the same generation that other members actively fought against England; one of the latter was martyred, recently becoming the only Irish person to be canonized in hundreds of years. The economic and political history of Meath in the 17th and 18th centuries is a microcosm of the history of the Protestant Ascendancy, of Catholic versus Protestant, peasant versus landowner, merchant versus gentry, and beef versus tillage. The 18th century was the time of the Georgian mansion, the most graceful architectural design in Ireland's modern history. Many mansions were built throughout the county of Meath, a symbol of the landowners' belief that the Ascendancy was there to stay. The economic and political organization in the 19th century did little shake their belief in the Ascendancy's power and longevity.

The patterns of landholding and land use that would distinguish Meath up to the creation of the Irish Free State were firmly established by the end of the 18th century. At that time it was already known as a county of large estates and of good land for either tillage or pasture. As in most of the counties that experienced major transfers of land ownership throughout the 17th century, the estate owners were largely absentees. When land was relatively valueless in the early 1700s, owners often gave generous leases for long periods (sometimes in perpetuity)

to Protestant and Catholic tenants (although under the penal laws Catholics could not hold leases of more than 31 years). Many of the original grantees—those given Meath land for services rendered to the Crown—had no intention either of settling or of farming land that they considered to be a poor investment. Thus, they gave long leases on good terms to those who would settle and farm. Some owners believed the land to be absolutely worthless; one officer of dragoons sold his estate to a blacksmith for a set of shoes for his horse! (Thompson 1802:57).

By 1800 over two thirds of the proprietors of Meath land were absentees. Although the number of "resident gentlemen" in the county was small, the number and size of estates were large. In fact, the ratio of proprietors in Meath to resident farmers was one of the highest in Leinster. Yet the obvious lack of interest some proprietors had for their holdings was striking. The Marquis of Lansdowne held 66,000 acres of estate in 1802, none of which he had ever seen. Most "farmers" in the county, then were those granted the initial leases from the owners, and were men of education, professions and some wealth (and, to a great extent, Catholics). Many of the actual proprietors desired to let their land to men of wealth and standing, thereby ensuring not only reliable payments of rent but also the acquisition of local social standing. In some cases the original grantees gave leases "for ever to persons of some substance residing in the county, to establish property for themselves" (Thompson 1802:57).

As the 18th century ended, however, and the value of land increased almost as quickly as did the local population, more and more occupying farmers sublet their land. Many of these middlemen gave up farming

themselves in order to make quick profits from the relatively short leases they gave tenants. As both the provisions trade and Dublin city grew, farms throughout the county continued to subdivide in order to accommodate the greater demand for dairy and grain. This was especially true in south, west and north Meath. Many of the larger estates in central and east Meath stayed relatively intact, but they were so large that great portions of them could be leased to make new large holdings for the growing middle class of farmers. Thus farmers (or, in some cases, estate agents) either worked the land themselves (or for their lords) or, as was usually the case, re-let the parts of their holdings to tenants who were farmers of lesser social standing, cottiers, laborers, or migrants. As noted above in Chapter II, the profits to be made in this systems of subdivision were sizeable indeed.

In Meath, however, as in some other counties of Leinster, when many of the larger estates were divided, they were let to farmers who themselves worked and maintained a large share of their holdings. These are the true ancestors--both culturally and in many cases biologically--of today's big farmers. As Meath farmer and magistrate Robert Thompson, a member of the Royal Dublin Society which was making a series of county studies to benefit agriculture at the end of the 18th century, asserted in 1802, the bulk of Meath's excellent land was held, lived on and used by "strong farmers" and 'graziers". The strong farmer, who let subsistence plots of land to tenants in return for cash and labor, and "...who provincially goes by the name of strong farmer", relied on mixed farming for his livelihood, with an emphasis on pastoral products. He usually farmed 100 to 300 acres, while pure graziers farmed immense

tracts, sometimes up to 600 or 1,000 acres.. It was clear to Thompson, however, that graziers, who used their land for the fattening of beef and sheep, were of a higher social status than most farmers in the county. Thompson held that graziers were by "education and intercourse in life, esteemed of superior rank to the farmer, and do not visit or associate with him, further than is requisite for the transaction of business" (Thompson 1802:79). Above the active grazier in Meath were only the gentry—the nobles and the wealthy who were either original owners of Meath land or those granted it a century before and who lived in the capitals of the Empire. Beneath the strong farmer were the largely Catholic tenantry who worked and sublet parts of the strong farmers' 300 or so acres; they were the farmers with 50 to 100 acres who continually battled to survive. The strong farmers lived comfortably, were good businessmen and were able to watch continually over their workers and tenants and thus improve the land (which some strong farmers held for life). And as the 19th century dawned the graziers in Meath were doing remarkably well. In 1802 farms of over 600 acres could provide without the attendance of the holders enough profits to keep a gentlemen in grand style, due primarily to the increased value of land and stock. As Thompson observes, a former grazier could make more money by subletting the land, previously held by one person, rather than by grazing it, and he would not have to provide the capital outlay for the stock (Thompson 1802:84). Thus, in Meath, the small farmer of 100 acres, the strong farmer of 300 acres and the grazier of 600 or more could all make a profit, which enabled them to control tenants and to improve or consolidate their social standing. The lessors of these lands "formed, like the middlemen,

a class of some affluence and frequently of considerable pretensions" (Johnston 1974:89).

In this era of strong farmers and graziers, paradoxically, Meath was one of the primary producers of grain in Leinster province, second only to Kildare. In the latter half of the 18th century prices for Irish wheat rose sharply. The counties around Dublin supplied the city with its grain. In the 1750s half the wheat consumed in the city came from the Irish countryside; by 1800 all but 10% was home grown (Cullen 1972: 70). Although Thompson thought that grazing was both more profitable in the long run and more suitable to the lifestyle of gentlemen since it allowed for more free time, he noted the sharp increase in production and profit within the tillage trade in the country. He believed that the state of husbandry had improved remarkably in the last decade of the century because of premiums paid by the Royal Dublin Society to support tillage, the increases in the population of both the countryside and the city, which created a demand for land, a rise in rents and a demand for more food, and the number of gentlemen of property who made agriculture their chief study in practice and theory (Thompson 1802:140). In Meath the areas of small farm and peasant tillage were in the western and northern parts of the county, on the rockier and wetter lands, whereas the strong farmers and estates raising grain were situated east and south of the Boyne, from Navan along the river to Drogheda, and southeast from the county town to the sea, or east Meath. In fact, the first major industrial building in Ireland was erected in 1767 at Slane, on the Boyne midway between Navan and Drogheda. This grain mill cost £20,000, but it turned a handsome profit as it bought grain from local farmers for cash,

stored it, kiln dried it, and then sold the flour (Cullen 1972:923). This local increase in the production of and trade in grain was largely due to the new Corn Laws, sponsored by John Foster, a gentlemen farmer from the Slane area, in the Irish House of Commons. As Thompson concluded, passage of the corn laws "insured a constant and regular demand for corn" and induced many farmers to "break up and turn into tillage, large tracts of ground" (Thompson 1802:207).

But the production and utilization of corn depended on access to markets in order to ensure maintenance of high price levels. Thus a network of internal roadways and waterways developed in the later years of the 18th century. The coach road between Navan and Dublin was built in 1729 and its northern extensions to Kells and Nobber were finished by 1733. A canal beside the Boyne between Navan and Drogheda was begun in 1756 and completed in 1800. Grain, coal and wool quickly became the major products transported by road and canal. And as rural production of tillage and wool was revitalized by increased demand, new legislation and improvements in transportation, a better internal marketing system quickly gave new life to a number of provincial towns. In Meath, Kells and Trim became the market towns for north and south Meath respectively (Lynagh 1968:6,12; Cullen 1972:86-87).

Tillage was labor intensive, however, and demanded both annual and seasonal attention. Much of the north, west and south of Meath was subdivided into thousands of subsistence plots: a cabin and a patch of land, often an acre, to support a family, a cow, pigs and potatoes. Many of the large estates in these parts of the county did not have the best land, and in some cases they were not actively grazed by gentlemen

farmers. This was common in the wet, rocky parts of Meath near the Cavan and Monaghan borders. Many of the great estates in the rest of the county kept their own cottiers, who supplied most of the labor needed annually. Thompson believed that these cottiers who were the direct tenants of gentlemen fared better than did their counterparts who rented from middlemen; although the mud cabins of the former lacked raised floors, lofts, windows and space, they were at least water proof. Many landlords (especially those who were themselves present on the estate) provided a garden and out-houses for all cottages rented. These cottiers on the estates lived in considerably better conditions than many who lived on crowded holdings and commonages elsewhere.

Much of the labor needed seasonally on farms and estates in Meath for intensive or extensive agriculture was supplied by the cottiers and the small farming families of north Meath and beyond, in Ulster. The money they were paid for their labor in the warm months of the year was often the only cash they could raise to pay their own rent or, in the case of the small farmers, to maintain or replace stock or grain crops on their own holdings. North Meath itself was a grain growing area whose farms were continually subdivided to accomodate its rising population. These small farms were subsistence, peasant holdings. The farms in the rest of Meath that grew grain for the market were divided only reluctantly by their holders. As Thompson noted in his analysis of county agriculture, farms of at least 50 to 100 acres were needed to make agriculture a viable business and way of life for a family, if this "common" farmer was "sober and industrious" (Thompson 1802:83). The small subsistence farmers in north Meath utilized a combination of grain, pigs, dairy-

ing and outside employment to survive, often on farms of 5 acres or less. Many of the cottiers and laborers further north were not as lucky. Migration to Meath in the spring and summer was an annual exercise for Ulster people from the middle of the 18th century. Even north Meath farmers went further south in the county to work at harvesting and haycutting on the strong farms or estates. This off-farm employment was to many the most remunerative part of their annual cycle. "Hence the importance of migration to many of them: after saving the rich harvest of co. Meath they returned to save their own meagre one" (Cullen 1972:80).

Many of the subsistence farms and cottier holdings in north Meath and in the southern counties of Ulster that border Meath had another important source of outside income so necessary for their survival. A cottage industry in the production of flax and wool flourished among the small farmers and cottiers in Meath in this period. Combing, spinning and weaving by women in cottages throughout the north and west of the county and in neighboring parts of Ulster kept households alive in the later 18th century, especially when seasonal employment was difficult to find on the estates further south and east. Flax was an especially important crop for the smallholder or cottier, who usually cultivated up to an acre for home use and for sale. Thompson judged that the best flax and linen could be found in the markets at Kells and Oldcastle, along the Cavan border. Nor coincidentally, these were the market towns for those areas of the county most overcrowded, where farms were frequently subdivided. A steadily rising population put greater demand on the land, but

also supplied the labor that enabled certain families to adapt to the increasing demand for cottage manufacture.

Whenever a cottager, who has family principally of girls, is able to sow flax, he endeavors to do it...(it) is a great source of profit, as every individual of his family may be employed in the different branches of its manufacture, and there is a ready and continual demand for the produce of their labour. He generally sells the finer yarn at market, and manufactures the coarser parts for his domestic purposes. (Thompson 1802:174).

Those small farmers who could not afford to allocate some of their holding to flax often rented some land at the high rate of £6 an acre in order to take advantage of the good prices for flax and linen that held into the early 1800s.

Thus, in Meath at 1800 and after a large concentration of good-sized farms engaged in mixed production with emphasis on either cereal crops or grazing, and were farmed by the original grantee, his agent or the immediate tenant. Unlike farms in much of the rest of Ireland, Meath farms, except in some parts of the north, west and south of the county, were not greatly subdivided. Even Thompson, a confirmed believer in the economic and social benefits of grazing, stated that tillage farms should be run by the original grantee or a man of standing and should not be subdivided. Citing the example of a Navan farmer with 1,000 acres under plow, he lauded the extensive tillage farmer who managed his capital better, employed more of the laboring peasantry, contributed more to the increase in population, and left the farm in better condition than did his smaller neighbors (Thompson 1802:80). It is in this era, then, that Meath began to earn the reputation, and rightly, of having the biggest farms and the richest farmers in the country.

In the early 1800s Meath's association with fattening cattle was also established. Although tillage was highly profitable, especially because of the new canal to Drogheda and the greater demand for corn in Dublin, Meath landholders very early began to consolidate their farms. In the years before Waterloo Meath was famous for its cattle, although it also enjoyed a reputation for excellent grain production. The move to tillage was indeed tempting to the strong farmer and grazier of the time. Prices had risen steadily to the end of the century and with the exception of a two-year famine production had keep up commensurately. The canal to Drogheda brought grain quickly and cheaply to the market paying the highest price in the region (Thompson believed that Drogheda was "the best corn market in the kingdom"). The waterway was then used to bring back lime to fertilize the land for the following season. Earlier, over three quarters of the county had been under grass, but by 1802 40% of it was being tilled. With the passage of the Foster Corn Laws (coincidentally John Foster's Slane farm was close to the canal) the profitability of grain production in Meath seemed assured, and the change from extensive to intensive farming on many estates seemed certain.

Yet Meath farmers continued to fatten cattle. Prices for beef also rose during the French wars, reaching their highest level ever in the first years of the century. In grazing capital investment, although initially high, is lower than in tillage, and grazed land is not as open, in Thompson's word, to "peculation". The grazier need not employ many men or overseers, nor need he deal so often with outside suppliers of agricultural replacement products. Although profit per acre is less when land is under grass, the grazier need not worry about the industry or

expense of laborers or draft animals, as a husbandman must. But concerns with capital investment and profit alone did not increase Meath farmers' reliance on grazing. As Thompson suggests, farmers' continuing with cattle grazing may be as much motivated by social or class considerations as by economic ones. The constant attention a tillage farm requires "...renders it an unfit occupation for a gentleman, whose property enables him to live more at ease, and who could not, if he would, or would not, if he could, pay that attention requisite to make the most of a plough farm" (Thompson 1802:104).

Ultimately, Thompson believes that the Meath land is simply too good to be employed in any other way than in fattening livestock. It is in the early 1800s that the pattern emerges in which Meath becomes the terminus of an internal network of cattle trading in Ireland where beef is fattened before its consumption or export, a role it has played up to the present. In 1802 Meath was

...more a feeding than a breeding or rearing country; the lands being generally too valuable to be employed for the latter purpose, the graziers are under the necessity of going to other parts of the kingdom for the major part of the cattle fatted by them (Thompson 1802:218).

Thus, store cattle were bought at fairs on Connaught and Munster and were fattened over the spring and summer to be sold before the onset of cold weather (few were kept over winter). Fat beef was sold to buyers from the north of Ireland for consumption in the growing cities or to be preserved in barrels for the navy, to Dublin merchants for home consumption and to English agents who had cattle exported and then driven into different parts of Britain. And as the industrial revolution spread throughout England, Meath's role as beef supplier to the cities of

Britain was established. Grazing became the primary focus of Meath's economy.

Grazing, however, was labor extensive, and as it grew in importance within the county, it seriously threatened the livelihood of many families from north Meath who had relied on seasonal employment in harvesting. The "regional" differences within Meath had long been clear "...where a growing contrast existed in the pre-Famine decades between the prosperous small holding regions supported by textiles in the north of the county and the region shared between larger farmers and a deteriorating proletariat in the countryside and in market towns such as Kells farther to the south" (Cullen 1972:111). By the 1820s, however, these small holders in Meath not only were losing seasonal employment on estates but were also suffering because of industrialization. The cities of Ulster, most notably Belfast, introduced the power spinning of flax for linen, thereby forcing many local peasants into the cities to work as weavers. The cotton industry in Ulster was destroyed by English competition, dumping thousands of specialists on the labor market. The rural weavers could not compete. As the linen and woollen industries became established in Ulster many of the north Meath smallholders failed and became cottiers or landless laborers, living on commonages or in the county towns. As the population continued to grow into the 1840s and domestic industry declined, there were significant changes in the importance of county market towns. In Meath, Navan, because of its central geographic position, its location on county and national roads as well as on the Boyne canal, and its access to waterpower, attracted the regional merchants and administrators who came out from Dublin to serve the

county. As Navan grew in political, economic and social importance, its chief county rivals—Trim, Kells and Athboy—stagnated (Cullen 1972:120-121).

In the 18th century Navan was very much a town of the Protestant ascendancy. It had a population of 2,500 with most of its land and property owned by two families that also had considerable holdings in the countryside. These families regularly sent one of their members to represent the town in the Dublin parliament. The Navan town corporation "was composed of long established Protestant landowners and middlemen, some owning estates in the area, others leasing property and land from the principal local landlords" (Connell 1978:5). Their interests and those of the town revolved around agricultural production, and did so until the close of the 18th century, when high prices for corn, the opening of the Boyne canal and the repeal of the penal laws gave new life to a commercial, largely Catholic middle class. By 1800 the economic and political leadership in the town changed, if only slightly, due to the influence of Catholic clerics who "led the Catholics of Navan out of the Penal Days to eventual control of the town to which their numbers and prosperity rightly entitled them" (Rice 1981a).

Laboring people and small farmers, however, were leaving the land during this period. By the 1820s Navan's population had risen to 3,500. Most men were employed in the provisions trade, crafts and mills (flax, flour and paper) and the distillery. Navan women were doing the same thing that they had done before in their country cabins and hovels, home spinning and weaving of linen and sacking. But the same market forces that had ruined cottage industries in most of the countryside were

beginning to affect those who had attempted to continue them in the towns. As the tillage demand for labor declined in the county, Navan's streets and back lanes became overcrowded, filthy and disease-ridden. As a British traveller melodramatically stated regarding Meath:

The towns, into which the poor have been driven, are thronged with squalid countenances; starvation stalks at noon day through their streets; and perhaps in no part of the world could be found so much wretchedness 'huddled' together into an equal space, as the tourist may note in the single town of Navan (Hall 1842:373).

Most of these new urban inhabitants were relatively unskilled agricultural laborers, who added to an already large number of unemployed workers. And as the estates around Navan turned increasingly to grazing there were no prospects for employment for more and more people. As the textile trade declined locally, Navan laborers depended almost entirely on seasonal farm work and on charity. In 1831 almost half the workers in Navan were engaged in agricultural work while fewer than one-quarter worked in manufacturing (as compared with almost 43% of the workforce ten years previously). Birth rates and immigration rates continued to rise, further exacerbating the employment, housing and health problems of the town. In the generation before the Great Famine, Navan's population almost doubled, reaching 6,000 in 1846. To most landlords, still Protestant and absentees, overcrowding in itself was of little concern. On one ten-acre parcel which the Russell family (a member of which, Lord John Russell, became Prime Minister during the Famine) had rented in town to a Rev. A. Hamilton for £43 a year, 34 tenants paid £100 to the Reverend for its use. These 34 tenants had 47 sub-tenants, who, in turn, housed many of Navan's immigrants. Almost 500 people lived on the ten acres, surviving on outdoor relief from the town workhouse, begging and seasonal

jobs. Quarters were so crowded that a constable reported that seven families were living in one room (Rice 1981b; Connell 1978:8,18). The Russells later bought out the Rev. Hamilton, evicted many of the tenants, shortened leases and increased rents—a process what was common in the countryside. One obsever in Navan just before the Famine saw very few small farms on what was primarily pasture land, and he concluded that this absence was the result of concerted efforts: "The policy of the 'graziers' has been, for a long time, to devote the produce of the soil to raising cattle, and the 'clearing of the estates' in Meath, therefore, has been proceeding at a very disastrous rate" (Hall 1842:373). Those tenants and laborers who remained in the country had to work an any available jobs on the tillage and beef estates in order to survive. In one case in the 1830s, as recorded in a Meath estate's papers, a tenant in return for a cabin, garden and less than one and a half acres of potato group had to pay 85.5 days of his own labor, an indeterminate number of days of his wife's and children's labor (depending on the landlord's needs), ten stone of potatoes (140 lbs), nine turkeys, and almost £9 in cash (the money earned throught the sale of pork products, odd jobs and cottage handicrafts) (Conway 1957).

Meath laborers, cottiers and the smallest of farmers, like those in the rest of the country, were able to subsist on the potato. When the blight hit, the potatoes died, but not as many Meath people died as in other parts of Ireland. Meath agriculture had already forced many people off the land. Although conditions were terrible in the towns of Meath and in those districts that had continued to subdivide holdings throughout the 19th century, agriculture changed little during the Famine

years. To the graziers, strong farmers and landholding gentry of Meath, the Famine put a great strain on their pocketbooks, because they had to support the county workhouses and fever hospitals, but it also did a great deal to free many tracts of land from what had become decidedly uneconomic and unprofitable groups of squatters and tenants.

Thus, by 1850, Meath had changed little in terms of agricultural production. Although 31% of Meath land was still under crops, tillage was declining in favor of dairying (in the areas around Dublin) and of beef grazing. Emigration from Meath to Irish cities, Britain, America and Argentina greatly increased in the latter half of the century. Meath was representative of the rich counties of Leinster which had been profitable corn growing areas but which now became excellent grazing ones. The structure of agriculture changed little in Meath before passage of the Land Acts. For the grazier and large landowners, "Consolidation was secondary to intensive stockraising as a path to capitalist agriculture" (Gibbon and Curtin 1979:442).

Meath was also the clearest example within Ireland of the success of landlordism, in which the political and economic control by the landed classes made both agriculture and political administration relatively efficient and orderly. Meath, like other parts of eastern Leinster, was characterized by a high ratio of resident proprietors, many very strong tenant farmers and graziers, a profitable market economy, and a diverse and rich cultural life in the countryside, towns and neighboring Dublin. Meath was at the very core of what itself was the central area of pastoral agriculture in the country, and it has remained there for over a hundred years. The best fattening land in Ireland since before the

Famine has been the sharply defined plains in eastern Leinster, south of Ulster and north of the grain growing areas of Kildare and Laois. Meath's role as a fattening area within the internal cattle trade (a pattern of agriculture that many historians had assumed was a result of the Famine but which has existed since the 18th century) became even more significant, as tillage production fell following decreasing prices, as the Boyne canal lost its importance as a means of inland transport, as Drogheda declined as a marketing and industrial center, and as Irish railways began to reach out to the whole country. In the later years of the 19th century, at the inception of modern Irish political economy, the strong farmers, landed gentry, graziers and merchants depended on one principal product--beef (Jones Hughes 1965:87-92; Kennedy 1981:185-193; Freeman 1972:274).

Grazing agriculture often does not demand on-farm management, or so thought many of the Irish landowners in this period. Although absentee landlordism was generally common, there was a remarkably high incidence of landlord presence in Meath, at least part of the year, as witnessed by the many estate houses throughout the county. Because of family or class tradition and proximity of Dublin, the gentry of Meath often had close personal contact with their rural land and employees, while they maintained homes and social contacts both in Dublin and in London. Some who were residents, however, did not take an active interest in their land as a productive enterprise. They kept most of their estates intact, but gave them to agents, bailiffs or managers, either to administer in their name to let out to reliable tenants. Although many primary landlords took an active interest in their own grazing lands, Meath became famous in the

fact and fancy of Irish history for its large tenant farmers. And in Meath 100 years ago the large farmer was usually a grazier.

Graziers bought cattle of one or two years old, usually born and reared in the West of Ireland, and fattened them for a summer or a year to be sold to the market to be slaughtered in Ireland or Britain.⁸ In the second half of the 19th century few Irish graziers were themselves born on their grazing land. Most were local men who had accumulated wealth through commerce, the professions, agriculture or estate management, and who rented large estates but did not sublet much of their holding. A number were former estate agents or middlemen, while other graziers acquired their capital in town commerce and industry. Although this was not common in Meath, many graziers elsewhere came from Britain and established their estates in Ireland as business ventures. The success of graziers' investments and livelihoods depended on their securing long leases at a good rate, conditions that were not difficult to find in 1800 but which became exceedingly rare later. The average size of their holdings in Ireland was probably between 400 and 600 acres, but there were distinct social gradations within the "class" of "grazier". "The large grazier with over 1000 acres differed from the grazier with 200 acres in terms of wealth, resources and status "(Jones 1977:4).

The grazier with sizable holdings who was not related to, or part of, the gentry could emulate his social betters, and he could usually afford comforts equal to those enjoyed by his more aristocratic neighbors. These graziers' families might not have a long genealogy, but they had enough money to ensure that the lack did not matter. To their

own tenants, nearby townspeople, and farming neighbors, the graziers were the leading figures of local society. They, after all, were rich, educated, powerful and present. As land was increasingly controlled by such graziers, they rose to the top of rural Irish, Leinster, and Meath polity and economy. The gentry, of course, were still at the apex of Irish social and cultural life, but the graziers formed a new and vital commercial and agricultural elite.

Many graziers were also local businessmen or agriculturalists, and some were Catholics who were either demonstrating or winning new-found social standing. As Catholics they approached the cultural superiority of the ascendancy class, but they could never attain it, as could not the former-tenant Protestant farmers who through skill or good fortune had established themselves on the land. Their cultural model at all times, however, was the "good life" so ostentatiously led by the gentry. Hence graziers built big houses in the country and the towns, sent their children to private schools and to convents and helped to animate the cultural life of the towns and cities. In short, the graziers were an elite in the farming community who wished also to be an elite in other areas of public life but could not gain the social status of the original land-owners. As David Seth Jones concludes in his work on the graziers in the 19th century

The grazier's social rank was just below that of the professional class but distinctly above that of the trading class. The large graziers together with the professional class, land agents and minor gentry formed the solid upper middle stratum within Irish society. (Jones 1977:5).

This predominantly Catholic middle class which took root on the land has shaped Meath and rural Leinster society to the present day.

The graziers formed a commercial and farming elite whose high status depended on the beef trade. Extensive agriculture in turn demanded access to wide tracts of land. As cattle and sheep prices held (or rose between 1850-1883), evictions decreased, the supply of animals increased to meet the demand, and the graziers wanted more land. They could only obtain it from the landholders themselves. Thus the middle class graziers, who had aped the culture of the gentry, began to turn against them politically in order to gain economic advantages. As the laborers, peasants, smallholders and mixed farming tenants began to agitate against the landlords and supported the National Land League of Davitt and the Irish Party of Parnell, so too did many graziers. In fact, graziers were often at the forefront of both movements. In Meath this created political allegiances and affiliations that have survived within the Irish party system to the present. As the Land Movement enjoyed their initial successes, which eventually led to the Land Acts of the 1880s, more and more graziers supported it both politically and financially. It was in the graziers' interests to weaken the landlords' economic ties to their estates, if they could not physically remove the latter from their land. The surest tactic was to throw in their lot with the militant farmer and laborer. By doing so, they increased their political and social standing in the local community (so important within the changing electoral system), staved off any agitation that might be directed at the graziers' landed enterprises, and further isolated those members of the gentry who feared that Ireland was no longer profitable nor safe.

In Meath both the grazier and the resident landlord used most of the county's acreage in 1879. In a catalogue of great landowners from the whole of Great Britain compiled originally at the behest of Westminster to determine acreage, ownership and the value of land for taxes, 88 Meath estates occupied over half the area of the county (Wilson 1980). The 88 landowners listed possessed 283,569 acres, which was half of the inhabitable territory of Meath, 567,018 acres (excluding 12,843 acres of water and forested plantation). If the 22,849 acres of roads and fences were deleted from the county's acreage, then the major landholders would have controlled an even higher percentage of the total. It must be noted here, however, that in the Irish returns to Parliament on landownership, not all "owners" were solely that. The lessors of land for 99 years or more were special cases in Ireland and were entered in the Irish returns as "owners". Therefore, the figures presented in the 1879 lists for Irish landowners are the minimum. Many landowners who granted long leases would not have that land registered in their own names. In one instance the author of the study, John Bateman, knew of 11 people who rented land from the same landlord, so that only half his acreage was recorded under his own name. The Meath figures, then, represent the lower limits to land ownership by the big proprietors. If the holdings of cognates, affines and 99 year leases were added to the totals, the acreage owned by a small number of families in 1879 Meath would increase radically. It would be safe to say, however, that most of these recorded 88 estates were grazed; moreover, most of the largest estates were not those of graziers who had recently come to power, wealth or importance,

but were those of the members of the Ascendancy whose families had been in Meath for hundreds of years.

Of the fifteen largest landholders in Meath in 1879, all were descendants of members of the Protestant Ascendancy, and all were manifestly British in politics, culture and outlook. Together they owned at least 149,857 acres or 26.4% of the county, and most gave their primary address as Meath. Most of the 88 proprietors listed had estates elsewhere in Britain or Ireland, but over two-thirds of those with estates over 3,000 acres in Meath listed it as their home county. Some of these major handholders had no other land outside Meath (e.g., John Nicholson of Kells and Robert Fowler of Enfield), but other held most of their land outside the county (e.g., the Marquis Conyngham had 7,000 acres in Meath at Slane, and 166,000 acres in England and elsewhere in Ireland, 122,000 of them in Donegal alone). Most (96%) of those Meath landholders with 1,000 acres or less gave their home address outside Meath. This suggests that by the late 19th century those members of the Ascendancy still flourishing in Meath had more than an economic interest in Meath. The Royal County was their home as well as their livelihood. The smaller estates, whether owned or rented, were either the remnants of larger old estates that for various reasons had shrunk to their present sizes, or they were new estates cut from the old to accommodate the post-Famine agricultural entrepreneurs, who knew that grass and beef meant profit on the British market (Wilson 1980; Bateman 1883).

In the 1880s this desire for profit was enough to motivate the rural middle class grazier to unite with agricultural laborers and small tenants in opposition to the owners of the biggest estates. It became increasingly clear, however, after the Land Act of 1881 that the interests of the tenant farmer and of the grazier were not identical. Land League agitation had forced many landlords to forego extended leases and to restrict the time to 11 months, or conacre. This prevented any tenant from laying claim to estate land, a serious threat as tenant ownership became the land movement's goal. Graziers, of course, depended on extended leases, something to which landlords, solicitors and estate agents were opposed. Furthermore, new leases of 30 years' duration included a covenant or insurance against expression of tenant rights which the lessee had to sign. Such covenants forbade tillage or any breaking of land, subletting or subdivision or transfer of possession of the plot. This attempt to undercut the move to owner occupation also cut at graziers' livelihoods. They were now prevented from producing their own fodder or green crops for winter and stall feed, and they had to purchase hay and feed from neighboring farms. This constraint forced many graziers to sell most of their stock before winter, when prices and profits were lowest. Thus, in the 1880s, when the Land Movement adopted tenant ownership as its slogan, the graziers, who up to then had supported the Movement as a way to weaken the landlords financially and politically, were forced to oppose many of the "radical" demands of the farmers (Jones 1978:57-70).

Earlier the graziers could and perhaps should have turned to the gentry as allies, but by 1900 it was already too late. The Protestant Ascendancy was no longer in control. Falling prices linked to international competition reduced the profitability of huge estates. The Tory and the Liberal governments had passed land acts which guaranteed a good price for land, which did not give the return it had in times past, and which was surrounded by hostile tenants and neighbors who rejected the gentry as alien. As the Gaelic revival took hold in politics, sports, literature, drama and art, the remnants of the gentry know that their time of decision had come. In the Ireland of 1900, the Ascendancy class had functionally lost political power both nationally and locally as the Catholic middle and working classes controlled the vote and the Irish party in Westminster. In Meath the Local Government Act of 1898 fatally eroded the formal political standing of the old estate people. Even Meath men of property and breeding had to be avowed nationalists to get elected to local government authorities. Within a generation after Bateman's listing of great landowners in Ireland, the Meath Ascendancy opted to sell much of their land to the Land Commission, and most left the county never to return. Under the 1913 Land Act, 5,736 applications were made to the Land Commission in Meath alone, for monetary advances totalling £4,069,699 in respect of 337 estates (Meath Herald 29 April 1911). Some landlords stayed, but on estates that for economic and political reasons they were forced to divide (e.g., the Conynghams of Slane are now living on 1,000 acres). In both Leinster and Meath, the period from 1875 to 1925 saw the demise of the Great Estates as a power

to be reckoned with.

The graziers, thus, were increasingly isolated in the political and economic troubles before World War I. As the great landlords began to comply with the requests of the Land Commission, the Catholic tenantry turned their attention to their Catholic and Protestant grazing neighbors, who were occupying large areas of pasture land. Threats, strikes and physical violence increased steadily until the outbreak of the Ranch War, which lasted from 1906-1908. It began in Co. Westmeath near the Meath border and consisted of theft, dispersal and killing of cattle on large estates and on the land or tenants who did not actively oppose the graziers. There were also scattered acts of violence against the graziers themselves. This war spread across the grazing lands of the central plain, from east Galway to the eastern coast of Leinster, but no county was more caught up in it than Meath. Relative to human population, the highest incidence of cattle stampedes or cattle drives in Ireland was in Meath, the next in Westmeath. The people taking part in such action were the small tenant farmers and not those farmers with sizable acreages. According to police records, 11.5% of those farmers arrested for Land League violence in 1881 held farms of over 100 acres, whereas in 1891 the percentage had dropped to 4.7%. By the early 1900s the smallest tenants were determined to get their own piece of land, and their grazier neighbors were the appropriate targets (Jones 1978:24-86).

In Meath the opposition to the graziers was centered in the United Irish League, the national successor to the Land League. The UIL held regular meetings to discuss agitation tactics, the organization's role within party politics at the state and local levels, and suitable victims

on local estates. The UIL was organized and run by middle class townspeople and farmers, but its main supporters in Meath were the poor tenants who wanted their own land. Although radical in intent, its politics were conservative, being pro-Home Rule and decidedly anti-Sinn Fein.

By 1908 the ranches of north Meath were hardest hit by violence. On one holding in Carlanstown north of Kells, that of a Major Dyas who was an absentee grazier, a band of "emergency men" with police escort had to be sent by the Dublin solicitors who ran the estate to cut 100 acres of meadow (Meath Chronicle 8 August 1908). Local tenants and laborers refused to do the job and made it difficult for anyone else to work. The goal of the UIL was a simple one—to break up the ranches of Meath. By the time of the Great War they had succeeded.

The graziers, like the landlords before them, had two basic choices. Up to 1885 the graziers had been allied with the peasant class and agrarian reform because of their interest in securing the free sale of tenants' rights to land. When, in the period 1885-1914, the goal of transfer of tenant's rights led to subdivision of estates and tenant ownership, the graziers either had to sell their land, break their leases and leave, or they had to themselves retain enough land to maintain their high status locally and nationally, yet try to be seen as one with the people. Most of these graziers who were British by birth or by tradition chose to leave. However, many of the graziers were Catholic, Irish born and educated, and native to the locality in which they had their estates. They flocked to the support of the UIL and Home Rule Party. The strong farmer advocated nationalist causes in order to

minimize opposition against him, to maintain his social and economic standing in the community, and to carve out a place for himself in the new politics of Local Government and the increasingly nationalist State Government. Some of these graziers sold land to the Land Commission, some divided up parcels among relatives, while others actively worked against the members of the Ascendancy who still held land, thereby making themselves popular among both the nationalists and the poorest farmers (who were often one and the same).

As the new Irish Free State was created, the Big Men of Meath were firmly established. Most of the Great Landlords and graziers had gone. The strong farmers who had relied on mixed farming since before the Famine, on acreages of 50 to 100 acres, were able to add to their holdings in the mass land sales of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Their farm enterprises had slowly turned to fattening beef as the mainstay. As the largely Catholic grazier class diminished both in numbers and size of holdings its members merged with the middle range of tenants who had been actively working their lands for over a hundred years.

Thus the strong farmers or Big Men of Meath today are not farmers of thousands of acres, but of hundreds. They are not primarily of the Ascendancy, but of the middle class tenantry who became owner occupiers. They are not absentees, but live in farmhouses that are usually situated on their greatest stretch of contiguous fields. They rarely practice only one type of farming. Although beef and dairying are still the two major farm enterprises, all farms grow combinations of cereal, root and clover crop, and they often have sheep grazing beside cattle. They are

indeed farmers of means, but their means are only great relative to other owner-occupied farms in Leinster and in the rest of Ireland. They live in a county with traditions of wealth and power, but the wealth and power of the farmers of Meath today are directly linked to the development of the state of the Republic of Ireland. For the last 80 years the farmers of Meath with large acreages (relative to the new scale of owner occupation) have constituted the new agricultural and political elite—holding positions of pre-eminence that have mirrored the economic and political fortunes of the country as a whole. The strong farmers of Meath are justly famous throughout Ireland for their farms, their wealth and their way of life, but their importance and role in the economy of the country are in no small way due to their part in the local and national political systems. Nowhere are the Big Men of Meath more influential than in the small-scale politics of the county and in the great halls of the Irish parliament.

FOOTNOTES

8

Much of this general discussion of graziers borrows from the only work (Jones 1977) that has specifically dealt with this group of agriculturalists so important in Irish history, and whom historians suggest must be studied to fully understand modern Irish history. However, at least for Meath, I do not think that all graziers can be considered simple capitalists for whom "land was simply an instrument of monetary gain and an outlet for capital investment" (Jones 1977:2). Many graziers used land to improve their social standing, to be "progressive" or to mimic the actions of their neighbors. The continuity that many families have enjoyed on Meath estates--families who would have qualified, then and now, as "graziers"--suggests a much more basic, traditional, association with a way of life than Jones's economic argument allows.

CHAPTER IV

Irish Politics and Agriculture, 1923-1973

A relative state of equilibrium among tillage, dairying and beef production existed at the beginning of the Irish Free State, reflecting an internal agricultural structure that had been developing in Ireland for almost a century.⁹ The new state's reliance on agricultural exports persisted up to the 1970s. With the exception of the "emergency" years of World War II, Ireland's economy has been predominantly dependent upon the export of dairy products, beef and livestock. The center for the last two commodities in Ireland has been Leinster province, with Meath the principal beef-fattening county in the country. Because of this important place in the structure of the national economy, the Meath farmers with sizeable acreages have played an extremely important part in Irish politics at both the local and national levels. The influential role of large farmers within the major political parties of Ireland has persisted up to the present. But when Ireland's entrance into the European Communities changed that country's relationship with her trading partners, the internal structure of Irish agriculture was rearranged. This, in turn, resulted in a transformation of the role of farmers within the Irish political system. The relationship between farmers and politicians changed substantially in Meath by the late 1970s. To fully appreciate these changes, one must understand the roles agriculture and farmers have played both in national policy and in the organization and goals of the major political parties since the inception of the state.

Most of the supporters of the Treaty with Britain who had been members of Sinn Fein in Dail Eireann (the Lower House, legislative body of the Irish parliament) formed the new governing political party of the Irish Free State in April 1923. Cumann na nGaedheal (Community of Irishmen) remained in power for ten years, following conservative economic and political policies that were so successful that the new state was on very solid ground when a new party came to power in the Dail of 1932. And it was in the 1930s that the primary organizational and ideological split occurred between the two major Irish parties of this century, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael. This split was based in large part on the conflicting opinions regarding the future of the Irish state, which were translated into violence during the civil war.

When Cumann na nGaedheal took power in the Dail it was far from a majority party. The anti-Treatyites won 44 of 153 Dail seats, but they refused to take them in protest against an assembly they considered illegal. Three other political groups made sizeable inroads at the first post-civil war election: Independents (16 seats), the Farmers Party (15) and the Labour Party (14). The remaining 63 members belonged to Cumann na nGaedheal, and with the support of the Farmers and some independents, they formed the new government and continued to form the government through the next three elections.

Cumann na nGaedheal was not simply a party organized around those favorable to the Treaty, nor was it a catch-all party for all those opposed to the anti-Treaty Sinn Fein. Its goal was "...also to bring together men of different classes, origins and creeds who were prepared to contribute to the building of the new state within the framework of the

Constitution as approved in October 1922 (Lyons 1973:484-485). The tasks that awaited the fledgling government were sizable indeed: the reconstruction of government, the establishment of the Free State as a member nation of the Commonwealth, and the regeneration of the Irish economy (Lyons 1973:485-486). In subsequent months and years the party did quite well. It streamlined the administration of the country at both the local and national levels. It settled the question of the exact borders between the Free State and Northern Ireland. And the party began slow but steady progress toward gaining equal rights for Ireland within the Commonwealth. But one of its most important achievements, and one that would become one of the major ideological disputes in the two-party system that was to develop, was its economic policy which, in fact, revolved around its agricultural policy.

William Cosgrave, leader of Cumann na nGaedheal and head of the first Free State government, backed wholeheartedly a policy of free trade—a policy which benefited the agricultural status quo. Most of the support for his party in the early 1920s came from those who had most to lose from continued hostilities with and separation from Britain: the propertied classes, the large farmers, the professionals, and tradesmen whose livelihoods were tied to the first two groups. And it was these groups who demanded aid in getting the economy back on its feet after the disturbances of the previous years. Prices had fallen after 1920, forcing many farmers who had borrowed heavily into bankruptcy. Thus, agricultural credit was non-existent. The cooperative movement had been set back through both a loss of cooperative spirit, when money was more quickly made by individuals, and the destruction of a number of

creameries in the Wars of Independence. The British market had also accepted all Irish products regardless of quality throughout the war years. As a result Irish creamery products had declined in quality. When the British market opened up after the War of Independence Irish products had to compete against the butter of Denmark and New Zealand and the eggs of Poland and China. It was clear to Cosgrave and the new government that the needs of agriculture were their first priority (Meenan 1967:71; 1979:35; Murphy 1975:64).

Cosgrave also realized that the interests of agriculture were not just the interests of those groups who supported his party. The Ireland of the 1920s was most definitely a rural society. The 1926 Census records that 61% of the population lived outside of towns and villages, with 53% of those employed in the state working in farming. Most farmers were owner-occupiers who used family labor on the farm. Only 20% of the farmers employed workers from off their farms. By 1929 over 97% of Irish farmers owned the land they worked, as compared to 3% in 1870. Most rural dwellers still depended on small and medium sized farms, with over half the agricultural workforce living and toiling on farms of 50 acres and less (Brown 1981:18-19; Rumpf and Hepburn 1977:227). And although the size of most farms was small, the average holding had increased over the years of the Land Acts, with many of the largest estates being subdivided among tenants. The regional structure of landholding remained relatively stable, however, as the largest owner-occupied farms in the country centered in the eastern plains of Leinster. Given this great number of agricultural workers, Cosgrave did not want to enter on a course which would push any of them into the hands of his political

enemy, Eamon deValera, who led the anti-Treaty opposition that refused to enter the Dail. Thus his government was for the improvement of agricultural production and profit.

The air of urgency which surrounded Cumann na nGaedheal's first attempts at bolstering agriculture was not solely a response to interest group pressure. The new government was faced with a serious shortage of capital. An agricultural depression was just drawing to a close. The 26 counties had lost the industrial zone of the country and they did not have the native supplies of fuel and raw materials to establish their own new industries. The Free State had neither an industrial tradition nor industrial environment. Those industries that existed "...were lightly scattered and deprived of the economies and mutual assistance which concentrations of individual industries are able to afford (Crotty 1966: 110). Skilled labor emigrated, while the supply of unskilled labor rose as agriculture became more labor extensive through beef production. The Cosgrave government was not prepared to introduce a protectionist policy for Irish industry by establishing tariffs on imported industrial goods. Its primary goal was the success of an agricultural policy that would expand farm exports, and it shied away from any international economic policy that might incur "foreign retaliation". "Far better, so it seemed, was it to rely upon the benefits of agricultural prosperity percolating through to the sections of the community, leading in course of time, perhaps, to a modes expansion of home industries"(Lyons 1973:600).

Free State agriculture was distinguished by its high numbers of beef

cattle and sheep and its poor utilization of labor and capital. The slow introduction of machinery and fertilizer resulted in a further displacement of workers—a situation worsened by a high birth rate. As more people left farming, the level of farm incomes rose per person, but, except in services, employment did not expand in the urban sectors. Given Cosgrave's free trade policy, industry could not expand. With agriculture tied to the demands of the British market that was now open to other countries' produce, it could not expand either. "With neither the rural nor the urban sector of the economy showing any tendency to expand, capital and labor were forced to emigrate unless they were prepared to accept very much lower rates of return" (Crotty 1966:110). In order to keep capital within the country, or to attract capital from outside the country, the level of direct taxation was kept below that of Britain.

Traditional liberal economic thinking was clearly apparent in the decision to bring the income tax down below the standard British rate, in the hope of attracting British capital, enticing rich emigrants to return, and generally encouraging private enterprise (Rumpf and Hepburn 1977:74).

In those areas vital to the new state's survival where private enterprise did not take an initiative Cosgrave's government began a policy of establishing semi-state bodies, the most important being the Shannon hydro-electric system.

The health of agriculture, then, was seen as the health of the state (a belief still common in many parts and among many people of Ireland today). Cosgrave recognized that imports were already high (35%-40% of GNP) and wanted an increase in Irish agricultural exports. Thus his government sought "...to make Irish farmers competitive by improving the

standard of their produce, if necessary by legislation aimed directly at regulating the breeding of livestock and raising the quality of dairy products" (Lyons 1973:600). Maize was imported as feed and wheat imported rather than use pasture land to grow it. All agriculture was to be geared for export with nothing protected in its own market (Meenan 1967:71). All in all, it was hoped that an expansion of farm production would raise living standards and increase domestic consumption. Farmers' incomes would rise, causing them to spend more in other sectors, thereby raising all incomes. Thus after 1921 Irish economic expansion was expected by Cumann na nGaedheal to be a product of: increased agricultural production, increased industrial production, a secondary development of agricultural expansion, and a cost-cutting government with balanced budgets (Crotty 1966:113-115).

The state immediately took a direct and decisive role in the structure of agriculture (establishing a political and economic pattern that persisted up to the 1970s) which ushered in a new era of farmer influence within the Irish political system. Government intervention in the 1920s revolved around livestock breeding, the marketing of butter and eggs, and cuts in the costs of production. It ignored subsidies, tariffs, and guaranteed prices. Throughout the 1920s Ireland's was definitely a free trade economy. A series of acts in the decade standardized quality of production and presentation for butter, meat and eggs, and eliminated the breeding of animals of indifferent strain. "The purpose of these policies was to improve the efficiency of production and marketing so that Irish farmers could sell profitably in the free and fiercely competitive British market" (Meenan 1970:94). The government also took

an active role in improving efficiency within the structure of agriculture. The Land Commission was given new rights and powers, especially over land that was untenanted or still held by both landlord and tenant. Cosgrave kept taxation of all sectors to a minimum. Technical education was expanded for farmers, under the aegis of the new Department of Agriculture. And perhaps most important of all for the farmer, the government agreed to supply loans at reasonable rates. The second great semi-state body of the Free State (after the Electricity Supply Board) thus came into existence, the Agricultural Credit Corporation (Lyons 1973:606-608; Meenan 1970:92-94).

These policies and new governmental institutions worked. By the end of the 1920s all Irish products had regained their reputation on the British market and were successfully competing against all comers. By 1929 the value of Irish exports reached £47 million, the highest such figure before 1948. The volume of exports in 1929 was not exceeded before 1960, and its value was 77% of the value of imports, a figure not again reached until the 1970s. And as agriculture improved so did some native industries, with industrial employment increasing by 5,000 (to a total of 11,000) in the 5 years up to 1931.

Cosgrave and Cumann na nGaedheal settled on an agricultural policy that benefited the economy overall in the 1920s, but one which particularly suited those interests that supported the party at the polls. As a number of authors have noted, a free trade agricultural policy favored dry cattle production over tillage and dairying, and thus favored the large farmers over the small. Although the Free State government held the interests of the farmers and the nation were identical, many groups

in the agricultural and urban sectors disagreed

while the farmer's interests might well have been best served by maximising dry cattle production, which would have afforded little employment and a low gross output, the nation's interests, under conditions of unemployment and emigration, might well have lain more in the development of dairying and tillage production, which would have afforded more employment and a higher gross output, even though the net output per acre to the farmer himself might well have been less (Crotty 1966:161).

The tensions within the Irish economy were not just those between industry and agriculture, free trade and protection, and labor and capital, but those within agriculture--between tillage and cattle rearing, labor intensive and labor extensive farms, and the small and big farmer. Cumann na nGaedheal policy supported the large farming interests, with centered in dry cattle, by not intervening in the structure of agricultural production. Rather it attempted to regulate quality and marketing. The government was not as concerned with social welfare among farmers as with their economic welfare, as it related to both the party's supporters and the free trade economy as a whole . The Minister for Agriculture under Cosgrave described his policy as "helping the farmer who helped himself and letting the rest go to the devil" (Meenan 1967:72).

Cumann na nGaedheal policy supported large farmers in other ways. They supported the Land Commission, especially in its efforts at alleviating land problems in the West and South of the country (the old Congested Districts) and in minimizing the rights of the old landlord class, but the government was slow to agree to demands to break-up larger grazing "ranches" (predominantly in the Midlands and the East) for distribution among the local landless men. "The medium-sized and larger

farmers were good friends of both the national exchequer and the governing party: it was to be expected that in such circumstances the government would put economic and political considerations above questions of broad social principle" (Rumpf and Hepburn 1977:75). The government also enabled many of the remaining Protestants to participate in government, primarily through the Seanad (the Senate, upper house of Parliament). Although their number dropped by 32% from 1911 to 1926 (8.4% of the total state population) Protestants were almost entirely pro-Treaty, -free trade and -Cumann na nGaedheal. In 1926, 28% of the farmers of over 200 acres and 18% of all professionals were Protestant. This percentage of state population lasted through the 1930s when between 20% and 25% of employers and top management in business and commerce were also Protestant. A free trade economy aided many of these people, but as political scientists are quick to point out economic motives alone do not account for electoral support. Protestant businessmen who would prefer protectionist policies had no political alternative in the Dail of the 1920s. Opposition groups were parties of special interests or almost exclusively from the left (Meenan 1970:72-73).

Cosgrave's government solidified Ireland's political independence as surely as it reinforced its economic independence. "In its economic policy the Cosgrave administration gave no indication that it wished to alter the traditional role of Ireland as the agricultural complement to industrial England" (Meenan 1970:73). The Free State continued as the junior partner in the British economy.

The Irish monetary system was firmly tied to sterling. Irish commerce continued, for the time being at least, to be conducted within the

framework of free trade, and ninety or more percent of Irish exports still looked to Britain and Northern Ireland for their market (Lyons 1973:600).

The conservatism of Cumann na nGaedheal was reflected in a sharp decline in overall antagonism toward Britain. British newspapers began replacing Irish ones, the British Legion of World War I veterans held large-scale celebrations by 1925, and the Free State army welcomed ex-British soldiers into their ranks. On the surface this conservatism seemed to bring a solidity to the political system which sustained the pro-Treaty party for quite some time (Brown 1981:13-37; Murphy 1975:64-66). This was only on the surface, however, for in the early 1930s the opposition of Eamon deValera and his splinter Sinn Fein supporters forced all political interest groups to choose either of the two major parties, both of which have governed in Ireland to the present.

DeValera and his supporters officially split from Sinn Fein and the IRA in 1926, and, after some hesitation, took their seats under the banner of their new party after the first 1927 election. Fianna Fail (Soldiers of Destiny) and deValera did well at their first election due to some ill-timed, unpopular legislation on the part of Cumann na nGaedheal on the eve of the election, the alienation of the supporters of republicanism through the enactment of severe law and order statutes, and the popular manifesto put forward by Fianna Fail which overshadowed much of the constructive work of past governments. Cumann na nGaedheal dropped from 63 to 47 seats while Fianna Fail took 44. The balance of the seats, and the fate of the government, rested with 22 Labour Party seats, 11 Farmers Party, 8 National League Party, and 21 Independents. After much debate Cosgrave was able to form a government, but under the

circumstances he called for another election at which his party took 62 seats to Finana Fail's 57 (Labour and the Farmers lost heavily while Sinn Fein and the National League dropped from national electoral importance). Through the assistance of Farmers Party and some independents, Cosgrave formed his fourth and last government in October 1927 (Manning 1972:12-14).

In 1926 Cosgrave destroyed both his own political career and that of his party when he concluded an agreement with Britain which confirmed that the Free State would pay the remainder of the land annuities left over from the land legislation of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. DeValera quickly added opposition to such payments to his party's platform. Up to this point Fianna Fail had put forward a nationalist viewpoint that reinforced Ireland's unique culture and that proposed economic self-sufficiency. From 1927 on "Fianna Fail branded its opponents as pro-British, attacked their economic policies and put forward its own attractive combination of constitutional advance and populist economic reform" (Murphy 1975:69). Fianna Fail wanted the removal of many requirements of the Treaty and the transformation of Irish agriculture. Tillage was to replace beef, to the benefit of the small farmer, while new manufacturing industries would be protected by high tariffs.

Although Fianna Fail's anti-British stance was a popular one among its republican and ex-Sinn Fein supporters, it alone could not get the votes necessary for a Dail majority. The two major parties' opposing position on the economy was the one issue—perhaps the first such issue in modern Irish politics—that divorced electoral and political support

from the issues of the Civil War. Fianna Fail initially had a tremendous urban following among the workers which weakened the Labour Party. After all, the urban working class was yet to experience the filtered-down prosperity it was supposed to from Ireland's agrocentric free trade economy. Dublin had the worst urban conditions in the country: overcrowding, high infant mortality and death rates, and chronic unemployment (Brown 1981:16). With Fianna Fail's addition of the annuity issue, however, rural electoral supports grew at the expense of all "left" and republican parties. Most tenant purchasers supported deValera and his party because "they were allowed to think that the ending of annuity payments to Britain would mean a complete wiping out of all individual obligations under the land purchase acts" (Rumpf and Hepburn 1977:102). Actually, Fianna Fail hoped to reduce the rate and keep the funds for Dail use. Rural laborers supported Fianna Fail because it, unlike the government party, was keen to divide the great "ranches" of the central plain and distribute farms among the landless.

Through 1928 Fianna Fail continued to attack the government on economic issues while it shaped its own economic program of self-sufficiency. Protective tariffs would stimulate industry while the government helped establish a merchant fleet, fishing industry and afforestation program. Fianna Fail also hoped to make public administration more efficient. In fact Ireland's internal affairs so guided Fianna Fail's actions that deValera began to soften his approach to Britain in an effort to allay the fears of those who expected a resurgence of the bitterness of the Civil War (Rumpf and Hepburn 1977:102).

Yet deValera and Fianna Fail never lessened their belief in an Irish Ireland and they consistently supported a program

...calculated to appeal to the smaller Irish farmers: a frugal Gaelic Ireland, as little dispoiled as possible by the forces of civilization, especially English civilization; a state in which there would be no rich and no poor, but rather a countryside scattered with small farmers and small industries (Rumpf and Hepburn 1977:103).

As the election of 1932 approached, the present two party split in Irish politics was taking shape. Fianna Fail had made a very successful appeal to the poorest members of the electorate, and although its reputation as the poor-man's party would not long outlast the oncoming election (as business flocked to its banner in the next protectionist decade) there were decided differences between the groups supporting the two major parties. Cumann na nGaedheal continued to champion the interests of the propertied classes of the state--large farmers, established professionals, and the leaders of commerce and industry. Fianna Fail saw itself as a party of the people, with a grassroots support and organization that, to this day, has been unrivalled in Ireland. In 1932 small farmers, shopkeepers, artisans and laborers looked to deValera to improve their economic conditions (Lyons 1973:524).

But although Cumann na nGaedheal supporters included many large farmers, both Catholic and Protestant, throughout the 1920s a large proportion of well-to-do farmers supported other political parties. In fact Cumann na nGaedheal support did not come solely from those areas where the propertied classes were based or from the wealthier urban areas. In an excellent study of voting patterns in this period, it was demonstrated that the strongholds for Cumann na nGaedheal support were in

the same western constituencies that supported Fianna Fail. The government party suffered (more so than Fianna Fail) at the hands of parties that were organized around specific economic, social or religious interests. The Labour Party was strongest in urban areas and in districts with many agricultural laborers, the Farmer's Party took root in areas of large farms, and independents did well due to a Protestant vote. "The Cumann na nGaedheal profile was essentially the negative of all these groups" (Rumpf and Hepburn 1977:81). Whenever a local party represented the specific interests of an identifiable group in a particular locale, then the issue of the Treaty was secondary. In fact, up to and including the election of 1932, the national question was only important in an electoral sense in those areas where minor or third parties did not have an organizational or ideological base (Rumpf and Hepburn 1977:75-81).

The "clear-cut" split in voter support is often considered to be a product of the Civil War. The relatively passive role of Fianna Fail and Cumann na nGaedheal in Irish politics according to the above analysis makes such conclusions suspect. Verbal contentions by Irish people today that their family always voted one party or the other, because of the Civil War, belie the fact that the choice between Fine Gael and Fianna Fail, today's two major parties, has only existed since 1932. My thesis contends that the national issue was in a great many ways a dormant issue for the electorate up to the 1930s in the face of much more pressing economic issues. And it is during the Economic War of the 1930s that 1) the two parties revitalized civil war antagonism as 2) they solidified their electoral support through 3) adherence to divergent economic programs

that 4) satisfied the needs of identifiable interest groups throughout the country. The role of the Farmers Party in the period before the 1930s supports this view.

The Farmers Party of the 1920s has been considered "the only sectional or economic interest group which succeeded in establishing its own political party and winning Dail representation" (Manning 1972:93). In fact it was the only minor party to survive from 1922 to 1932. From a highpoint of 15 seats in 1922 it slipped to four in 1932 when it merged with a new party that incorporated the interests of middle and large farmers, the National Centre Party. For its 10 years, however, the Farmers Party represented "better-off farmers" and "rural landowners" and although it supported Cumann na nGaedheal in the Dail it was not above debating such support, especially when a number of farmers felt that protectionism would be more advantageous to their businesses (Manning 1972:93-96). Its purpose as a party was to represent agricultural interests. Its decline was due to its inability to represent small farmers. Yet it was not strong in some counties that were composed of big farms, such as Meath, Dublin, Laois and Offaly. Specifically, the Farmers Party in Meath was closely allied to Cumann na nGaedheal because the economic needs of farmers in that county were being met by that party's policies. The counties where a Farmers Party grew strong were counties that had big farmers who wanted to make their wishes known at the national level because most of their fellow constituents either did not believe the government was furthering their interests or they believed the national issue to still be alive. To be precise, the Farmers Party was strong in areas that did not have a majority of well-to-do farmers and in which

Cumann na nGaedheal was not strong both ideologically and organizationally. It took a number of years before the small farmers recognized that Fianna Fail's policies were geared to their material benefit. The better educated large farmers quickly recognized the need for political lobbying to further their own interests. The creation and duration of the Farmers Party points to isolated groups' perceptions that they must organize for such representation themselves, around issues separate from the national issue. Other farmers, as in Meath, recognized that their voices could best be heard through Cumann na nGaedheal county organizations.

The Farmers Party was only a small one in the Irish parliament, however. The major third party was the Labour Party. Throughout the 1920s the Labour Party attempted to establish itself as a party anxious to improve social conditions for workers, as a party linked to a socialist ideology and progressive action. But its ability to organize locally, act as a coherent opposition in the Dail, and to attract those workers it felt were most affected by the issues it defined as crucial was limited due to national voter preoccupation with both the agricultural economy and the national issue. The Labour Party also lacked the concentrations of urban workers to make it truly a national party. It did make some inroads among agricultural workers, but Fianna Fail proved to be the party of the landless people who wanted the Irish rural dream, their own land. This highlighted the essential ideological paradox for Labour--its voters were conservative, Catholic workers who did not want to change the system, just their role within it. The party was never able to establish an ideology that reflected the specific interests of Irish workers because their interests were seldom concerned with their class

position. By 1940, under pressure from the Church, the Labour Party had to drop all reference to a "Workers' Republic" from its constitution. Ultimately, its electoral strength over the years has been due to the strength of individual personalities locally as well as certain trade union connections after 1930. When Fianna Fail proposed protectionist policies, Labour was given new hope. Perhaps, allied to Fianna Fail, it could come to power through a coalition government. Ironically, however, workers both rural and urban voted for Fianna Fail directly. Labour was never to play the pivotal role its founders had hoped for, and due to the exigencies of Irish parliamentary politics, it was only to reach power over the years through coalitions with Fine Gael in opposition to Fianna Fail (Rumpf and Hepburn 1977:81-87; Manning 1972:63-84; Lyons 1973:524-525).

In 1932 after a campaign which stressed national self-sufficiency, repudiation of debts to Britain and a protectionist policy, Fianna Fail won a resounding electoral success. Fianna Fail's 72 seats combined with Labour's seats and three independents to form a government, with Cumann na nGaedheal, the Farmers Party, the National League and some independents in a dazed, shaken opposition. DeValera immediately began to "make good" on his electoral promises. Republicans were released from prison, extremist papers began publishing again, the oath of allegiance to Britain in the Dail was abolished, the Treaty-required office of Governor General was made powerless and the army and police were left intact (against the wishes of the IRA supporters of deValera who demanded a purge of pro-Treaty people) (Murphy 1975:76). But deValera's boldest move, and

one of the most important in the development of electoral support within the Irish party system, was the cessation of payment of land and other annuities to Britain.

DeValera held the Ireland had no legal or moral obligation to pay the £5 million annually due Britain on tenant purchases made under the Land Acts and he withheld all payments. In 1932 Britain retaliated by putting special duties (20% ad valorem) on all agricultural imports from Ireland (which were primarily livestock, meat and dairy products), followed in 1934 by quota restrictions on imports of Irish fat and store cattle. Britain protected her own agriculture by restricting the import of fat cattle to 50% of the 1933 total, imposing a complete restriction on store cattle, and prohibiting the entry of Irish beef and veal. Britain also hoped to take enough in duty to equal the annuity withheld. The effect such measures had on Irish livestock and meat trades in some areas was near catastrophic. In retaliation Ireland established tariffs on British imports. But it was Ireland that suffered the heavier losses. Although it could easily find substitute imports of raw materials and manufactured goods, it was very difficult to find new export markets. The Irish standard of living plummeted as her cost of living rose. Expansion in the domestic consumption of agricultural produce helped relieve the plight of Irish farmers, especially beef farmers, but this was achieved only through a drastic cut in prices. From 1931 to 1935 the price per head of cattle was halved. By 1935 Britain had collected £10.7 million through duties, nearing the £14.5 million the Irish repudiated. The "Economic War" between Britain and Ireland quickly became expensive for Fianna Fail and the Irish people in terms of the

economy, national politics and international relations (Rumpf and Hepburn 1977:114-115; Lyons 1973:611).

Fianna Fail's trade war was also intended to help achieve agricultural and industrial self-sufficiency. Self-sufficiency was planned through the increased production of four specific foods: wheat and feeding stuffs (oats and maize), fruit, vegetables and tobacco. To do this, land had to be taken out of grass, and the numbers of cattle had to drop. The levels of production of eggs, butter and bacon would still be maintained if not expanded for both the national and international markets. Because of the need for more varied and reliable trading partners in the years of the economic war with Britain, the Fianna Fail government made the creation of new markets part of their new agriculture policy. "The fundamental aim was to redirect the economy of the country to accord with nationalist political aspirations" (Rumpf and Hepburn 1977:115). An economic dispute with Britain aided the transformation of Irish agriculture from a livestock exporter to a producer of food for the table at home. "Feeling was widespread within Fianna Fail that 'it was a damn good job that the English cattle market had gone, as it would make the farmers realise that they should take off their coats and till the land for the production of food'" (Rumpf and Hepburn 1977:115). But the farmers that Fianna Fail wanted to roll up their sleeves were those it believed had for too long paraded on their ranches in stylish tweeds--the big men, the large farmers, the "graziers".

A changeover to wheat at the expense of beef and continued support for bacon, eggs and butter were policies aimed at meeting the economic needs of the small farmers, the main political support of deValera and

his party. DeValera's dream, one that he carried with him to the end of his long political career, was a self-sufficient, free, Catholic and Gaelic nation of small independent rural producers. Policies aimed at limiting, if not destroying, the economic strength of large farmers, graziers and rural entrepreneurs were well received in those areas of predominantly small holdings and landless workers. And the small farmers consistently voiced their approval at the polls. In the West of Ireland alone Fianna Fail received over 60% of the first preference votes in the election of 1933.¹⁰

Those who worked on subsistence holdings were also delighted by the government's policy regarding land distribution, which both small farmers and Fianna Fail contended had not been a priority of the last government. In fact, the Land Commission under Cosgrave had been quick to act against small holders who did not meet their purchase payments. All this changed under Fianna Fail. Annuities were not paid to Britain but were paid to Dublin at half the rate. The Land Act of 1933 did away with Cumann na nGaedheal's policy of voluntary sale of land by large farmers and replaced it with a system of government expropriation, with payment, of any land deemed suitable (in terms of use, fertility, ownership, locale, etc.). Fianna Fail met these demands of the landless and under-employed farmers' sons who were increasingly being forced to remain in Ireland due to both the worldwide depression and the 1928 end to open immigration to the United States. From 1933 to 1951 744,000 acres were distributed among 57,700 families, as opposed to 452,000 acres among 24,000 families under Cumann na nGaedheal. Fianna Fail spent £7.6 million alone on land redistributed in 1936 (Cosgrave's government spent

£2.7 million in 1931). Fianna Fail made good on its campaign promises in the hope that its supporters would continue to trust the party in future elections. The voters did, thus establishing a tradition of parliamentary promise-making that has lasted to the present.

Government policy, therefore, favored small farmers at the expense of large ones, and was part of an overall economic plan that aimed at strengthening the country through economic growth. Its economic plan was

a serious and prolonged attempt to redress the balance between the different sectors of the economy—to free the countryside from the dominance of the cattleman, to extend the area of tillage, to develop home industries and thus provide employment for those who might otherwise be obliged to emigrate (Lyons 1973:614).

To accomplish this the government put an end to free trade policies, a move it perhaps would have had to make in due time anyway as a result of world economic conditions and changes in trade policy throughout Europe.

In Fianna Fail's first budget it introduced 43 new duties on imports; by 1936 more than 1,000 products had come under some form of protection. These barriers were established to aid the growth of native industry, but to accomplish this substantial capital had to be introduced. In the absence of private sources of capital the state intervened directly, passing bills that favored Irish-owned companies with quick and reasonable credit. The government also continued its predecessors' policy of establishing semi-state companies to provide essential services, and it expanded national housing by taking a large share of the financial responsibility at state level. From 1931 to 1938 the value of industrial output rose from £25.6 to £35.4 million, with employment rising from 111,000 to 166,000. Non-agricultural exports declined in value in the same period, however, from £6.4 million to £4.4

million. Throughout the years of the trade dispute Fianna Fail could not reverse an international economic relationship that had existed for generations. In fact, imports of goods other than food had actually increased between 1932 and 1938 (£27.6 to £30.0 million). Government policy helped establish some light manufacturing industry (e.g. in flour and apparels) but in the 1930s home manufacturing depended on a home market that itself was depressed due to the drop in agricultural exports.

Clearly the need for increased agricultural production, to replace imports or to expand exports, and to infuse more purchasing power into the economy, was at least as pressing in 1939, after six years of intense protection, as at any earlier time (Crotty 1966:137).

The government's protectionism quickly found favor among young businessmen, beginning a relationship between Fianna Fail and commerce and industry that has existed to the present and which took a good deal of conservative support away from Fianna Fail's opposition. Another relationship developed in this period. The large farmers, targets of much of government reform policy, became during the Economic War, the steadfast political opponents of Fianna Fail--an opposition that lasted until Ireland joined the European Communities in the 1970s. In fact, a good deal of support for the main political parties by agricultural interests in the rich land of the East of the country dates not from the "troubles" of ten years before but from the "battles" of the Economic War.

By the 1930s the pattern of livestock and meat production for exports had become established. Internal markets sent one- and two-year-old cattle eastward to the new, large, owner-occupied farms of Leinster and to the farms of the remnants of the "grazier" and "ascendancy"

classes. Grain crops declined steadily under the new Irish government as they had under the British, with ploughed land falling from 29% of total agricultural acreage in 1851 to 12% in 1931. In the first ten years of the Free State, beef cattle, milch cows and horse numbers remained stable. Although poultry and pig production increased on small farms, the number of very small farms was dropping. In a trend that continued to the 1950s, farms of less than 15 acres and more than 200 declined, while those between 30 and 100 acres grew in number. Farm consolidation led to a drop in demand for rural labor, especially on beef farms. Agricultural workers decreased from 644,000 to 605,000 in the decade after 1926, in a period which saw little room for capital investment in farms. Farmers who were able to make a profit used it to improve their standard of living, to subsidize emigrants and to provide for daughters marrying off the farm. This structure of agriculture changed with the new government and the Economic War with Britain (Lyons 1973:601-605).

Thus, Fianna Fail's policies attacked the economic bases of large farmers and their beef production. The government's economic and social welfare policies supported the claims and needs of the small farmers. Other bastions of large farmer strength were also attacked. DeValera abolished the Senate of the Oireachtas (Irish parliament) and did not establish a new upper house until the uni-cameral legislature, the Dail, passed laws limiting the power of the Senate. Earlier, the Senate had been the house within which Cumann na nGaedheal had allowed Unionist and Protestant interests to participate in government. By abolishing the Senate, deValera destroyed much of the input of large farmers and old commercial and business interests at the national level.

Fianna Fail

also redesigned local government, maintaining that recent legislation by Cumann na nGaedheal had given propertied classes undue influence at the local level, thereby weakening both the "little man" and the new government party in local politics. A new franchise included all persons over 21 years of age and not just ratepayers. New procedures for hiring and administering civil servants also resulted in weakening of the British-trained, largely Protestant government bureaucracy and the opening up of their positions to the new university graduates of the new state (Rumpf and Hepburn 1977:112-114).

As the political and economic foundations of their life came under attack by the new government, large farmers and those whose livelihood depended on beef and its export quickly tried to adapt. This involved changes in lifestyle, business and political support. The big farmers of Leinster and parts of Munster were perhaps the hardest hit of the agricultural community. Small farmers did well in poultry, pig, wheat and dairy production, but cattle farmers suddenly had no external market. The price for beef halved in the early 1930s. And in the areas where beef was purchased, primarily for meat factories supplying the domestic market, it could only be sold off the farm of a government inspector/purchaser approved the sale. It was in this period that the main party cleavages of modern Irish politics crystallized in beef producing counties like Meath, where farmers who had to sell their livestock to survive utilized personal, familial and political networks to get their animals to market. In many instances political, philosophical and ideological loyalties dating from the War of Independence and Civil War became secondary considerations as farmers desired above all else to

remain solvent. Clear cut local patterns of political support and political patronage developed for the first time in the state—patterns that in most respects reflected past political allegiances but which were now tempered with economic necessity and both national and local political expediency. As the trade war developed and Fianna Fail attempted to consolidate its power, the local electorate for perhaps the first time were given concrete examples of divergent political policies. Up to 1932 they had been governed by a Free Trade party whose only major opposition was, in essence, an ideological one that developed after Fianna Fail's entrance into politics in 1927. By 1933 all economic, political and social interest groups in the country had experienced the effects of the two major parties' policies. The big farmers and beef producers of Meath suffered at the hands of protectionism. Their choices were few—change to tillage or dairying, utilize existing networks of personal ties and family business to sell their animals, cultivate new networks, or become the political clients of the new party in power. My thesis holds that it is in this period of intense agricultural upheaval that the bases of political support for the major parties were established in Meath and throughout the beef producing areas of Leinster.

At a national level opposition to Fianna Fail slowly formed a united front. After 1932 neither Cumann na nGaedheal nor the Farmers Party provided a suitable platform for the farmers hardest hit by government policy. Many of these farmers wanted free trade policies again, other wanted reductions in subsidies to other forms of production, while still others wanted all annuities stopped, even those paid to their own

government. In 1932 the National Farmers and Ratepayers League was founded, later renamed the National Centre Party. It hoped to protect and further agricultural interests but to have a broader appeal than the Farmers Party. It also wanted to avoid any connection with the Civil War controversies of the past. The National Centre Party's principal objectives were the promotion of agriculture, the recovery of farmers' prosperity, the ending of the Economic War, the input of farmers in the creation and administration of government policy, an end to Civil War allegiances, and a friendlier policy towards Northern Ireland. But as this party gained support and began talks with Cumann na nGaedheal regarding future coalition deValera suddenly dissolved the Dail and called for a quick election. He wanted more of a majority in parliament to bolster his stand against Britain. "The 'snap' election was also designed to head off the incipient moves for a united front among the opposition, and an overall majority could enable him to dispense with his reliance on the Labour Party" (Murphy 1975:78). Civil War issues were raised afresh, obscuring the economic troubles of the nation. Fianna Fail and its leader registered a tremendous victory: 77 Fianna Fail seats, 48 Cumann na nGaedheal seats, 11 Centre Party, 8 Labour and 9 Independents. The union of opposition parties had been forestalled. The National Centre became the nation's third party (Lyons 1973:526-527; Manning 1972:96-98).

Opposition to Fianna Fail grew outside of electoral politics as well. An association of ex-Free State army men quickly developed into a conservative, para-military fraternal organization which saw itself as the possible savior of Irish democracy in the face of deValera and "his"

IRA. The Army Comrades Association (ACA) adopted the blue shirt as a sign of membership and strength. As the country became increasingly depressed, and the IRA still remained a legal organization with obvious links to Fianna Fail, membership increased in the ACA. In 1933, after further alliances, the association was named the National Guard under the command of an ex-superintendent of police. Although officially taking on an ideology of a vocationally-based, corporate state, borrowing from the fascism of Europe as much as from the writing of Pius XI, the Blueshirts depended on local issues for their recruitment. "The issues which gave Blueshirtism its impetus...were far from academic. Blueshirtism was essentially the product of Civil War memories, fear and distrust, and the threat of economic collapse" (Manning 1972:231).

The Blueshirts increasingly played a role in displays of strength against the supporters of the government. Cattle slaughtered in the fields, acts of physical violence, and farmers' refusals to pay both annuities and rates to the government were supported by many groups opposed to Fianna Fail policy. The government retaliated with shows of force by police and a series of laws passed to minimize violence and dissent. In August 1933, the National Guard was declared an unlawful association. Undaunted, the Blueshirts increased their agitation through 1934, still driven by the forces of "economic deprivation". The government hesitated to move against them, however, for the year before the Blueshirts had entered into a political alliance with the two main opposition parties (Manning 1973:132; Lyons 1973:527-531).

In 1933 Cumann na nGaedheal, the National Centre Party and the National Guard merged, forming the United Ireland party, or Fine Gael (tribe of Irishmen). The three groups participated equally on the new party's executive council. Although Cumann na nGaedheal had been the largest and oldest political party in the new state it was rapidly losing electoral support. And although many of those who supported that party from its inception--businessmen, property owners, professionals, and large farmers in the East and Midlands--would eventually direct the policies of Fine Gael, Cumann na nGaedheal ceased to exist. In the view of one author, the only common unifying bond among its old supporters was the acceptance of the Treaty, while Civil War actions, unpopular legislation and poor organization at the local level added to its decline (Manning 1972:19). It took new economic problems to create interest groups opposed to Fianna Fail policy. The three largest such groups, excepting the Labour Party, formed Fine Gael, which has remained the state's second party to this day. The party's first leader was General Eoin O'Duffy, head of the National Guard. When O'Duffy continued to support extra-legal action by farmers, spent party funds wastefully, admired Hitler and Mussolini openly, and failed to lead the party to victory in the 1934 local government elections, he resigned. In 1935 W.T. Cosgrove became the head of Fine Gael (Manning 1972:19-21).

Thus it was not until the economic and social policies of a dominant Fianna Fail government threatened them that the large farmers of the country joined forces with a number of seemingly unrelated groups--conservative Catholics, rural workers, professionals, "old" commerce, propertied classes and Protestants--to form a solid opposition party.

They organized this party to fight for their material interests and not to represent any one ideological stand from the Civil War. Before Fianna Fail's rise to government, large farmers like small farmers were split by region, social background and treaty allegiance. All the state's parties represented, in varying degrees, republicans, pro-Treatyites, socialists, Catholics, Protestants and capitalists. The world depression, nationalist politics and protectionism forced these groups to decide what was best for their future livelihoods. They turned to those who not only shared their nationalist views but also to those who would help them to hold onto their farms, businesses and shops. The Economic War was not solely a trade dispute between countries, but the battleground where two new forces staged for a long standing political war fought to further the interests of its soldiers, the constituents of Fianna Fail and Fine Gael. Irish political parties had come of age.

For all its importance in Irish affairs, the Economic War was short-lived. In 1935 the first step in a return to more amicable relations took place when the Coal-Cattle pact between the two countries was signed. The quotas on Irish cattle were raised in return for agreement to take all United Kingdom coal. But what had Fianna Fail accomplished? On its own protection for native industry could not succeed in establishing Ireland's manufacturing self-sufficiency. The economy was too dependent on imported fuel, machinery and raw materials. The few light industries that did develop increased urban employment, but the lack of native industrial capital forced more government investment in state-sponsored bodies.

Agriculture also changed little. The value of farm exports fell

from £35.8 million in 1929 to £13.9 million in 1935, reflecting the drop in meat and livestock exports. From 1929 to 1934 the number of cattle exported fell from 775,000 to 500,000. The cattle industry was near disaster in 1934. In many ways this was the avowed goal of the government which hoped to change grassland to tillage land. Wheat expanded from 21,000 acres in 1931 to 255,000 in 1936. Ironically, this increase in wheat acreage was at the expense of other crops. Pasture land decreased only minimally in this period (due, in part, to a rise in dairying) while beef production declined. Thus, Fianna Fail plans regarding wheat did not prove successful nor did its hope that tillage would help solve rural unemployment problems. In Leinster, the province that turned most to wheat (up 14,000 acres from 129,000 to 143,000) there was a 8.3% drop in males engaged in farm work. Connaught and Ulster, areas of small farms, lost 31,000 and 29,000 acres of wheat respectively. The big farms of Leinster and Munster became energy intensive and not labor intensive, for as they changed from beef to tillage they utilized animal labor and adopted new forms of mechanization, thereby creating an even greater demand for fuel (Crotty 1966:146). Using 1930 as base year (100) the index for total tillage areas in Ireland was 111 in 1936 and 102 in 1939. Using the same base, 1930, the acreage of wheat in 1936 was 952, up to 955 in 1939.

The government could not escape the demands of an economy dependent on outside fuel and luxuries (tea paramount among them). Britain wanted Irish livestock. Fianna Fail could not let the cattle industry die. To support a declining economy, the government introduced guaranteed wheat

prices, import controls on bacon and flour, export subsidies on butter, bacon and sheep offals, laws demanding the use of Irish grain in feed, bounties on cattle exports, a home sugar-beet industry, and direct subsidization of farms through decreased annuities. The Fianna Fail policy of self-sufficiency had failed (Lyons 1973:612-621; Murphy 1975:86-87; Crotty 1966:138-140).

After the Cattle-Coal pact Irish agriculture slowly returned to its earlier structure. By 1937-38 cattle had again risen to 50.8% of agricultural exports and Anglo-Irish trading relations reverted. Although British imports fell from 75.8% in 1932 to 54.0% in 1935, the essential nature of their trade was unchanged. As one author concludes regarding the Economic War

...for the Irish disputants the quarrel, bitter and prolonged as it was, could not be allowed to alter the direction of trade; indeed, there was no other direction in which trade could go. Irish exports were still utterly reliant upon the British market (Lyons 1973:613).

From 1932 to 1938 Irish exports to Britain never fell below 90% of their total exports. The government had failed in its efforts to transform the economy. But if Fianna Fail did not succeed in its overall aims in the period of the Economic War, it did succeed in both establishing itself as the primary political party of the state and attracting a sizable and loyal electorate. It also precipitated the union of diverse interest groups into a formidable and just as durable opposition political party.

In the following decade, ending with the period after World War II, Ireland's economic ties to Britain were as strong as had ever existed between the countries but its political ties became increasingly strained, culminating in the declaration of the Irish Republic in 1948.

Deterioration in relations between the two governments was a product of Fianna Fail policy, the consolidation of the Irish government's majority, the continued fragmentation of an effective Irish opposition, and World War II.

DeValera's new constitution for the nation was passed by the voters at the general election of 1937 at the same time they voted in a new Fianna Fail government (formed with Labour support). Its overall majority was a casualty of the Economic War but not a fatality. His weakening in parliament notwithstanding, deValera did not hesitate in his belief in the territorial sovereignty and national destiny of Eire (as the Free State was then officially called). In 1938 new Anglo-Irish agreements were signed. British control over Irish naval bases ended, as did any claim to Irish military facilities or personnel. The Economic War was formally concluded when Eire paid £10 million as final settlement of the land annuities debt. The British market was again wide open to Irish agriculture. Ireland gave favorable status to some British products, but continued to protect all Irish industries "not fully established" (Murphy 1975:94).

DeValera's policy of neutrality and his belief in the rights of small nations led to the severance of military ties to Britain. His reputation for extreme nationalism had declined in 1938 as he steadfastly pursued policies of both law and order and social welfare at home, and respect for Ireland internationally. And as his reputation as a strong and fair leader increased the support for opposition parties suffered. Perhaps wanting an even stronger government than he already enjoyed in order to meet the coming war, deValera dissolved the Dail in

1938 and called another quick election. Opposition parties were at a considerable loss. The new Fine Gael party had been shaken by the overall popularity of the new Anglo-Irish agreements, which in effect put Eire out of the Commonwealth. Although unemployment and poverty created discontent, the opening of British markets suggested new hope. Fine Gael itself had suffered organizational in-fighting which further weakened the party's efforts at the polls. The opposition attacked the government on economic grounds, singling out the policies of deValera himself, alleging "...that during his period in office annual exports had dropped by over £13 million, the income of farmers by a total of £134 million, and the wages of farm labourers by £9 million, at a time when taxes had been increased by £21 million" (Rumpf and Hepburn 1977:135). Farmers and businessmen did not listen however, The 1938 election was Fianna Fail's greatest prior to 1977 and gave the party an overall majority. "Fianna Fail's independence of Labour was now assured, and deValera's hand was enormously strengthened in dealing with the IRA and in the formulation and execution of an effective neutrality policy (Murphy 1975:96).

National agricultural policy in the ensuing years was more a product of world-wide conditions as they affected Ireland than of conscious efforts by the government and interest groups. When Britain entered the war it needed Irish labor in both its military and industry. This relieved the pressure on Irish agricultural resources and added to the national income through remittances. Although Fianna Fail wished to continue its policy of economic growth through a strong export trade in agricultural goods, it was severely hampered by a lack of foreign feed, farm machinery and fertilizers. Nonetheless, neither emigration nor the

loss of agricultural imports prevented Irish agricultural output from growing in the war years (1938-1939 = 100, 1945 = 116.8). This was primarily due to schemes of compulsory tillage in order to meet domestic human and animal needs (a policy which did not have a lasting effect on the structure of agriculture in the post-war years). In 1940 one eighth of all arable land on each holding had to be tilled; from 1944 to 1948 at the end of this policy it was three eighths. Output was maintained at the expense of soil fertility resulting in a drop in crop yields per acre. The absence of imported coal led to increases in the use of turf, the production of which was included in agricultural statistics. Finally, output increased due to the nature of extensive agriculture. Sheep and beef production did not need large inputs of machinery or chemical fertilizers and the surpluses of both products were quickly purchased by Britain. Although such exports declined, the percentage of agricultural output exported only fell from a 1934-1938 average of 34.3% to a 1939-1945 average of 26.3%. Most of these exports were in Ireland's traditional products

meat not only remained plentiful, but the export of live animals and meat products continued to be the staple of Irish trade with Britain and the principal means whereby neutral Ireland managed to build up large external assets during the war (Lyons 1973:623).

Although tillage acreage expanded from 1.5 million acres in 1939 to 2.6 million in 1944 (wheat alone going from 250,000 to 667,000 acres) it was simply not enough to meet domestic needs (Lyons 1973:622-623; Crotty 1966:158-159).

Thus, ironically, the big farmers of the counties of the Midlands and the East (Meath foremost among them) made money off livestock, sheep,

meat, wheat and dairy in the war years. The supporters of Fine Gael were content with the policies of the government. Not surprisingly, these were the years of Fine Gael's worst decline. Although the party increasingly stressed the needs of big and medium farmers it could not make headway against policies influenced by a world war. Fine Gael doggedly continued, in an air of classical liberalism, in its proposed policies of free trade, curtailed government intervention and an end to Fianna Fail paternalism (Rumpf and Hepburn 1977:143).

By the post-war election of 1948 Fine Gael had sunk to an all-time low of 19.8% of the total poll. Its decline was the product of a number of factors. First, many farmers were disinclined to oppose policies that they had done well under. Second, Fine Gael support of neutrality during the war robbed it of its mantle of a "Commonwealth" party, one of its major party planks. Third, some Fine Gael leaders had revived nationalist anxiety by calling for an Anglo-Irish military alliance. Fourth, the Blueshirt episode was still an issue in rural Ireland. Fifth, no new leader stepped forward upon the retirement of Cosgrave in 1944. Finally, and most important, "Another factor which militated against popular support for Fine Gael was the aura of middle-class respectability which clung to the party and this, ironically, at a time when it was already losing middle-class votes to Fianna Fail" (Murphy 1975:110-111).

The Labour Party declined in this period as well. Most rural laborers had consistently voted the nationalist issue and had supported their local Fianna Fail patrons. The majority of rural voters were owner-occupiers. Emigration removed many people who might have become Labour supporters in a country with such a small industrial proletariat. Poor

party organization in the countryside did not help. "Its 'natural' voters, rural and urban, were lured away by the Fianna Fail blend of populist reforms and nationalism" (Murphy 1975:113).

Fianna Fail had not been idle in the decade after the Economic War. It had begun attracting propertied and professional people who benefited from the party's protectionist policies. Businessmen saw the government as a protector and champion while Fine Gael remained an effective spokes-party for the issues that had decreased in importance. From the party of the "common man" Fianna Fail had developed into a party of money. Although its voting base was still the laborer and the small farmer, the exigencies of power had forced compromises that helped Fianna Fail maintain a high level of party organization and efficiency. And if the national issue no longer seemed a priority, local voters and traditional supporters could not ignore the "practical" advantages of having Fianna Fail as both their local and national patron. Being in power and being in government changed the "political complexion" of the party (Murphy 1975:109).

As Fianna Fail's support grew among people of wealth and power, not all of its original rural supporters were satisfied with either party's legislative progress or paternalism. In 1938 a new farmers' party was founded, Clann na Talmhan (Children of the Land), which was based in the West of the country among small farmers (unlike the defunct Farmers Party). Its goals reflected the material need of its founders: reduced land tax, afforestation and land reclamation. It especially appealed to those farmers whose incomes stagnated or decreased in the war years when beef farmers did well. Its organization was hindered by the same fac-

tors that have prevented farming interests from forming a strong political party up to the present

the difficulty of accomodating the diverse interests of farmers engaged in different types and scales of farming: the lack of cohesion between different regions, including difficulties in travel and communications; above all, perhaps, the blurring of political lines resulting from the presence of farmers in other parties with agricultural policies of their own (Murphy 1979:115).

It was not until the rise of a national farmers' association that the needs of most, if not all, farmers were finally and forcefully articulated at the national political level in Ireland. Nonetheless, in the 1943 election this new farmers' party took 10 seats in the Dail, with four independent farmers also elected (Murphy 1975:115-116; Lyons 1973:561; Manning 1972:99-101).

Other disgruntled Fianna Fail supporters, disenchanted with the party's attitude toward republicanism, yet anxious to leave behind Teaty divisions, founded Clann na Poblachta (Children of the Republic) in 1946. When it was clear that organizationally and electorally the new party would soon be on very sure ground, deValera called yet another snap election. This time, however, the gamble did not pay off. In 1948 Fianna Fail lost its overall majority and Fine Gael dropped to its lowest share of the vote in history. For the first time in Irish history a coalition government was formed by Fine Gael, Clann na Poblachta, Labour, National Labour, Clann na Talmhan and some independents. John Costello of Fine Gael became the Taoiseach (Prime Minister). Fianna Fail had ruled for 16 years and was now the opposition. Its ouster was primarily a product of diverse groups' discontent with the government on economic, parliamentary and nationalist matters. Perhaps for the first time in

Irish politics this new "coalition showed that the polarisation of politics around the Civil War was not immutable" (Murphy 1975:121).

Both governments, regardless of political ideology or support, had little flexibility in terms of economic policy in the post-war period. Initially, world food scarcity meant a high demand for Irish crops, maintaining high incomes for some sectors of agriculture and adding to the value of Irish assets (£270 million in Britain alone in 1946). Irish governments embarked on a policy of full employment, reduced emigration and raised living standards. Their plans included increased aid to agriculture, the protection of manufacturing and increased deficit spending. But the inherent weaknesses of Irish agriculture remained. In the decade after the war both the volume and rate of growth of the Irish GNP were among the lowest in Europe. Growth that did occur centered in extensive agriculture. Rising cattle prices, expanding livestock markets, heavier state subsidization, increased demands for goods and services, and state protected industries were all factors in Irish economic growth, but on their own they severely limited further development. The Irish economy was hindered by a shortage of private capital, competitive exports and expanding domestic markets (Lyons 1973:624-625; Crotty 1966:159-167).

This inflationary period in post-war Ireland could only be controlled through the control and expansion of agriculture. "Because of her small internal market and her lack of fuel and raw materials, Ireland could not achieve Western European living standards without selling abroad" (Lyons 1973:625). To stimulate foreign sales and to support increased spending at home, agriculture had to grow, entailing increased

government spending in that sector (£4.33 million in 1939 to £13.25 million in 1952). By 1952, 10% of the total state expenditure was on agriculture, rising to 18.7% in 1962. Although many supporters favored tillage and continued to do so through the 1950s, all Irish governments returned to the production of dairy goods, beef and sheep as their primary exports.

The cattle industry expanded considerably in the late 1940s and 1950s. In 1937-1938 cattle, beef and veal accounted for 50.8% of agricultural exports; in 1960-1961 they accounted for 70.2%. This was due to many national and international causes. The traditional products of mixed farming on small holdings were no longer supported. International agencies, like Marshall Aid, supported livestock exports. British demand for meat was higher than ever before. Cattle in the post-war years was the only major farm export which did not require any export subsidy. And as large-farm products filled the market, small farms declined in their share of production and incomes (Crotty 1966:167; Lyons 1973:626).

Agricultural policy through the late 1950s, political rhetoric notwithstanding, supported extensive agriculture, the production of beef and the big farmers. The widespread purchase of tractors (40,000 between 1930 and 1963) and the increased use of combine seed-and-fertilizer drills, selective weed killers and combine harvesters, combined with guaranteed prices to make wheat and sugar beet production enterprises for large farms. As these farms expanded production and increased the quality and quantity of their tilled products, they squeezed out local small farm competitors. By 1957 the country had surpluses of wheat and

sugar beet beyond domestic requirements. And as wheat and livestock production increased the production of native feeds declined. ;When controls were placed on the importation of foreign maize and barley, pig and poultry production, the lifeblood of small farms plummeted (from 36.3% of total agricultural exports in 1937-1938 to 16.7% in 1960-1961).

As farm incomes increased, so did both consumer prices and standards of living. Such rises adversely affected the quality of life on small farms that could not produce the quantity or quality of goods that Irish policy demanded. These farms declined because replacement costs increased steadily, family labor emigrated, there was insufficient capital to buy land or mechanize, and there was a serious shortage of marketing expertise. Thus, although Irish agricultural policy was meant to stimulate nationwide production through increased profits, the increased profits were made on larger farms. After almost 35 years of state policy, both Fianna Fail and coalition governments were still supporting the regional structure of Irish livestock production.

Government policy, therefore, did not transfer wealth from the non-agricultural sector to the agricultural, but from small farmer to large farmer. As extensive agriculture, livestock production and mechanization continued to rise there was less need for small farms throughout the country. In the thirty years after the rise of Fianna Fail, the champion of the small farmer, consolidation of farm holdings had continued. In 1960, farms of 1 to 30 acres accounted for 49.6% of all holdings and 17.4% of farming land, while in 1931 it was 57.9% and 22.5% respectively. In 1931 42.8% of all males working on farms did so on holdings of 30 acres and less. This figure dropped by 50% in the next 30

years, while on farms of over 100 acres the number of workers dropped by 12%. The halving of the labor supply on small farms prevented any expansion in the production of poultry, potatoes, pigs and cows, and it reinforced the less labor intensive production of young cattle on small farms. Thus, price supports for tillage and dairy products, decreased prices for young cattle (a reflection of a surplus in calves, itself a product of dairy supports), high prices for imported feed, rural depopulation and continued farm consolidation all reinforced the traditional regional pattern of agricultural production, and entrenched political and economic power in the regional and national centers of large farming. These same factors--farm consolidation, a decreased labor supply and mechanization--brought even greater profits to the large farmers. Agricultural exports rose but at the cost of the central role of the small owner-occupier in national affairs. The major parties were faced with the problem of keeping small farmers loyal to politicians and governments that had weakened the position of small farmers (Crotty 1966:167-190; Lyons 1973:624-628).

In the electoral politics of the post-war period these economic issues became paramount. The declaration of the Republic under the first coalition government of 1948, the rise of new and influential small parties and the lessening of anti-partitionism and a Church-state dispute over health care and planning were all ultimately overshadowed by national concern with the economy. The conservative nature of agricultural structure and production, the absence of private capital and a small domestic market and the lack of exports were all problems compounded by the devaluation of sterling (1949), the inflationary effects of the Korean War, a teacher and bank strike and a severe lack of social

services. Although the economy made some advances in terms of industrial production and employment, these were minimized by a drop in agricultural employment. From 1946 to 1951 only 800 new jobs were created each year (Lyons 1973:573). While the governments changed rapidly (Fianna Fail governed from 1951-1954, and Fine Gael dominated another coalition from 1954-1957) the problems of the economy remained. By the mid-1950s a serious crisis of confidence in both the future of the economy and in future governments had developed, due in no small measure to a widening balance of payments deficit.

Serious efforts on the part of the Irish government to restore both confidence in the economy and belief in the government's ability to control factors damaging to the state resulted in the First Programme for Economic Expansion (1958). This programme suggested that the slow growth rate of the economy had been due to the failure of agricultural production to expand. "It was clearly implied that agricultural expansion was regarded as a sine qua non of future economic growth and, indeed, of the viability of Ireland as a political entity" (Crotty 1966:192). The main effort in this first move towards planned economy was to increase the production and exports of agriculture through improvements in grassland farming. In the industrial sector the programme hoped to stimulate private investment while allocating considerable capital to the maintenance of the various state-sponsored bodies. Unlike previous policies, the programme protected new industries until they could survive without government intervention. Protection in the old sense could no longer be countenanced. "The Programme took it for granted that before long Ireland would be participating in some form of European Common Market and

that to aim at self-sufficiency in the old style was simply not realistic" (Lyons 1973:629)

The First Programme established state economic policy as the primary political consideration of all the major parties, thus acknowledging a trend that had been developing since the 1930s. Given new allegiances to state economic planning politicians of all political persuasions had to argue their constituents' interests within the new programme before any future programmes were planned. This belief in planned economy shifted much of the emphasis away from policy patronage, i.e., it recognized for the first time the primacy of beef and dairy production in the structure of Irish agriculture. All sectoral interests had to approach government with that precondition in mind. The First Programme wholeheartedly supported efficient agriculture on large consolidated holdings. State aid shifted from subsidies on finished products (e.g. butter and bacon) to subsidies on factors of production (e.g. fertilizers), while the state Agricultural Grant was shifted into aid for productive supplies and educational services (all more beneficial to the big farmer) and away from rate relief. This recognition of the political and economic importance of the large farming sector reflected a belief in economic expansion through the utilization of the traditional patterns of agriculture, as well as the result of concerted efforts by farming and political interest groups, led in great part by large farmers, to effect national policy. It was clear in the 1960s that Ireland would have an opportunity to join a European Economic Community and that big-farmer-dominated grassland production would be the country's principal source of exports within that international body. Thus, the First Programme

acknowledged the strategic political and economic role that large farmers and extensive beef production played within the Irish state. Ironically, as one author recently noted, the recognition of the traditional structure of beef production through the First and Second Programmes limited agricultural production, for although dairying or sheep production would result in lower net incomes for farmers, they would increase the volume and value of total farm production (Crotty 1966:198).

Economically, the First Programme was a qualified success. Irish GNP rose from an average of 2% a year before 1958 to 4% a year up to 1963. Emigration declined as industrial jobs increased and the 1966 Census showed a net increase in the state's population. Private investment doubled while savings increased. The standard of living slowly rose to the levels of Ireland's European neighbors. In 1963, industrial production was up 47% over its 1957 level. But the First Programme did not attain its primary goal. Agricultural output increased by only 1% in the same period while beef production itself did not materially increase. Cow, cattle and sheep numbers went up by only 6% with only 251,000 acres going from tillage to grassland. In fact these modest advances in the modernization of beef production were themselves the result of forces that had been at work for at least a generation. Government policy itself never strictly adhered to the spirit of the Programme. The Agricultural Grant towards the rate relief remained (I suspect because it was too sensitive a subject among farm voters) and it kept level with local taxation increases, thereby subsidizing all agriculture and all farmers. The greatest success of the Programme was the Bovine Tuberculosis Eradication Scheme, but this on its own could not

outweigh the failure of the Programme's agricultural policy. As one economic historian concluded: "...the 'Programme for Economic Expansion' introduced very little that was new into Irish agricultural policy and...such innovations as were brought in were ineffective or of doubtful value" (Crotty 1966:202).

The Second Programme for Economic Expansion (1964-1970) attempted to be more specific regarding its economic goals and the means to achieve them. It held that agricultural expansion was best achieved through an increase of almost 50% in cattle numbers. Dry cattle production was still considered the major area of improvement, even if expansion in beef meant contraction in more intensive areas of production. The Second Programme reinforced the popular opinion in Ireland--an opinion fostered by many large farmers--that the country was first and foremost a beef producer. As the Irish economy emphasized agriculture, beef again began replacing people in the countryside. Many rural laborers and small farmers were seemingly powerless in the face of

...a course of development which threatened their extinction, and which did so not in order that total output might be increased but simply to provide greater profits for the owners of land and capital, even though it meant a reduction in the level of employment and the volume of total output (Crotty 1966:204).

In the ten years spanned by the Programmes for Economic Expansion the planners of the state targeted a 43% increase in cattle and a 17% drop in rural dwellers, which, if it had been attained, would have been the most drastic demographic change since the Famine.

Economic expansion was itself hard hit by further trade disputes with Britain in the early 1960s which resulted in a new trade agreement at the end of 1965. Restrictions on imports between the two countries

were removed, British import quotas on some Irish farm goods were reinstituted, and Irish exports of live animals and meat products were increased. Ireland also revised her relationships with other foreign investors and trading partners. Overall, its international economic relations were based on "...the assumption that sooner or later entry into the Common Market must come (and)...that her exposure to external forces, always great, was being intensified" (Lyons 1973:632). When entry into the European Communities did come in the early 1970s it was to start a series of changes that have transformed Irish agriculture and Irish politics and redefined the relationship between the two.

In the 20th century Irish politics increasingly became an arena wherein a number of factional groups have attempted to articulate their ideological or economic interests in order to affect or determine, if only in part, national government policy. Economic policy continued to be in a very great measure agricultural policy. Beef production and large farmers, continuing a pattern dating from last century, established their dominance within both Irish economic planning and Irish electoral politics. No county benefited more from the predominant position of beef fattening and dairy production than Meath. International economic policy continued to revolve around markets for beef, dairy and tillage products. Until the 1970s this market was almost wholly dominated by Britain. Thus, political independence brought the state new freedom to establish its own policies (thereby creating new areas of political influence, patronage and clientage) but little flexibility in applying such policies internationally. Agricultural and economic policy-making consequently entailed the dispensing of services and apportioning of the

limited state budget. This placed great importance on the role of elected representatives within policy formation and implementation. When membership in the European Communities changed Ireland's relationship to foreign markets and redefined her role in decision-making within an international arena, then the role of national agricultural policy and the position of Irish representatives in regard to such policy was transformed within the Irish state. The relationship between farming and politics—a relationship that had developed over 150 years—changed in the 1970s when Ireland figuratively "left" Britain and "joined" Europe, in the Common Market.

FOOTNOTES

- 9 From this point on in my dissertation, the term "Ireland", unless otherwise noted, will specifically refer to the 26 counties of the partitioned island, and will be used interchangeably, depending on the time period, with "Free State", "Saorstat Eireann", "Eire" and the "Republic of Ireland".
- 10 Ireland votes on a proportional representation system (see Chapters VII and VIII, and footnote 15).

CHAPTER V

Joining Europe:

The Common Market and Ireland

Ireland's accession to the Common Market on 1 January 1973 marked a turning point in Irish affairs as important as any battle, invasion or famine that has distinguished its history. The EEC opened up a network of political, economic, social and cultural ties that have, in the span of a decade, altered Irish society in ways that were both predicted and welcomed and in ways that were undreamed of. The international arena that Ireland is now so firmly seated within has raised the standard of living, made industry the most productive in Irish history, shifted the focus of exports to the continent, made many British cultural influences less important and helped rearrange national political loyalties, affiliations and networks. The EEC years have also put pressure on the Irish citizen through increased prices, a rise in unemployment, high inflation rates and the need to become more aware of political and economic affairs outside of the country. The Irish citizens perhaps most influenced by such changes have been the farmers. They have responded to the processes of internationalization in ways that have radically altered their roles in Irish society and polity, making 1974-1983 a landmark decade in the agropolitical history of the state. It was a decade that the Irish economy prepared for in the 1960s.

The Programmes for Economic Expansion had only been partially successful in the 1960s. Services, industry and agriculture improved steadily, but certainly not to the degree hoped for. It was clear from the late 1950s that Ireland's era of protectionism was doomed, and it was hoped that the free trade system of the Common Market was the best way to revitalize a stagnating economy. Two balance of payment crises in 1952 and 1956, the lack of growth in GNP and the decline in state population from 1953 to 1958 and the early 1960s emphasis on export-oriented industries and tourism all led Ireland to request membership in the EEC in 1961. From that point on, Ireland's joining the Common Market became both a goal and a necessity. Although industry grew in the 1960s, by 1972 its growth rate had fallen from 6.4% to 4.9% (due principally to a slowdown in industrial employment growth). Agriculture improved by the end of that decade, with the volume of production going up due to the livestock and meat industries, but this was not enough to warrant faith in the economy as planned by the experts. A hoped-for 4% annual expansion rate had never been realized, while the volume of agricultural production grew by less than 1% a year. Lack of confidence in Ireland's ability to control its own economic future was reinforced when the goal of increasing the level of employment by 81,000 from 1963 to 1970 was not only not reached, but there was a net decline of 18,000, leaving a shortfall in employment of 100,000 jobs (Walsh 1980:30-35; Kennedy and Dowling 1975:257-258).

The Irish government's change from a belief in protectionism to one of free trade as a way out of economic stagnation was further heralded by the Anglo-Irish Free Trade Agreement in 1965. This officially put an end

to the deValera period in government affairs and restored many of the economic ties with Britain that had been lost since the 1930s. It was not, however, a return to the complete economic dependence of the previous 200 years. Both the Irish people and the Irish government recognized the role open to them in an international arena. Unlike prior eras

The important difference now lay in the determination of the Irish government to use its powers of taxation and expenditure to maximise the gains to the country from its participation in the world economy, and to obtain favourable treatment for its agricultural exports (Walsh 1980:33).

All classes and interest groups were aware not only of the need for Ireland to adapt to a changing international environment in order for its economy to develop, but also that such adaptation was the key national issue. The by-words of national economics--inflation, unemployment, balance of payments, economic growth--became part of the Irish lexicon as the country prepared for the almost inevitable move into the Common Market. And as the Irish electorate began to appreciate the changes in their material conditions of life that were possible, they were quick to demand action from their representatives.

Civil servants, especially in the key policy-making departments, were imbued with a new sense of priorities by the politicians who realised with increasing acuteness that their survival was closely linked to the performance of the economy. (Walsh 1980:36).

Old political networks and small-scale patronage were no longer sufficient to satisfy the voters, especially when their livelihoods were deemed to be threatened by the mistakes or inactivity of government. The farmers of the 1960s were the first group to go beyond traditional means of putting pressure on the policy makers, a sign of the development of modern interest group politics in Ireland.

During the Emergency and post-War years when farmers, especially those with property and wealth, became disillusioned with the possibility of having a powerful farmers' political party, and recognized the need for communication on a national scale among all farmers, they founded a new occupational society, the Young Farmer Clubs (1944), later becoming Macra na Feirme. Their goals included the provision of educational services, the organization of fraternal activities, the improvement of farming and the articulation of farmers' needs at the local and national levels of society. To encourage the organization of farmers Macra na Feirme helped found the Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers' Association (IMCMA, 1950) with its membership coming primarily from the South of the country in Munster, and the National Farmers Association (NFA, 1955) with a membership of beef and tillage men from throughout the country.

These two organizations became the organs of farmer agitation in the 1960s when farmers became disenchanted with both the growth of agriculture and the role of their parties and representatives in policymaking. They felt that farmers and their needs were being ignored by elected officials and government bureaucrats who were themselves too quick to adopt a free trade philosophy, something which many farmers were fearful of. Farmers' numbers were falling while the average size of their holdings went up in the post-War period. Farms of under 30 acres declined while those of 50 to 200 increased markedly. The rising numbers of medium (and in some areas, large) farmers wanted a voice that would be heard in national affairs, especially when they feared being lost in an international arena that loomed before them. Thus, in 1964, the NFA demanded formal government recognition of their status as a spokesgroup

for the farming community (a position many farmers, especially those of the ICMSA, disagreed with). The Taoiseach, Sean Lemass, gave in to the demand, and announced that future governments would consult the NFA in the formulation of agricultural policy (Manning 1979:53-56; Kennedy and Bruton 1975:28-29).

But the NFA membership did not think that recognition was enough to stave off the pressures of inflation, price fluctuations, depressed incomes and rural underemployment. In October 1966, the NFA led the "Farmers' Rights March" a trek of 217 miles to Dublin. Once in the capital they began a sit-down protest in order to speak to the Minister for Agriculture who did not agree to meet them. By January the protest had developed into the largest national demonstration by farmers up to that time. Farmers used their tractors, cars and farm machinery to block bridges, highways and town intersections throughout the country. The press coverage that their tactics received was unprecedented, as was the number of jailings that followed. Just as in the Economic War, the agricultural community retaliated by refusing to pay their rates. In this case, however, a number of the protesting farmers owned small holdings and were supporters of the government and Fianna Fail. Police seizure of the property of some tax evaders made the situation more vitriolic between government and agriculture but relieved many urban workers and members of the non-farming middle class who were aggravated by the farmers' illegal tactics and convinced that farmers did indeed receive special treatment from the Irish government (a belief that has fueled rural-urban antagonism to this day). When a new Fianna Fail Taoiseach, Jack Lynch, took office in 1967 he met with protesting groups, released

the prisoners, and promised better days for agriculture in the future (an implied EEC future).

The dispute between agriculture and government had been unprecedented. Politicians now realized that farmers could, as a group, organize to demand their needs and no longer had to rely solely on political parties for the articulation of their interests. Farmers understood this also, but also realized that ultimately all agricultural policy was controlled by the government which itself was increasingly sensitive to both the needs of other national interest groups and the new demands of an international economy. Farmers had to utilize as many tools as possible to affect, if not channel, agricultural policy. The troubles of 1966-1967 were a standoff. Neither side won the dispute and each became wary of the other.

Government realised that it could not afford not to consult with the farmers while the farmers got an accurate measure of their own strength—they could put pressure on government and they could make life difficult for them—but they were not going to dictate (Manning 1979:57).

The government was in a strong position. It controlled policy and still commanded enough traditional support so as not to be threatened. It would not be until over a decade later, and five years of EEC membership, that farmer-government confrontation would have a very different structure and result.

The commercialization and capitalization of agriculture continued throughout this period. In the decade up to EEC membership, there was concrete evidence of governmental monetary support of agricultural expansion, primarily in beef production. State expenditure on agriculture went up 400% in current price terms between 1960 and 1972. A two-

tier milk price support scheme which favored smaller producers was introduced in 1969, accompanied by a Beef Cow Incentive scheme to encourage beef (over dairy cow) herd expansion. Although mechanization continued (tractors going from 44,000 to 92,000 between 1960 and 1972, or less than one for every two holdings over 15 acres) most farmers relied on family labor, with the number of laborers falling from 60,000 to 35,000 by 1972. These farms were increasingly gearing themselves for production for export. In 1960 14% of farm output was consumed on the farm, 5% in 1972. In order to gain greater control over the production and distribution of their products, and to further present a unified front to what was increasingly a hostile market, farmers consolidated their resources and established hundreds of small cooperative creameries (which resulted in a small number of very large businesses) and some cooperatives in meat processing, grain milling and livestock marts. Rural industrialization, seasonal migration, part-time, off-farm employment and tourism also facilitated a move into part-time farming throughout the country (in 1972 22% of all farmers were part-time) (Matthews 1980:2-3).

Throughout this period the major political parties attempted to both sustain their old support and to attract members of the new and expanding electorate which was created by a fall in emigration, a rising birth rate and a return of migrants. The first coalition government led by Fine Gael collapsed in 1951. DeValera led Fianna Fail as Taoiseach up to 1954 when John Costello of Fine Gael chaired the second coalition government (to 1957). DeValera left the government in 1959 to become President, leaving Lemass to lead the party, government and country up to Lynch in

1967. But with the new-found importance of economic affairs in electoral politics it was difficult to distinguish between the two major parties. Fine Gael held on to most of its traditional supporters among large farmers and the middle class. Fianna Fail adapted better to the changing circumstances of the 1960s. The party became much more of a "catch-all" party, surprisingly gaining support among the new urban voters. A 1969 poll showed an impressive distribution of Fianna Fail supporters nationwide by class, region and age, for the party had "maintained its hold on the men of little property while becoming increasingly involved with the men of very considerable property that the Lemass era had attracted to the party's support" (Murphy 1980:9).

Thus in the decade before 1972 the economy became the principal issue in Irish politics and society. As it stagnated many groups attempted to stimulate the government to direct action. Some succeeded (business interests), some made valuable inroads thereby establishing precedents that would have important consequences (farmers), while others felt, and were, virtually powerless to improve their positions (urban workers). To all groups and individuals, however, it was clear that the Irish economy was not independent of international forces and that it could no longer support a policy of protectionism. When Ireland accepted the conditions for entry into the EEC in 1972 it offered to join Britain, Denmark and Norway in making an EEC of 10 members. The referendum put before the Irish electorate on 10 May 1972 resulted in a tremendous victory for those supporting membership. Given a 70% poll of the electorate, 83% were in favor of entry, the most one-sided vote in state history. What contributed to such a victory for those supporting membership?

A number of important factors accounted for the Irish electorate's overwhelming acceptance of the EEC. The growth rates (high by past Irish standards) in GNP and exports, the influx of foreign investment and the reduction of trade restrictions through the Anglo-Irish Free Trade Agreement gave the population of Ireland new confidence in the nation's ability to maintain growth to increase its share of continental markets, and to withstand foreign competition in the home market. The majority of the electorate, either consciously or unconsciously, were also voting to weaken Irish economic dependence on Britain. In terms of its agriculture, still the principal sector of the economy, Ireland was dominated by the United Kingdom (UK), with terms of access to the British market being determined by the British government. Membership in the Common Market would allow participation in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) which promised higher prices and guaranteed continental markets for Irish goods. Besides, the voters already knew that Britain was joining the EEC, and many were fearful that if Ireland did not go in either Britain would become even more dominant in Irish economic affairs, since it would remain the primary link to Europe, or that Irish prospects for an equal role in European affairs would be next to nil (McAleese 1975:133-134).

The electorate were also aware of the terms of entry into the EEC that had been agreed to for Ireland. These terms were perceived as both generous and timely by many groups in society. Membership would mean immediate participation in the CAP which would greatly benefit the farmer and the exchequer. Ireland was granted exclusive fishing rights within a six-mile limit and partial rights out to 12 miles for a ten year period. In industry, in an effort to attract and keep foreign investment, Ireland

was allowed to continue its national grant schemes for new enterprises, to honor export tax reliefs already established and to grant these tax reliefs for new exporting businesses up to 1990. The short term gains these represented to agriculture, fishing and industry were more convincing than any arguments raised against the long term effects. Although many urban workers voted against membership the majority voted for accession even in the face of prophecies of higher prices for consumers. This vote was partially a result of a nationalist desire to be rid of Britain, partially a belief in the importance of agriculture in the Irish economy, and partially a result of party influence. Entry into the Common Market was a priority for both Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, and a vote for membership was considered a vote for your party. The 83% victory was testament to the ability of the two parties' organizations to both disseminate information and to deliver the votes. Ironically, this was perhaps the last time that either major party could predict the voting of the majority of their traditional supporters. In 1972 voters accepted that Ireland would become more influential internationally if it joined and would be foolishly isolating itself if it did not. In this view either the country went in with its British neighbor or it ran the risks of a less certain future on the outside. The Irish voter did not hesitate, and on the first day of 1973 Ireland joined a European Community which would be increased from an original six members to nine in that year, and to ten a decade later.

Some dissenting voices were heard, however. The Labour Party and some trade unionists feared an end to protectionism and the domination of both free competition and a Brussels bureaucracy. Some scholars felt

that Ireland's very backwardness would prove a liability and that its small economy, population, industrial sector, growth rate and industrial labor force would never be able to weather the destruction of traditionally protected industries such as motor assembly, textiles, carpets, shoes and furniture. They also predicted a loss of economic power by the government and the Dail when policy decisions shifted to the continent (an incisive prediction, and one that does not seem to have unduly worried the elected representatives at the time) (Coughlan 1971). Still others demanded an insularity that was either ridiculous or anachronistic: "family life as we know it would disappear", "the land would be in the hands of foreigners", and "hitherto protected industries...would collapse like a deck of cards" (Wilson 1971:viii-ix).

Forecasts of doom notwithstanding, Ireland peacefully settled into its new European role and enjoyed a decade of unprecedented change. From 1973 to 1981 a total of £3,000 million was given by the EEC in grants and subsidies to Ireland, principally through the Farm Fund, Social Fund, Regional Development Fund and interest subsidies. In return Ireland paid £368 million into the EEC budget but received a further £1,000 million in preferential loans from the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). Although two-thirds of the grant money received (or £2,000 million) came from the CAP, Irish industry has expanded and diversified under the free trade agreements in ways that have lessened its dependence on the British market (Irish Times, 1/12/82, 31/12/82). In 1973, 56.1% of Irish exports went to the UK and 17.6% to the original Six of the EEC. In 1981 the figures were 42.8% and 31.7% respectively (Dorgan 1981). From 1974 to 1981 Ireland "had greatly

reduced its dependence on the disaster-prone giant across the Irish Sea and in the island's six northern counties" (The Economist 24/1/81). The separateness of the two economies was symbolized by Ireland's joining the new European Monetary System (EMS) in 1979, breaking its currency link with sterling when Britain did not enter the same system.

Economic independence also led to independence in other areas. Most Irish people and observers of Irish life agree that Britain no longer commands the attention of the Irish in their everyday lives, and that the Irish citizen has turned increasingly to the continent in economic, political, cultural and intellectual affairs. This new "internationalism" on the part of the Irish population is evident in the coverage of all communications media, the curricula of schools, colleges and universities, the discussions of all interest groups at public meetings, and in the everyday casual conversation on the street. Irish citizens are as aware now of Italian terrorism, Dutch dairy production, French economic policy and Danish fishing as they were of British affairs a generation ago. "Independence" from Great Britain in economic and cultural affairs has helped foster a new awareness of national identity on the world scale, which is reinforced by Ireland's role in the United Nations, especially in military peace-keeping missions such as in Lebanon. But membership in the European Communities and independence from old trading relationships are the result of sizable capital investment by the EEC—a boon that at times seems overly generous given the size of Ireland and its economy. In 1981, with only 1% of the EEC population, Ireland received (of the total EEC budget) 6.4% of the Regional Fund payments, 10.5% of the Social Fund, 9.8% of the Farm Development Section, and 8.7%

of the total lending of the EIB (Irish Times 30/12/82). Ireland's economy has consistently had one of the highest growth rates on the Community. Its 2% rate in 1982 tied it with Denmark for the lead (the EEC average was 0.3%) while its estimated 2.4% rise in GDP in 1983 should give it the highest growth rate in the community (Irish Times 1/12/82).

These material benefits have not been unblemished, however. In 1981, of the community of Ten, Ireland had the highest inflation rate (19.6%), budget deficit (13.2% of GDP) and rate of governmental over-borrowing (15.4% of GDP), and was next to the top in unemployment (13.2%). A lack of native fuel and rising prices for Irish imports (80% of which are raw materials or investment goods) add to the pressure on both the exchequer and the populace. A chronic balance of payments problem relies on the money sent from Brussels, primarily to the agri-cultural sector, and tremendous government borrowing from abroad. The budget deficit was almost £1,000 million in 1981, adding to a national debt that was a record £3,000 million in 1980. Government ministers of both major parties were hard put to find realistic solutions to their problems (Dorgan 1981; Irish Times 1/12/82).

The government, in an effort to cope with the national shortage of funds, has also had to deal with the various interest groups of Ireland which themselves demand more of a share of the national wealth to help combat rising prices and meet either their accepted or newly perceived standard of living. Trade unionists want good jobs and more wages, traditional industries want more protection, the Church wants less secularization and the nationalists want more government initiative on the North. Even that part of the population most directly affected by

EEC policy has felt the pinch. The initial boom in agriculture that was attendant on accession ended in 1979, which put even more pressure on the government when farmers expected their representatives to protect agriculture from international forces.

Overall the Irish citizen has come to believe in the prosperity of a Common Market and is loathe to allow his sector of the economy, or the interest group he belongs to, to compromise on receiving their fair share of the new wealth. This has affected the Irish political system in a way unforeseen a decade ago. Much of the economic policy that directly affects the livelihoods of Irish citizens is no longer determined in Dublin. The funds that have so helped the country and the policies that have both relieved and pressured different sectors of the economy emanate from the continent. The citizenry of Ireland demands action from their government. The politicians of the country are often powerless to act. This has caused both a realignment of interest group relationships within politics and a new awareness on the part of both citizen and representative as to the strengths and weaknesses of an EEC-dominated Ireland. The farmers were among the first to act within this new set of affairs (see Chapter VIII).

Divisiveness between citizen and government did not hinder the expansion of new industries within a more "European" Ireland. A number of new industries that held firm against international pressures were those of microprocessors, pharmaceuticals and food processing. To date, over 850 foreign companies, 25% of them American, have been drawn to a market that guarantees the avoidance of EEC trade barriers. Ireland also has the highest rate of return on investment in the EEC, the lowest labor

costs, a well-educated English-speaking workforce, a stable business and political environment and generous tax schedules and incentives (e.g. a guaranteed maximum tax of 10% on all industrial profits up to the year 2,000). Employers also enjoy an environment in which trade unions are both weak and extremely competitive. When skilled workers cannot be recruited locally, experienced Irish can be enticed back from North America, Britain and Africa (as in the case of Tara Mines in Meath). Understandably, this situation has not helped labor get higher wages, which has made the jealousy between worker and farmer all the more acute. Overall, Ireland has done well out of its new industries, although many traditional ones that were formerly protected, like clothing, textiles and shoes, have gone into decline (The Economist 24/1/81). New industries have helped attract overseas investment, have provided jobs for both new labor and returned emigrants, and have forced the government to invest heavily in the development of its regional infrastructure, a task it has also turned to the Common Market for aid in.

Over the last several years Ireland has been disappointed with the amounts it has received from both the Community's Regional Development Fund and the Social Fund. The former had been touted by both Fianna Fail and Fine Gael as being tailor-made for the Irish form. In fact, the Regional Fund, part of which is allocated on a quota system to poor regions of member nations and part of which is allocated within a developing Regional Policy to community-wide trouble spots, has provided over £160 million to Ireland. The Social Fund has allocated over £180 million to Irish-run training and retraining schemes in those area hardest hit by

unemployment. These funds have seemed to have little effect in Ireland, at least as perceived by the workers in disadvantaged regions and in Dublin who cannot find a job. When the sums paid to agriculture are announced there is no wonder at the disgruntlement of the urban worker toward the policies of both the government and the EEC, especially when he purchases food at high "European" prices--food that is often produced "just down the lane".

As has been true since the creation of the Irish state, agriculture remains the primary sector of the economy within an EEC context. "With 40% of those in industry dependent indirectly on agriculture and farms spending an estimated £560 million a year on goods and services, the land is still Ireland's greatest asset" (Dorgan 1981). As such, the Common Agricultural Policy, the most important single item in the EEC budget at 75% of total expenditure, is also the most important aspect of Common Market policy to Ireland. The CAP's basic principles are to increase agricultural productivity, to provide a fair standard of living for farmers, to stabilise internal markets, to protect against outside market fluctuations and to ensure reasonable consumer prices. Price protection is provided through threshold prices or export restrictions, and minimum prices are guaranteed internally through intervention or support prices and direct payments to producers. A structural policy is also supported by the EEC which hopes to modernize agriculture through farm consolidation, education, mechanization and the subsidization of commercially viable farms at the expense of subsistence holdings (European Communities Commission 1979:46-48).

The benefits to Irish agriculture were both great and immediate after 1973. As outlined in Chapter I, higher prices, guaranteed markets and state subsidies radically increased farming incomes, output and exports. A crisis Community-wide in the cattle industry in 1973-1974 did not curtail either a rise in the agricultural community's standard of living or in its expectation of substantial future growth. Liquid and creamery milk, tillage and beef production all made profits in that period. The more farmers made, the more capital the banks and the government were eager to lend them for construction, mechanization, change in farm use, expansion of herds and land purchase. As the price for produce went up and credit became readily available to the adventurous the price of land kept the pace. Up to 1979 there seemed to be no end to the boom in agriculture. By that year, however, the pressures of a European budget and economy began to take effect. Other Community members like Holland, Denmark and Italy had begun to effectively compete against Irish goods. Irish agriculture was hit hard by the sharp rise in both the inflation and interest rates, and was visibly shaken by a cut-off of bank credit and threats of foreclosure. The Community also adopted a more prudent pricing policy (certainly prudent to countries like Britain and Germany which paid heavily for the CAP) which allowed only moderate annual increases in agricultural prices (Deasy 1983).

But the CAP-inspired growth in Irish agriculture had not been stopped by 1979, only slowed down. Although farmers' real incomes dropped by 40% in the four years subsequent to 1979, they are still at the real level of 1974, the first and most impressive of the boom years. The recent slight fall in output prices and rise in input costs has hit

the farmers who most extended themselves five years ago. "They are the bright men with good land, who during the great boom of the mid 1970s maximised production by buying expensive foreign machines, chemicals and feedstuffs, and maybe some land too" (The Economist 24/1/81). These farmers excluded, however, the Irish agriculture of the 1980s is in fine form. Between 1970 and 1980 production went up by 35% and the agricultural price index by 400%. The value of farm production went from £350 million to £1,700 million, the value of farm exports from £180 million to £1,200 million, and family farm incomes from £180 million to £650 million (with a drop in the number of farmers from 180,000 to 150,000 nationally). At the personal level this represents for the milk industry, the most lucrative agricultural industry since 1979, an increase of 11p a gallon in 1970 to 53p a gallon in 1980. In the same decade the quantity of milk increased by 70% while the number of dairy farmers went down by 30%. This shot the average return for the milk producer up from £600 to £6,000 (Dalsager 1983; Irish Times 14/4/81).

In the most recent statistics Irish agriculture remains the healthiest sector of the economy. The 1981 Farm Management Survey recorded a 36% rise in family farm income over 1980 (38.5% on farms worked full time)--a rate that dipped slightly to 24% (6% in real terms) in 1982. In that same year, agricultural exports were up 15% in value and 3% in volume, with cattle and milk leading the growth (12% and 10% price rises respectively, with an 8% increase milk volume). The overall value of agriculture went up 13%. And the estimates for the 1983-1984 economic year are also good. Although Irish farmers campaigned for double the amount, the EEC Council of Ministers decided on a 4.4%

agricultural price increase for the year, which should be enough to maintain current levels in output and standard of living. Farmers will also benefit from the recent Irish High Court ruling which made the traditional means of assessing land rates unconstitutional. Until the government can develop a new system, which will not likely be in the next year, farmers will save a considerable sum (£69 million in the current year). This last boon will especially aid large farmers on good land assessed for high rates, many of whom live in eastern Leinster (Irish Times 30/12/82; 16/12/82; 22/12/82).

Thus, the CAP has continued to be the EEC lifeline to both Irish agriculture and the Irish economy as a whole. With almost 22% of the population on the farm (more than double the Community average and greater than all the Ten save Greece), 37% of its exports agricultural, and 17% of its GNP coming from the farm, "Ireland has by far the greatest stake in agriculture of any European country" (The Economist 24/1/81). Yet the Community-wide difficulties in the CAP threaten the future of this stake. From 1983 onward, the security of the CAP depends on such factors as the resolution of the British dispute over payments to the EEC, agreement over the revenue collection to maintain the CAP and the Regional and Social Funds, and the terms of membership for Spain and Portugal which could enter as early as 1986 (Irish Times 4/12/82).

Such threats to the future of the CAP are largely out of the control of Ireland, however, due to the nature of policy making at the Community level—a process which Ireland has been notoriously poor at influencing.

In the words of an Irish journalist

Ireland needs the CAP. The official government line is that we will resist any attempt to weaken or change it. Yet over the years the CAP has changed, often to our detriment. Our input for constructive change of the policy has been low. (Shanahan 1981).

The reasons for this are complex, yet begin with a simple fact.

Agricultural policy--the Irish law of the land--is principally decided by the diplomats and governments of nine other nations. Although member governments have great flexibility in the manner policy is carried out or in the ways that the goals of policy are achieved, and, in some cases, as in some grant allocations or structural reorganization, have complete freedom, they are bound in the majority of cases to the strict requirements of international agricultural laws. A brief description of the overall decision-making structure of the EEC will enable the reader to better appreciate just how fully Irish governments have lost the power to decide policies that were their lifeblood in the maintenance of traditional electoral support.

Since the era of the Six, policy decisions have initiated with the Commission of the Communities, who are charged with originating policy, submitting feasible plans to the council and administering all decisions and laws. It is composed of fourteen statesmen (politicians rather than diplomats) who are appointed by unanimous agreement among the member governments and who must remain throughout their four-year terms of office independent of their national governments and the Council. At present there are two commissioners each from France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom and one each from Belgium, Denmark, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. The Commission's proposals which must be

approved by the Council of Ministers, who directly represent the interests of their nations, are sent first to the Coreper, an association of the Ten's ambassadors, who first make their country's views known regarding the new piece of legislation. This stage is usually an information gathering one. If the Coreper agrees, then the Council can assume it has little to do but officially approve and send it back to the Commission. Most often, however, the proposal goes on to the Council of Ministers for political dealing. This Council's membership is a shifting one, depending on the subject of the proposal, i.e., it is on agricultural policy, the Ministers of Agriculture of the member nations sit on the Council, if it is in a subject dealing with fishing, the relevant ministers, ten different people, meet. It is a Council of Specialists with the Foreign Ministers of the Ten acting as the Senior Council, with briefs to act on any issue as necessary. The Council makes decisions in all areas except the budget which is partially controlled by the European Parliament, 434 members elected by popular vote from the Ten (first election June 1979). This is largely a symbolic body although it acts as a study group for technical legislation and has the drastic powers to reject the budget or dismiss the Commission. When decisions have been reached by the Council, the Commission is given the task of implementing them and monitoring their progress in the member states (Noel 1979:3-7; The Economist 9/10/82; European Communities-Commission 1979:20-31).

National interests are principally and most forcefully expressed in the Council of Ministers as the member states wheel and deal to get the best for their countries. This means a series of compromises and promises, but the Council itself is above reproach, especially given the

watchfulness of the Commission who are sworn to the service of the Community as a whole. The Council, which has a weighted voting system according to the size of the country, must have a "qualified majority" to approve the adoption of the Commission's proposals. Thus Ministers can affect policy, but only in ways that are agreeable to most of the other nine Ministers (especially important being the Ministers of the four largest countries who have ten votes each, with five for Belgium and the Netherlands, three for Denmark, Ireland and Greece, and two for Luxembourg). A Minister cannot reject out of hand any proposal it sees as detrimental to his nation's interests (European Communities-Commission 1979:22-25).

This policy making process has had profound effects on Irish government and politicians. In the first years of membership the distinctions between domestic and foreign policy areas became quickly blurred. The Department for Foreign Affairs and its Minister became one of the most powerful, when a few years before it had been a decidedly 'junior department. Other departments also adapted to the changed circumstances. The Department of Agriculture, long an independent and powerful institution, found itself the new kid on the block with little to say and even less to back it up. It is still the principal link to the Council at which it argues strongly for the CAP. In this capacity it plays

...a leading role in the formulation of Irish policy, although it could perhaps be argued that its main task is now primarily one of implementation. It is interesting that the staff of the Department has increased at the managerial and administrative levels rather than at the policy making level (emphasis added, Burns and Salmon 1977:284).

But the Department and the government no longer initiate and control agricultural policy. The CAP has been good to Ireland, but the events of 1979 on have shown farmers that it is subject to many forces beyond their, and the government's, control. Although the government can still do much to aid agriculture, it too is pressured by urban workers to protect their interests, and the number of urban voters has gone up steadily while farmers' numbers continue to drop. The electorate perceive one simple fact. If agriculture is the key to the Irish economy, as generations have attested, and agricultural policy making is largely out of the hands of the Irish politicians, then these same politicians have lost a large share of their power over their economy and within their society. This has meant change in political relationships within the country at all levels--change that was largely induced by the entrance of Ireland into the EEC. Such change, much of it CAP initiated, has been especially noticeable in agricultural counties such as Meath.

CHAPTER VI

Meath Before the Common Market

The first thing to strike the motorist of the 1970s as he enters Meath on any one of the four main national roads that traverse the county is its flatness. Whether it be on the main Dublin-Galway road, which briefly passes through the southern tip of the county, the Dublin-Cavan road which, with the Dublin-Monaghan road, cuts through the finest farm land in Meath (some say the country), or the Dublin-Dorgheda road, which skirts the cereal and beef areas of Meath on its way to the border and Belfast, the motorist is on a straight hilless run. If he takes the time to notice the lay of the land he is passing through and does not just enjoy it for its driving ease then he will be struck by a number of equally obvious facets of "Royal Meath", jewel of the Old Pale. If familiar with either Ireland or agriculture (and some would also say you cannot know one without the other) the traveller will marvel at the large, regular shaped, almost rectangular fields, separated from each other and the road by "ditches", which are rarely holes in the ground but made up of thick hedges sporadically gapped with gates (and never the rock walls of the West). Perhaps he will smile at the evenness of the pastures and fields which are seldom scarred by bog, weed or rock. If a farmer himself he might even pull over to the the left and get out of his car (perhaps an EEC-new Escort or a 20-year-old bucket of a Morris Minor) to admire the size and tone of the Hereford or Friesian cattle, bred for beef or milk respectively, and stocked on the land in numbers that would

make any many of the land envious (if it weren't a sin, that is). If a "progressive" farmer of the New Ireland, our motorist might wonder why the herds he is watching aren't peppered by any Fench Charolais, whose meat would give a fine return on land like this, or if he is a farmer from the West or South whose whole farm wouldn't fit on the unbroken field before him, he might just be wondering where all the sheep are being hidden, or why "ranchers like this are still let allowed to live" on such fine holdings "by that lot up in Leinster House" (The Dail, that is). Or if our tourist is a Yank come to visit his ancestral home, or even an anthropologist at the beginning of his study, the sight of a brand new combine harvester will make him think about how different and complicated it all looks compared to the quaint land that was expected. And our traveller hasn't even met the people yet.

Meath is a county of rich land, people and history, but also one of great extremes.¹¹ Its 577,823 acres is the most fertile and widely used pasture and tillage land in the country (95% of total available land, the highest proportion in Ireland). Almost 91,000 people lived on the land in 1979, an increase of 26.6% over 1971, the biggest rise in population in rural Leinster outside of Kildare, Meath's neighbor to the south and another growing service area and suburb for Dublin. The density of 101 people to the square mile also points to its new status as a county of commuters, especially from the booming towns within 30 miles of the city. Net immigration to the county has been continuous since 1966 but surpassed all estimates since 1971. The preliminary report for the 1981 census indicates the total population to be over 95,000, a rise of 5.4% in 2 years. The major towns have grown at the expense of rural areas,

especially in the north and west of the county, outside of the Dublin "zone". The rural districts around Navan, at the very center of the county, and around Dunshaughlin, the closest town to Dublin, went up in population by 45.6% and 49.4% respectively, the third and fourth highest rates of increase in all Leinster (behind Dublin County North, next to Dunshaughlin, and Celbridge, County Kildare just to the south of Meath). Navan's urban population, 4,277 in 1979, shows a decrease, but this was due to more people moving into housing estates just outside the urban district limits. Estimates go as high as 12,000 for the "town" population. In fact, Navan's rural district posted an increase of 118% between 1971 and 1979. Kells (2,595) and Trim (2,193) had population growths of 8.5% and 29% respectively, reflecting in the latter case the attraction of the 25 mile journey to the city to commuters (Central Statistics Office 1977a; 1979).

Local industry and mining have also been factors that have aided such impressive growth. Tara Mines, in Navan, are the largest lead and zinc mines in Europe. They have employed up to 800 people, many of whom are "returned" Irish who worked on mines throughout the world. Although the influx of miners was a factor in the building of a number of housing estates around Navan, it was secondary to the overall expansion in incomes and credit in the mid 1970s. Navan, Trim, Dunshaughlin, Dunboyne and Ashbourne (a town completely developed as a commuter residence and service area) became towns where Dublin residents could invest in second homes and be relatively certain of finding people to rent them. Local residents also invested, looking for both a safe return on their money and tax breaks. A number of families took advantage of this period to

establish sons and daughters in homes, either upon their marriage or in the hope of it, that were near to the "home place" or the parents' residence. These new housing estates were also only an hour's drive, at most, from Dublin's city center—an attractive commute to the growing number of Dublin bourgeoisie and petit bourgeoisie seeking to escape the city. The three villages of Laytown, Bettystown and Mornington along Meath's 13 mile coastline also offer both access to Dublin and Drogheda and an opportunity for summer resort residence or development. In short, Meath has both one of the fastest growing populations in the country and a number of the most rapidly developing towns in Leinster, due, in part, to increased industrial and mining employment, the inflationary economy of the 1970s and the expansion of the capital city.

But Meath is an agricultural county with the richest land and farmers in the whole country. Its farming has revolved around the cattle industry since the 18th century, a fact that the county is famous for throughout the nation. Meath is known as a "beef" county. Its large farmers are called "ranchers" by many outsiders to this day. Regardless of the actual land use in the county it would be difficult for Meath to escape its reputation as the home of the "graziers". The importance of its role in the beef trade of the 18th and 19th centuries has been discussed above. In this century Meath has remained the pre-eminent beef fattening county in the nation.

The love of cattle in Meath agricultural society is shared by farmers throughout a country where cattle are kept in one form or another on almost every farm and which in no rural district do they fall below 25% of the total livestock units. The reasons why this is so for the

nation as a whole, and Meath in particular, are many. As seen above, beef and meat were the principal products demanded by the British market which dominated the Irish economy for almost 300 years. The Irish climate and terrain are ideal for year-round pasture and foggage. A tradition of beef production is reinforced by farmers' familiarity with, and fondness for, cattle. Over the years adequate incomes could be made off of cattle, especially when such farming was combined with other types of production. Such income was also very socially acceptable. The overall uncertainties of certain types of cattle production and cattle dealing also appealed to the more adventurous of farmers. Since the 19th century, cattle rearing and trading have been the paramount professions for a farmer. To this day, "There is a certain prestige attached to the keeping of cattle, espeically good quality advanced stock, and to being a good judge of animals" (Gillmor 1977:119). Cattle rearing is an extensive farming system where input costs are low and labor requirements both minimal and seasonal, and which is suited to farms that are fragmented or of irregularly shaped fields. Part-time and aging farmers are also attracted to the low costs and light work. Thus, cattle, whether as the principal means of production or in conjunction with other livestock or tillage, are the mainstay of Irish agriculture.

Meath is the largest beef county in Ireland. In 1974, at the beginning of the EEC era, Meath's 337,100 total cattle far surpassed any other Leinster county. More importantly, its 30,200 cattle that were three-years-old or over was the highest figure in the country, indicating the county's role as "fattener" for urban markets and export. To put this number into perspective, all the counties of Connaught, the western pro-

vince, could muster only 33,00 three-year-olds in the same year. Meath's 86,900 two-year-olds also topped Leinster and was second only to Cork, in Muster, a dairy county. To feed all of these animals, Meath's pasture land and hay fields accounted for 379,600 and 107,900 acres respectively, or about 85% of total county acreage. Although much of this grass was for the ever-increasing dairy herds and the sizable numbers of heifers kept in calf, Meath's agricultural economy at the start of the 1970s depended on the dry stock or beef trade (Central Statistics Office 1977a:74-81).

As already noted, Meath receives most of its cattle as stores from counties in the Midlands, which in turn receive their calves from the small farms of the West, South and North. Fully one-third of the calves born in the cow districts of the Southwest leave the area, while one-half the cattle aged two to three in the Midlands originated elsewhere (Gillmor 1977:124). Meath's fertile grassland is ideal for both fattening and a quick turnover in beef cattle, and is the terminus for store cattle (animals over one and one-quarter years intended for further fattening in the country) which will be fattened from three months to a year. The movement of cattle from other regions to Leinster can be accounted for by the eastern region's environment, agricultural structure and proximity to markets. "Advanced cattle are more suited to large than small holdings because of the low output per acre, small labor requirements and the substantial capital investment in such animals" (Gillmor 1977:123).

Meath fattening of stores has traditionally been a low cost system based on summer grazing. Cattle are bought in the spring, fattened for three to five months, and sold to the market in the fall when they are at their heaviest. Since the price is lowest when the supply is high some farmers attempt to sell as close to June as possible. In the last five years some Meath farmers have set up winter fattening diets for their cattle, so that store cattle could be bought cheaply in the fall and fattened over the winter for spring sale to the butcher. Silage production has begun replacing hay making as the principal source of winter feed. When the animal is judged ready for sale it is brought to the auction mart which is privately owned or co-op, where it can be bought by cattle dealers, exporters, butchers or meat factory agents. These auction marts, which are open one day a week for the sale of selected livestock (e.g. sheep on Monday, dry stock on Tuesday, etc.) and rotate their schedules with other marts that service other areas of the county (Ashbourne beef auction on Thursday, Trim on Tuesday, etc.) have replaced the cattle fairs so famous in the past (for a brief description of a mart see Curtin and Varley 1982) (Gillmor 1977:125).

Cattle also figure prominently on small farms where they are a source of dairy goods, primarily in the north of Meath, as well as large dairy farms that have developed in pace with the demand of Dublin consumers. At the beginning of the last decade commercial dairying was practiced on one-third of all farms in the country but the percentage was much lower among full time farmers in Meath. In 1978 there were 2,100 farms in Meath that were either liquid or creamery milk suppliers while there were almost 10,000 farms, 8,000 of them over 10 acres. These

dairymen can be found throughout the better agricultural lands of the county from Kells east to the sea and southeast to Navan, Dunboyne and Dublin.

Rural Irish land is usually divided between crops and pasture. Only 25,000 acres of Meath's 577,000 are not ploughed or grassland. Of the 549,000 acres of crops and pasture in 1974, only 52,200 grow corn crops and a mere 8,700 root and green crops. By 1978, 68,000 acres were set aside for wheat and barley with another 12,000 for roots and greens, but a full 85% of the county's agricultural land was used for livestock. The best land for corn tillage in Meath has been the east of the county, roughly within the triangle formed by Navan, Drogheda and Dunboyne. This is the zone which helped make Meath a major producer of cereals during the deValera era and his call for a return to tillage during World War II (Central Statistics Office 1977a:74-75; Foley 1979).

The small farms of the north of the county have some pigs, especially on the Monaghan border, but the county is known more for its sheep (217,900 county-side in 1974). These are found on the hill farms of the north and the poorly drained bogland of the north, west and south of the county. Some big farms graze sheep on the stubble of root and cereal crops, or graze them on the same fields as cattle. Their wool and lambs provide a steady source of income. Sheep is not a principal farm enterprise in Meath.

Perhaps the most important livestock besides cattle for Meath's economy, society and national image is the horse. On stud farms throughout the south and east of Meath thoroughbreds are reared, trained, watched, pampered and prepared for the races that captivate the sporting

Irish and British. In fact a race meeting in Ireland is a social event surpassed only by its importance in the local economy. Most Irish stud farms are in the Dublin region, with 44% of thoroughbreds found in Meath, Kildare and Dublin, due, in varying degrees to the flat terrain, fine pasturage, size of farms, ready access to Dublin, and the social military and economic traditions that have been associated with the area (Gillmor 1977:131). Meath is also known far and wide in Ireland as the county not only of the "grazier" but also of the "hunts" (hounds leading riders to the fox) and the "horsey set" with their tweeds, jodhpurs and grand accents. Show jumping is a nationally followed sport and the most famous riders and horses have their farms in Counties Meath and Kildare. The pure blood horse business also helps foster the national and self-image that Meath is both a rich county and a county of rich people with expensive interests and tastes.

Land use in Meath follows patterns established between 1750 and 1850. Meath is a beef fattening county which also has a large investment in both thoroughbred horses (due to its location, colonial history and wealth) and dairying (on both the poor farms that have survived their post-peasant trials and on the relatively new commercial dairies). Corn production has been a lucrative enterprise on the large farms of the east of the county, on the flat land that slopes down to the sea. Sheep are a useful addition to farms in wet, rocky or inaccessible areas. This structure to Meath agriculture saw little change up to the 1973 accession to the EEC. Except for the Economic War and the Emergency, beef production on large farms has been the source of economic and political

influence and power on the part of the Meath large farmer, rancher and grazier.

Since the 1920s Meath has consistently had the greatest number of dry cattle of all the counties, the highest total number of fattened beef (three-year-olds), the largest proportion of beef to total cattle population and the greatest number of large farms on which the cattle are stocked in the country (holdings which are usually listed on census rolls as "over 200" and "over 300" acres). Cattle numbers dropped before the 1950s, however, then began a slow but steady rise up to the present, with the greatest single increase coming in the years when Ireland joined the EEC (290,306 in 1970; 329,777 in 1975). Of more importance both to my thesis and to Meath beef farmers is the number of fattened cattle which has been the key to Meath prosperity over the years. As can be seen in Table 4, three-year-old cattle supplies fell off by almost 20,000 between 1930 and 1934, the period of the Economic War. This was a drop of 30% over four short years. The lowest national total was hit in 1937 (1.6 million cattle) when the effects of the War took hold. It is clear by the attendant shortages in the two-year-olds in Meath that all fat beef were either sold off or butchered as quickly as possible in those years, and that yearlings and calves were the major investments by farmers who could neither sell their cattle to England nor get it to the urban consumer. Meath again became a producer of finished beef cattle during the Emergency years of World War II when, although the country officially downgraded their importance in favor of tillage, the British market took all the beef Meath could supply. The number of three-year-olds began to drop after the war while two-year-olds increased in importance, due

TABLE 4

MEATH CATTLE, SELECTED YEARS, 1925-1975*

	Total Cattle	3 yr. olds	2	1	Calves	Milch
1925	236,107	79,790	69,583	37,920	22,973	18,091
1930	232,116	63,702	81,370	41,135	21,478	17,855
1934	202,376	44,760	60,025	40,278	28,858	23,108
1939	225,946	41,542	67,401	51,187	31,030	24,537
1944	211,492	54,607	55,213	35,921	29,084	27,784
1949	208,838	643,844	49,468	32,895	25,857	28,803
1954	225,165	57,950	58,350	38,970	32,333	32,019
1960	244,800	41,600	64,900	49,200	39,700	42,400
1965	274,885	31,439	69,333	60,718	50,243	50,709
1970	290,306	26,501	77,849	65,969	52,796	55,406
1975	329,777	30,404	88,444	75,630	56,465	43,462

* The numbers for Heifers in Calf are omitted.

SOURCE: Central Statistics Office, Dublin

largely to improved technology, which enabled cattle to be finished earlier, and to consumer preferences for lean meat. Changes in marketing and packaging changed the structure of production in beef as well. Before 1950 exports were almost exclusively live stores and finished beef, but since then the beef processing industry has been a principal buyer of Meath cattle. It was not until Ireland joined the Common Market, however, that Meath dry cattle increased in numbers in all age groups (at the expense of dairy cows). Continental markets demanded Irish cattle and meat to satisfy the European tastes for selected beef cuts that were leaner and less marbled than those for British tastes. The high prices guaranteed by the CAP made beef production a very enticing enterprise at the beginning of EEC membership. Although there was a beef glut in 1973-1975 which brought a depression in prices, beef has remained the principal enterprise on Meath farms to this day. The majority of the large farms of the county still fatten beef, preferring the lower costs, the security and the traditional way of life to the more demanding and costlier dairying. In the 1973 Card Index survey of the Meath County Committee of Agriculture, cattle farms were far and away the most prominent agricultural enterprise in the county (see Table 5).

The structure of Meath agriculture has also remained stable over the years. At the founding of the state, Meath's land was held by fewer farmers, and on average in larger holdings than found in any other county. In 1926 39% of the agricultural land of Meath was in holdings of 200 or more acres. The absolute number of very large holdings decreased steadily over the next two generations due to the workings of the Land Commission, the emigration of many of the remaining "gentry" and the twin

TABLE 5

MEATH FARMERS 1973
(CARD INDEX SURVEY, COUNTY MEATH COMMITTEE OF AGRICULTURE)

Full Time	Part Time	Total	0-50	50-100	100+
4243	1535	5788	3284	1334	1170

Main Enterprise	0-50	50-100	100+	Total
Cattle	1725	697	788	3210
Cereals	30	32	58	120
Pigs	12	6	-	18
Horticulture	39	1	5	45
Sheep	13	6	13	32
Creamery Milk	429	194	73	696
Liquid Milk	452	278	192	1222

SOURCE: County Meath Committee of Agriculture

processes of consolidation and legally sanctioned partible inheritance. Thus farms over 200 acres were slightly reduced in number while those between 100 and 200 acres became the most popular county-wide among full time farmers. By 1939 the holdings over 200 acres numbered about 550, in 1954 535, and in 1975, 500. In the same three years farms between 100 and 200 acres totalled 860, 892 and 930 respectively. Of course, these statistics do not indicate the precise acreages above the 300 mark, but since the overall number of smaller farms has decreased since 1923 it is safe to assume that the larger holdings are getting bigger while medium holdings increase in number. This has been the case since World War II. But because there are fewer large farms now than in 1926, the percentage of total farms that are 200 acres and over in the county is decreasing each year. Since not nearly as much of the county is owned by these large farmers as was owned by their ancestors, the average size of their holdings is much lower than two generations ago.

The groups that have not done well in keeping their land have been the gentry and grazier groups that were the targets of Land Commission purchase and displacement. From 1923 to 1975, 137,421 acres of Meath land were acquired by the Land Commission for sale to former tenants and neighboring small farmers. Most of the great estates of the 19th century were broken in this way. The property was vested in approximately 3,500 holdings, all of which were redistributed at a cost of almost £3 million. These are the highest figures for all of Leinster and among the top achievements of the Land Commission nationwide. They indicate the strong voice the medium sized farmers of Meath had at the national level, and how potent public opinion was in the belief that Meath, among all the

counties of the East, was the home of the Ascendancy class, defenders of an antiquated colonial system. As acres were taken away from the traditional "large farmers" of Meath, a new class of men, with smaller farms and different pasts, was taking on the same title.

The large farmers of today's Meath own lands that are not nearly as sizable as their ancestors' lands of a hundred years ago. In fact, the largest farm landholdings in Meath (or what once were farm lands) are owned by either the remnant of the Ascendancy class or by business corporations. Lord Dunsany whose family is one of the oldest and most "Meath" of all, dating from the Norman conquest, is the largest single landowner with almost 1,500 acres (see Table 6). His demense, in south central Meath, is noted for its castle (across the glen from Killeen Castle, keep of kinsmen of old, and next to the fields of an agricultural college), beef herds and plantation (woodland). It is so picturesque that it is often used for motion picture location shooting. The same can be said for the demesnes of fellow descendants of the nobility--families whose castles spawned towns and who held sway over thousands of acres and thousands of people in times past. The Earl of Mount Charles, at Slane Castle, and the Marquis of Headfort, at Kells, each control over 1,000 acres, a fraction of what their families once held. Their lands are great, however, when compared to their fellow farmers'. Although difficult to determine, because of farmer fear of tax, traditional silence regarding one's business, and because accurate records of ownership are not centralized, Tables 6 and 7 list the landholders of 500 acres or more in Meath and break down the other holdings of above 200 acres by size. Those with 500 and more are surely the "largest" of the

TABLE 6

MAJOR MEATH LANDHOLDERS, 1979
MORE THAN 500 ACRES

<u>Landowner</u>	<u>Acres</u>
Lord Dunsany	1,486
Limestone Land	1,165
Tara Exploration	1,145
Earl of Iveagh	1,090
Earl of Mountcharles	1,039
Marquis of Headfort	1,001
Cement Ltd.	969
John Pollock	960
Nigel Naper	918
John Fowler	908
Nigel Fynn	888
Christopher Fitzpatrick	867
Frederick Shekleton	761
Achates Investment	757
Peter Austin	721
Brendan Crinion	699
John Prendergast	662
John Nicholson	644
A.F. Coddington	641
Sam. McCormack	628
Richard Blake	581
Trustees, Maynooth Mission	577
Salesian Fathers	572
Thomas Bruton	570
Joseph Barry	558
Mrs. Burke	556
Dublin District Milk Board	548
Ferrans Stud	546
Con O'Sullivan	543
John Finnegan	538
Gerald Horgan	528
Frank Brady	513
Vincent Eivers	503
T.E. Potterton	501
Colm Williams	<u>501</u>
TOTAL	26,084
(4.7% of 550,000 Meath farm acres)	

SOURCE: Rates Office, Meath County Council.
Irish Business, September 1979

TABLE 7

MEATH FARMS, 1979
MORE THAN 200 ACRES

<u>Acres More Than or Equal To</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>% of Total Full Time Farmers</u>
450	12	.3
400	17	.4
350	43	1.0
300	43	1.0
250	69	1.6
200	83	2.0
	267	6.3

<u>Miminum Acreage</u>	<u>% of Total Farmland</u>	<u>% of Meathland</u>
5,400	1.0	.9
6,800	1.2	1.1
15,050	2.7	2.5
12,900	2.4	2.2
17,250	3.1	3.0
16,600	3.0	2.9
73,800	13.4	12.6

SOURCES: Rates Office, Meath County Council
Irish Business, September 1979

large farmers, but those with 200 are truly the "large farmers" that Meath is so famous for in modern times. These tables are based on agricultural statistics from the Central Statistics Office, an article on landowners from a business magazine, and my own research at the rates office of the Meath County Council (this last task was made doubly difficult because of fragmented holdings and the use of a number of names as the listed owners of farms in order to either avoid tax or qualify for lesser rates or grants). They support the view that Meath owners of large farms have not decreased in number since the 1930s. Beyond the top 35, who are only .8% of Meath full-time farmers but who own 4.7% of the agricultural land, there are still almost 250 holders of 200 or more acres. Great corporate owners like Tara Mines, Limestone Land and Cement Ltd. notwithstanding, the largest farmers in Meath own between 500 and 1,000 acres.

Although small in comparison with North American agriculture, the holdings of the large farmers of Meath are, on average, the largest in the country (along with areas of Kildare and parts of Cork) and by far among the largest in the European Community. Although they are found throughout the county, very few are in the north and west. The best agricultural land and the largest farms are in the areas around Navan, Trim, Slane, Dunboyne, Ratoath and Duleek, the center, south and east of Meath. And in a native system of reckoning, in which the term "large" or "small" is very much determined by your locality, these landholdings are very large indeed. In Meath of 1976-1980, "large" farms were considered by most to be about 200 acres and above, "medium" farms were 100 and above, and "small" below that mark. In the Midlands 150 acres is often

considered a large holding, while in the poorer areas of the West 100 acres would make a man very wealthy. In a county of 90,000, with no more than 5000 farmers (and the number seemingly dropping by the day) 10% are of 200 acres or more. When one considers their leadership in economic, political, cultural and religious affairs, they form a recognizable elite within local society. When I told a small farmer in Dingle, County Kerry, who worked a 27 acre farm on which he raised a family of eight, that I had just visited a 400 acre Meath farm, he told me I must have been very much mistaken. "There are large farms in Meath, ranches even" he said, "but the government wouldn't allow any to be over 200 acres". In his eyes he could not understand why people could ever even consider owning that much land. "What would they be wantin' it for?"

In Meath they do want land, know what to do with it, and want to add to it. Farms exceed 200 acres, yet acreage excepted, large farmers are not a homogeneous group. They come from different social backgrounds, political traditions and religions. Together, in Meath, they form an elite that has dominated local society up to the 1970s when both Meath and Ireland changed around them.

Although the "large farmer" has had many guises in the literature, drama, history, sociology, and folklore of Ireland, the composition of the group (if, indeed, it ever was a group at the national level) has often changed. Large farming stays, but who the farmer is, and what he does on the land, do not remain the same. The above chapters have shown that at the start of the 20th century the great estates of Leinster were under considerable political, economic and public pressure. Their land was demanded by former tenants. The British government no longer seemed

able to protect their interests and many of their family members had died in the Great War. Foreign agricultural competition ate into much of their profits. Irish republicanism seemed to threaten their very lives. As this remnant of the gentry packed to leave (a few stalwarts determined to stay) their land was quickly snatched up by their neighbors. But former tenants alone did not become the beef farmers of Meath so famous in this century. Protestant farmers, many from the north of Ireland, took advantage of their own farming skill to work the land in the same ways as did their Catholic neighbors. It made no difference if their holdings were 200 acres instead of 2,000--they were the largest that sensible men could expect to inherit or buy in the depression days of the first quarter century. And there was social, economic and political compensation as well for the hard working man of means. By the 1960s their sons, with educations undreamt of a generation before, got ready to turn the farm into a successful business. It is they who are the true large farmers of an Ireland gone into the EEC.

But the Big Men of Meath are, as they always have been, much more than businessmen. Since the original fieldwork of Arensberg and Kimball (1940) pointed to large farmers as a population worthy of ethnographic study, little has been written on their social organization. In a recent sociological analysis of Ireland, one scholar laments the lack of data on the life style and social organization of large farmers, one of the two "classes" of farmers so often alluded to. And although the gap between the two types of farmers has widened, suggesting "the existence of certain very marked characteristics for large and small farmers, no systematic analysis has been undertaken along these lines" (Peillon 1982:

17). Although the following does not seek to rectify wholly this gap in the literature, it is a beginning in the creation of a more detailed picture of Irish rural life. Meath people know they are residents in the county of the largest farmers, but many are loathe to hazard descriptions of who and what "large" means. Most assume that influence, prestige, wealth and power are all directly related to acreage. Thus, using acreage as a guide in identifying the largest farmers, I have constructed the following scheme of the types of large farmers. To do this I have used the categories given me by farmers themselves as well as the impression of non-farming Meath people. This ethnographic introduction is aimed at presenting a fuller profile of an agricultural elite whose political power has been transformed because of the internationalization of agricultural policy making.

The largest individual landowners in Meath are the few isolated descendants of the Anglo-Norman and British families that dominated first the Pale and then all the country. These families, whose names are linked to the seats of their past glory, such as Slane, Dunsany and Headfort, are still at the social pinnacle of the old Ascendancy class in Meath. This group is known locally as the County families, the last of the great Protestant families from the 18th and 19th centuries. The life of this minority (less than 5% of the county are Protestant) is culturally distinct from the majority in Meath. They are the descendants of landlords who ruled very large estates, usually from the "Big Houses" at the end of a tree-lined lane. This Georgian mansion is often still the residence of the family, although farm sheds, barns and assorted out-buildings stand nearby. If not in a Georgian house, these county

families reside in a two-story stone house of their own design, height being of some significance in claims to prestige within the community, if your home is isolated on your own property. The farms that these families preside over, and work on in most cases, are usually principally beef farms, although tradition, investments, inheritance and socializing demand an interest in horses (for show jumping, hunting, breeding or racing). Almost all county families are Church of Ireland; some Catholic families with land, wealth and long-standing residence on their land culturally ape them, but are seldom accepted by the county families and are derided by other Catholic farming families. The social life of the county families reinforces their religious separateness. Most children go to private schools in the county, Dublin or Britain and then to British universities or Trinity College. They are most likely to marry people of the same religion, socioeconomic background and education, and to marry someone from outside the county. Gaelic football and Fianna Fail conventions are scrupulously avoided.

The old county families have made, and continue to make, a lasting impression on the character of Meath. Needless to say, some people still look on them with resentment. I recall one small farmer talk about a local big farmer taking a whip to one of his workers, warning me about what to expect when I visit the farm. It took five minutes for me to ascertain that the event took place in the 18th century. The tale teller did not quite share my amusement at the seriousness of his warning. Most Meath residents, however, look on the descendants of the old landlords with respect mixed with apathy. Since their social networks do not cross very often, it is easy to be affable, tolerant and pleased at the knowledge

that the day of the county families the hegemony of their class, has come and gone. Although there are occasional spirited outbursts by small farmers who tout a past republican cause in order to demand more land from the "gentry", there is no real threat in Meath to either their livelihoods or their lives (nonetheless, an Alsatian trained to kill which never left the side of one landlord as he showed me his estate prevented me from making the same statement in his company). For the county families themselves, I observed no regrets at the exclusivity of their position. Meath was their home. Ireland was their country. Many continued to see Britain in a benign light and they often wished their neighbors would do so as well. In general, they were not happy with the Irish government. The families I knew had long since given up hope of having any real political choice in Ireland. Most still supported Fine Gael, dating from the founding of that party, but even that was waning in the early 1970s.

The county families' life in Meath revolved around their farms, their horses, their outside investments in business and a social life which brought them out of the county much more so than their Catholic neighbors and wealthy counterparts. Their economic importance in the county is sizable, given the land they own, the people they employ, the valuable link they provide in the internal beef trade, the professions their families bring back to the county, and the capital investment they draw in, especially in blood stock. Their political role has been minimized over the last three generations, but it was these county families that were instrumental in making Home Rule so practicable in the 19th century and who helped set up the Local Government system of 1899 which

took over for the landlord-run Grand Juries (which, admittedly, many other county families fought to preserve). They remain a force in the secularization of both Meath and the country, however, in which the state must separate itself from the Roman Catholic Church.

Given this importance in local affairs, it is no wonder that they are a sizable interest group within agriculture. Of the 27 farmers and landowners in Table 6 (excluding corporate owners) at least 10 are of the old county families. Many farmers with 200 acres or more are either cognates or affines of these families (cross-religion marriages do occur, but not with great frequency at this level). Many of these farmers are also participants in the Irish Farmers Association. They are respected and listened to by other farmers because of their education, demeanor, family's Meath tradition and wealth. The biggest of the county families do not participate in such organizations, however. Their farm managers run their farms. Most do not bother with either fraternal or occupational groups in their locality. Some of the largest "county" landholders simply want to be left alone, while others seemingly go out of their way to be both model neighbors and model citizens of the community. Often they are forced to rely on the good will of their neighbors because of financial pressures. The Earl of Mount Charles is considered by many to be an ideal member of the old Ascendancy. A young man in his thirties, whose academic training took him to Harvard to study history, he introduced some business ideas to the county by establishing a restaurant and night club in his castle, and has used his grounds for a recent Rolling Stones concert. The business he has attracted to Meath is complemented by his attendance to the wishes and needs of the population

of the Slane village, which perhaps ironically, used to be part of the estate. Yet members of the community or not, most large and small farmers in Meath are not of this class, nor do they seem comfortable at being considered in the same category. Perhaps because of the nationalist past or the cultural present, the county families stand out in dress, accent, dialogue and demeanor. I often heard Meath people suggest that the old county families were regimented, cautious, mean, decisive and haughty. When I asked one farmer of east Meath to elaborate on his neighbor's strict adherence to propriety, he directed me to observe his hedges, "they are always cut" Old landed families have countered such charges with the view that many Meath people demonstrated irrational republicanism, laziness, envy and religious ritualization. These stereotypes reflect past class conflict, but also indicate community awareness that the 20th century has favored the culture of the newly landed Catholic big farmer. It is this latter group that has so affected the modern image of Meath as a county of Big Men, but it cannot be denied, stereotypes notwithstanding, that the large farmers of Meath are, in great part, the physical and cultural descendants of the Ascendancy class of a past age.

There are a number of other Protestant farmers with sizable holdings who are also members of the fabled "large farmers". Most have not held their land for nearly as long as the county families, however, They are the farmers whose ancestors worked in overseer capacities on the great estates and who took advantage of the Land Acts of the last century. Many are immigrants from the North of Ireland who came from as far away as Donegal in the internal migrations of cattle men who followed

their animals to the market towns of the east coast. There is a large number of these self-made Protestant farmers in east Meath. Many of their ancestors migrated south from Ulster last century to work in mills and shipping (cotton and linen in Slane and Drogheda and cattle and corn to Scotland and England) but ended up in agricultural labor. Still others used their knowledge of beef to carve out tenant holdings from the ranches established after the Famine. A few British people who retired to Meath on sizable holdings to pursue "gentlemanly" farming also belong to this group, although culturally they might prefer to be associated with the long-standing county families. Culturally, the majority of these self-made Protestant farmers are little different from the majority of their Catholic neighbors. They dress, speak and participate in community functions in ways that make it almost impossible for an outsider to recognize their cultural or religious background. Although their time in Meath has been perceived as relatively short-lived—I have heard the term "back-door Protestants" used, which refers to their relatively late entrance into the county—they are full members of all community activities. The one aspect of local society that sets them apart is their religion, which is most often Church of Ireland and Presbyterian. They do go to Gaelic sports and Fine Gael meetings (until the 1970s never to Fianna Fial), and act in most public affairs in no way differently from neighbors of similar education, land and interests. Inter-marriage is acceptable if not common. Children go to national (public) schools and then on to vocational or further academic training. In present day Ireland more children are going to university, which means more training in professions and less reliance on the "home place" or

either support or a stake. Materially and politically the are very much like their Catholic neighbors. Because of their immigratn past and present religion, however, they are sometimes singled out as having less a claim on the land than others have. Legally this is preposterous, but culturally it presents an interesting view of the seemingly solid front that large farmers are perceived to have by small farmers and townspeople alike.

The majority of large farmers in Meath are the Catholic descendants of the strong tenants of the gentry of old. Although many of them arrived in Meath in the last century for the same reasons outlined for the strong Protestant farmers, most large farmers take pride in their Meath heritage (few are ever asked to prove their family's longevity in Meath). Many of these strong middle class Catholic farmers do indeed descend from skilled agricultural workers who left the north and west of Ireland to meet the 19th century demand for men who knew beef: managers, stewards, cattle dealers and hersdmen. Some were required to work with both draught horses and thoroughbreds. Still other ancestors of Meath strong farmers were the tenants of the pre-Famine landlords—tenants who by cleverness, hard work and luck survived last century's travails until they had a chance at their own holding. When the people of Ireland talk about the large farmers of Meath they may imagine the great estates of the mansion-living grazier, but they are unknowingly referring to middle class businessmen whose inheritance, sense of tradition and way of life make them the mainstay of Meath, and national agriculture. And their love of both the land and the profit they can make off of it make them little different from both their rural and urban detractors.

The big farmer of Meath during his workday looks remarkably like Irish farmers everywhere in the country. Although he might pay more attention to detail, he is still dressed in cap, collared shirt, old trousers (never jeans), Wellington boots and the ever-present jacket (which often looks like an old suit jacket relegated to manual labor). Differences in class position can seldom be seen until a farmer cleans himself up at night. The nice suit, tweed cap and shiny brogues bespeak of wealth and social standing which could not possibly be from a small farm. Even the old cars some drive around their farms are deceptive. The new car is back in the garage, or the wife is using it at her job or on her errands (that is, if she does not have her own car). The wives of young big farmers are fashion conscious, educated (at least secondary school level), usually employed in local service jobs or in the city, and in almost complete control of the home. Older wives stay more at home, due primarily to their larger number of children. Although I have no statistics by size of farm, I observed no real difference in attitude toward size of family among any Meath farmers of the same generation. Although the current child-bearing generation does not want as many children as the last, most farm wives that I asked thought that four was a good number of children for a family, and a goal they hoped to reach (six to eight children not being uncommon in their parents generation).

Rural Ireland is a natalistic society. Secularization notwithstanding, it is expected that upon marriage there will be little delay in having children (the national marriage and birth rates in 1975 per 1,000 population were 6.8 and 21.5 respectively). This is partially due to the relatively late age at marriage of both partners. Although most

marriages in the state are between people of 20 to 24 years old, men on farms are often much older. Upon marriage, however, most women have their first child within the year. Mean natural growth rate in 1976 was 11.3, higher than the national average of 10.1. The average number of children per family in Meath is over four, which matches the national average for farming families, although there are some indicators that large farming families are having fewer children. Young couples in Meath, especially on the farm, who do not have children are the cause of concern among their family members (Central Statistics Office 1976; 1977b).

Big farmers, like all farmers in Ireland, do not live in nucleated settlements. The family home is at the end of a tarmacadam drive, surrounded by trees and farm buildings, on the largest single holding of the farm (or, in Meath terms, on the largest "farm" on the holding, "farm" as a term being applied to all parcels of land added over the years to the original farm). Both the building and the original farm land are called the "home place". Most homes are two story stone, with a number of additions figuring prominently on the older buildings: kitchen, toilets and bedrooms. The fields or farms of a holding are usually scattered, sometimes ranging five to ten miles away from each other. Most large farms of any duration in the county are centralized, i.e., most of their land is in the same townland and is composed of contiguous fields.¹³ In fact, in many of the old county family and old Catholic farms, their mailing address is the townland, and when one refers to one's home the townland name is used. This is true of most rural Ireland—one does not go "home" but one goes to "Keenogue" or "Painestown" or "Rathnaree", the

townland on which the home place rests. The home of the Meath big farmers is replete in varying degrees with the major consumer goods of modern Ireland: washing machine, clothes dryer, color TV, dish washer, stereo, hair dryers, video recorders, etc. (I hesitate to list the telephone because of the notoriously inefficient phone system). Families spend most of their time indoors in both the kitchen and sitting room (parlors and/or the dining rooms are reserved for guests and formal occasions) with most children doubling up in bedrooms.

The family's day begins with standard Irish breakfast of juice, cold cereal, porridge, egg, rasher, bread, butter and the ever-present tea. The children go off to the Catholic national schools or the more exclusive convent schools, while some secondary-school-age boys stay to help on the farm (depending more of their ability rather than on need for their labor). Most children are encouraged to pursue their education to at least the tertiary level, and most do. Farm laborers are hired off of neighboring small farms. The wife and mother of the household goes to her own job, or does the shopping, cleaning and organization for dinner, at which she has all those "belonging to her" on the farm for a meal. The days where the woman of the house feeds the farm's workers their dinner are long gone, except in hay-making season when long, hard hours are kept. At the 1:00 p.m. meal, meat, potatoes and green/root vegetables are served after soup and before sweet and tea. This is the main meal of the day. If the woman is at her own job, a daughter or hired housekeeper (farmer's wife or daughter from a small farm in the townland or nearby, or a female member of the husband or wife's kindred) stays the day. The family is reunited at tea time, at approximately 6:00 p.m. and

after the Angelus, before or after which the cows are milked again, having also been done at breakfast time by either a laborer or household member. During the day the farmer has attended to the chores of being the "boss", a common term used by sons and workers in reference to the farmer on his own farm. A quiet pint, an evening of whist, a meeting of the IFA or Irish Countrywomen's Association (ICA), or a visit to a neighbor on business or pleasure (they cannot be separated) rounds out the day.

Most of these farmers--that is, those farmers' sons who will or hope to be principal heirs to the land--marry when they feel it is certain that they will soon have some control over the farm. This usually means when the farmer is old, ill, ready for retirement, pressured into it by family opinion, delighted by a son's choice of mate, desirous of an Old Age Pension, or afraid that his chosen heir is fed up and leaving. Seldom will a son who wants the farm be able to attract and marry a woman when she knows that it will be years before the farm is theirs. In some instances, when the young woman is both liked by her suitor's family and recognized to be an attractive prospect, i.e., she has a job that is well-paying and prestigious locally and therefore very much in demand, a couple's "doing a line" (seriously courting publicly) will bring very strong pressure to bear on the father. The two most attractive jobs locally for women were teacher and nurse because they were respected positions, "feminine" jobs allowing the wife to be at home often, paid well and were always in demand in the local labor market. One 26 year old teacher from a well known agricultural family had received three proposals in as many years from farmers that she had known from birth but

had not been particularly friendly with. The advertisements by farmers looking for suitable spouses in the personal columns of the weekly paper "The Farmer's Journal" are worthy of scrutiny in this regard.

A farmer has a number of choices regarding his successor if he does not himself want to relinquish the farm. He can draw up a new will that the son is party to, build a new house on his land to establish the new couple, make the son farm manager with at least nominal say over the business, begin to transfer bank accounts over to the son or give the son complete control over a portion of the land, with written agreement to hand over more in the future. Whatever the farmer does, it must be open and public. He would be shaming his son and severely limiting his chances for a desirable marriage partner if he kept the younger man on the farm in no capacity other than as the dutiful and hopeful son. Although the use of such terms as "boy" to refer to farmer's sons who do not have their own farm is not common (as in Arensberg and Kimball's Clare) such a person's status decreases steadily each year. Simply put, a man of 30, let alone 40, is not considered a "social adult" by the farming community if he has reached that age, wants a farm, and does not have it. The older he gets the less chance he has of getting married. And although marriage is not necessary for the running of a successful farm and household, it is necessary if one hopes to claim some prestige within farming circles. A wife and children are considered part of a successful farmers's life cycle. Of course, the happiest couple with the brightest, most industrious and most attractive five children will reap minimal prestige from the community if they cannot run a farm. To first attract a wife, however, a young farmer must first deal with the "boss". And a

farmer knows that he must compromise in order to keep his primary heir interested in working the land. Although government and EEC programs intended to stimulate early retirement have failed in rural areas, they did serve to make farmers more aware of the national concern with making agriculture "younger" and more efficient. Farmers cannot help wanting to hold on to the the position of preeminence that often took them 30 years to achieve, while they waited for their fathers to give it up. In Meath, the farmers do not wait to transfer ownership until there is a marriage agreement between their sons and girlfriends as has been reported for Clare and other areas. Most transfers occur before both the death of the older man and the marriage of the younger, and these transfers occur gradually. Final transfers do occur late, however, fitting a national pattern in which on farms of 100 acres and more fully one-third of male farmers do not become farm managers (a prelude to ownership) until they are 35 years or older (Commins and Kelleher 1973:24).

Who inherits the farm? In Ireland where all inheritance is legally partible and all children's rights are protected farms are seldom divided. The rules of succession to the farm are not clear cut. In Meath the eldest son is often considered by many to be the natural heir, but if he was disinclined then the land would probably go to the son (or, in rare cases, the daughter) who showed the most skill and interest in farming. In short, the farm usually goes to the son with both the most promise and the favor of the father or parents. In most cases the candidate becomes known within the family by his teens. If an elder brother's skills are matched by a younger one's then succession has a great deal to do with the father's age, health and regard towards each

son. In some cases the father's favorite heir can be given the farm at a relatively young age in order to keep him on the land. In others, the favorite can be uninterested in the succession, but the father is blind to it. In one instance in the Navan area the eldest son on the farm who had a clerical job in the town had been earmarked for the farm, but, in his words, a farmer he "was never to be". The third boy, just finished secondary school, loved the farm and the farm life, but knew the land would go to his brother. The antagonism between them resulted in a violent fight--the lover of farming emigrated the next day. His father wouldn't, or couldn't, stop him. He still hoped his "heir" would come to his senses. In some rare instances, brothers will divide the acreage of a large farm upon the death of the "boss", but this is considered unsound economic and social behavior by the community (and rightly so, given higher profits per acre on large farms and community belief that one brother must naturally be a better farmer). Mostly, however, the heir will be the one who almost everyone in the family thinks is best for the farm: an industrious, educated and well-liked son and brother.

One of the reasons there are so few disputes between siblings over succession is the cultural code of both maintaining the home place intact and providing for other heirs. Although a formal dowry (and matchmaking) system has not been in effect for over two generations, all women and men have familial rights to the income of the farm while they are on it, and expect provision from its resources when they make the move off of the farm. In the past, daughters have received a secondary to university education as their birthrights. Some also receive financial aid in establishing their new homes (whether as single or married) especially if

it is in an urban area. Fathers often give building sites on the home farm to daughters who move to the city or emigrate, so that they might some day erect a home to return to. Bank accounts in children's names are a rarity, given the fluctuations in capital ever present in agriculture, but few farmers begrudge the financial necessity of educating and establishing daughters and sons. As mentioned above, an educated daughter is more "attractive" in local society, which also adds to the farmer's prestige, and she is better able to find employment in government service and business. Sons who will not inherit the whole farm are seldom able to get a piece of it. Like their sisters, most are educated, but for the "big men" of Meath this means at the very least in a technical college. Most do a university degree in the professions. The principal heirs often do an agricultural degree. In one very rare case, one 400 acre farmer's four sons each did accounting, law, medicine and veterinary science, leaving him with no one willing to take the farm (it goes to a daughter and her husband). Some sons who are looking for business or professional employment locally, and/or who are contemplating marriage, receive money to buy a house. Funds were also provided in the 1970s for sons' futures, especially in the booming real estate trade. A house or site on the home farm are attractions for the working son living away to come back to visit. In modern Meath among farming families siblings do not demonstrate marked hostility toward each other. In regard to succession, each child has a good idea of both what to expect and when to expect it. At a certain point everyone in the family knows when the child can no longer claim against the estate. In some instances, upon the death of the father or transfer to a sibling, land

might be sold or bank accounts closed to pay the others a lump sum. In most cases this would appear lavish, though not unwelcome, to the children themselves, especially if they are already established members of their communities. The nature of the commitment between father and children is at times rigid and at other ephemeral. When I asked a young woman emigrating to America why she did not claim a site, one-third of an acres, from her father's farm of 300 which would fall to her brother, she replied, dismayed by the boldness and ignorance of my query, "because he paid for my schooling". The fact that he had paid for all her siblings' through secondary school, but only the brother, the only son, would inherit the farm presented no problem to her.

Thus farmers' children go into the professions (for employment locally, in the cities, and sometimes for emigration) business, service industries and farming. Most are married in their twenties and would be delighted with having four children. Their fathers' wealth, if any, gives them education, initial capital and the ability to improve their geographic and social mobility. But at least one son or daughter stays in farming on the home place, and it is that occupation that has been the basis for big farmer influence in Meath society over the last few generations.

Beef farming has changed over the last decade. It still is the least labor intensive of all major farm enterprises, but more income, guaranteed markets, increased credit and grants, and improved education and advisory services have all stimulated both increases in production and changes in traditional ways in beef farming. As of old, every day the conscientious beef man must walk his fields "counting", checking

that all his animals are well. To do this he must walk some distance because fields can stretch for miles away from the road. The farmer must often search an hour or more for the one animal that he cannot find and which could be caught or hurt in any ditch around the field or fields that this particular herd is let out on. If not found, then other farmers' fields and the roads must be searched (the greatest hazard on Irish roads besides Irish drivers who motor astride the imaginary center strip are livestock that are being driven or who have broken through a fence). If all animals on a field are healthy, then it is on to the next. Each man's herds are staggered over his fields according to age, weight, time of purchase and expected time of sale. And every individual animal is recognized and acknowledged by its color, personality and personal history. On numerous occasions farmers have directed me to certain animals by describing them by color or design—signals that I simply could not distinguish on one animal from the 20 other like beasts within view. In one instance I had to approach five different Hereford of the same color, hue, tint and tone (or so I thought) until I picked out the "red" one. And each animal will have its own history on the farm. A likely scenario of years gone by would be a 2-year-old being bought in October, put in the paddock or home field, and then in a series of three or four more fields until being sold the following fall. Most animals are kept outside in the mild winters, but on fields that themselves provide few nutrients. In the past, hay, combined with high protein cereal nuggets, have been the principal foods for the winter. In spring the beef is put on what could be the first of three fields, each one known for its grass's value. When one asks a family where the

farmer is, they usually know which field he is on depending on the time of day, how many animals must be counted, how soon they are going to be sold, and how many neighbors he has to pass to do his counting (and with whom he will probably have a cup of tea and a chat).

Thus, daily labor over the yearly cycle is minimal, but seasonal labor can be demanding. Farm workers who are employed full-time work side by side with the farmer and his brothers or sons in caring for the health of the animals, loading and unloading livestock, sowing and reaping grass for hay-making, feeding animals in winter, milking the family cow(s), caring for any crops sown for human or animal consumption, and repairing buildings and machinery. But given the availability of family labor, very few full-time agricultural workers are now employed on beef farms--most work on tillage and dairy farms. In the haymaking season, which can extend from June to August in the dry summers, assistance is needed to cut, turn, bale and stack the hay. Two generations ago this required a great deal of human labor, most of which was supplied by neighboring small farms (most other big farms would also be racing against time to get the grass into their hay sheds before it rained). Such labor is still required for loading bales and "taking the hay in", but either a farmer's own machinery or that of outside contractors do the cutting, turning and baling. In fact, many large farmers, and especially their sons, have gone into business themselves as agricultural contractors. Many Meath farmers fondly remember the days when neighbors helped each other at these times, in ways similar to the "cooring" recorded in Arensberg and Kimball's Clare, but are quick to point out that good neighbors are good "friends" still (implying kinship

within one's kindred) but that the necessities of business often put strains on one's ability to help a neighbor just when it is needed or requested.

This commercialization of traditional agricultural cooperation has been accelerated in the last ten years. Government programs, IFA information, the media and the internationalism of the EEC have all made the large to medium Meath farmer quite aware of the need for agricultural efficiency. All of these notwithstanding, the Meath large farmer would never pass up grants, loans and advice that were intended to increase both his profit and the value of his land. Mechanization, land drainage, disease eradication, improved animal and cereal strains, and farming techniques developed on the continent have all been warmly welcomed by Meath farmers. As noted above, many beef farmers have begun to improve production so that their finished animals can be sold at the time of highest prices in early spring, when beef fattened on grass over the summer are taken off the land instead of letting them to be a drain on it over the winter. To achieve an "intensive" beef system farmers must rely on silage, a farm-feed system well known in America but new to Ireland.

Although a silage system entails more of an initial investment in capital and labor than other forms of cattle feeding, it is less dependent on the weather, for it can be made in the rain, and it is a self-feeding system in which the animals do not need the farmer's assistance. The relatively high nutrition of silage puts weight on the beast over the winter, while hay often only keeps it on. Silage making also allows the "production" of more grass for the animals. The first

cut of a meadow that has been left without animals since March is in late May or early June. Grass length is shorter than that for hay. It must be cut short and thick, before it goes to seed. As one farmer explained, silage cannot be let grow too long because although you have more bulk you lose quality because it becomes "woody" (and he only used the new system for two seasons prior to our talk--change has come rapidly to Meath). Once the grass is cut it is treated with chemicals, packed down by a tractor, put in a roofless cement pit open along one length, and covered in plastic so that it can ferment. By winter the side of the plastic will be pulled back to allow feeding. A second or third cut of grass is possible in late July and August depending on need (and not weather).

The development of silage in Meath is a good example of the ways large farmers have adapted to new economic conditions. Silage must be used if one wants to take cattle off fields for winter. It is not only an invaluable beef practice but is ideal for dairying, especially on intensive farms of 100 cows or better which have become common in Meath since 1973. If silage is not used, and cattle are left out in the winter, then some fields are worn down by these "sitting" cattle. In spring other pastures which have been replenished must be utilized. Silage frees land for revitalization and tillage. Therefore, on the largest Meath farms cattle are not "summered" as much as they were. Intensive beef are brought as stores in October at 10 cwt and are sold from January to May at 13 cwt after meat has been put on them through barley feed and silage. More net profit per animal is made, the land is in better shape and the farm is free to expand into tillage providing an

opportunity for further profit. With the availability of government grants to set up the buildings and buy machinery necessary for silage making it is of little surprise to note that the big farmers of Meath have used it as but one tool in their new business of "European" farming.

The last group of large ""farmer" worthy of note are the new owners of stud farms, many of whom are not native to the county and are often not from farming families. Most are Catholic, but some are Protestants raised in the trade but who are using blood stock as a new investment, while still others are urbanites who have taken to the way of life after they made their money elsewhere. Although difficult to categorize because they overlap all those categories mentioned above, the blood stock farmers form a recognizable sub-group in Meath, especially in the areas near Kildare and Dublin.

Overall, Meath large farmers have become quite aware of international agricultural marketing, prices, governmental policy and consumer tastes. They are supplied a steady stream of information from the IFA, auction marts, newspapers, radio, television and their fellow farmers who have begun to travel more to Europe. For their own welfare Meath farmers know that they should know about European markets. In the late 1970s Meath beef went to Germany, Meath cereals and lamb went to France, and Meath calves were being shipped to Italy. All three major farm enterprises--beef, tillage and dairy--were directly linked to the continent through the CAP. And farmers' knowledge of Irish international trade was comprehensive. At a number of IFA meetings in Meath I witnessed discussions of Italian dairying as detailed as any discussion of Irish farming and which bespoke of businessmen's knowledge of their trading networks

and their competitors. Not only are Meath big farmers, the rural Catholic middle class descendants of the old tenantry, driving newer and bigger cars, sending their children into the professions and demonstrating consumer tastes unheard of years ago, but they are also becoming businessmen in an international arena. I began this chapter of my thesis by saying that one could not tell a small farmer from a large one because of his work clothes. Certain minor differences (such as the quality of clothes before soiling) notwithstanding, this is still true. But once one has spoken to a farmer the differences quickly appear. The traditional farmer of Ireland is someone who reacts to conditions that arise but cannot be controlled. The new international farmer—so well entrenched in Meath—is a businessman who wants to control the affairs in his life. He has the knowledge, expertise and capital to act rather than react. His attitude, one that has been forming since the founding of the state, betrays an assumption of local influence but also suggests his belief in his family's, farm's, and country's future. Everything the large farmer of Meath says and does suggests this confidence. The Ireland of the EEC confirmed it.

Such confidence in the future was also prevalent among the urban population of Meath in the 1970s. As seen above, Irish towns and villages have expanded rapidly. Although Meath is known as a farming county, fully two-thirds of its working population in 1976 were in industry and service, with their share of the total increasing each year. By 1981 rural employment had fallen by 25% in ten years, whereas both manufacturing and construction had accounted for the sharp rise in urban employment. The national Industrial Development Authority (IDA) was

successful in bringing the new industry to the county, most of which was foreign. This semi-state body became a model for local development authorities in Europe because of the many international concerns willing to take advantage of both attractive working conditions and ready access to the EEC market. In my years in Meath three large manufacturers were brought into the county: Southborough, in Kells (UK, cabinets for computers), Polymark, in Trim (UK, iron-on garment labels), and Nippon Electric, in Ballivor (Japan, integrated circuits). By 1975 Meath was guaranteed fixed assets investments of £4,407,000. This greatly stimulated many of the villages and towns which had been losing its population, and helped some others, like Navan, to sustain its growth.

Navan, the administrative, economic and geographical center of Meath, has long been a successful and powerful town. One of the original towns of the Pale, it has served as the seat of political power in Meath up to the present, and its position at the meeting of the Boyne and Blackwater Rivers has made it the county's center of transportation and communication. It has always been a wealthy town, servicing the needs of the large estates and farms that have surrounded it with churches, bakeries, general stores, butchers, restaurants, hotels, race courses, dog track, train station, bus stop, cinemas, police station and government offices. A crowded town—each day traffic crawls to a standstill on the medieval main street as it heads north to Cavan and south to Dublin—it has spread out from its ancient districts, across both rivers, into housing estates and long stretches of newly built bungalows for the town's thriving middle class. In the 19th century well-to-do families had homes in the countryside, houses in Navan and houses

in Dublin or London. The wealthy of the 20th century Navan—those families who replaced the gentry of times past—owe much of their fortune to the furniture industry. Of the 62 manufacturers in Navan in 1978, 46 made furniture. Although Meath as a whole had 2.4% of the national workforce in manufacturing it also had 12.1% of the furniture industry, most of which was in Navan. Besides being known as a furniture center Navan is also home to both Navan Carpets and Tara Mines, which each employ hundreds of people. But as Navan's population has increased so has unemployment. County unemployment doubled from 1974 to 1976, due largely to Navan cutbacks as Tara had labor trouble and both Navan furniture and carpets had to begin fighting continental imports, an unwelcome result of the EEC. In the first six months of 1976 alone, Ireland imported £5.1 million worth of carpets, double that of all of 1975 (McGill 1976). And the lay-offs that resulted have continued into the 1980s.

Navan has a large working class population, the product of years of small industries that needed skilled craftsmen—skills that became family traditions. It has an active trades union movement but not a very powerful one (a product of international bickering as much as poor recruitment). Due to the large following of Fianna Fail the Labour Party does not do as well in the Navan Urban District as it should given the numbers of workers. Most unemployed and employed workers live in the housing estates built one and two generations ago. They are poor, especially in relation to the money being made by other townspeople and the big farmers. At the beginning of the last decade personal income per head in Meath was an astounding £335 (the price of a bullock) due to the poor wages and high urban unemployed. Although unemployment compensation

and state subsidies (e.g., for children) help, the wealth differential in Navan is remarkable.

Navan is a town of and for the middle class. It has a large number of businessmen, professionals and government employees. In 1971 of the 16,000 Meath workers who were not rural employees over 2,000 were listed as professionals in the census. The Navan of the last decade is one of wealth, conspicuous consumption, investment, gambling and confidence in the future. Wealthy people worked and played together in the county. Their economic fortunes did not depend on the city or the continent for Meath itself had become their best customers. Of course, the owners of furniture factories fought a constant battle against foreign competitors everywhere in Ireland, which led to the institutionalization of an annual Navan Trade Fair which attracts buyers from across the country, Britain and the continent, but the inflationary times of the mid-1970s made many Navan people either wealthy or wealthier. This influx of capital showed in the new hotels, at the tennis clubs, and at the many social functions organized by such groups as the Chamber of Commerce, the Rotary Club, the Licensed Vinters, etc. New homes were built, stocked by antiques and fronted by Mercedes. The petit bourgeoisie of the towns--the shopkeepers, small publicans and blue collar workers--did very well as business boomed and credit became readily available. The class divisions in Navan were apparent but were often lost in the exhilaration of good times for all. In a country that prides itself on not having a class system like that of the English, and which reinforces civility in all formal and public situations, it is difficult to pinpoint class antagonism, especially in the absence of any real "left" political movement (which

Ireland has not had since the creation of the state). But class distinctions in wealth, behavior and aspirations were obvious. The class roots of group behavior are not Irish cultural concepts, however, and like many nations of the Western world, most Meath people considered themselves members of a vaguely defined middle class. This lack of consciousness regarding class, let alone the absence of class consciousness, has also served to obfuscate the issue of "large" vs. "small" farmer.

Since Arensberg and Kimball (1968) introduced the concept of "large farmer" to the sociological literature, as they would have had to do given the distinctions drawn between "small" and "large" farmer in the Ireland of deValera's new Fianna Fail, there has been concern expressed in the literature over the lack of data regarding the sociocultural life of these large farmers (Wilson 1984). As recently as 1982 a reviewer of contemporary Irish society still questioned whether there were indeed "two farmer classes". Without supplying an answer he pointed out that many divisions and cleavages in the social lives of the two groups, but also alluded to their cultural homogeneity (Peillon 1982:17-18). He suggested that the answer might be found in future research on large farmers. Based on my research in Meath, I believe this confuses rather than helps. There are not two classes of farmers in Ireland, but farmers who are members of different classes. The large farmers of Meath today are not of the same families or class as a century ago but are members of the strong middle class of Ireland that has developed rapidly since World War II. Although they come from a cultural and economic tradition that gives them codes of behavior and attitudes similar to other farmers, it

would be foolhardy to presume that farmers are of one type, divided into two groups according to land and wealth. The "culture" of the large farmers of Meath is the culture of an agricultural middle class who up to the 1970s served as a rural elite in local society, a position that has become threatened in the Meath of the EEC with the rise in prominence of professionals and the urban middle class. They have not abandoned their elite status, but rather are adapting to new sources of competition. As the numbers of farmers decrease, new strategies that do not rely on the unity and homogeneity of farmers (at least, not solely) have been devised to protect the economic livelihood and social position of strong farmers.

In Meath in the 20th century the large farmers described above functioned as a rural elite in the following ways. They owned the best land and rented a good share of the rest from smaller farmers. They were the terminus in a regional and national cattle trade, and at times, a group powerful enough to control cattle prices. As such they have controlled access to the national and international markets, whose agents smaller farmers would never have direct contact with. Large farmer capital investment was instrumental in setting up agricultural co-ops and livestock marts, which have increased production and provided protection for price and profit levels. The old NFA was also considered a large farmers' organization. After all, they were the ones that had the free time and money to participate in its organization and programs--it was only natural that the interests of big farmers would be first served by it. The IFA has largely escaped that reputation and is seen nationally as a representative of all farmers' interests, but in Meath the IFA is by far a big farmer organization, i.e., regardless of membership rolls, the

large farmers still direct decisions, suggest policies and control information. These farmers have also been in large part the parents of urban and rural professionals who have returned to the county as vets, lawyers, dentists, doctors, nurses and politicians. This reinforces networks that the large farmers have established over the years with townspeople in commerce, government and services--networks based on friendship, blood and marriage, religion, fraternal organization, political parties, sports and pub drinking. Part of the central position these farmers have had in Meath is due to the fact that many are not tied to Meath. They have land, investments and influential relatives in other counties, Dublin and Britain. This gives them, in a variety of situations, an air of influence and control which adds to their local prestige. Large farmers also act as models of behavior. They are the fine upstanding, church-going citizens whose business acumen, loyalty to the land and sense of community responsibility are a credit to their townland, village and county. It is their role as an agricultural elite within the politics of Meath in this century, and the ways it has begun to change since 1973, that is the subject of the next chapter.

The EEC affected Meath in many significant ways. The CAP grants, subsidies, price levels and guaranteed markets aided the farming population greatly, which in turn led to a boom in most sectors of the Meath economy. Increased incomes on farms coupled with bank willingness to provide credit led to more rural spending on construction, land improvements and consumer goods. Town manufacturing and service industries expanded in order to meet a greater local demand, and they were joined by international companies seeking access to the EEC.

Housing became a priority in urban and rural Meath due to the influx of money, the expansion of Dublin and the coming of international mining. The standards of living and services rose markedly in the 1970s literally right before my eyes. Where a deserted field stood in 1980 upon which Irish homeless set up an illegal caravan park, a full-fledged enclosed shopping center now stands. Although a percentage of the county's population has suffered—unemployment rises each year—Meath has done very well materially in the years of the EEC. Meath people, for better or worse, know they are not longer just citizens of Ireland. They are also citizens of Europe and they expect the quality of life that Irish insularity for generations prevented them from achieving. The impact of the EEC on all sectors of Meath society can be seen through an examination of farm expansion and bank credit in the mid 1970s.

The expansion of agriculture in Meath in terms of beef, tillage and dairy production was greatly aided by both government grants and the opening up of credit from both the Agriculture Credit Corporation and private banks. Meath farmers, especially large farmers, saw the opportunity to both save some of the money being made through their new profits and to enlarge their businesses on the guarantee of high prices and stable markets for the future. Banks were in complete agreement. And those farmers willing to take advantage of developmental credit were not the traditional farmers of old but were the farmers of large holdings who held that "farming is no longer a way of life, it's a business" (Byrne 1978). Young commercial farmers who wanted to make structural changes and add to their operation were the ones who flocked to outside agencies to help finance the heavy capital expenditure needed, especially

in a period of rising prices for all goods and service (Culligan 197). Surveys done by the Agricultural Institute showed that in dairy farming, an area that relied heavily on credit for expansion at this time, the most successful milk producers used high levels of technology, had secondary education or better, were prepared to use farm credit and relied on the agricultural advisory service (Byrne 1978). In the Ireland of the EEC, farmers in Meath complained that it was almost impossible to avoid using credit when one looked at the projected profits. It was also almost impossible to avoid getting credit because of the persistence of bank officers, who often visited the farm to convince farmers of the error in being too conservative in the new "business" of agriculture.

In Meath from 1976 to 1979 one major bank increased its lending to farmers twelve-fold (whereas personal loans went up by only five times), indicative of the actions of all the banks in the county and the region. In 1978-1979 most farm loans from the same bank in Meath were for land and dwellings (60%), livestock (15%), grain and fertiliser (10%) machinery (6%), and land improvements (5%). Although county-wide figures were not available from the ACC, on a national level the ACC level of loans outstanding went up from £233 million in 1977 to £291 million in 1978, with £143 million in new business by the end of 1978 (Agricultural Credit Corporation 1979:31n). By 1979 the Allied Irish Bank in Navan registered that 62% of its loans outstanding were to agriculture and only 20% were personal loans (9% to buildings and construction, 8% to service industry). And the money that flowed to the farms built milking parlours, drained land, bought combines, added to beef herds and increased the buying power of the medium to large farmer. So much credit was

available that, in two remarkable cases I know of, beef farms—one owned by a middle class farmer near Navan and the other a county family near Kells—completely changed the farm enterprise in the span of two years, turning their farms into dairy holdings of almost 100 cows each. The size of their monthly checks from the creamery were satisfying indeed.

The availability of funds in the mid to late 1970s sent the price of land skyward. Acres of prime agricultural land that went for less than £1,000 in 1975 were £3,000 in 1978. Competition by housing sites added to the inflation. A third of an acre site went up by ten times in the Navan area, and what was sold for £500 seven years ago now goes for £3,000. Farmers, knowing that in the old days their farms could never sustain a financial burden large enough to finance expansion, borrowed money to buy land to take advantage of the profits, grants and tax shelters presented to them. By the end of 1979, however, banks began cutting back on credit in the face of drops in agricultural prices and changes in demand and policy in the EEC. Many farmers found themselves overextended when the bank came calling. And although whole farms would never be claimed by either the ACC or the banks (the publicity would be devastating), land began to be auctioned off in Meath at average prices of £1,500/acre. Nonetheless, the raise in credit from 1973 to 1979 opened up the buying and investment power of Meath farmers, which in turn started the county off in a boom in farm building, land improvement, housing and urban services. This made the county much more attractive for Dublin commuters and helped spur the largest population increase in the county's history.

By the end of the 1970s the rural elite of Meath—the largely Catholic middle class farmers—were facing economic pressures that threatened the high profit and standard of living they had become accustomed to over the decade. Both the boom and the bust were external to Ireland, however. Large farmers, who for three generations as leaders and members of their respective political parties had organized local politics as a way to influence national rural policy, found that their decreasing numbers and the rise of rural professional and businessmen weakened their influence in county politics. This became doubly dangerous when it became clear that national politics could no longer control the policies so vital to agriculture. Large farmers had to both adapt to the change in their political status in Meath and to the changes faced by their occupation in the national and international political arenas. The citizenry of Meath, so long led by the large farmers in local politics, found the old elite changing because of the decline of power in politics at the local level. Large farmers continued to hold power in 1979, but in ways much different to those of the previous 75 years, as is evident in an analysis of Meath county politics from 1899 on, culminating in a look at the tax dispute of 1979.

FOOTNOTES

- 11 See Figure 2. Unless otherwise noted, all statistical information in this chapter are from the Central Statistics Office, Dublin.
- 12 The relatively few genealogies I have on this group of farmers show that males often marry whil away at university, military service, in business or their professions. They then return to the family home. Many females in the past married into similiar families in the county and in neighboring counties. Today their marriage patterns are not much different from males. Genealogies at all levels of Meath society were difficult to collect because of a low level of family nucleation, a suspicion of all questions concerning status and economics, and informants' ignorance of the fate of ancestral emigrants.
- 13 The townland, the basis division of the countryside since the 17th century, distinguishes all locations in Ireland and is the country's smallest administrative division.

CHAPTER VII

The Meath Political Elite: Big Farmers and Small Politics in the 20th Century

The farmers of large holdings in Meath in this century have acted in many ways as a local elite. Their position of social prominence has been due to their instrumental role in county agriculture and county business. Since 1900 the wealth, social status, education and kinship ties of large farmers have made them the most powerful single interest group in Meath. They have been at the center of formal politics, through their positions in both local and national government, and the source of local power through their paramount position in the economy and their ability to "get things done" in the public domain. Their political role in 20th century Meath has been a changing one, however. Since the creation of the state the national government has effectively contested the power of local government and local representatives. The last three generations has seen the steady loss of institutional power by farmers and other county representative not to national representatives but to the parliamentary parties and the state bureaucracy. Yet the participation and influence of the farmer in the formal political life of the county was assured, as was their commitment to their political parties and the battle to retain government power at the local level, when changes in national policy regarding land and income tax combined with the loss of state policy making power to the EEC resulted in an important change in

the direction of Meath agropolitics in the 1970s.

Since the landed classes of the 19th century left the county, and the local government system they had established was replaced by the county council system (1899) the new class of larger farmers increasingly became the spokesmen for local society at both the county and national levels. Their role as a burgeoning elite developed rapidly. Economically, they owned most of the land and controlled most of the capital in the county, although the wealth of the county had been markedly redistributed since the days of the great estates, they provided direct employment to the majority of Meath laborers, and they supplied the stimulus to the county economy which provided for all commercial and service employment. At the creation of the state the Meath economy was primarily Meath agriculture. The men who controlled agriculture in any of the localities of the county commanded prestige and attention. Their economic importance belied their often scanty education (a fault their children did not repeat) but often made them men with quick wits, glib tongues and the art of decisiveness. These skills were further testaments to large farmer participation in government and politics. Their elite status in agriculture, which gave the preeminent positions in the social, cultural and religious life of the county, enabled them to quickly become Meath's political elite.

The political role of large farmers in Meath from 1920 to the present has been a changing one. They have wielded their power in a number of informal or non-institutional ways through the mobilization of kinsmen and neighbors for party and political electoral support, the utilization of personal networks to affect policy formation and admini-

stration, financial aid to parties and interest groups, the influencing of public opinion through their participation in fraternal, occupational and religious organizations, and their control of both productive resources and many aspects of the local market. Yet large farmers were never in complete agreement as to the ways to best serve their economic interests. Sociopolitical cleavages like religion, perceived class position and nationalist beliefs helped fragment large farmer power. One of the most effective means to retain the power they had became formal participation in both local government and local party politics.

Most political influence and power wielded by Meath large farmers in this century has been within the two major parties, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, and within the local government system, principally the County Council. Although largely ignored in Irish political science as either a powerful institution in national affairs or a source of elite recruitment and behavior, the local parties and government at the county level have given local representatives national importance and local power. The large farmers of Meath have used county party politics and local government as a springboard from which to launch their demands of national policy makers. In fact, their uses of local government only ceases to be effective in the last decade. Yet the nature of local politics, the study of which my thesis views as instrumental for the understanding of local political society, and by extension, national political society, has not been a concern of Irish political scientists reflecting, I believe, an unconscious downgrading of a parliamentary representative's political constituency to a position of little influence in the Irish political process.

The literature of Irish political science has concentrated on a number of problems in political structure and organization at the national or state levels. Such studies can be grouped into a number of distinctive themes: the institutions of government and politics and the ways they interact (Chubb 1970; McCracken 1958; Hogan 1945); Irish party systems from idiosyncratic and comparative perspectives (Mair 1980, 1979; Chubb 1969; Moss 1933); Irish electoral politics, including the study of sociological cleavages as evidenced in voting patterns (Carty 1981, 1976; O'Leary 1979; Penniman 1978; Sinnott 1978; Farrell and Manning 1978; Gallagher 1976); and the role and social statuses of parliamentary representatives (Cohan 1974, 1973, 1972; Whyte 1966; Chubb 1963). There are very few studies of Irish politics from a comparative interdisciplinary perspective, i.e., one that draws on the models of sociology, anthropology, economics, geography and history, in order to deal with macro-political processes, just as there are very few micro-political studies of individual constituencies, local club electoral behavior and local political culture. One scholar has ably pursued the former (Garvin 1978, 1977, 1974) while there have been a few descriptive analyses of urban (Gallagher 1980; Garvin 1976) and rural electoral and machine politics (Bax 1975, 1970; Sacks 1976; Carty 1981). Yet given this wealth of data and analysis (which rivals economics and history as the finest bodies of social science literature on Ireland) Irish political scientists still lament the dearth of comparative research on the problems they find so provocative at this national level of political analysis. In regard to the Irish party system, seen as much too idiosyncratic by comparative European political scientists, Peter Mair, one

of the most productive and stimulating of young Irish scholars, concludes that

The Irish case must be one of the more, if not the most under-researched in the West European universe. The number of scholars working in the field is extremely limited: even a quick glance through the literature will testify to the constant recurrence of the same group of sources. (Mair 1980:6).

He is correct. A "quick glance" at the above references will cover most of the people and sources he refers to. Yet how much more under-researched is the local, village, town, constituency and county levels of political affairs in Ireland?

Studies of local politics in Ireland have been confined to either analyses of local political machines, using models from anthropology and political sociology (Bax 1975, 1970; Sacks 1976), or the description of local political institutions and processes as they are related to the national electoral process (Carty 1981). Little political science literature has dealt specifically with the role of local government and politics in the creation of both a national political elite and national political process, either within or outside of the party system. In fact, because local politics (at the county or constituency level and below) are such a neglected area of Irish social science it seems that, beyond the oft-mentioned comments on constituency support for parliamentary representatives that emphasize a political culture steeped in localism, clientilism and personalism, Irish political scientists feel that little of importance can be said regarding local politics' role in national politics. Their assumption appears to be that the form of local politics is remarkably homogeneous nationwide (i.e. local parties, interest groups and electoral politics are structured alike by county or

constituency, and are but sub-systems of the whole), but that the content of local politics differs (i.e. one or the other party dominate locally, or independents command local votes based on their personalities, their past, or both). In this vein local politics is often inferred to be a byproduct of local history, with its present configuration of little import to a political scientist as long as they function alike in all constituencies (which they assume they do). A survey of Irish political studies suggests that local politics cannot themselves be fruitfully studied as political systems.

My thesis disputes such assumption and inferences. The structure of local politics and its role in electoral politics, political recruitment and the creation of policy and the articulation of local interests and needs at the national level are matter for empirical research. The role of local political society in policy formation and implementation is even more in need of study in an Ireland so dominated by the EEC.

To date only two comprehensive field studies have been conducted on the structure of local political systems. Both are from the early 1970s, the eve of Common Market membership, at the end of an era in which local government slowly lost its national power and local politicians' roles began to change. One of these studies was conducted in a parliamentary constituency in the north of County Cork in Munster (Bax 1973); the other took place in the northernmost constituency of the Republic, in Donegal in Ulster, an area famous for its support of both Fianna Fail and a powerful political family at the center of a vast county-wide network of political control (Sacks 1976). Both analyses were concerned with local political machines and the role of local politics in the careers of local

TDs and the used models of patronage and brokerage that had been so useful in field studies in southern Europe, Asia and the United States. Neither study attempted to analyze local politics as a system that itself had goals that were distinct from those of like systems in other areas of the state, or of the state itself. Both authors sought to analyze the machine as a machine. The causes of local sociopolitics, before the advent of the observed machine were of little consequence to Bax since much that should be problematical he treats as "given" (Bax 1973:3). Sacks's fine historical analysis of the Donegal Mafia (as that "machine" is commonly known) does not begin until he has made only passing reference to a vague Irish political culture. Their approach is functional and descriptive but does little to explain the nature of local politics as a system in its own right, as distinct from the national political system of which it is a part but, as my thesis contends, not a microcosm.

These two studies described local politics but in a larger way ignored the importance of local government in rural society. Local politicians' input into county councils were reviewed not as part of an analysis of governmental decision-making and administration but as a testament to some of the many ways local politicians retain their standing in the community. A sociopolitical analysis of the structure and function of local agovernment within local politics and within national politics has yet to be done in Ireland (and because of the power of the central and local government bureaucracies is not likely to be done in the near future). But an analysis of local politicians' roles within the local government system is a necessary complement to the analysis of their roles within a local party system and crucial to an understanding

of the creation and maintenance of both local and national political elites. A prominent part of large farmer elite status in Meath in this century has been due to their participation in local government. And a review of the many ways the local government system affects the quality of life of Irish citizens gives a good indication of why local government is itself worthy of further research within Irish politics. Although the power of Meath local representatives has steadily declined in local government since 1925 under the twin attacks of local and national governmental centralization of power, an overview of the history and role of such representatives in the Meath county council presents an interesting picture of the ways local politicians, primarily farmers, attempted to protect their own and their constituents' interests against all perceived internal and external threats. To give such an overview, however, it is necessary to first describe, in brief, the nature of both Irish and Meath local government.

The term "local government" in Ireland refers to the activities of a number of directly elected authorities--county councils, borough councils, urban district councils, town commissions--which are supervised by the Department of the Environment in Dublin (formerly the Department of Local Government). This Department oversees the activities of local authorities, regulates the recruitment of officers and approves all major schemes undertaken by the local body, including the borrowing of money. There are currently 110 elected authorities in Ireland, including 27 county councils, the primary unit of rural local government (County Tipperary is divided into two for administrative purposes). These county councils, which have been in existence since the Local Government Act of

1898 have from 21 to 31 members (excepting Cork, with 46) elected by proportional representation (P.R.) every five years with all vacancies being filled by co-option. Councillors are not elected to serve the whole county. They represent the County Electoral Area (CEA) that they usually live in and which votes them into office. In this way all areas of a county are guaranteed representation and heavily populated areas cannot swamp the voting in any one election. These councillors are not full-time public servants nor are they paid for their services to the community that elects them. They usually meet as a body every month, except August, but must have an annual meeting, quarterly meetings and an annual estimates meeting. The meetings are supervised by an elected chairman and are attended by both the councillors and the top administrators in each county who are appointed by the local government civil service. The most important and powerful civil servant in the local system is the county manager. Overall, the Irish Local Government system, although developed from the British model, is quite distinctive when compared to other European and American systems.

Relatively tight central government control, universal use of the council-manager plan, a sharp legal division of power between the council and the manager, nomination of higher level personnel after open competition by the three member Local Appointments Commission--a national body--and the sharing of a common manager by all local authorities within a county are the five principal distinguishing characteristics of the Irish local government system. (Zimmerman 1976:483).

Irish local government's work can be divided into two categories: major or policy functions, performed by the elected councillors, and executive functions, performed by the county manager and his staff. The manager system, an idea originally from the United States, developed slowly around Ireland from the 1920s on, and was extended to all counties by the County Management Act, 1940, which took effect in 1942. Under this manager-council system of local government there are two kinds of functions that must be carried out--reserved and executive. Reserved functions are the domain of the elected representatives and include budgeting taxation, borrowing, making bye-laws, adopting development plans and the adopting of a building program to meet housing needs. Executive powers of the manager include the appointment, control and discipline of the staff "and the multitude of decisions which go to make up the day-to-day business of local authorities" (O'Donnell 1979:67). The elected council's principal power is over the county's finances. The manager prepares an estimate each year detailing the money needed for each service the local authority provides, and the council examines the estimate and decides on a final amount which will be raised by the rates on county residents in the coming year. The manager cannot exceed the sums approved without the council's permission. Beyond the functions that are specifically labelled "reserved", however, the manager has considerable flexibility. "All functions other than the reserved functions are defined as executive functions and are the responsibility of the manager who in theory possesses only administrative power" (emphasis added, Zimmerman 1976:485).

In fact, the above description of the division of labor in local

authorities in largely theoretical. Elected councillors are supposed to seek the advice of the manager and his staff before making the decisions so important to their constituents. Over the last generation, however, they have increasingly bowed to the "experts" and have consistently approved the plans and administration of the bureaucrats who serve the council. This rubber-stamping has led to a serious loss of power by elected representatives in local government, a situation made even worse by the end of the last decade due to the central government's tightening of control over local decision making. Although the manager system has been instrumental in making local government both efficient and largely free of patronage, as I shall point out for Meath, and is considered by at least one eminent scholar to be "perhaps Ireland's major invention in the field of government" (Chubb 1964:261), it has caused a shift in power away from old elites in rural Irish counties. In theory the decision-making powers of local government rest with the council. In practice the manager and his staff are instrumental in both establishing and implementing policy (Zimmerman 1976:486). The most important power still vested in the county councils in the mid 1970s was the approval of the budget and the rates, but it was the managers who prepared the budget and told the representatives what had to be done to maintain vital county services.

All county councils are the main organs of Irish government for the provision of the following services to the citizenry:

- 1) Housing and Building: the council builds, maintains, rents, and sells houses; it also supplies loans and grants for the building of private housing and the reconstruction of existing houses.

- 2) Road Transportation and Safety: the council provides, improves and maintains all roads in the county, and is also responsible for the provision of road safety, material and personnel.
- 3) Water Supply and Sewerage: the council must provide piped water and sewerage schemes to all residents in the county.
- 4) Development: the council must plan and provide sites for all industrial development in the county.
- 5) Environmental Pollution: the council must provide for domestic scavenging, burial grounds, civil defense, water safety, fire protection, pollution monitoring, beach cleaning and the removal of waste and abandoned cars.
- 6) Recreation and Amenity: the council must provide swimming pools, libraries, park facilities, open spaces and recreation centers for county residents.
- 7) Agriculture, Education and Wealth and Welfare: the council contributes towards the County Committee of Agriculture, a consultative body that helps provide advisory services to county farmers and which is financed from both local rates and the Department of Agriculture the the Vocational Education Committee, another consultative body made up of councillors and educators which helps provide and manage vocational schools and regional technical colleges in the county, subsidized by the Department of Education. The council also aids in the administration of all animal and plant diseases' control, land drainage and the payment of Higher Education Grants, a principal means of going to university for many county school-leavers. Human health services became divorced from council

control in 1971 with the creation of the Regional Health Boards but for 50 years were a major council activity.

Nearly 90% of capital expenditure by local authorities is on the above programs. In 1978 £770 million was spent on operating expenses for local government nationwide, with only 10% of that figure coming from rates and the remainder contributed by the Exchequer. This state contribution is in the form of grants for health, services, housing, roads and water and sewerage schemes. Annual rates' relief adds to the central government's package: over £80 million covering the de-rating of domestic premises (homes, flats, secondary schools and community halls) and £38.5 million for the agricultural grant paid to relieve rates on agricultural land (O'Donnell 1979:689-69). Much of this central government concession to financing local services was product of the national governments of the 1970s and served not only as a means of centralizing financial control in Dublin but also as a tactic in the increasingly severe national electoral contest in which the two major parties have competed for a newly "mobile" vote which would swing toward whichever party promised the most in terms of material benefits (or so the parties believed). Chief among these new swing voters of the 1970s were the farmers, as evidenced in County Meath. These same farmers were the primary faction in both local government and local politics since the creation of the state.

The role of county councillors in local politics has been described in detail for Cork and Donegal constituencies and has been mentioned in passing in a number of studies of the role and backgrounds of TDs (Cohan 1973; Chubb 1963). Little has been written on their role within the

defined activities of the local government system. Theoretically, councillors still have a number of powers that can limit, if not direct, the manager and his staff, the de facto power holders. Political scientists have followed the lead of most councillors who themselves have minimized their own role in formal decision-making in local authorities and who insist that administration is best left to the experts. Both councillors and political commentators believe that the manager dominates local government, which indeed he does in modern Ireland. "The absence to a great extent of committees, the fact that the manager is necessarily in close touch with central departments, the existence of a County Managers' Association...all combine to make the manager the powerhouse of local government" (Chubb 1970:286-187, as quoted in Zimmerman 1976:486). But such a dominant position is a product of local political development and not an imperative of local government structure. A review of Meath county council politics in this century will highlight the loss of power by councillors in the formal governmental system as well as their entrenchment in the informal aspects of local constituency politics, serving the needs of their constituents, parties and themselves.

The county council is the most important administrative unit in government for the Irish citizen. It provides essential environmental services. It is the political arena in which citizens' needs are first heard through their neighbors who are elected to serve the CEA as the members of the county council (MCCs). The council is also the primary link between the people and the national government and administration. The MCCs form the local cadre in political parties and are the necessary local agents for TDs. Most services granted in Dublin are administered

through the council—"the central government makes the general schemes relative to local matters through its departments of state. The county council acts as government agent for the expenditure of state grants and local public moneys" (Bax 1973:40,45). In both Cork and Donegal, county councillors, and at a higher level, TDs, have been considered both "patrons" and "brokers" within their political systems.

Both Bax and Sacks utilized models of informal politics that were developed by anthropologists in other areas of Europe (Boissevain 1965, 1966; Silverman 1965). They concluded that the local Irish politician is primarily a broker—one who is able to convey information between his constituents and the people who themselves control the land, job, services and money. He acts as "messenger boy" for both sides. He feeds information necessary for further action to decision makers, and he is helpful in achieving results that are beneficial to his supporters. The more people of influence he knows the more clients or supporters he will attract, making him more attractive as a go-between to even more powerful people. The politician's personal goals in this are many but of primary importance is re-election. "His basic aim is building up and expanding a network of contracts for people who, in return for his efforts on their behalf, might be induced to vote for him." (Bax 1976:50-51). The county councillor and TD as brokers do not themselves control the majority of resources that are needed by their voters. In some cases they do, however, and in those instances they function as patrons. In Sacks' Donegal constituency the benefits of a political patron were "multi-faceted" and were dependent on relationships that had both "tangible" and "affective" components. Bonds of loyalty, kinship, ideology and

friendship tied voters to politicians who in some cases could provide jobs, honorific appointments and titles, civil service positions, houses, medical cards, bank loans and many other services. In other cases it was clear that such services although provided were not being provided by the politician, yet both voter and brokers were willing to believe that the politician did indeed have a positive effect on the outcome (Sacks 1975: 82-90).

Thus, the local politician of Cork and Donegal are intermediaries, acting as information gatherers and conduits from the most local of levels to the local and central governments. In fact, the majority of an elected representative's time is spent taking care of the requests for service by individual voters (not in the officially defined functions as councillor), requests that above all require the transmission of information with the hope that a politician's influence can have some bearing on the issue at hand.

A politician's task--providing answers to the question of his people--includes seeking information, grants, benefits or rights, expediting a case, granting favours, jobs, licenses, renting a county council cottage. Most of these questions lie within the sphere of local government... :(Bax 1973:45).

As Bax has so ably described it, a politician is supposed to "pull strings" for his supporters and constituents. His sources of information for the multitude of individual cases he must take care of are many. People visit him at home, work or at his leisure to tell him their problems. Some people write formal letters to their councillor, but many with this skill bypass the councillor and approach the administration directly. Those who do not are seeking a politician's contacts as well as his communication skills. Local politicians make a point of either

chairing or attending the political clubs of their party in their areas. These areas are quite well defined. A councillor can only be elected by voters in his electoral area (Meath has five) so he only attends to the wishes of CEA residents, whereas a TD is elected county-wide but his party and fellow politicians know which clubs and electoral areas are "his", i.e., which form his primary voting base and which he must both cultivate and keep happy. Other politicians attempting to set up their own such base would rather keep the TDs away from their own CEAs. Local politicians gain information by attending as many fraternal, sports, racing, church and governmental meetings as possible. Many also hold regularly scheduled office hours in convenient public halls, which they advertize in papers and which are open to all past, and potential, voters (Bax's Cork residents have aptly termed this "Hearing Confessions"). A local politician is, in short, always on duty. "He is at the beck and call of this people, listening carefully, writing down all the problems in his 'prayerbook', as the people sometimes call his notebook, and promising to do all he can" (Bax 1973:46).

The local politician approaches the Local Authority by both mail and in person, contacting either the county manager or any number of his assistants closest to the issue at hand (e.g., the county engineer for a requested sign post). Regardless of the fact or fancy of such intervention, i.e. whether or not the MCC or TD can indeed begin to accelerate services due his supporters, he wants a letter from the relevant civil servant acknowledging that he attempted to do so. A carbon of the letter is sent to the constituent concerned. If the service is ultimately rendered, the politician claims credit. If it is not, he can blame the

bureaucracy. After all, he did what he was requested to do. The councillors' written requests and county council replies give the politician credibility regardless of the outcome. In most cases, however, there is an outcome, and a positive one. This is because many people go to their local politician to intercede for them in matters that have, unknown to them, already been decided in their favor, or to get some service that is their by law and that they will get as a matter of course. The politician is happy to take some credit for their provision and is quick to deny culpability when any of his requests go unheeded. He is not above suggesting that such input on his part is necessary, even when he is in fact doing little to affect government decisions

Often the intervention of the politician is entirely gratuitous, as a decision is made automatically. But the constituent, laboring under a different belief, feels a sense of obligation to the politician. In this way a patron-client tie will evolve between politician and constituent, despite the fact that the politician has only appeared to help his constituent. (Sacks 1976:50).

Sacks has called this "imaginary patronage" and identifies it as a chief tactic in the politician's battle to get votes. The game is not whether the politician has power and influence, but that he appears to have them, and that people either believe that he can get things done or that "there is no harm in trying" by going to him (Bax 1973:49). He is a broker who wants to appear to be a patron.

This view corresponds in great part to the perceptions county councillors have regarding their own role in local politics. Four definitions appeared most often in a national survey of councillor role perceptions (Zimmerman 1976). The most commonly held was that they are "watchdogs" for the local ratepayers. They are there to ensure that the

interests of their electoral areas are served by the local and national authorities. Councillors also consider themselves "mediators" between the people and the government in issues vital to both. They convey the needs and opinions of their voters to the administration and bring the officials' responses back home. Councillors consider their most time-consuming role to be servicing constituents' needs, i.e., attending to the provision of local services deemed necessary by the community. Perhaps surprisingly, councillors also see themselves as necessary to county decision-making and policy formation (Zimmerman 1976:487-489). Of course, all of these roles overlap, and being the "official" view of councillors regarding their own behavior, they highlight the service aspects of their role within the community to the exclusion of both their role within party politics and any material or intangible rewards that are gained.

Local government is very politicized at the county level. Councillors are not only local contact men for their constituents but are party representatives as well. Since the 1920s local government elections have been fought on national party lines, and have been used as electoral training grounds for young politicians. They have also served as "test cases" in order to observe the popularity of the major parties after the introduction of policy or prior to a national election. Local elections, because of the high percentage of national representatives taking part and the politicization of the contest, are very well attended. The Irish system of proportional representation, in which a person's vote can be shared or transferred among a number of candidates, is also an incentive to get out and vote for a number of your local choices.¹⁴ This type of

voting adds to the competition, however, because party candidates are also competing against each other in CEA's that can often return half the number of candidates running. And voters need not rely on party identification or affiliation to pick their first choice. Localism, friendship, religion and sports are among the factors that influence voting.

The fact that the election system is the single transferable vote in multimember constituencies has always meant that, for most, a choice of candidates within one's party is available, and thus it is possible to give weight to local and other considerations without going outside the party (Chubb 1970:290).

And if the county council elections serve as both experiments in party popularity for their national committees and training for ambitious politicians, they also quickly establish the feasibility of contesting national elections for some candidates. Given a good number of first preference votes at the local elections, and if he does all the representative work expected of him and is thus able to get the reputation of doing his job well (with the aid of the local press, for one), a councillor may be able to turn local support into a national voting base. To do so, however, he must not be actively competing against a standing TD from his party. In fact, the party would expect the councillor to use his support to keep that TD in office. Not surprisingly, most TDs themselves sit on county councils, maintaining a "high profile" locally in order to keep their own voter support and keep an eye on potential rivals from within their own party. All politicians are aware that the county council provides "the younger politicians with a place where he may learn the ropes while waiting for the local TD to die, retire, or make some irrevocable blunder in the course of his duty" (Cohan 1973: 224). The county council is thus a proving ground at which the next

leaders of the party at the local level have an opportunity to become future leaders of the party at the national level. The county council is also an honorific body to aging local party brokers who take their seat as a reward for years of service to the community and the party. "Essentially, it is a second echelon for members of the party—a way to rise up to the first echelon, or membership in the Dail, and also on occasions a way to retire gracefully" (Cohan 1973:224).

Thus, the county council serves as a body of local representatives who have a number of powers over the actions of the county manager but seldom use them. They prefer, because of Irish political cultural emphasis on localism and intermediaries, the demands of their occupations in private life, and the structure of party cadres at the local level, to spend their time as political brokers, appearing to aid in the provision of essential services. Most bureaucrats and politicians believe, like their constituents, that they aid the political process by keeping civil servants on their toes. Councillors are also learning the intricacies of party politics, elections, brokerage, public relations, bureaucratic organization and local social work. Some will use this for political advancement. Others will hope to but never achieve it. Still others will be satisfied to use the local political level to pursue their own material and ideological interests as well as those of their constituents. In rural counties like Meath, the majority of councillors in the 20th century have been farmers, and large farmers at that, and the majority of their constituents have been farmers as well.

A discussion of Meath local politics in this century must include the views that contemporary councillors have toward the job they chose to

do. In some senses the 29 county councillors who were in office (1974-1979) during my time in Meath, all of whom I interviewed on the formal and informal aspects of their roles in the County Council and party politics, were more candid than those discussed from the literature above and more precise about many of the fundamental issues so important to their electoral areas and county.

Of principal importance to the county councillors of Meath of the 1970s was their role as local ombudsmen. Many enjoyed the sense of "community responsibility" that made them act in the best interests of their fellow citizens. Their primary duties as a "go-between" or "mediator" between their constituents and county officials included petitioning in writing for services in housing, roads, social welfare, water and sewerage, and government grant schemes, the filling out of the forms necessary for the above, personally visiting officials to put "pressure" on them to expedite the case, providing relevant information of a personal nature to the council which might affect the outcome, providing "compromise" solutions when the law is clearly going against clients, doing the ground work for the officials of the council when they want local opinion on a council plan or the availability of local resources for council use (e.g. councillor aid in getting local land purchased for a village housing scheme), and acting as an all around advisor on both the availability of governmental services and the suitability of each individual request by constituents for such service. A number of these Meath councillors likened their legal role to unpaid solicitors. One called them all "unqualified social workers". They see themselves as providing an essential service, in that the administration

of the council has neither the personnel nor the time to pay attention to individual cases. The Meath county manager and his staff agreed wholeheartedly with this view. The councillors function as field agents collecting and disseminating information about the quality of the council's service and its impact on almost 100,000 people--information that people themselves would be ill at ease or impeded in providing directly to the council offices in Navan. In fact, besides the councillors, there is no structured or institutional way for the mass of Meath residents to make their wishes known regarding local services, nor are there the facilities or personnel to handle them if they did. This has become the primary job of the councillors, who consider it very necessary indeed. Many point out the number of people who, because of the "fear" of the officials which date from "British colonial" times, and their poor education, cannot and would not fill out the bureaucratic forms to get what is entitled to them. They go to their councillors as their local spokesmen. As education levels change, however, fewer people are relying on this service. And the officials of the county council are quick to point out that no favoritism or patronage is practiced in their offices. They insist that everyone who is legally entitled to their services receives it fairly. Whether Irish citizens believe this or not, much traditional political behavior changed in Meath in the 1970s.

Meath councillors did not limit their role to constituent services. Most mentioned their role in party politics and how their council position affected their future political plans or reflected their past. Some were finishing their political careers and enjoying the prestige of party-endorsed political service, true to the national model outlined

above. Others had already used the council as a stepping-stone to the Dail, with a number of their colleagues looking greedily on. Sitting deputies and rival candidates form within their own parties were gathering their forces in the late 1970s and looking forward to the next general election. With the expansion of Meath to a five seat Dail constituency in the period after my fieldwork, competition became stiffer among the councillors hoping to break into the "first echelon" of politics, becoming part of the national political elite and one of the heads of the Meath elite. For those councillors not as ambitious, their role includes information gatherer and ombudsman for all loyal members of the respective party, organizer and chair of CEA electoral activities, network man for the local party TD, and overall representative for the party at all public, social, religious, sporting and political events. None of the councillors that I inter-viewed mentioned "policy-making" or "legislating" as one of their roles. Most, in fact, lamented their loss of power over the decade of the seventies, and some questioned the future of county council and councillors. A few who had been in local government since the days of the County Managers' installations (1942) were quite articulate about the many ways that they have lost power, influence and prestige during the course of their political generation, and agreed with the younger councillors that change for the worse had been rapid. Given these changes in their role as councillors, and the consequent changes in the status of the Meath political elite in relation to the power of the county administrative staff, why do these people serve? The answer rests in a complex pattern of tradition, community pressure, party loyalty, nationalist ideology, political ambition, desire to improve their busi-

nesses, social responsibility, greed, sense of accomplishment, sense of prestige and power, social mobility and politics as hobby or social pastime. The reasons for a being a county councillor in the Meath of the 1970s are linked to the amount of influence and power available to those who have served as a political elite for three generations. It is clear that the role of councillor has changed within the last generation. My hypothesis is that this is one cause of the changes in farmer participation in local and national politics, along with changes in the business of farming induced by the EEC. To demonstrate the links between farming, local politics and power that have changed and continue to change, a review of Meath local government is necessary. To do this, I have divided Meath 20th century political history into four stages.

The first stage of Meath local government (1899-1920) is the end of the Ascendancy period in which the structure of the system was established. Prior to the county council system, Meath administration, jurisprudence, fiscal affairs and health services were supplied by both a Grand Jury and a number of Boards of Guardians. The former, composed of landowners, was in charge of county roads, courts, police, a number of hospitals and local taxes. Meath was also divided into six Poor Law Unions (1835, Poor Relief (Ireland) Act)--Kells, Navan, Trim, Slane, Dunshaughlin and Oldcastle--which was each administered by a Board of Guardians, a third of whom were nominated with the remainder being elected on the basis of property and rate-paying qualification. They were primarily responsible for "sanitary" conditions in their Unions and were entitled to establish a "poor rate" among landholders to pay for the costs of services for the poor. This tax paid the costs of water supply,

sewage disposal, refuse collection, cemeteries and the building of laborers' cottages (the first in Meath were built in the Kells Union in 1886). (Dorgan 1978:9-11).

The present 27 county councils of the Irish Republic came into being under British rule through the Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1998, which was passed as a means of reducing the number of overlapping local authorities. The act created councils in each administrative county which were to manage the administrative and financial business that had previously been the domains of Grand Juries and Poor Law Guardians. These county-wide councils would be complemented by rural district councils (RDCs) which would correspond to the old Poor Law Unions and which were responsible for health conditions. The chairs of these RDCs were co-opted onto the County Council. The political overtones of the act, which wanted above all to put county government on a representative basis, far outweighed its other aim of administrative efficiency.

The key to rationalisation of local bodies lay in solving the problem of county government, which meant overcoming or bypassing the reluctance of landowners to abandon the virtual monopoly of local power which they exercised under the grand jury system (Roche 1982:45).

In fact, such a move had been considered by London a decade previously but had been opposed by unionists in Ireland fearful of a nationalist takeover of local government. The landowners were literally bought off when the new Agricultural Grant was extended to Ireland. The Exchequer was directed to pay half the rates on agricultural land and relieve the landlords of the responsibility of paying half the poor rate. The creation of an elected representative body under a less stringent franchise than existed before gave the new class of nationalist farmers, of large

to small holdings, greatly increased political power in local affairs (Roche 1982:45; Keane 1982:4).

The form of local government that was presented to Ireland "was a virtually unwanted gift from the Conservative government to the Irish people" (Roche 1982:46). The Irish Party, which had labored for so long for Home Rule, felt it to be a device to divert them or buy them off (another attempt to "kill home rule with kindness"). Unionists who were willing to stand and serve in the new system did so in opposition to the new influence of the Irish Party locally. When both groups entered the councils, however, they met another group of nationalists who were using the new Local Government to further their aims of establishing a democratic foundations independent of England. Sinn Fein quickly established itself as a third party in Local Government around a program engineered, in part, by the vice-chair, later chair, of the Meath County Council, John Sweetman. Sinn Fein, in fact, was instrumental in establishing the General Council of County Councils which it hoped would lay the groundwork for a new Irish political system, but the Home Rule revivals of the new century, spurred on by the Land Acts and local versions of the United Irish League, quickly put an end to such grand schemes. The basis for local representation had been laid, however. The 1898 Act made all parliamentary electors (plus peers and qualified women) the local government electorate. One vote per person and a lowering in ownership requirements to householders (instead of property owners of a high valuation) irrevocably gave the voting power to the new nationalist majority (Roche 1982:46-47).

In Meath, in this last period of British rule and first of local

government, 73 men served in the county council in the years 1899 to 1920. They were either elected by their constituents in the new County Electoral Divisions (CEDs) or appointed from the RDCs. Most of the men serving were wealthy landowners, many of whom were of the Ascendancy class and avowed Unionists. Many listed their profession as "gentlemen", "grazier" or "captain". These landowners were holdovers from the grand jury system who relied on their Unionist neighbors and former tenants for the votes necessary for membership. Many sizable landholders were Catholic nationalists however who strongly supported either Sinn Fein or the Irish Party. Although the county council was largely a body for discussion--its principal duties were to maintain roads and mental hospitals and collect rates--it became the central focus for national politics in the county. The first motion in the Meath County Council, on 22 April 1899, stated in part that

We hold that no body of men are competent to make laws for Ireland, save only an Irish Parliament. We declare that we will not yield willing obedience to any but a native legislature, and that we will do all in our power to regain this--the undoubted right of every nation (Minutes, Meath County Council)

Both Sinn Fein and the Nationalists agreed on this. In the years to come such agreement became scarce as a running battle developed over the best way to pursue, and the best form of, Irish sovereignty. By 1910 the Home Rule group had effectively defeated both the Unionists and Sinn Fein contingents for nominal control of the Council. On 13 July 1908 Matthew Gartland was welcomed to the council and congratulated on his electoral defeat of Sweetman, who "was in the County Council nine years too long". Gartland, a candidate with labour support, was praised for his Nationalist stance while the admission of Unionists to the council, like Major

Farrell of Moynalty, was sorely lamented (Meath Chronicle 6 June 1908). By 1916, the time of the Sinn Fein and Irish Volunteer rebellion in Dublin, the Meath County Council was an entrenched meeting place for Home Rule advocates, to the point that they went on record to dissociate themselves from what has become one of the most honored events in Irish History. They stated, on 29 May 1916 in their official minutes

that this council desire to record their condemnation of the recent deplorable outbreak in Dublin, which they believe to be gravely detrimental to the real Political and Industrial Interests of Ireland, and that we all call upon Nationalist Irishmen to support Mr. John Redmond's Constitutional Policy.

By 1920 the new Meath political elite which was primarily Catholic, nationalist and of large landholdings, had been replaced by more radical nationalists who believed in a Republic that should be established by force of arms. The nationalist farmers who were first admitted to power in 1899, albeit little power save in matter of service and amenities, continued as the largest interest group in the local politics of the new Irish Free State. This first stage of local government also established another precedent in Meath for it became the forum at which the local and national issues that were the bases for party politics came to the fore. The council meetings provided an arena that, with the help of the press, enabled voters to witness the beliefs and actions of their elected representatives. And although the personnel changed drastically in the period between the 1914 and 1920 elections, the electorate still looked to the county council for leadership in the troubled times of a divided nationalism that were ahead.

Overall, the 1898 Act and subsequent four local elections in Ireland had a number of far-reaching effects. The county government system was

established, and has remained untouched to this day despite great extremes in size, population and development. New men came into government, especially in the urban areas where members of all classes served. Both urban and rural councils reacted to the motor car with a glut of road construction, and both enthusiastically welcomed state institution of social welfare programs. The last British legislation on the subject, the Local Government (Ireland) Act 1919, established proportional representation as the universal mode in local elections, a practice later adopted by the Free State for all elections (Roche 1982:47-49).

Thus the beginning of the Irish Local Government brought to Meath an elected county council staffed by representatives from an agriculturally-oriented nationalist poualition, who used the council to articulate and propagate the political ideologies that were at the very core of political party membership, and who brought a great deal of local control, based on a wide range of class-based political participation, to the infrastructural development of the county.. This responsibility of the council for development was a key factor in the agricultural and political changes of the second stage of local government history in Meath, in which local polticians became the political patrons they have been accused of being to this day. The years from 1920 to 1942 were the halcyon ones for the modern Meath political elite.

The politicians of the first stage of local government saw fit, almost to a man, to abstain from future elections. The first election that was run under the new conditions of a War of Independence was in 1920 when the so-called Sinn Fein Council was elected. This was a legal council, replacing the 1914 one, but it derived its authority from a Sinn

Fein-dominated Dail that itself was declared illegal by the British. Nonetheless, in the records of local government in Meath this first county council of the new national political system is judged the legal successor to the previous councils. By the mid-1920s the new Free State had begun centralizing control over the Local Government apparatus, which was no mean feat given the Civil War that had just ended, a bureaucracy largely trained by the British civil service, and the dissolution of rate-taking and provision of services in some local areas due to the Troubles. The first peaceful and open election in local government in the new state took place in 1925 putting an end to an era that saw, at times, county council meetings in barns, back rooms and factories.

From the end of the Civil War to the early 1930s, both national and local politics were dominated by Cumann na nGaedheal, chief party of the Irish Free State. All the services that past county councils provided were to be continued under the new state system and some were added. The Local Government Act, 1925, abolished the RDCs, which took care of road maintenance and sanitary conditions, and transferred their duties to the county councils. Thus the Meath County Council was in complete control of local health, sanitation, sewage, water, waste disposal, road construction and maintenance, defence, fire and safety, social welfare and public assistance. It was also the main organ for the channeling of information regarding local education, agricultural services, telephones and tourism to national departments, which conducted their business largely with the cooperation and recommendation of the local authorities. The most important powers that the new county councils of the Irish Free State had were the striking of the rate each year, which determined the amount of

tax county property holders had to pay to maintain services, and the hiring of the majority of county council employees. In fact the "corrupting" influence of this last power was so obvious that the first move in the long lasting struggle between the center and peripheries of power and administration in Ireland (a struggle at present almost won by Dublin) was made by the national government when it established in 1926 a Local Appointments Commission, charged with selecting and appointing well-qualified non-political persons for the principal offices (chief administrators and technical personnel) in local authorities. A Combined Purchasing Act, 1925, also gave the central government some control over the spending of local authority money. These acts, passed in part to limit patronage at the county level, were themselves not free from patronage at the national level in an era which made party membership and loyalty prerequisites for public service.

From the very first the ruling party did its best to reward those who had supported the Treaty side in the establishment of the Free State. Compensation Acts provided pensions for those wounded and disabled who had fought in the War of Independence and in the National army in the Civil War. All who fought for the Republic in the Civil War were excluded (Kelly 1936:91-93). Once Fianna Fail formally came into politics in the end of the decade, most of their support came from small farmers, small businessmen, agricultural workers and urban workers. The economic policies of the Free State had favored medium and large farmers, professionals, and some large businessmen. The franchise remained one based on property, however, a condition that would be fought bitterly in the early 1930s. Cumann na nGaedheal made clear its intentions regarding

the loyalty of government employees. A 1925 law made employment in the civil service, local government service, and a number of professions and service occupations attached to the government dependent on signing a declaration of allegiance to the Free State Constitution. Government grants were awarded to local councils on the condition that they give their lower level jobs to former and present adherents to the Free State since in the Civil War (Bax 1976:20). The policy of rewarding party supporters by the government in power was quickly established in the first years of the new state, but it took the early years of Fianna Fail power to make an art of such patronage, in the years when, in Meath, the economic divisions between the main parties meant the difference between surviving and not in the midst of an Economic War between Ireland and Great Britain.

In this second stage of local government, the most powerful stage for local politicians, the Meath County Council administered the county through a series of committees, made up of elected representatives, local civil service, and co-opted members of the community (who, like the councillors, were unpaid). Thus, committees ranging from CEA boards of health to village housing to roads maintenance decided upon the personnel to be hired, the money needed, the outside businesses to be contracted, the type of service to be provided and the priorities in service in terms of order and location. Although the county council, in the form of its chair, had to approve all such orders, the political agreements were decided among all the councillors and depended on which party had a majority. Of course, necessary services were well provided. But in Meath of 1920-1942 none of the political parties, and certainly neither

of the major two, feared a local electorate that was disgruntled over its patronage. In fact, besides the national issue, the only way to gain and keep electoral support in Meath was to "take care of your own". And it is this essential split in local politics in the 1930s that shaped local politics up to the 1970s. It was a split begun over nationalist differences but reinforced, if not cemented, by the economic difficulties suffered under Fianna Fail governments and made either more palatable or unbearable by the presence of local party patronage. Fianna Fail supporters in Meath were aided in many ways that helped them get through the Economic War and depression. Fine Gael supporters, many of them beef farmers, were made long-standing enemies. To both groups, however, it was clear that the best way to combat the other party's patronage, and to do the best possible for yourself, neighbor, electoral area and business partners, was to get a seat for yourself and your party on the county council.

The Meath political elite that dominated local government and politics in the heyday of party power up to 1942, before the onset of the county manager system, was overwhelmingly one of farmers and agricultural workers (see Table 8). From the initial Sinn Fein council, in which everybody belonged to the same party, party politics was one of farmer-dominated parties. From a pre-EEC lowpoint of just 45% of the council in 1920 (a group with a very large share of agricultural workers, shop employees and clerks) farmers' share of council seats rose steadily, peaking in 1934 with 25 positions (or 71% of the councillors elected or co-opted from the election year to 1942, the largest and most powerful council in county history). Nonetheless, this overwhelming farmer

TABLE 8

MEATH COUNTY COUNCILS, 1920-1979
MEMBERS, BY OCCUPATION

Councils												
Occupation Group	1920	% total elected	1925	%	1928	%	1934	%	1942	%	1945	%
Farmers	17	45	21	55	20	56	25	71	17	57	19	58
Laborers	7	18.4	10	26	8	22	1	3	6	20	4	12
Professionals	2	5	0	0	0	0	2	6	2	7	3	9
Merchants	1	3	5	13	2	6	5	14	4	13	4	12
Company Directors	2	5	1	3	1	3	1	3	1	3	2	6
Other	9	24	1	3	5	14	1	3	0	0	1	3
TOTAL	38	100	38	100	36	100	36	100	35	100	30	100

TABLE 8
(continued)

Councils

Occupation Group	1950	% total	1955	%	1960	%	1967	%	1974	%	1979	%	*
Farmers	22	71	20	61	23	70	18	58	12	38	8	28	
Laborers	2	6	3	9	2	6	3	10	1	3	2	7	
Professionals	2	6	1	3	2	6	2	6	6	19	7	24	
Merchants	4	12	4	12	4	12	6	19	6	19	8	28	
Company Directors	1	3	1	3	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	
Other	0	0	4	12	2	6	2	6	6	19	4	14	
TOTAL	31	100	33	100	33	100	31	100	32	100	29	100	

* This table only includes the 29 original members of the 1979 council.

domination of the council was not a party domination, for in that council the numbers were evenly divided between the two major parties (see Table 9). It was a Fianna Fail council, however, which did much to influence future political beliefs in the county. Farmers as a group continued to control the council until the 1970s, in the fourth stage of Meath local government development. Before that time their numbers never fell below 55% of the total council. Table 10 shows that their percentage of councillors elected for all of stage two was 57%, a figure that increased by six points in stage three but which plummeted by the fourth. Within stage two, however, it was not only their overall number that was important but also farmer domination of a large part of the county economy. Most of the other members of the council directly or indirectly depended on agriculture for their livelihoods. Perhaps more importantly, the parties themselves were farmer controlled (except for Labour which was primarily an agricultural workers' group) and reflected not only agricultural interests locally but the party politics of the nation. The Local Government Election of 1934 was the most important one for both the county and the nation in history, and marks the formal beginning of the ideological and behavioral split of the two major parties in the country today.

Laborers and merchants were the next largest groups represented in the councils of stage two but from the earliest years their political importance was held in check or declined locally as their parties adapted to the strength of the Farmers Party (locally known in Meath almost exclusively as the Farmers and Ratepayers Party) which represented medium to large farmers and which, with Cumann na nGaedheal, was to form Fine Gael

TABLE 9

FARMERS, BY PARTY
MEATH COUNTY COUNCIL, 1925-1979

Party	Councils				
	1925	1928	1934	1942	1945
Fianna Fail	0	4	12	7	8
Fine Gael	0	0	13	2	1
Independent	2	3	0	2	5
Labour	1	0	0	0	2
Farmers & Ratepayers (Farmers, Independent Farmers)	14	13	0	6	0
Cumann na nGaedheal	3	0	0	0	0
Cumann na Talmhan	0	0	0	0	2
Other (Old IRA, Republican, etc.)	1	0	0	0	1
TOTAL	21	20	25	17	19

TABLE 9
(continued)

Party	Councils					
	1950	1955	1960	1967	1974	1979
Fianna Fail	13	8	11	8	6	5
Fine Gael	7	12	10	9	6	3
Independent	2	0	1	0	0	0
Labour	0	0	1	1	0	0
Farmers & Ratepayers (Farmers, Independent Farmers)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cumann na nGaedheal	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cumann na Talmhan	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other (Old IRA, Republican, etc.)	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	22	20	23	18	12	8

TABLE 10

MEATH COUNTY COUNCILLORS BY OCCUPATION
STAGES TWO - FOUR, 1920-1979

STAGE	2		3		4	
	1920-1942		1945-1967		1974-1979	
Occupation	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Farmer	100	57	102	63	20	33
Laborer	32	18	14	9	3	5
Professional	6	3	10	6	13	21
Merchant	17	10	22	14	14	23
Employer	6	3	4	2	1	2
Other	16	9	9	6	10	16
TOTAL	177	100	161	100	61	100

before the 1934 election. Within the earliest days of stage two, however, it was a council which favored pro-Treaty people for county jobs (clerks, road workers, drivers, etc.), did its best to minimize the amount of local money the agricultural ratepayers would have to raise to pay for services, and argued nobly and well the national political issues (such as the IRA, the Treaty and trade and agricultural policy) which it knew it could influence through the press, its role as representative of party cadres, and its sending of farmer and labor-supported TDs to the Cumann na nGaedheal-dominated Dail. The years before 1934 in Meath local government were ones in which local committees set up by the council to provide basic services had as at least one priority the rewarding of party workers and voters (which excluded all Republicans and members of the new deValera Fianna Fail party). It was also one which assumed that one of its principal roles was to act as a forum for political party dialogue which would, in turn, be heard by the policy makers in Leinster House. This politicization of the council would become even more marked in the 1930s, as would the degree of patronage distributed by the council in what remains for Meath the most decisive decade in its political history up to the present one.

In almost all the interviews I conducted among Meath farmers, on large to small holdings, regardless of their political traditions, the first answer I received regarding the cause or origin of their family political loyalty was the side taken in the Civil War. Slandorous statements regarding the people involved at the national level aside, however, when I pushed people to describe why or how their family chose sides originally, the evidence brought to bear in Meath was consistently

from the early to mid 1930s, during the Economic War, ten years after the initial split. Most people were at a loss to explain the initial causes, but were quick to point out the deviousness of the political leaders, the unfair electoral and administrative practices, the patronage and brute strength of the opposition in the 1930s (there seemingly was no gap in the logic in presenting such data as evidence—it was almost as if their families became pro- or anti-treaty because they know that in the following ten years the "other fellows" would act the way they eventually did). The losses to Fine Gael families in the Economic War were prominently argued by one side, while the riches of the pro-British graziers and the strong arm tactics of the Blue Shirts were key elements in Fianna Fail memories of the period. It was clear that Meath people of the 1970s did not care about their fathers' and grandfathers' original political choices, but that the actions of the other side both during the Civil War and during the Economic War clearly vindicated the choice and made loyalty to their political party tangible—a necessary response to the attack on the material conditions of their lives only ten years after the founding of the new state. For the farmers of Meath it was the events of early Fianna Fail and Fine Gael party formation a generation and a half ago that decided their political loyalty up to the 1970s. And, as in the last decade, it was a series of economic problems that first so politicized them. A review of some of the national and local, documented and locally remembered, forms of political patronage and economic pressure will present a fuller picture of the past events and the symbolism of Meath politics.

The Economic War between Britain and Ireland began in 1932 when the Fianna Fail government refused to pay money due Britain in the form of Land Annuities and Britain retaliated by putting duties on Irish agricultural imports. The ensuing disaster in Irish agriculture, especially in the beef trade, has been outlined above. It was extremely devastating in Meath, a county whose economy depended on the shipment of store and finished cattle, largely on the hoof, to Britain. The big farmers of the county, who had supported the Farmers Party and Cumann na nGaedheal over the years, were especially hard hit. The War itself followed an agricultural depression that had Meath farmers expecting help, not disaster. In the country as a whole agricultural income had fallen 12.48% between 1929 and 1931, and the price of one to two-year-old store cattle fell by 17.2% between 1931 and 1932, sliding to 58.8% below the 1931 level in 1935 (Orridge 1981:7). In an effort to save both their rapidly dwindling cash supplies and oppose the Fianna Fail government that had put them in such dire straits, many farmers refused to pay both their annuities and their rates to the Irish government. In 1930-1931, 14.1% of rates were not paid, while in 1933-1934 non-payment rose to 36%, falling to 31% in 1934-1935. As one scholar has shown, such non-payment took place principally in prosperous agricultural counties among large farmers, both Catholic and Protestant (who were directly dependent on exports), Protestant small farmers, and some Catholic and Protestant commercial interests in the east of the country (Orridge 1981:9-11). This same scholar suggests that the developing political confrontation in national politics had more to do with social cleavages based on the Economic War than it did with nationalist or republican ideology (which the case of Meath

supports).

Nonetheless, Irish historians and political scientists still insist that present day Irish political cleavages are a result of the Civil War (Carty 1976; Gallagher 1981) even though neither of the major parties gained their electoral support until the early 1930s. The fact that many groups that had supported other parties eventually became members of Fine Gael, the new party of the 1930s, and that many shared a pro-treaty belief, is itself not explanatory. The social and economic bases to their formation of a new party remain largely problematical. The Centre and Farmer parties were not simply the ideological opposition to Fianna Fail republicanism—they were parties with defined social and economic objectives. The reasons the membership of these parties formed with other interests into a new party, at the time of the Economic War, must be explored at local and constituency levels. My thesis argues that the "traditional" political cleavage in Meath is at the very least due as much to the economic conditions of the first half of the 1930s as it is to any Civil War divisions, and argues strongly against generalizations about political behavior based almost exclusively on voting patterns, party membership, and socioeconomic correlations in the absence of local case studies (the greatest need in Irish political studies). Such statements as the following cannot be valid as long as field research into the social and economic roots of political behavior of individuals, families and larger interest groups is ignored.

The long-standing differences that divide political parties in Ireland do not correspond to any social or economic cleavage in

Irish society...only in Ireland is the structure of the voter alignment underlying the party system unmarked by any social cleavage. The cleavage that divided Irishmen and structured the nation's party competition was political (Carty 1976:200).

My thesis examines the causes of political party cleavage in Meath in the 1930s and its effect on the Meath political elite's role in local government. Unlike much of the literature in political science, and begging the question of independent and dependent variables, it does not attempt to explain or describe political cleavages through the use of political variables alone.

In local government of Meath before 1942 all services were the responsibility of the county council, or, to be specific, the committees of the council responsible for each major service, i.e., roads, water and sewage, health, etc. The nature, timetable and recipients of these services were the sole responsibility of these committees which were controlled by the MCCs who were delegated by the council as a whole to sit on them. Civil servants administered the committees' decisions if they were approved by the overall council. Thus the interest group of party that controlled the council controlled a large share of the patronage the council could command. Before the mid-1930s large farmers, representatives of first Cumann na nGaedheal and then the Farmers Party, dominated the council. Most Meath political power rested with them. But the central government constantly chipped away at that power by attempting to curb local government functions and control civil service hiring. Its relative failure to do so before the 1930s is a testament to the decentralization of Cumann na nGaedheal and the absence of an organized opposition party. Thus, the strength of both local government

in Meath and the interest groups elected to it were linked to the development of political parties at the county level. Before 1934 in Meath the parties of the nation took a backseat to the election of people who would best represent CEAs as patrons. The parties did not themselves command attention until the first major local elections of the decade which, in 1934, reflected voter preference toward the national government, the new political parties and the choice they provided, the developments of the Economic War and the hope that a victory for your party at the county level would ensure future control of goods and services. This last belief was new to Ireland because, for the first time, the form and content of local patronage was viewed as the domain of the political party that controlled the voting of the council. This belief was both a product and a cause of the building of the political parties of the 1930s.

Before the parties became the chief instrument of power in Meath local representatives principally sought to champion their constituents' interests by providing necessary material services to their communities at large and their individual clients. The former involved the complicity of other representatives who themselves wished their communities to benefit, as in such schemes as the construction and maintenance of roads that linked all parts of the county, or the provision of rural electricity. The latter task of satisfying clients' individual needs was the most time consuming but was the most rewarding in terms of voter support. If the MCC "got the job done" then he had a right to expect a person's, and often a family's, vote. Such services included individual health benefits, getting a man a job as a laborer "on the roads", and

getting a council house for a newly married couple. It all depended on which committee the local MCC sat on, and the committees of the local MCC's friends and the committees controlled by the party of your local MCC. Prior to 1934, farmers and Farmers' Party controlled most of the committees, aided at times by members of the Labour Party. The role of the local MCC did not entail the airing of many national political party issues because, before the late 1920s, and the emergence of Fianna Fail, there simply were not many issues of great note which could be influenced through a political party. Meath people today remember this period of the first decade of the new local government as one in which you supported your local MCC because he not only represented your CEA but your way of life as well. This was especially true of large farmers. Many small farmers, although mindful of the many differences in wealth, way of life and nationalist ideology between themselves and their larger neighbors, could not afford the time and money themselves to run for office, nor did they have the necessary networks to run a successful campaign or ensure a productive working relationship with other MCCs even if elected. Besides, in the 1920s there were still landholding restrictions on the franchise, further limiting the pool of prospective electors for a small farmer. Thus large farmers who served as MCCs only secondarily stood as representatives of farmers as a whole. They belonged to a party, the Farmers' Party, whose ideology was supported by the national government and which reinforced their roles in both local society and government. By providing services they kept Meath functioning, the Party going, and themselves in office.

This situation changed with the arrival of Fianna Fail and their control of the national government by 1932. This not only resulted in the Economic War, but in a bid by parties (Fine Gael being founded in 1932) to politicize county government, thereby ensuring party power at the local level and developing local party organizations which would be mobilized in future to put or keep their parties in power at every level of Irish society.

The Economic War followed hard on the heels of Fianna Fail's taking control of the Dail. With the crumbling of the former government party, the reaction of disparate interest groups to Fianna Fail's economic policy and the rise of fascism and corporatism which resulted in the Blueshirt movement, a party vacuum was created. Fine Gael provided a party platform which brought together many former political enemies and friends in opposition to the economic and social policies of the government party. The national seriousness of these events was mirrored in Meath. In the course of events in the Economic War, in which British markets were closed to Irish beef and Irish farmers refused to pay their rates in protest, Meath was particularly hard hit. Large farmers, with considerable capital invested in beef, were especially pressured. The major, if not only, market for their animals became that for local and urban consumption. And in the County Council of 1928-1932, which had only five Fianna Fail representatives, MCCs were relatively powerless to aid their county's farmers. Because of tight Fianna Fail control of international marketing--control which placed considerable emphasis on Fianna Fail patronage at the national and local levels--individual Meath politicians could neither rely on favors due them for past services nor

look to their party for help (for their party was not in power). The need for affiliation with national parties that could control governments and national economic policy became apparent, whereas previously there had been one major party in a government which supported decentralization.

In Meath of the early 1930s Fianna Fail controlled the cattle market, lifeblood of the county, but it did not control the County Council. In order to sell cattle export licenses or permits had to be provided by the seller. Without licenses no animal could be sold or transported to Dublin or Britain. But these licenses could only be obtained through the Department of Agriculture, a ministry in Dublin controlled by Fianna Fail. In Meath such licenses were available at the local Committee of Agriculture, a committee of the County Council but one controlled by a combination of Fianna Fail MCCs, local Fianna Fail supporters, and Department bureaucrats. As both Fianna Fail and Fine Gael Meath people remember, the principal way to get a license was not to go to your MCC of the Committee of Agriculture directly, but to go to the new Fianna Fail Cumann (club) in your community. These local political clubs were the suppliers of licenses through their patrons on the Committee and in Dublin. If you did not "turn" Fianna Fail in this period, if you did not join the local club, and if you did not have a considerable number of local butchers in your network of social or business contacts then your animals were almost worthless. It was in this period that the support of most large Meath farmers turned so visibly towards Fine Gael. Although past political events and nationalist ideologies played key roles in party divisions, in Meath the ability to sell your animals, pay your rates and keep your farm afloat were all just

as instrumental in aligning voters. The locally and nationally accepted views still persist that the civil war loyalites were at the root of the two party split in Irish government, but in Meath this split had just as much to do with fattened-beef sales. And Meath's beef trade did terribly. As can be seen in Table 11 beef cattle numbers dropped drastically in the first years of the 1930s. Three-year-olds dropped by 15.3% between 1931 and 1932 and by a further 8.1% and 10.9% in the next two years. Two-year-olds were down by 13% at the height of the Economic War. Meath farmers who kept beef cattle also kept calves and yearlings. They hoped to weather the current economic troubles and have replacement stock for the revival. They had a long time to wait. By the end of the decade, long after the end of the "hostilities" in the Economic disputes, Meath fattened-beef, three-year-olds, had dropped by 35% from 64,000 to 41,000 head. Only the one-year-olds held firm, gaining by 29% in overall numbers between 1931 and 1939.

Thus the early 1930s was an extreme time for Meath economy and polity. The Blueshirts—a strong interest group in rural Meath—provided a solid framework for Fine Gael, in combination with many old Farmers Party members sorely affected by Fianna Fail control of the national and local beef trade. Many poor farmers, urban workers and small businessmen in towns and villages joined Fianna Fail because of the patronage they provided as well as the nationalist position they held to. Many of these early Fianna Fail supporters were irate citizens long denied County Council and Cumann na nGaedheal patronage. They felt that it was now their turn to receive some material rewards. National Fianna Fail moves helped support their position. Army pensions were supplied to Republican

TABLE 11

MEATH CATTLE, 1930s

1 June	3 yrs. old & over	% change	2-3 yrs. old	% change	1-2 yrs. old	% change	Total (including bulls, cows, heifers in calf)	% change
1931	64,633 (9,939)		73,594 (-3,434)		39,664 (+1,833)		225,952 (8,336)	
1932	54,694 (-4,455)	-15.3	70,160 (-1,116)	-4.7	41,497 (-2,179)	+4.6	217,616 (-4,015)	-3.6
1933	50,239 (-5,479)	-8.1	69,044 (-9,019)	-1.6	39,318 (+960)	-5.2	213,601 (-11,225)	-1.8
1934	44,760 (-3,218)	-10.9	60,025 (+7,376)	-13.0	40,278 (+10,909)	+2.4	202,376 (+23,570)	-5.2
1939	41,542	-7.2	67,401	+12.3	51,187	+27.0	225,946	+11.6

SOURCE: Central Statistics Office, Dublin

veterans (1932), compensation was paid to all those whose property was damaged aiding the Republican side in the Civil War (1933), and service pensions were awarded to old Republicans and their families (1934) (Kelly 1936:91). To both parties, in Meath as well as in the nation, a demonstration of electoral strength was needed as a clear sign of the new political alignments. They viewed the 1934 local elections as a crucial test of their political future.

Fianna Fail was first to recognize the importance of controlling locally elected bodies. The benefits in providing services to local constituents notwithstanding, such control would cement the local to national party structure, and present a picture of almost unilateral government and party solidarity at every level of administration. Fianna Fail was especially leary of municipal local government. "The Fianna Fail party did not have control of the municipal bodies who through non-cooperation could block the Government program. The franchise in municipal elections extended only to rate payers" (Kelly 1936:93). To break their opponents' hold on municipal and local government, and to win the first local elections after their victory in the Dail, Fianna Fail had to change the local franchise. To do this, in the form of the Local Government (Extension of Franchise) Bill, 1933, which gave the vote to every citizen 21 years of age, a large amount of money was pumped into local government. In 1922-1923, 22.6% of local revenue came from the central government (77.4% from the rate payers). By 1928-1929 central funding had risen to 38% of the total budget. The new franchise bill was a calculated move by Fianna Fail to extend the vote to those groups which had become their national voting support. Both the party and their

opponents felt that Fianna Fail had no chance under the old franchise. The Seanad delayed the bill, however, so that in the 1934 elections only the rate-payers voted. Fianna Fail expected a loss. In Meath, a county hard hit by Fianna Fail policy and one in which most standing MCCs campaigned vigorously against the national government, their defeat was a certainty.

Besides the extension of party and governmental power into rural areas the 1934 elections were significant in a number of ways. Being the first elections after the start of both the Economic War and a Fianna Fail Dail majority, a government victory would vindicate their economic policy. The election was also a test of strength for the new political movements of Fine Gael and Blueshirtism. Local party organizations-- hastily constructed and extensively placed in every CEA in the county-- were being put to the test for the first time. And the elections also served as the first electoral contest in the history of the state in which economic issues were as important as political or ideological ones, a precedent often copied on subsequent elections.

In Meath the 1934 elections were clearly fought along economic lines. All three major parties saw it firstly as a contest among the parties for electoral support, a contest waged over economic policy, and secondly as a battle for party control of local politics. As such, it was the first party-politicized contest in Meath county council history. It was also a battle of competing patrons, highlighting just how far each of the parties could and would go to satisfy the needs of their supporters and attract new ones. Thus in early 1934 the government announced it was going to increase the agricultural grant to local county councils,

a move clearly aimed at placating both the agricultural community, whose rates would drop, and local councils who would not have to strike a high rate to tax their constituents. In Meath this increase especially aided smaller farmers (giving relief to the first £20 valuation on land, which in Meath is roughly the first 20 acres of one's land), giving a total of £11,000 to the county making it fifth in the nation and the highest in Leinster (Meath Chronicle, 24 February 1934). Subsequent debates in the County Council focused on the issue of rates. The chair John Quinn stated that the rate relief was nothing in the face of an economy which made rate payment in itself a problem. "We see unfortunate people having their cattle seized and driven away by the bailiffs because they were unable to pay the rates". James Kelly, Fianna Fail TD and MCC, countered by asking if Quinn was condoning the non-payment of rates, a question answered with cries from the floor of "no, no!". Kelly went on to question the money being made by big farmers who had invested in tobacco, wheat, oats and potatoes, and who surely were not suffering as much as they lamented. His statements pointed to the sharp division in party support and goals when he asked "Why don't the ranches go into tillage, instead of employing one or two men?" The Labour senator and MCC Michael Duffy wondered in such hard times at the wealth of the "market manipulators", the "banks" and many of his Meath neighbors for "In the country they could see hundreds of expensive motor cars at Blue Shirt meetings" (Meath Chronicle 3 March 1934). Many MCCs were quick to point out the inactivity of past governments in regard to the provision of services in Meath. Lamenting the poor record of Cumann na nGaedheal which held power for ten years in Dublin, one Fianna Fail MCC felt

"...it was strange that in these years of prosperity they had not built a cottage for the rural worker. In Meath alone, under Fianna Fail, 700 cottages had been built in two years" (Meath Chronicle 9 June 1934). It is important to note that such patronage was emanating from Dublin. It was clear to Meath residents what was being offered—substantial material benefits over those supplied by Cumann na nGaedheal if they bound themselves to a national political party.

The Blueshirt organization recognized the threat that economic power wielded by the government held for their electoral chances. In an article published in the Blueshirt official journal, the newspaper United Ireland, 7 July 1934, with the title "A Carrot for Meath", the Blueshirts regaled the government for the false rumors it spread regarding a beet factory it would place in Meath which would employ 700 men and which promised that "farmers would more than make up their losses on cattle by their profits on beet". Needless to say no factory materialized, but the Blueshirts were aware of the power that the government had through their acknowledged ability to provide such services. They had little to use as ammunition in Meath except the call to farmers to use the 1934 elections to fight the Fianna Fail "mandate" to hold onto the land annuities—a mandate which had removed them from the British market, destroyed their beef industry and put the title to their holdings in jeopardy. It was clear to the new Fine Gael party that this would be the first local election fought on party lines (United Ireland 26 May 1934). As a Fine Gael TD announced in a Meath rally "Any person with a vote, particularly the farmers, who did not use it at the elections next month, was not fit to be called a citizen" (Meath Chronicle 19 May

1934). The Meath Blueshirts considered themselves both the core of the county's Fine Gael campaign and, unlike Fianna Fail, a truly democratic body, because "they had people from the cottage and people from the Castle; they had the farmer, the professional man and the business man, all marching under the Blueshirt banner...the spearpoint of Fine Gael" (Meath Chronicle 19 May 1934). Fianna Fail campaigners believed that they themselves "were not putting forward Captains and Colonels and Generals (which they saw Fine Gael doing). They were putting forward plain people; many of whom had fought in the IRA..." (Meath Chronicle 19 May 1934). Just how much Fianna Fail appealed to the interests of poorer farmers and laborers looking for a brighter economic future and remembering the nationalist past can be seen in Table 12, a list of reasons why local voters should vote for Fianna Fail and against Fine Gael in the Trim CEA.

Although Fine Gael came out with a Local Government scheme in early June which promised rate relief for rural and urban rate payers, a national reconstruction scheme and new social welfare programs, their campaign revolved around the economic and political policies of the party in power. They feared a "Party dictatorship" (Meath Chronicle 10 June 1934). Nonetheless, the 1934 election in Meath returned 20 Fianna Fail MCCs out of a total of 35 (15 Fine Gael seats, no Labour). Of the 35 seats, 25 were farmers (12 FF; 13 FG), 71% of the total, the largest farming representation in County history. At the national level 15 of the 23 councils contested were won by Fianna Fail. In Meath, the Fianna Fail TD James Kelly felt his party's victory was a vote of confidence in their actions at the national and local levels, and that the new politicization

TABLE 12

FIANNA FAIL ELECTION HANDBILL, 1934

NINE REASONS WHY YOU MUST VOTE FOR
FIANNA FAIL:

1. Because it is a Vote for Ireland.
2. Because it is a Vote for the Land for the People.
3. Because it is a Vote for Homes for Irishmen.
4. Because it is a Vote for Honest Work at Honest Pay for Honest Irishmen.
5. Because England wants you to vote Blue Shirt.
6. Because Meath was forced to become a cattle ranch to feed England.
7. Because Fianna Fail will make Meath a Tillage County again to Feed Ireland.
8. Because Fianna Fail means Irish wheat, Irish beet, and everything Irish for the Irish people.
9. Because a Vote for Fianna Fail is a Vote for De Valera.

And because reasons 1,5 and 9 are a Gospel for every good Irishman.

NINE REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD NOT VOTE FOR
THE BLUE SHIRTS

1. Because a Vote for the Blueshirts is a Vote for John Bull.
2. Because a Vote for the Blueshirts is a Vote for Ranching.
3. Because a Vote for the Blueshirts is a Vote against yourself.
4. Because a Vote for the Blueshirts is a Vote against the Plough.
5. Because a Vote for the Blueshirts is a Vote against Ireland.
6. Because a Vote for the Blueshirts is a Vote for the Hovel for the Worker
7. Because a Vote for the Blueshirts is a Vote for the Foreign Worker against the Irish Worker.
8. Because a Vote for the Blueshirts is a Vote against Irish industry.
9. Because a Vote for the Blueshirts is a Vote against De Valera.

of local government was proper. Kelly "at all times believed that politics should enter the County Council chamber" (Meath Chronicle 7 July 1934). He promised Fianna Fail's political opponents that they would suffer no "victimization" and "intolerance". Unstated was the new belief that the political parties should control local government both as agents of their national executive and as dispensers of patronage. The 1934 election saw an end in large part to nonparty political localism in Meath, in which an electorate voted for an individual who would best serve their local interests regardless of party. From 1934 on the parties saw to it that local electors believed that the parties were the best means of serving local interests, so that they should vote for the individual of best qualities within that party they selected as their own. In Meath this choice for farmers was largely influenced by conditions they were placed in during the Economic War. The years 1932-1942 were years in which the political center continued to take away power from the political periphery but were also years in which the party politician of both county council and county councillor-as-patron were complete. From the 1930s on Meath farmers believed that the best way to influence both local and national administration and policy, towards the satisfaction of their material and ideological needs, was to participate in party politics, a necessary step in being elected to the county council and the Dail.

A change in the personnel and personalities in local politics took place in this second stage of county government in Meath. Most of the old Sinn Fein councillors passed from the public eye. For some their enthusiasm had waned. Others could not adjust to the control of central-

ized political parties. As one former Sinn Fein judge and MCC remembered in front of the fire in his sitting room, many of his colleagues became "soured by the new politicians who were in it for what they could get out of it". Although a farmer himself, he was aware that many farmers of the time were representatives of their "sectional group or party" and not of the people at large, which he believes the patriotism of the 1920s made mandatory. The new politicians, many who fought the British and many who did not, did not serve as much out of a sense of patriotism as out of a need to represent the interests of their families, neighbors, livelihood and party in a time when both the nation's parties and levels of government were settling down. Into this new political arena stepped a new breed of politician who relied on personalism, localism, the networks provided by his profession and party backing to "get the job done".

One of the most successful of such politicians was Pat Fitzsimons, Sr., who founded a Fianna Fail organization in Navan which to this day is instrumental in party affairs in the county, which controlled most of the county councils up to the 1970s, and which provided a political legacy that has been passed on to two sons, both publicans like their father, one of whom is a European MP, a TD and a MCC, the other an Urban District Councillor in Navan. Pat Fitzsimons, often called "the Godfather" in recent years, allegedly ran the committee system of the County Council to his party's advantage for ten years after the 1934 election, and was the party leader in the Council for a generation. Regardless of political persuasion, everyone in Meath was aware in 1977-1980 of the power Fitzsimons and his party wielded in the years before. All services, jobs,

favours and political commitments asked of Fianna Fail representatives, it is said, passed across his desk. Many former Fine Gael and Labour MCCs remember with regret and a sense of amusement, some with hate, the lack of control over the resources they all needed for successful political careers. Even some Fianna Fail MCCs who felt that the Navan group kept the Council in their grip do not remember old Pat too well. And although it was physically impossible for Fitzsimons and his local Navan Fianna Fail cumainn to have controlled as much of county affairs as both their friends and enemies have charged, it is clear that Fianna Fail controlled the majority of the vital county committees of 1934-1942 and were important in the hiring and firing of county employees, the contracting of businesses to do council work and the provision of national services by the Fianna Fail-dominated Dail. Not surprisingly, the national bus line's only stop in Navan is still at Fitzsimons' pub and shop. In the 1930s to get things done in the Navan area most Fianna Fail people went to Fitzsimons' pub to get a chance to talk with him, a pub that to this day, centrally situated in Navan's Market Square, people visit to speak to Jim, the son and the TD. Many a pint has been taken while waiting to ask a favor (not least by inquiring anthropologists). The 1930s was the time of the Fianna Fail-dominated County Council, but also of a Navan-dominated Fianna Fail, and a Navan organization run by a network revolving around one family. If Meath ever had a political "machine", on the model presented by Bax and Sacks for Cork and Donegal, then it was that of Fitzsimons' Navan Fianna Fail.

Fianna Fail as a national party was not interested in giving more power to County Councils. DeValera believed in the centralization of

political power in party executive and especially in the party leader. Thus, the 1930s was also a time in which the government, well aware of its gains in local politics, slowly increased its control over local government encroachment into their domain for such moves were labelled in the party's interests. DeValera, however, did not have the control of the country's political system and electorate that he wanted (perhaps he never did). The 1937 election saw a great victory for the new Constitution, but a number of setbacks for Fianna Fail politicians. DeValera and his party had to realize, perhaps for the first time, that they had to provide more than lip service regarding nationalism and an "Irish" Ireland in order to keep the votes necessary to remain in power. Even the smallest of farmers needed material incentives. The Economic War had proved all this. The 1937 election showed the effects of that war. "In short, for the first time since the foundation of the Irish State, a substantial body of electors followed their local and personal preferences in economic and social matters, doubtless from the conviction that the Treaty-Republic issue was moribund" (Hogan 1945:30-31). It is a shame many Irish political scientists do not themselves look beyond this last issue in their analysis of party formation and electoral patterns. Nonetheless, deValera's Fianna Fail recognized that it could not allow a local government system to provide power bases at the local level which could not be controlled from the center. Local political control of political goods and services had to end. Thus, ironically, it was a Fianna Fail government that made County Management a nationwide institution in 1942. In the case of Meath they had been the party best served by local political control, yet they were the ones to remove those

conditions, making way for stage three of Meath local government.

Stage two of Meath local politics was one dominated by farmers. As can be seen in Table 10, 57% of all serving representatives were farmers, a figure actually deflated by the large number of laborers serving in the earliest councils in the 1920s. Merchants also rose in importance, chief among them publicans, whose central location, figuratively and literally in Meath geography and social life, made them sources of information, favors, credit and vote organization. Clerks, full-time politicians and trade unionists make up the "OTHER" category, many of whom were actually farmers and agricultural workers. Overall, stage two established precedents in the occupations of public service that would remain well into the Common Market era until the very end of stage four in Meath politics. Farmers would last as the principal occupation in local politics until then, when changes in the economy and politics of the country, due largely to the processes of national development and internationalization, saw the beginning of their demise as a local political elite.

The third stage of Meath local government and politics began with the County Management Act (1940) which saw the end of both party control of local services and the committee system. In 1942 all counties were assigned county managers who were appointed by the Local Appointments Commission. Each manager was entrusted with all "reserved functions" of the County Council, i.e. all administration and decision making not specifically given to the elected members. And since 1942 these executive functions have dwindled both in number and importance. The most important function that the MCCs have had in the past has been the approval of the county budget that is prepared by the manager and his

staff, a power linked to the land rate that the Council decides is appropriate each year to help pay for local services. The manager cannot overrule the Council or their approval of a rate for local taxpayers, nor can he hire council workers or borrow money unless the elected members agree. In theory this gave the council considerable control over the manager. In effect the manager has determined the budget and rate necessary each year. County Councils, in varying degrees, accept recommended estimates with little opposition. A law in 1978 made rate assessments an executive function, further limiting MCCs and calling into question their true role in the five areas they are supposed to have some power: finance, legislation, political affairs, policy decision and control of the executive branch. The years between 1942 and today have been ones in which the reserved functions of elected members of county councils have diminished in scope and importance leaving them with little to do within the local government system as envisioned in either 1920 or 1942. In the years I spent in Meath the members of the council did not exercise any of the above five powers and functions to any appreciable degree except in political affairs. At all times and in all situations they were the spokesmen for their constituents, representatives of their electoral areas and parties, and watchdogs over the provision of services by the council and manager. Their influence in these three areas was considerable, but the power of the manager to make and enforce decisions, some of which were definitely within the domain of reserved functions, was unquestioned. He, and previous managers, had become the one to "get things done."

Thus, stage three of Meath local government was one in which the

sources of patronage so critical for the creation and maintenance of local party loyalty and service were taken out of the hands of the county councillors. They continued to be local network men, the core of party cadres so vital to electoral success (and at times instrumental in failure) and key men in the articulation of voter needs and preferences to national politicians and policy makers. Their ability to directly supply the stuff of patrons made them into the brokers of information, real and imaginary, that has been central to their role to this day. This lost power has been but one that has fallen prey to the two-pronged attack of government and party centralization since the 1930s. Their role has been the one so ably described for them in the literature cited above.

In 1942 the establishment of a nationwide manager system was only the latest step in the control of local administration by the central government, a process begun at the start of the state with the creation of the Local Appointments Commission and combined purchasing. The new managers were men trained in the civil service and were not loyal to local factions or party to local intrigues; their first loyalty was to be to their service and country. The Fianna Fail move to make county administration both more efficient and less diffuse was itself a compromise with certain members of the government who wanted to do away with county councils altogether. To some they were and "expensive anachronism", a legacy of British rule, which administered services that were national in scope (housing, public health, roads, etc.) yet were so fraught with local politics that efficient administration was impossible (Roche 1982:105). Compromise or not, many local councillors were

outraged by such a sudden loss of power and function. A long debate resulted in Irish government reflecting the antagonism between the new local government administrators and elected members--a debate that lasted until 1955 when the central government passed yet another act which, on the surface, established the rights and powers of the councillors over the managers, but which, in effect, has led to manager control in local government which has lasted to this day.

The centralization of administration, finance and policy proceeded in the generation and a half after 1942 in the period I have labelled for Meath as stages three and four. All local appointments were made by the manager except for rate collectors which were appointed by the MCCs on a vote basis at a council meeting. This was the last job they could provide as patrons, and at least one MCC I interviewed admitted that money was known to change hands in order to get enough votes from the councillors. This remnant of the 1930s was taken away from the county council in 1972. From that date all rate collectors were hired by the manager. In 1972 all health services were taken out of council jurisdiction and put into a nationally administered Regional Health Board system. This also took a large share of councillor influence out of local politics as it made the provision of health services less connected with local government. Voters saw the power of local representative shrink further. Although the Regional Health Boards were ostensibly set up to give more time to the managers and councils to attend to housing, planning, roads and other services, it also was due to the "tendency of central departments to work towards an arrangement giving them undivided control of their own local systems" (Roche 1982:86). This was true of

all departments in the central government, most of whom had their own agencies at the local level or who saw their services administered through the councils. Local finances were increasingly subsidized by the State, a process which made both bureaucrats and representatives increasingly dependent on their counterparts in Dublin. By the end of the 1960s the State paid for about 50% of local authority expenditure. This figure continued to rise until the Health Boards were taken out of the budget. The process of state subsidization continued, however, so that in 1977 46% of Local Government income nationally was from State grants, a figure which rose to 59% and 61% in the following two years (Roche 1982:146-151). For Farmers, much of this state grant took the form of an agricultural grant awarded to farmers in all counties to help defray the taxes on their land. This has consistently been one of the state policies that local and state farming representatives have seen as a major issue in policy in Dublin, and one that has been indicative of government concern for farm voters. This changed by the 1970s however, as the central government's concerns altered according to the new electoral politics that developed in an EEC Ireland. Local representatives continued to be buffeted by the gale from Leinster House. By 1977 most influence they had wielded in the granting by the manager of planning permission for housing was lost to the nonpolitical Planning Board of the Department of Local Government An Bord Pleanála (1977). From that point on, with finances largely controlled by Dublin, planning in the hands of Local Government offices, health services, the duty of a Regional Health Board run mainly by professionals and all local jobs out of their hands, the members of county councils recognized that they could no

longer serve their constituents in the manner they had just 35 years before. To highlight their loss of local and national influence, local community councils began to spring up throughout the countryside. These are voluntary associations formed around expressed local interests who feel that their communities are not receiving proper attention from the local and State administration. They purposely take on roles that correspond to the accepted ones of local councillors, many of whom see community councils as a threat while others treat them as yet another way to build up local support for national elections. It was clear that after the mid-1970s, at the time of my fieldwork, both councillors and electorate felt that the local government system had passed the MCCs by. The only power they had left was the raising of local income through the rate. Even this power, however, proved shortlived.

The Meath County Council I observed in action for two years in 1977-1979 was different in composition from those that had gone before, and it demonstrated the multifaceted role of local representatives outlined above—a role whose modern complexion is a product of a slow process of losing power to the central government. As can be seen in Table 8, the members of the Meath council from 1974 to 1979 included only 12 farmers, 38% of the total, the lowest proportion since the creation of local government. Professionals (economist, nurse, solicitor, politician) accounted for 19% of the council, the same figure as merchants. Only one laborer and one company director served, the lowest figures on record. As Table 10 details, stage three shows a marked difference to stage four. The generation of Meath politics that came between 1942 and 1974 council continued in the pattern established previously, i.e., farmers

formed 63% of all elected members, the highest percentage in history. Both professionals and merchants grew in numbers at the expense of laborers and others, but they far from threatened the hold farmers had on the council. Yet the early 1970s a time of great change in the Irish economy and polity within the EEC, saw a drastic drop in farmer participation in local government in Meath. I have categorized this as a major change, a separate stage in Meath political development, because it does not follow any pattern emerging from the previous 30 years. In fact, in the previous election (1967, see Table 8) a full 58% of the councillors were farmers. In the six elections since County Management began, farmers composed from 57% to 71% of council representatives. Thus, throughout the long period of state centralization of power, farmers still wished to serve at the local level. Why did they stop in the early 1970s?

The change in Meath councillor occupations is a result of the many changes in Meath politics that occurred rapidly at the beginning of the decade---changes that themselves constitute a new era in Meath local politics that I believe represents a new direction in both local government and farmers' participation in it. In Meath, the most important changes include the centralization of policy, finances, major appointments and planning appeal decisions, the decentralization and redistribution of health services in the Regional Boards and the solidification of decision-making and most reserved functions in the office of the county manager. Simply put, it was difficult for councillors to even keep up a facade of power holding. Even their role of interest-articulation was being challenged by community councils. A second major

cause of local political change was the shift in major policy-making to Europe. For the big farmers of Meath, long interested in having a role in party organization, local government and national government, either through party cadre or elected representation, the areas of policy-making closest to their way of life became centered in the Common Market. Large farmers serving in the council, and most of those outside the council that I interviewed, saw little or no reason to look on any level of Irish politics as being central, causal or instrumental in future agricultural policy. To farmers, politicians had become very junior spokesmen on the matter. In their eyes some personalities could matter--a Meath man had served as agricultural minister in Europe and done very well for Irish farmers--but politicians were in most respects too ill-informed on agriculture to be trusted with the future of the profession at the European level. A third reason for the decline in Meath farming politics was the rise of urban, commuter, professional, service and proletarian populations in the county. Many of the new Meath voters came from urban backgrounds ill-disposed to large farmers, while many of the newer merchants and professionals in politics appealed to the new electorate. This increase in working and middle class voters was complemented by a sharp drop in the farm population of Meath, itself a fourth cause of Meath political change. As farmers' sons go into the professions, the mines or construction, they do not forget their agricultural roots, but often vote for the representative who best articulates the most local of interests. Thus, the system of patronage and brokerage that the large farmers of Meath were instrumental in establishing has come full circle and has created niches for up and coming politicians in the guise of clerks,

merchants and professionals, who are catering to the socioeconomic needs of people who have left the land and who no longer perceive farmers' interests as their own.

These reasons alone do not account for the great changes in Meath local politics in the 1970s however. Since the days of deValera local politicians served as party representatives. Their role in local government was primarily one of service to the community, in ways that quite definitely changed over the years, but secondarily was one of party cadre member who was using the local organization as either a stepping stone to the national level or as a place to retire to after years of service. Very few local politicians served for the sake of it. Yet over the years all three major parties have made concerted efforts to take power away from county councils, in order to centralize power among those who already had it, to remove conflicting power bases, and to make state government and administration more efficient. And as this process developed, local government became less an overtly political affair for the parties. Never again did local government take on the importance of the 1932 election. It still served as a training ground and network base for individuals within the parties, but it increasingly became an arena in which the national executives were only interested at national election time. As one of the directors of Fianna Fail told me in an interview on party strategy for the simultaneous local and European elections of 1979, the local elections were "unimportant" when compared to the European ones. Although he would never admit it at the local level--my first meeting with him was at a Meath party gathering at which he lauded the party locals on their work for the elections--the party cadres there

remained important as long as they could produce the votes the national executive demanded. The provision of services to constituents by party members was a necessity in achieving this, but was in itself of little importance. Meath party leaders at the local level serve as a political elite whose power diminishes seemingly by the day, and whose most pivotal role in party politics has become that of a control of information and a supplier of votes in the election process. This was ably demonstrated in the 1979 election.

The fifth cause of major Meath political change was recognized by the county councillors of 1974-1979 themselves. Their role perceptions, unlike those mentioned by Zimmerman (1976) included "vote supplier", "local leg man" for the party, and a "keeper of the flame" for old party traditions. Very few had any illusions about the power of their office or their ability to improve the role of councillors. One of the reasons given most often for their sad state of affairs was the pressure put on them by Dublin. Many of the council saw their political role as becoming rapidly outdated in an EEC dominated Ireland that was seeing the end of many long-standing traditions. Few saw the EEC as either a direct or indirect cause of the plight of the local government, but more than a few recognized that rapid socioeconomic change, spurred on and reflected in the media, was not only making their jobs as local politicians much too complex, but that the Dail itself had become nothing more than a "large county council itself". The nationally and internationally caused changes in Irish society made many of them, especially the longest-standing members, question the usefulness and future of county councils and councillors.

Thus, in Meath politics, contrary to much that has been written on local government, there has been a great degree of politicization. In the past, party politics have made local politics a national concern. In the era after county management was introduced, and both the national government and national parties sought to limit the bases of local power, politicization has continued in a formally delimited way. Yet all aspects of an MCC's work reflects on his party (unless he is an independent) and his work is always, at least in part, for his party, but little can be done collectively as a party in the County Council because little can be done by councillors anyway. Meath councillors made it clear to me that any powers they still have on the books they are reluctant to use because they fear a situation in which the County Manager becomes hostile and the cooperation and expertise of the manager and the council civil servants are not freely forthcoming. To them the exercise of their reserved powers would in effect be a move against the authority and power of the present manager. Some individual councillors would oppose the manager on issues important to themselves and their constituents, but they lack the support of party mates, party allies and opposition members. The incessant call for the redefinition of the Navan urban district by a Fine Gael councillor from 1978 to this day is a case in point. But the only time councillors can be sure of a solid party vote is in the vote for the chair at each annual meeting.

In stages two and three of the Meath council described above the position of the chairman was both a testament of party power and the hook upon which much patronage and brokerage hung. In the period up to 1974-

1979 the chair has become largely a prestigious position, but it still has some very important roles. Because the chairman of the council must sign all official documents he is party to all decisions the manager makes and is chief conduit to the elected membership. As the chair he recognizes speakers at the monthly meeting, a not unimportant role in that the order in which he recognizes them is instrumental in having their names and words featured in press accounts. The chairman also attends all official, semi-official and public relations functions in the county. Since he acts as a public representative in this capacity his travel allowances add up. He also is asked to represent the council on many national and international fact finding trips that come the council's way (a "perk" many senior councillors have enjoyed over the years). And although the chair has often remained with one person and one party for many years at a time (Pat Fitzsimons being a model), recent years have seen it bounce back and forth between parties and an independent, further testament to the unsettled times party politics and local government have entered into in my categorized fourth stage of Meath politics in which 1978 saw perhaps the "last straw" in the demise of local power.

Between 1973 and 1977 health and housing charges had been removed from county rates. The Local Government (Financial Provisions) Act, 1978, removed the assessment of rates on all private homes, thereby taking 850,000 householders off local rates (the state would in the future pay all rates owed by them to the local authority). In the new national party politics, in which very tangible material "carrots" were placed before the voter before elections and were kept there afterwards to

insure or gain future support, both major parties agreed to the aims of the Bill. "At a stroke this removed almost one third of the independent income available to local authorities and transferred the burden to the national exchequer" (Dorgan 1979c:2). In fact, the state would pay two thirds of all leviable rates. The Act went on to remove the "striking of the rate", based on the council estimates, from the list of reserved functions. The Minister of Environment was given the power to determine the maximum increase in the rate which could be struck by councils. This move was touted as a means of protecting farmers and businessmen still paying rates. The government felt that local authorities would raise their rates substantially once most citizens were materially unaffected, "thereby inflicting a heavy burden on the exchequer, farmers and businessmen" (Dorgan 1979c:2). The Minister could also limit the amount of money which a local authority could spend on any particular item listed in a county's annual estimates. Overall, he put a limit of 11% on a rate rise in 1978 and 10% in 1979 and 1980, a severe limit in a country with inflation rates at up to 20%. The last great power of county councillors over the raising and allocation of local funds was not removed as much as "amputated" (Roche 1982:157). As one TD said in the Dail debates on the Bill "Unless the local councillor has some say in the amount and the method of raising taxation there is no use in our kidding ourselves that we are leaving him with any power. He has no power" (as quoted in Dorgan 1979b). Although this last statement is still in doubt--two of the authors cited above are quick to point out the genuine power still left to councillors such as in development planning, land zoning and environmental quality control (Roche 1982:viii; Dorgan 1979b)--it is clear that

the most basic and long-standing power of councillor control over local finances has passed from the scene and with it much of the rationale for local interest group participation in local politics. This sixth cause of major political change in Meath in the late 1970s was a crucial one in the role of farmers in their confrontation with the government over taxes and their participation in the 1979 elections. Suffice to say at this point that only 8 farmers were elected to the Meath county council in 1979, just 28% of the total, the lowest figure in Meath history.

This plummet in farmer participation is due to the following reasons examined above, all instrumental in the new, present, era in Meath politics: 1) a steady loss of power in local government, climaxed by the loss of financial power in 1978, 2) the loss of all forms of patronage to state centralization and efficiency, 3) the entrenchment of the power and function of the county manager, 4) the rise of other interest groups and classes in Meath society, 5) a decrease in the Meath agricultural population, 6) the changing role of party politicians and elected representatives at local and national levels, due to the internationalization of policy making, and 7) the realization that their businesses and way of life could be equally if not better served through the organs of the IFA. This last point is examined in the following chapter.

The drop in farmers elected mirrors a new volatility in farmer support for political parties that has been recognized for national elections since 1973 (Penniman 1978). A pattern began emerging in the 1977 election when strong farmer counties, those known for large farmer support of Fine Gael, voted for the opposition Fianna Fail largely in

reaction to Fine Gael-Labour coalition tax policies (Farrell and Manning 1978:156-157). In Meath alone the vote for Fine Gael fell from 30% to 24%. This new "freedom" for the farm voter to vote his interests rather than his traditional party became a party campaign concern in the elections for local government and the European Parliament of 1979, also the subject of the next chapter. As farmers took a less active role in both party and government affairs in Meath, their vote became less assured, making the attraction of this volatile voting bloc (if indeed it was a bloc) a party priority in Meath (and the nation as a whole). The role of independent candidates finally became a key issue at all levels of government.

Thus large farmers have consistently formed a political elite in Meath up to the end of the 1970s. They have been the majority of county councillors, the key personnel in the two major parties' organization, and the principal source of national politicians. They have provided valuable services both to their communities and to the administration of local government while helping their parties in terms of information, electoral campaigning and playing key roles in TDs' political networks. By doing this farmers have enjoyed, in varying degrees, power, prestige and material gain. Although as either elected representatives or party men they did not act as agents for a self-identified interest group, their individual voices, especially the individual voices of large farmers already influential in their communities acting in conjunction, became over the years a powerful pressure within party and government. Such pressure was a natural response to farming constituents' demands and the politician's recognition of the needs of his own community and his own

business. Most of the way to apply this pressure have been taken away over the last generation through government centralization. The farmers' role in local party cadres has therefore diminished, compounding the problem of a shrinking agricultural electorate. As many of the basic services formerly supplied by various agencies of the local and national government have become centered in Dublin and Brussels much of the former role of farmers has become unnecessary. As most agricultural policy-making shifts away from the parties, the government and the nation itself, farmers as politicians are becoming redundant. Some still pursue prestige, party advancement, a social life and business improvement within electoral politics, but most have turned to other farmers within a farmers organization to articulate their interests. This became clear in the tax dispute of 1979.

FOOTNOTES

- 14 Each elector uses a "single transferable vote" (STV), which indicates the voter's preference for the candidates in his order. He does this by ranking the candidates from first to last on the ballot paper. A candidate is elected if he receives enough votes to reach the "quota" for his constituency. The formula for this is:

$$\text{QUOTA} = \frac{\text{number of valid votes}}{\text{number of seats} + 1} + 1$$

Once a candidate is elected, any votes he received are transferred to the ballots' secondary choices through the application of another formula. As candidates are eliminated the ballot sheets listing them as first preferences are also transferred to other candidates. For a more detailed discussion of both PR and STV, see Penniman 1978, 175-177; Sacks 1976:137-138.

CHAPTER VIII

Meath Farmers and Politicians in the 1979 Tax Dispute and Election

In February, 1979, the Government of the Republic of Ireland proposed a budget which presented a tax package for farming—a package which included a 2% surcharge on agricultural production. Farmers throughout the country quickly mobilized their political and economic resources to oppose the Government's initiative in establishing new tax programs for agriculture. This chapter examines the ways the farmers of County Meath in the rich agricultural region around Dublin organized their opposition. Farmers bypassed their political parties, their traditional means of affecting policy decisions, in favor of the national farming interest group, the Irish Farmers Association. This change in the role farmers play in politics is due in part to Ireland's entry into the European Economic Community in 1973, as the new-found economic strength of the Irish farmer has redefined his place in the national political system.

This new political role for Meath farmers is also a product of a drop in both their overall number within local society and their power within the formal political system at county and national levels, a situation symptomatic of the new relationship between agriculture and politics that has developed since Ireland joined the EEC. This was demonstrated in Meath in the first six months of 1979 when a national tax dispute and the simultaneous Local Government and European Parliament

elections ushered in a new era of Meath agropolitics—one in which an agricultural electorate votes increasingly according to its occupational interests and not according to traditional party loyalty, in which independent politicians are playing a more important role, and in which the IFA has become a new and powerful arena for the pursuit of local and national economic and political ends. These changes became apparent after the five year transitional period for EEC membership was completed.

No member nation of the Common Market has been better served through joining the Community than Ireland. High growth rates, foreign investment, net immigration and decreased dependence on the British economy has led to drastically improved agricultural incomes, state and EEC subsidization schemes and public and private sources of credit. In a country which enjoyed such prosperity in agriculture and which sees itself as largely rural, there seemed little to worry about. Successive Irish governments had borrowed heavily, however, and the fiscal burden was increasingly put on the shoulders of the urban wage earners, who were more and more reluctant to support the agricultural boom with their taxes. By 1979 the sharply rising urban population no longer saw Irish national prosperity as being synonymous with Irish agricultural prosperity. And although they had little formal means to make this clear, the governmental budget gap forced the issue for them.

Thus, the sharp rise in farm income and standard of living that was a direct result of Ireland's membership in the Common Market became a national political issue in early 1979. The party in power, Fianna Fail, estimated that in 1979 Irish farmers would pay a total of £52 million in income and real estate tax, or 5.5% of farm income. This represented

an increase of 1% of farm income from 1978, while government subsidies for agriculture had increased significantly in the same period. In fact, combined aid to Irish agriculture from both national and European community sources was estimated at a minimum of £545 million. The government felt that it could no longer consider agriculture as an underdeveloped sector of the Irish economy. Irish farmers should and would pay a more equitable share of the state's expenses. The government itself was under considerable pressure from the wage earners of the country who felt it was they who were subsidizing agriculture. In 1978 alone employees in Ireland paid about £526 million in income tax, representing 16% of their earnings (Ireland—Government Information Service 1979b:58-59).

Therefore, on 7 February 1979 the Budget Proposal for that year called for a widening of the income tax net (based on real estate value) to include 6,000 more full-time farmers. This was a move considered inevitable by farmers throughout the country. They were shocked, however, by the second, unprecedented, proposal of the Government. Ostensibly to pay for the costs of education, research and advisory services, the Government announced a 2% levy on all cattle, milk, pigs, sheep, sugar, beets and cereals, to be paid at the point of sale. The Government estimated that this levy, which would go into effect on 1 May for cattle and milk and 1 August for the remaining products, would raise approximately £16 million in the financial year.

The farmers of Ireland were outraged, and immediately opposed this levy on many grounds. They felt that the government was acting unconstitutionally by establishing a tax quota for a particular community, and

then establishing programs to raise a desired amount from that community. They also rightfully saw this levy as a very high tax on net income. Although the levy was only 2% of the purchase price of agricultural goods, this could mean a high percentage of income after expenses. Beef farming, the mainstay of Meath agriculture, would be hardest hit. Although a fattened bullock might sell for £500 the profit on that animal could be as low as £30, which would leave only £20 after the £10 levy was subtracted. This amounted to over 30% tax on profits (Irish Times 8 February 1979). Irish farmers also felt that this new tax was being rushed into effect and that the Government had not done their homework. It was unclear, for example, who exactly was to collect this levy at the point of sale. Many merchants resented the Government's wishes that they act as the middlemen and add the levy on to their prices.

Farmer opposition was universal as well. Each of the regions of Ireland, whose local economies were based in different strategies of production, had their own particular products taxable under the new scheme. The small farmeres of Ulster and Connaught, largely untouched by income tax demands, would have their milk, calves, sheep and pigs falling into the new net. This was especially disturbing to the small farmers who have traditionally been the electoral support that has kept Fianna Fail in almost unbroken power since 1932. The large profits that the dairymen of Munster had been earning through liquid milk, creamery milk and calves would also be hard hit. The farmers of Leinster would be paying their 2% as they brought their finished beef to the cattle marts and their milk to the Dublin dairies. A good number of them had also recently gone into the tillage of wheat and barley, so that none of the products made on

their mixed farms escaped the government's notice.

The farmers' reaction to the Government's move was not due to economic motives alone. They felt that, in some respects, they were being betrayed by the Government they had returned to power in 1977 by the largest majority in the history of the state. The farmers of east Leinster, whose landholdings are the largest in the country, were instrumental in the swing in large farmers' votes away from their traditional party, the opposition Fine Gael. They were thus astounded by the change in Fianna Fail policy. To add insult to injury, the major reason for their support of the present Government was to voice their disapproval of the tax system introduced under the last Government, a coalition of Fine Gael and Labour, which first taxed farm income (Penniman 1978). Furthermore, farmers felt that the government's new taxes were the result of political pressure from tax-paying employees. Farmers believed they were being used as scapegoats in order to placate politicians' constituents.

The budget was announced in February on 1979 but the levy would not go into effect until May or August. Farmers throughout Ireland mobilized their political resources to force the Government to reconsider its position. Meath farmers were quick to react to the government's announcement, but did so in ways which began to break with tradition. As noted in Chapter VII, both Meath and Irish politics at the local level have revolved around various forms of patronage and brokerage with local and national politicians mediating between both individual and grouped constituents and public and private agencies at the national level. Since the 1920s and the Civil War, both large and small farmers have been the supporters of Fine Gael and Fianna Fail respectively. Because Meath

(and the remainder of Leinster) has had a high percentage of large farmers, it could command a good vote for the opposition party. Nonetheless, the more populous small farmers ensured that Fianna Fail held political control at both the local and regional level. This clear-cut division in political support is due partly to differences in the issue of national development, partly to the economic policies and programs of agricultural subsidization that the parties enacted when in power, and partly to personalistic politics at the local level, wherein brokerage established individual and family support for particular politicians and by extension their parties.

This history of agropolitics in the Irish state is also one of subsidization, in which local and regional groups have competed for national funds through their traditional avenue of political brokerage. National agricultural policy was decided upon by national politicians who depended on their constituents' votes. The rules of the game were clear-cut. In a country where the national political system was instrumental in maintaining farmer economic well-being, i.e., through state support for agriculture and international trade agreements, politicians could establish individual and family clientage. In return for their political support and votes, farmers hoped to influence the state through their respective parties and politicians.

When the tax dispute developed between the farmers and the Government in early 1979, however, the farmers of Meath did not act according to their expected, traditional role. Simply put, large farmers did not attack the Government because they were Fine Gael supporters, nor did small landholders support the party that had been their sponsor since

the 1920s. All Meath farmers opposed the Government. Perhaps for the first time in Irish political life, the farming supporters of each major party considered that their welfare was not synonymous with that of their parties.

Pressure was most definitely put on the Government through the informal channels of political clients and patrons. But within the time frame that these events were being played out, nothing could be significantly affected in this disjointed way by early summer. In Meath it was also clear that the large farmers had not completely abandoned their traditional party loyalty. Their strong vote for Fianna Fail in the last general election was a protest against tax, not against the principles of any one party. There were thus in no position to bring pressure to bear on politicians who had never been their "brokers".

The main thrust of farmer opposition, then, developed through the structure of the Irish Farmers Association, the non-partisan occupational society organized for the improvement of Irish agriculture through research, communication and services. Since the early 1970s as more and more farming bodies have been incorporated into the parent IFA, it has become the primary agricultural lobby or pressure group in the nation. It represents the majority of Irish farmers, drawn from each region and involved in every aspect of agricultural production, and acts as their spokesman both within Ireland and in the European Community. (And, as such, is in need of much more sociological analysis than one PhD dissertation, Anderson 1974). Up to 1979, however, it had never successfully confronted an Irish Government over policy decisions. In this case its goal was a simple one: stop the levy, and establish a united farming

front whose interests would supersede former political alliances. The IFA knew that all the political parties were sensitive to the last swing in voting patterns. Large scale social disapproval of Fianna Fail's tax policies was sure to make the government anxious, especially in light of the forthcoming June 1979 elections to the European Parliament.

The farmers of Meath as a body felt especially threatened. The high profits they had been making since 1973 had been largely reinvested into their businesses. Common Market guaranteed prices and demand led to an expansion in credit which enticed farmers to borrow heavily. Improvements such as farm mechanization, new buildings, silage pits, milking parlours and land drainage all led to considerable farmer debt. The new tax system would cut into the profit necessary to keep these farmers solvent. If it was allowed to go uncontested, the Government might feel free to put even more pressure on farming income. Unlike previous periods of government opposition, however, Meath farmers quickly allied themselves with the national leadership of the IFA, a body unaffiliated with any party.

From 7 February on, the major topic of conversation for friend and foe of the Meath farmer was "the 2%". From the craftsmen of Navan's furniture industry to the North Meath farm laborer to the East Meath stud farm owner, all of Meath wondered at both the audacity of the government and whether the farmers were powerful enough and organized enough to let them get away with it. To some Meath people, most notable in the towns, it was about time the farmers paid their fair share. The farmers, regardless of past political persuasion, immediately began to see this as the first battle in a new war, that between the new European farmer in

Ireland, keen to protect his livelihood and way of life, and the old Irish politician. The organization needed to begin the fight was provided by the IFA. Following directives immediately put into effect by national headquarters, the county executives of the IFA met as soon as possible in order for branch members to bring back the organization's information and line to their villages and rural townlands. Although each county executive, composed of an elected administrative body, a national IFA appointee and the representatives of the many county branches, would receive little information not covered in the press, they would receive the message that the IFA was going to lead the fight. If farmers wanted to change the new policy they had best join together within the ranks of a united Association. From the outset of this crisis for farmers the IFA leadership in Dublin had called on the farmers of the country to use whatever means necessary to put personal pressure on their politicians but above all to no longer abide by past political "understandings". The IFA line was to trust those most interested in protecting the rights of all farmers throughout the country, to find out how that was to be done, they were urged to attend their county executives' meetings. To show he meant business, Paddy Lane, president of the IFA, "warned the Government that farmers would soon have an opportunity to show that they no longer had blind allegiance to a Government that reneged on their election promises to farmers" (Irish Times 10 February 1979). The unveiled threat, which referred to the elections upcoming in June, was one of many that the IFA was to make in the days that followed.

On 12 February 1979 the Meath IFA county executive met at the Beechmount Hotel in Navan in what was one of the best attended ever in

county history (the largest IFA gathering by far of those I witnessed in over two years). Almost 200 farmers packed the small meeting room to both hear what the Association had to say and to voice their own grievances. The tone of the meeting was set by the county chairman who announced that the 2% levy was introduced by the government "to appease the Trade Unions". The calls for action were many: unanimous support for the IFA leadership in Dublin, contesting the unconstitutional levy in the courts, voting the present government out of office, starting with the June Local and European Elections, refuse to pay any levy, directing the County Council Committee on Agriculture to protest the government's move, and to consider strikes, marches, pickets and overall economic harassment. These suggested avenues for action were made all the more pertinent due to the presence of a number of farming county councillors and some farmers known throughout the county to be interested in either elected office or IFA positions of authority. Most notable was a past Fianna Fail candidate for the Dail who then was the chair of the Committee of Agriculture of the County Council and whose present and future political career depended on the good will of the farming community. This councillor attempted to point out his party's line that the levy was earmarked for the payment of advisory services. The militancy of the meeting precluded any such party plank explanations—it was clear that these Meath IFA men and women would not even consider the relevance of the government's position. A Slane farmer, known since the 1960s for his beliefs in farmer rights, countered the comments of the councillor by saying that farmers should not have to pay for services they did not control. The implications were clear: farmers no longer could allow

politicians the luxury to control the direct services and policies. Farmer control had to be more direct and predictable. By the end of that important Meath meeting (which, testament to the seriousness of the movement, lasted beyond the 11:00 p.m. closing hour for the hotel's pub, depriving the members of their very traditional pint of stout) a number of courses of action were decided upon: all branches were to hold meetings and contact their local TDs, a delegation from the county executive would themselves approach the county TDs, a special meeting of the executive would be held on 21 February, and the county executive agreed to support in any way they could the directives of the national leadership.

The great turnout at the meeting was unprecedented. Individual phone calls and personal visits mobilized branch members who from IFA newspaper reports clearly knew the issues that the IFA felt should be discussed. The Meath meeting was held not so much as a fact-gathering exercise but to demonstrate to all interested parties that the county's farmers were united in their opposition, and that the IFA was the means whereby that opposition would be articulated and sustained. The legitimacy of this position was reinforced when local politicians attended that first meeting, by their presence seemingly disavowing the actions of the government and aligning themselves with the farmers.

The attendance of some standing councillors and some ambitious farmers highlighted the dilemma of many local politicians because of the government's unprecedented move. If you are a Fianna Fail councillor and farmer, do you hold true to your party or your profession? If you are a Fine Gael farmer, do you take advantage of the government's blunder or hold back for fear of alienating your neighbors? And if you are a townsman of either party, can you afford endangering your electoral

support in what remained a largely rural county? For those candidates whose votes came primarily from urban blocs their situation was largely one of concern for their fellow party members, but such politicians were a decided minority in Meath. The dilemma that Meath TDs and MCCs found themselves in would have been a minor one in the past. Party directive and loyalty, especially within Fianna Fail, would have dictated the actions of politician and voter alike. But in Meath in 1979, in which agricultural policy and subsidization was largely free of governmental control, the parties' politicians no longer enjoyed the luxury of a secure electorate. Thus, many local politicians chose to be seen as not supporting the government wholeheartedly. In Meath in mid-February their actions ran the gamut from attending farmer meetings, to suggesting compromises at party meetings, to asking TDs to raise the seriousness of the issue at the weekly meeting of the parliamentary party at the Dail, to the discrete but drastic call for a change in the party leadership. In Meath at the local party level, both Fine Gael and Fianna Fail did their best to do nothing on the 2% levy issue. The days of party control of votes and voters had long since gone.

Meath farmers looked to the IFA administration in Dublin for a guide to their next moves. From the beginning of the growing dispute the Association claimed that the government was not only going back on its promises to the farmers who voted them into office in 1977 but was attempting to undo years of Irish and EEC policy. As Lane announced on 9 February "the massive support given by farmers to the present Government almost two years ago was given on the basis of getting a fair deal and an opportunity to develop their farms in order to compete with their fellow

farmers in Europe" (Irish Times, 10 February 1979). He requested that all branches and county executives meet to discuss the government's "unjust measures". At the same time a dairymen's association promised legal action. By the 11th the IFA and Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association (ICMSA, the IFA's chief national competitor and an organization up to then reluctant to become allied with the more powerful IFA) had agreed to cooperate completely to coordinate all resistance. The government was seen to be accomplishing what years of discussion could not--farmer unity as a national interest group. When the IFA announced it also intended to send a questionnaire to each TD to discover his/her views on this issue before the next election many rural TDs became alarmed. The farmers themselves were also considering direct action, following the lead of 20 Connaught farmers who went to the offices of the Agricultural Minister on 9 February to get some answers.

If the government was surprised by the universality and vehemence of farmer protest it was very unhappy to see the direct political competition which resulted. Within a week of the Budget announcement, the papers were carrying stories on the popular support for a farmer running for the European parliament. T.J. Maher, a famous leader in the Irish Creamery Co-Operative movement, was being touted as a farmer who would independently serve the interests of Munster farmers in Europe. The Fianna Fail government knew that if he ran one of the 15 national seats being contested would definitely be in jeopardy. The IFA was against such political moves, as well as the desire of pig producers to negotiate with the government independently, because it believed that the farmers' overall position was weakened. The Association was also not content to

keep the issue a national one. On 16 February it was reported that the IFA had requested the EEC Commission to give an opinion on the legality of the 2%. If the Commission deemed it to be in contravention of the Treaty of Rome the IFA would challenge it in the European Court. Their position was a simple one: the 2% did not allow Irish farmers to receive the full EEC guaranteed price for produce covered by the CAP (Irish Times, 16 February 1979). The IFA was demonstrating, perhaps for the first time, its belief in its new role as spokesbody for European farmers, especially when the Irish government threatened their community rights. It was also demonstrating its recognition of new power bases for Irish agriculture.

Although initially suprised by the reactions, the government had not been idle since 7 February. Yet little it did met with much suc-cess. Its directives to the Fianna Fail party organization to support the line did not meet with local approval in the countryside. Although the Irish Press supported the government in principle it had lttle to say about the methods selected by the government. The Irish Times and Irish Independent ran stories which went from middle of the road accounts of the need for farmers to pay more tax to outright attacks on the new budget. When on 13 February a Fianna Fail TD from Cork announced he was going to question the sanity of a 2% levy at the sacrosanct meeting of the parliamentary party the next day, the country knew that the Fianna Fail TDs were in open rebellion. Many TDs felt it was up to them to represent the interests of farmers in their constituency and were loathe to both let the IFA encroach on their position and put their political futures in jeopardy by going along with a rash government. On 15 February the deputy party leader, George Colley, announced he would look

into ways to ease the 2% levy, following "complaints from several Fianna Fail back-benchers" (Irish Times, 15 February, 1979). Colley also attempted an old Fianna Fail ploy. He stressed that small farmers would only be minimally affected by the levy. It was really aimed at large farmers (which might be interpreted as Fine Gael supporters). The ploy failed, however, and did little to quell the deepening IFA outcry.

Both the IFA and ICMSA could not stop Maher from running for Euro-office nor championing the pig producers separate delegation to Dublin. They made the most, however, of charging that the government sought to split farmer opposition by dealing with separate sectors of the farming community. When the pig producers attempted to enter government offices they were blocked by farmers from Clare and Meath. In fact, the members of the Meath IFA were among the most vocal and organized of all farmers in opposition, a role they maintained throughout the crisis.

By the third week of the month there were numerous calls from within Fianna Fail to either change the new farm tax policy or rethink the entire tax system for the country. The government was caught—it could not compromise either position for fear of angering either the farmers or wage earners (who paid tax out of their wage packet on the PAYE system). To do nothing courted political defeat, however. Thus, on 21 February, the Taoiseach announced that the 2% levy was no longer part of the budget, which would have to be approved by the Dail, but would be put into effect through Ministerial order, which needed no parliamentary vote and could last for 12 months. It was clear that Jack Lynch, the Taoiseach, had decided to use the weight of his office, government and party to force the issue. As the IFA deputy president said "We will not

pay. At this stage the gloves are off. The time has come for action" (Irish Times, 22 February, 1979).

The farmers of Meath did not need the new announcement to spur them to action. At their second IFA county executive meeting of the month they had decided to send a large contingent of farmers to support the announced meeting in Portlaoise between farming leaders and the government and to send an equally large number to protest the Fianna Fail annual convention, the Ard Fheis, which was taking place that weekend, 23-25 February, in Dublin. Lynch's directive, occurring on the eve of his party's meeting, sought to quiet party dissension. It made Meath farmers angrier and more determined. Furthermore, the farmers of the whole country were angrier than even their leaders suggested. Spontaneous demonstrations, road blockades, sugar beet delivery delays, milk strikes, and withholding of dairy products and a shortage of fresh meat were nationwide occurrences, and were the handiwork of farmers of all acreages and farm enterprises. Unlike the farm dispute of the 1960s in which the IFA unsuccessfully confronted the Fianna Fail government of the time (due largely to the Association's reputation of being a "large farmer" one), the IFA and ICMSA had mobilized the country's farmers in opposition to a Fianna Fail government voted in with the greatest margin of victory in Irish history. The country's farmers felt that they had had a great deal to do with that victory and were just as sure they could use their influence to make that same government reverse its policy. In short, the IFA and, to a lesser extent, the ICMSA provided the organization and national position to effectively bypass the old means of affecting national policy. The farmers of the IFA were no longer asking the government,

they were telling. The country wondered what Lynch, who had already cast his die, would have to say at the Ard Fheis.

It was Colley, not Lynch, who did the speaking at the convention. On Saturday, the Minister for Finance announced that the levy would not be applied to the sale of sheep and pigs or to cattle slaughtered under disease eradication programs. It would also not apply to sugar beet production in the west of the country, or the the first 5,000 gallons of milk delivered to creameries or milk plants. This effectively freed 35,000 milk suppliers from the levy and partially relieved 43,000 other farmers (Irish Times 26 February, 1979).

The government's motives were clear. By removing the levy from these activities it was again subsidizing small farmers throughout the country. By doing so it still hoped to split the united farming front that quite literally erupted two weeks earlier. Furthermore, these small farmers had consistently been Fianna Fail supporters since the party was founded in the 1920s. It could not afford to alienate the faithful in the face of the important June elections. Yet, the government could not remove the levy altogether for the precedent had to be upheld that the government could establish special measures to tax the "special" category of "farmer". Besides, the prestige of Taoiseach and the government were on the line. When they first announced the levy, however, they did not predict the degree of farmer unity nor the strength and role of the IFA in that unity.

The farmers of Meath were incensed by these concessions. As Monday's Irish Times reported, Colley's announcements did not impress a hundred or so Meathmen who picketed the conference all day Saturday

(26 February 1979). As one Meath farmer said (Noel Austin of Summerhill) "the levy exemption on milk supplies under 5,000 gallons was only the yield of seven good cows". Simply put, the modifications affected Meath minimally. Few Meath farmers are involved in pig and sheep production, and their sugar beet was still liable under the 2%. Milk suppliers had their first 5,000 gallons free, but a large dairy farm would supply at least 100,000 gallons a year. Beef farms, the mainstay of the county, were untouched by the new announcement. Therefore, the Meath IFA resolved to double their efforts to support the Association at that Monday's mass farmer demonstration in Portlaoise, in Co Laois, Leinster.

For most Meath farmers there was really little choice. For the best of the young farmers of the county--those who because of education, ambition, business acumen and overall social sophistication would be termed "progressive" or development farmers--the IFA had become the principal avenue for influence and power. The high level of economic and political analysis that was demonstrated by the leaders of the Meath county executive showed clearly that the leadership that once had served the county council were now in the IFA. After two years of observing numerous local government meetings, I could not help but admire the goals decided upon, and achieved, by the relatively young IFA Meath leadership. It was clear to the sons of the old Meath farm elite that their best chance at political power lay in their interest groups and not elected politics. As one young farmer, with a holding of 200 acres and a family political legacy that included both major parties and TD/Ministers in each, told me at the height of the tax dispute, he had a choice (now that his farm and family were established). He could go into the county

council and hope for a TD spot or he could go into the IFA county leadership and perhaps use that as a springboard for national prominence. He has not run for political office since.

It was these young farmers who joined with the older generation, 5,000 strong altogether, in Portlaoise that Monday. Their cheers greeted Lane and Anthony Leddy (ICMSA leader) who told them that no government ploy would divide the farmers. Seeing the leaders of former rival associations agreeing on the same podium must have given both the throng of farmers and the government representatives cause for belief. Lane announced to them all the goal of the farm association: a "single taxation system, such as every other sector of the community had. And... farming organizations wanted to be consulted and involved in the drawing up of that system" (Irish Times 27 February 1979). They were telling the government, in no uncertain terms, that if it wanted the support of farmers for its tax policies it had to deal with the farming associations. The old system of party brokerage could no longer be relied on. The implications of February 1979 was that the IFA spoke for the farmer because the new "European" Irish farmer could no longer trust his government to protect his interests.

On 28 February 1979 the government, in consultation with farming leaders, agreed to drop the levy, paving the way for an income tax yield "in line with other sectors of the community" (Irish Times 29 February 1979). Negotiations were to continue until 1 May by which time a mutually agreeable tax system for farmers would be announced. The victory was clearly the IFA's while the loss was but the government's first in the year. The June elections were still to come. Curiously,

however, the significance of the events of February were unclear to many. Even the staid Irish Times, never a champion of Irish farmers, editorialized farmers to remember their traditional role in Irish life by reminding them of their central place in the Irish economy.

Farmers have sped the economy of this State in no mean fashion... The farmers' representatives should have a sense of history which may be denied other, less settled people. Let their leaders, while arguing their case as strongly as their convictions carry them, not forget that the stake they all have is greater than the stake of even the most monied townfolk; let them speak for the real Ireland. (Irish Times 29 February 1979).

The government was far from out of trouble, however. By 1 March the unions of the country began voicing their disapproval of the deal made with the farmers. Old animosities quickly rose to the surface. The president of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions threatened action by the union movement and demanded "rights similar to those now apparently won by farmers to negotiate economic policy with the Government" (Irish Times 1 March 1979). Fianna Fail TDs, especially from the cities, continued to dissent with the party leadership. The Labour party was outraged. In the words of one Labour TD, they could not agree with the government's "cowardly surrender" to the farmer. Within days there were impromptu work stoppages throughout the country and a series of protest marches were planned in many of the nation's urban centers. On 5 March Lynch, obviously reeling, delivered a prepared speech that stated the "Government did not surrender" to the farmers, and that the farmers will be forced to pay the same amount of tax already demanded of them. The people of Ireland did not agree.

The urban center outside Dublin quickest to organize itself against the government's newest moves was Navan. Under the leadership of Dermot

Forde, an independent county councillor and Carpet Factory employee, a march was planned for 9 March. The first of the nation's organized protests had more than 1000 people marching both in support of a new national agreement between labor and government and in protest against the government and farmer. The size of the Navan demonstration—occurring in the central town of the nation's richest agricultural county, one known for its role in recent events—was not lost on all the interested parties. Although many marchers were from out of town, most of the 1000 were Navan residents and they formed a sizable part of the 5000 strong urban district population. The significance for Navan and Meath politicians was especially apparent. Forde was known as a local politician whose clever use of the press belied his interest in making it to the Dail. If an independent could gather this much support in urban areas, and farmers were alienated from politics in rural areas, then what would the effects be for candidate and parties in June?

The successful Navan protest began a series of nationwide protests which culminated in the 20 March national union protest which saw 150,000 working taxpayers take to the streets of Dublin. Their goal was a "total overhaul of the taxation system" (Irish Times 20 March 1979). Surprisingly, the demonstration, which also saw 40,000 march in Cork, 8,000 in Galway, and 2,000 in Dundalk, was not particularly anti-farmer. The thrust was against a government which was seen to be weak. The 22 March call by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) was for new tax and pay policies by 30 April, the day before the new farmer deal was to be announced.

The events of March again caught the government unaware. By trying to placate farmers it had sparked the largest demonstration in the history of the state (the Irish Independent likened it to both the 1913 Lockout and the 1932 Eucharistic Congress). By attempting to maintain its hold on farming votes it had jeopardized its support among urban workers. Perhaps most importantly, however, the government was publicly seen to be unpopular. After its unique successes of 1977 it had slipped to arguably the most unpopular government in Irish history. Just how unpopular was to be proved in the Local and European elections of June.

The farmers of Meath, who had been so instrumental in the national IFA move against the government and so forceful in their pursuit of their self-described rights, with little regard for traditional avenues of political influence, had not been idle during the Trade Union reaction. Their efforts were twofold: to take an active part in the IFA negotiations with the government over the tax (the ICMSA's support is mainly in Munster), and to capitalize on the apparent weakness of individual politicians and their parties to either cajole them for their patronage/ brokerage or to stand farmers as party men or independents against them in the coming Local elections. The people of Meath, as politically astute as any in the country, knew that those elections would be seen as a test of faith in both Lynch and Fianna Fail.

The seriousness of that test was due to the special nature of the election. The first Local Government elections in five years were to take place on 7 June, at which time the Meath county council and Navan, Trim and Kells urban councils would be contested, the same date as the first popular election for the European Parliament. Three seats (out of

a national 15) were being fought over in Leinster. The two major parties were running three people each while Labour put forward only one. Interestingly, the only farmer of the seven major Euro-candidates was Mark Clinton, Fine Gael, a former Minister of Agriculture and Meath native, a man of great renown in Leinster for his activities on the part of farmers and one with a very wide network of kin and friends in Dublin and Meath. Fianna Fail, who selected their candidates before the seriousness of the present situation hit home, put forward a teacher and two businessmen. These choices provided a particular cause for concern among the parties in Meath in the days before June.

The 1979 election was a special one in many ways, all of which made it more important than any local election since the 1930s. Each party wanted to be recognized as being able to make the transition to truly European parties. They had already aligned themselves with groups of parties in European Parliament nominated by member governments but the population of Ireland at large had never been asked to approve or disapprove their parties' records in Europe. With the overall acceptance of European status by Irish citizens the future course of national elections might be presaged in this international election. The June election was also the first in the nation's history in which TDs (MPs) ran for a whole province. Each party wanted to be successful in the test of running cross-county campaigns.

The prestige that would accrue to a Euro-MP would also add to the party's status at home and abroad. Since Euro-MPs could also be sitting TDs, the authority such people would bring to Dail debates would be inestimable. And although Euro-parliamentarians could not be Ministers in

their home governments, their dual mandate of sitting in two governments made them de facto secondary foreign ministers with very wide ranging portfolios indeed.

This election also provided a stern test of party organization and mobilization. It was the first time local councillors seeking re-election and first office-seekers were asked to campaign simultaneously for party and candidate at the provincial level. This was especially difficult in Meath which had no presently standing politician in the Euro-race (Clinton represented the County Dublin). In an age in which "American-style" public relations had become just as important in campaigning as individual candidate's reputations (rock records, T-shirts and bumper stickers competed with door-to-door canvassing as campaign tools) neither of the major parties wanted to be lacking. In short, they wanted to be seen as modern, international parties, sensitive to the needs of a more sophisticated European electorate. The events of February and March jeopardized this goal. Fianna Fail especially had underestimated just how sophisticated and European the modern Irish farmer had become. The campaign in Meath was fought under this shadow.

The Fianna Fail party nationwide is widely recognized as being better organized and more structurally sound than the others, which often have local chapters or clubs in name only. It was thus easier for me to identify, approach and gain the cooperation of Fianna Fail in Meath in studying their campaign. Both other major parties in Meath were just as cooperative, but they lacked the organization at many levels to either offer that cooperation or make it workable. Thus, much of what I write

generally about the 1979 campaign is based on participant observation within mostly Fianna Fail groups and gatherings.

The orders for the 1979 campaign came down from Dublin and were delivered from one level of party organization to the next. These directives included: points to be stressed while campaigning, questions and answers to steer electors to, the current party slogan, the emphasis on Euro-candidates and the party's national and international record to date, and the nature and style of party campaign material. Fianna Fail, for example, supplied leaflets to its Meath party with the Euro-candidates' pictures and short biographies on one side and the local party put black and white versions of their own candidates for local office on the reverse side. The difference in visual impact was not lost on the party member or voter--the Euro-election was the important one. Most Meath party workers were not as certain. The Meath candidates' priority was to get themselves elected first, and then worry about the "Euro-people". This attitude pervaded the campaign from April on, after the local candidates were selected for each County Electoral Area (five in all for Meath).

Party tactics in Meath were straightforward for they had been used to great effect in many past elections. Voters would be approached through billboard, post, personal visits by candidates at religious, social and sport gatherings (e.g. outside the chapel on Sunday at a local dance, or at the Sunday football match) and a door-to-door "canvass" at which the candidate would introduce himself, or reacquaint himself, or say hello to an old friend or client. The order of the day for candidates was to be at all times friendly, gracious and hospitable, and if at

all possible, stay away from any embarrassing issues. This latter directive was much easier to keep for Fine Gael and Labour candidates in 1979. The national leadership provided national and provincial exposure for the party's platform and candidates, but the local Meath politicians often felt this a hindrance rather than a help for it highlighted potentially troublesome issues (and to the local politicians all national issues are that) and candidates who were not locally based. The most important tool of all to the campaigner was the door-to-door visits. Each night during the campaign in the Navan EA candidates would get their "assignments" for the day, i.e., which townlands, streets or housing estates they were to canvass. In that way every house in the district was visited at least once by a party candidate. The nature of the exchange at the doorstep depended on a number of factors, not the least of which was whether you were already a standing representative. Newcomers had a great hurdle before them which was why many came from sports or businesses that had already brought them some notoriety.

All things being equal, however, the doorstep exchange contained very little substantive information. The campaigner said hello, introduced himself, gave the citizen some literature (with his own picture circled or checked), asked to be remembered on election day, and left with a thanks. Little time or linguistic delay was allowed for the citizen to complain, praise or ask questions. On many occasions they did, however, but on just as many the politician evaded any discussion of national and even local issues by blaming the government, the other party, the council staff or even his own party. The goal for the politician was a simple one: be seen, not heard, and above all, do not become

associated with anything that the voter does not like. Many candidates felt the "door-to-door" was their single biggest strength (except for past performance or reputation) because it enabled them to use their "charm", "chat" and "sincerity" to the greatest advantage. Often forgotten in the canvassing of 1979, and when mentioned, done so only as an afterthought, were the Euro-candidates. The local candidate's message was clear: "save a vote for me, and if you have another, give it to the other fellow running for Europe". Of course, the votes in no way conflicted with each other. Everyone had another vote. But local politicians in Meath would be damned if they let their own chances be jeopardized through any association with outsiders. In Meath in the election of 1979 the national parties provided funds, leadership, slogans, literature and campaign information and advice. They sent the Euro-candidates for one or two swings through the county to address the public or attend party meetings. The Meath party organization provided advice, support and administrative expertise. But the candidates themselves, "out in the trenches", cared for one thing only--getting elected. The national issues of the day made that difficult for Fianna Fail members and farmers alike, unless those farmers could rely solely on the farm vote. In three of the Meath EA (Kells and Trim excluded) this could no longer be expected.

The candidates for office in the Local elections were selected in April. Local political clubs or chapters allied themselves with other clubs in a district in order to support their candidate at their party's convention at the Electoral Area level. For local elections there is no higher level, for candidates represent only the EA at the county coun-

cil. Although the whole council votes on all council matters they seldom vote on matters that directly affect the whole county. Rather, each EA's representative is in a constant trade-off relationship with other party members and other EA representatives. In a local election one can only vote for your EA candidates, yet your EA's services are dependent on politicians from throughout the county. Therefore, one of the skills you seek in your representative is the ability to "horse trade" or "cattle deal" in order to get what his own area wants. Thus, the EA meetings of each party were the decisive ones for the coming election, and for Fianna Fail at least, were deemed important enough to have the Euro-candidates "high-profile" it be chairing the nominating conventions. Although not the subject of this thesis, this nominating system was the veritable stuff of the political process at the local level, in which deals made before the convention were reinforced or broken at the moment of voting for candidates, or were renegotiated for the second, third and fourth ballots. Parliamentarians throughout the world could not have done better.

The candidates who ran for local office in 1979 in Meath reflected many of the changes that had been taking place in local government over the preceding decade. As can be seen from Table 13, only 26% were farmers, but more importantly, they were second to employees who constituted 34% of all those seeking office. Professionals made up 17% of the total. This represented a significant drop in farmer interest in local politics and a sharp increase in interest expressed by employees (labourers and craftsmen), reminiscent of the earliest Free State county councils. An overview of the candidate does not present a complete

TABLE 13

1979 CANDIDATES, MEATH COUNTY COUNCIL
BY OCCUPATION AND C.E.A.

C.E.A.	Dunshauglin	Ceanannus Mor (Kells)	Trim	Slane	Navan	TOTAL	% of Candidates
Occupation							
Farmers	3	4	4	3	3	17	26
Laborers	1	4	5	4	8	22	34
Professionals	4	3	1	1	2	11	17
Merchants	1	3	0	4	1	9	14
Company Directors	2	0	1	1	2	6	9
Total						65	100
SOURCE: Meath County Council							

picture; extended ethnographic fieldwork enables a researcher to make informed opinions about the viability of candidacy. Most of the labourers and many of the farmers running for office in Meath in 1979 were not "serious" candidates, i.e., neither their parties nor their fellow citizens gave them much of a chance. Many, I am sure, hoped for an opponent's mistakes, a drop in support for an opponent's party, or a good reputation as a candidate, thereby setting the stage for a future run for office. By my estimation there were nine farmer candidates who had the reputation, intelligence, party backing, opening for a geographical voting base in the EA and political acumen to be elected. Eight of them were, with the ninth prepared to "have a go" again. The groups most influential among the candidates were the professionals, eleven of whom ran and eight successfully. As noted in Chapter VII, Meath local politics has begun to favor the educated urban professional. Although more workers and farmers ran for office in 1979, the parties, electorate and public officials had already begun expecting the presence of professionals, the self-employed and merchants in the county council chamber.

The dearth of farmer candidates—especially candidates who could win—was due to many important but recent developments in Meath and Irish life. Many of the large farmers who had formed a Meath elite no longer felt that politics was as valuable an enterprise as it had been. Local government offered few opportunities to wield power, especially after its loss of control over finances to the central government. Both formal and informal politics had less impact on agricultural policy than before the 1970s. Most price, trade, market and farm structural policies were

determined on the continent. Being a local party cadre member did not give the same tangible benefits it once had. These same farmers, given more income and credit, were faced with a multitude of business decisions which they were frank in admitting were not part of their lives in the 1960s and before. And as their own and their family's educations have improved, there has been less regard for the petty machinations that some of the more prosperous farmers see are the mainstays of political life. Farmers of Meath in 1979 were still very much part of the patron-client networks of old, but they were much less likely to enter the powerless arena of public life. As the urban and wage earning populations began to rise in a county increasingly a suburban satellite of Dublin, paralleled by a drop in farm population, farmers realized the need to concentrate their political and economic efforts. Although in most cases not self-consciously or collectively done, farmers began to support, participate and trust the IFA. That association's role in the tax dispute in Meath was evident. Many politicians, off the record, admitted that the good young farmers were simply not interested in politics anymore, and "why should they be with their businesses and association keep them occupied" (a Navan politician's lament).

It would be erroneous to portray the IFA as a singularly successful body in 1979. In March and April their representatives, along with those of the other farm bodies, worked on a tax plan with the government. Suggestions included an "accounts" income tax for all farmers and a resource or land tax which might give some farmers more incentive to maximize profits. As April wore on, the farmers saw that the government was refusing to give into the unions on tax changes. Some thought this a

good sign, others were made wary. On 24 April, a week before the deadline, the government announced its tax package for farmers which included a resource or land tax (based on the PLV rate used in the past for local county taxation).¹⁵ It also removed every other type of tax except accounts immediately and applied the new system to a wider range of farmers. On 26 April the Meath county executive of the IFA met to discuss, deliberate and eventually turn down the tax offer. To them a land tax was just as arbitrary and unconstitutional as the levy; the account system for all farmers was preferable to the Meathmen, but they wanted a transitional period in which to adapt to it. Their anger was directed at the Trades Unions, the government, which they believed had stalled on this issue since February, and their own IFA leadership, which they judged had had little input and had shown a very poor reaction to the government package. The Meath IFA had been at the forefront of the February dispute and were determined to see that their organization followed their advice (if not their lead). Most importantly for my thesis, however, was the almost startling fact that in the over two hour discussion that evening of 26 April not one IFA delegate as much as mentioned an elected representative, let alone pursuing old conduits to pressuring politicians. It was clear to both of them and me that they knew that their economic fortunes had to be won firstly through their interest group, the IFA. On 28 April, the IFA in Dublin rejected the government plan. The "war" between the farmers and the government over tax policies which has lasted to this day began on 1 May 1979 when the 2% tax levy was instituted. And although a long and at times bitter feud, the IFA won at least one significant battle. The High Court ruled that it was unconsti-

tutional to base any taxation on the old Poor Law Valuation, thereby creating the need for an accounts or tax records system.

The public dispute over the farm tax and the government's handling of it after 1 May (although the farm organizations refused to pay the 2%, the government collected the same amounts through manipulation of a Value Added Tax (VAT) on all sales) gave great heart to many Fianna Fail politicians in the weeks before the election. But their hope in their party's popularity was either in vain or poorly timed. The results of the election, both in Meath and nationwide, boded ill for Fianna Fail. In Meath the election also hurt the Labour party in Navan.

Table 14 shows the initial county council elected and which is in office to this day. The results highlighted the ways that personality, good reputation (as one who "gets things done"), education and independence from parties can lead to startling electoral success. Most notable was the vote for independent Forde in the Navan EA. In 1974 he won the last seat available from his area, but in 1979 he topped the poll, taking a good number of first preference votes away from both Labour and Fianna Fail. A Labour councillor lost his seat to Fine Gael in the same area. Only one farmer was elected to the Navan share of the county council, while the largest number, three, was in Kells, the northernmost part of the county. That area's votes by party stayed stable since 1974 with all seats staying with the respective parties. Dunshaughlin EA saw a Fine Gael economist, brother to a Meath TD, take a Fianna Fail seat and in the process raise his party's share of the vote by 7%. Fianna Fail's vote went down by almost 9% giving votes away to independents. Although

TABLE 14

MEATH COUNTY COUNCIL, ELECTED 6-79

<u>C.E.A.</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Party</u>
Dunshauglin	Bruton, R.	Economist	FG
	Conway, S.	Pharaceutical Chemist	FF
	Fitzgerald, J.	Self-employed	L
	Hogan, B.	Nurse	FG
	Wallace, T.	Farmer/Turf Accountant	FF
Ceanannus Mor	Bradley T.	Engineer	FG
	Brady, J.	Farmer	FF
	Farrelly, J.	Farmer/Auctioneer	FG
	Hynes, E.	Hackney Owner	L
	Lynch M.	Publican	FF
	McEnroe, H.	Farmer	FF
	Muldoon, F.	Merchant	FF
Trim	Carey, W.	Farmer/Auctioneer	FG
	Dempsey, N.	Teacher	FF
	Hilliard, C.	Farmer/Mart Manager/ Auctioneer	FF
	Lowe, P.	Maintenance Craftsman	L
	McLoughlin, F.	Clerical Officer, Meath County Council	L
Slane	Cudden, J.	Lorry Driver	L
	Doonan, R.	Shopkeeper	FF
	Fullam, P.	Farmer	FG
	Kelly, T.	Pharmacist	FG
	Traynor, P.	Cafe Proprietor	FF
Navan	Andrews, P.	Representative	I
	Dorgan, J.	Management Consultant	FG
	Fitzsimons, J.	T.D.	FF
	Forde, D.	Customer Service Manager	I
	Murtagh, J.	Foreman	
	O'Neill, P.	Businessman	FG
	Rooney, S.	Farmer	FF

SOURCE: Meath County Council

a number of those elected in Dunshaughlin, the EA closest to Dublin, come from farming families, only one was himself a farmer (in Fianna Fail, and the person most articulate regarding compromise at the February IFA meeting). Slane EA saw a drop in support for Labour with no real difference in party seat allocation. There, too, only one farmer now served. And Trim experienced the greatest single vote for a Labour candidate, who helped carry his running partner into the council and take almost 20% of the votes away from the two major parties. In the county as a whole the percentage of votes for all the major parties decreased, to the benefit of independent candidates (see Table 15). Fianna Fail lost the most support, down 3.41% of total votes. The number of farmers dropped, but professionals, employees and people with their own shops and businesses were much better represented. Farmers were seen by the politicians and electorate to be passing from the scene, while many heralded the day that professionals could bring to the council their education and/or specialized skills (e.g. two economists were elected in 1979). Most daunting was the showing of Frank McLoughlin in Trim whose support was based primarily on his reputation as a hardworking and resourceful representative who "gets the job done" and not on his party affiliation. Fianna Fail and Fine Gael knew his next move would be the Dail (which he subsequently was elected to). In Navan Forde was considered the man to watch. Overall, Fianna Fail had lost a great deal of support from all sectors of local society but especially from the farmers. Their votes did not go to Fianna Fail but to individual candidates; they could not vote for too many farmers because there were not that many in the field worth backing. The events of February to June

TABLE 15

MEATH COUNTY COUNCIL ELECTIONS, 1974 AND 1979

1st Preference Votes

	1979	1974	Change
Fianna Fail	15065	14666	+399
Fine Gael	10075	9059	+1006
Labour	7657	7376	+281
Sinn Fein W.P.	74	-	+74
Socialist Labour	79	-	+79
Others	<u>3559</u>	<u>1719</u>	<u>+1840</u>
Total Valid Poll	36509	32830	
Total Electorate	57893	50495	
% Valid Poll	63.06%	65.02%	

TABLE 15

(continued)

	<u>Seats</u>			Range of Candi- dates/Seat	<u>Voters Choice</u>	
	1979	1974	1974		1979	1974
Fianna Fail	13	45%	14	48%	2.0 - 2.6	2.0 - 3.0
Fine Gael	9	31%	8	28%		
Labour	5	17%	5	17%	2.24	2.38
Sinn Fein W.P.	-	-	-	-		
Socialist Labour	-	-	-	-	65	69
Others	2	7%	2	7%		
Total	29	100%	29	100%		

SOURCE: Colgan 1981:106

1979 showed that the preceding decade had moved the best of the old elite's heirs into business, the professions and the IFA.

Fianna Fail did just as poorly in the national Euro-elections. Farmer candidates topped the polls in all three non-Dublin constituencies. And although not strictly part of their "platforms", all three opposed the levy. In fact, one, T.J. Maher, had started his independent campaign because of the tax dispute. The farmers of the country had spoken. They were going to vote for "farmer" candidates regardless of party (even if non-party) in order to achieve their goals. It was ironic that the first election at which farmers could demonstrate this was to a European Parliament, one of the institutions of the Community that had helped change their livelihoods irrevocably, and which in turn changed their role in Irish party politics.

Support for the IFA continued in the months that followed, keeping pace with the government's unpopularity as the levy/VAT taxes were collected. The IFA continued its campaign to make the government rescind the levy and establish farm accounts as the only acceptable method of taxation. Surprisingly, the IFA still presented a united front for even the farmers who were relieved from the levy supported the IFA and their fellow farmers in the east who bore its brunt. Selective government patronage could not split the new farmers of the IFA. They appeared to be united more closely by the realization that as a body they could effectively pressure the government along a selected course of action. If the government did not comply the farming vote (for the first time not the Fianna Fail farming vote or the Fine Gael farming vote) could put it out of office. This was demonstrated in the national by-elections in

November in which the government party was defeated decisively. By the turn of the year the leadership within Fianna Fail had split, due in part to the government's alienation of both farmers and workers.

Thus, the years after 1973 had proved significant for both Irish politics, and the period of 1979 to 1980 were crucial in the development of both Meath and national agropolitics. In Meath the results of the 1979 tax dispute and combined elections were especially significant. As Meath entered a new decade it was clear that most farmers were no longer participating in local government. Those that remained in both the county councils and party organization did so with less enthusiasm, at least in their role as farmers representing farmers. In fact, most farmers seemed to be less inclined to participate in any formal party politics. Their votes became their primary political tool, one used often and well, as farmers became known as the most volatile of voters throughout the nation. Meath farmers were quite explicit about the many disadvantages to party loyalty. By the end of the 1970s it was rare to find farmers who were not willing to at least consider going against tradition in order to vote their perceived economic interest. This volatility helped foster support for the IFA. In Meath this support began to siphon off the most educated, ambitious and well-known young farmers from formal political interests. The progressive development farmers of Meath in the 1980s are the farmers of the IFA--young men and women who recognize that interest group activity is their best tactic in winning their local, national and international goals.

Nationally, the events of the late 1970s, culminating in the protest and elections of 1979, led to a great factionalism in party structures.

This was particularly true of Fianna Fail, whose success long depended on central party control of a tightly-knit grass roots organization, and which has seen a disturbing number of factions develop over the decade (Garvin 1981). And although the overall impact of volatility remains problematical (Garvin 1982) the votes of farmers can no longer be predicted. This development in Irish politics has helped create an image of farmers by farmers that their interests as businessmen and agriculturalists make them into a group with special needs and special powers. Recognition of the strong position of farmers in a united IFA has also increased wage-earners' dissension, political opposition and voter volatility. To all national interest groups the primary problem of the nation became the government's management of the economy (Blackwell 1982). The crisis of the 1980s is one of confidence in government and politics on the part of the Irish citizenry.

Thus, the reorganization of the tax system and the institution of successive budgets have proved sizable hurdles for Irish governments. From 1979 to 1983 Fianna Fail had a change in party leadership which reflected party dissatisfaction with policies that led to a great drop in party popularity after 1977. Three successive Irish governments have been voted out of office since 1979, and at each election farmers have demonstrated their willingness to vote the IFA line to achieve their interest group's goals. In fact, within the national political arena, in which many interest groups are voting economic issues, the group which is most damaging to government and party confidence is the farmers. Not only are farmers reluctant to continue traditional voting patterns, but the power of the IFA rivals many organs of government. This power rests,

in part, on the new internationalism of the farming body.

Irish farmers have joined their counterparts in the other nations of the European Communities by joining the Communities-wide farmers' interest lobby, COPA (Averyt 1977). The IFA maintains offices on the continent in order to affect all policy issues relevant to Irish agriculture. Their role within national politics has become stronger as a result, especially in areas directly related to European Community policy making. Farmers' collective political voices have become louder in other nations because of the interest in policy formation and their ties to other farming groups internationally (Feld 1966, 1974; Buksti 1979; Keeler 1980; Andrlik 1981). The importance of these farming lobbies in both large and small nations of the Common Market highlights the differences inherent in national and international policy making, when the needs of a national farming lobby can be at odds with national governments but quite in line with the needs for transnational farmers and governments (Newby 1980). And the farmers of Meath, who have done so well economically within the Common Market, have gone to the forefront of the new Europe-oriented IFA. If any group of farmers in Ireland qualify as European farmers, it is the large farmers of Meath.

In conclusion, 1979 saw an Irish government wholly unprepared for farmer reaction to its new tax programs. It did not predict the extent, degree and form of Irish opposition. Perhaps for the first time farmers of every county, income level and farm enterprise had united for a common goal. Fianna Fail had misinterpreted the farm swing vote in 1977, thinking it was for them rather than against the tax policies of the previous government. Furthermore, for the first time as well, a party in

power could not break the pressure of farming interests through selective patronage. In Meath the farmers of both major parties in large part bypassed their accepted political role in order to make their needs known through their national lobby, the IFA. This mobilization within the IFA was unprecedented. As an organization it effectively articulated the needs of the new, "European" farmer. Meath farmers as businessmen no longer needed or solely depended on national government subsidization. Common Market relations, by changing the role of Meath farmers in the national and international economies, have resulted in a redefinition and realignment of the role of Meath farmers within the national Irish political system.

FOOTNOTES

- 15 Rates are a local tax levied annually by local councils. They are based on rateable valuations determined for the whole state by the Valuation Office. The amount of rates that a citizen has to pay is determined by multiplying the rateable valuation of the property the citizen owns (land and buildings) by the rate poundage, that is by the amount of the rate in the pound fixed by the local authority. The basic valuation legislation is still the Valuation (Ireland) Act, 1852. Since 1852 there has been no general revision of land valuation.

CHAPTER IX

Conclusion:

The New Politics of an EEC Ireland

County Meath in 1979 was the site of intense farmer opposition to government tax policy. Meath farmers demonstrated their new role of volatile voters in the election of that same year, thereby joining a national wave of farmer discontent with governmental agricultural and budget policies. The large farmers of Meath were the most vocal and best organized of county farmers in this period, and they became an influential group within the national farming lobby, the IFA. This farmers' organization, in turn, invested increasingly in its own international connections within the Common Market in order to influence the new agricultural decision-making in Luxembourg and Brussels. Their attention to European matters was both ironic and fitting: for half a decade the CAP had helped forge the large farmers of Ireland into a wealthy and united bloc of businessmen, lobbyists and citizens. As Ireland became more a part of Europe in the 1970s, agricultural relationships were re-defined within the national political economy. The internationalization of capital and the centralization of Irish party politics have helped change Meath farmers into an agricultural elite relatively unconcerned with local government but keen to pursue their perceived interests in both the national and international political arenas through the organs of the IFA.

An historical analysis of the role of farmers of large landholdings in Ireland cannot be separated from the analysis of regional agricultural production since the 17th century. This analysis shows that in contemporary Meath the "class" of "large farmers" is far from monolithic. In Meath today large farmers are Catholic and Protestant, descendants of the Anglo-Irish gentry or self-made men of the 20th century. Most are in beef production, less in dairy, fewer still in stud farming. In the years of the Common Market most have put their newly mechanized holdings of 200 and more acres into mixed production in an effort to provide maximum adaptability to international conditions. Most of these large farmers rely to some degree on the traditional regional division of labor in beef production. Before the 1970s, in a time in which all farmers in Meath were dependent on the policies of the national government, and regional agricultural production depended as much on Leinster House as it did on the weather, the "large farmers" of Meath so famed in song and story were actually a group severely divided. Cleavages of religion, historical origin, political ideology, political party, patronage and clientage and farm enterprise made the national myth of large farmer political power problematical. Large farmers did control Meath society before the Emergency years of World War II, and remained influential in county government, politics, society, religion and culture up to the 1970s, but it was never the same group of large farmers who wielded power over time. Vagaries in power in Meath often reflected the success or failure of the national elites that Meath farmers were tied to. It remains clear, however, that large farmers were willing to participate in local government and politics in order to further their economic

interests. This role in local politics changed decisively in Meath over the last decade.

My ethnographic research in Meath at the end of the 1970s represented a number of new directions in the study of Irish society by anthropologists. It was the first long-term analysis of a rural population in the wealthier, more developed East of the country, and the first of an occupational or interest group across a whole county (at times extending into neighboring counties of Leinster). My analysis of class and interest group politics borrows from models long used in Irish political science and introduced into sociology through the study of two constituencies in the South and North. It is also explicit in its call for the analysis of relationships of power and political control over time and place, both among the people traditionally the concern of anthropologists (peasants, workers, rural kin groups and networks) and among those who have themselves been the power holders (landlords, government officials, party leaders and large farmers). A successful analysis of power in any area of Ireland demands considerable knowledge of both formal and informal politics, and is dependent on the understanding of the many networks all political actors are part of. Voter profiles, election analyses and Dublin-directed inferential analyses of rural political goals do little to advance Irish political studies, but much to replicate Irish political science.

Meath agropolitics in the late 1970s entered a new era, much different from the previous eras of post-1898 local government. To demonstrate the ties between agriculture and government in Meath a description of Meath's political economy in this century and an analysis

of the changes in local politics in the last decade answer in part recent calls in Irish ethnography for research in many areas long ignored by anthropologists (Wilson 1984). It also implicitly suggests to other social scientists the value of long-term participant observations, in conjunction with the analysis of primary and secondary historical sources for the understanding of complex socioeconomic issues. In short, the Meath large farmers of 1977 to 1979 had already broken with the political and economic patterns of their ancestors, and they did so in ways that are crucial for the development of Meath society and which might prove fatal to representative local government. This role in local politics passed from one of formal participants in local government to one of interest group members active at the local, regional, national and international levels.

The causes of the large farmers' move out of local government into political lobbying were many. The generation of farmer politicians after 1940 was faced with a series of moves by both the government and the political parties to centralize leadership in Dublin. This was accomplished through a series of laws that established the county manager system, relocated planning responsibility to the capitol and removed tax powers from local government. Not only was the control of local funds largely co-opted by Dublin bureaucrats and politicians, but the needs of local constituents consistently became secondary ones to the ever-strengthening national political parties. The pressure on Meath farmers to find alternative means of influencing policy making became more acute as the agricultural population steadily declined in the county. And while overall farmers numbers dropped, their percentage of the county

population declined even more drastically due to the expansion of Dublin suburbs. As farmers began to lose status in the redefined social system of the 1970s, professionals in Meath rose in power and prominence. It was clear to both actor and observer, farmer and professional, native Meathman and the new "blow-in", that farmers could no longer command the attention in local government and politics that they once could. My thesis supports the view that this loss of farmer power was due primarily to the loss of their ability to meet the demands of the old system of patron-clientage. Because both the Meath and national economies changed so radically in the decade after 1973, complementing a process of political centralization in effect since the 1920s, the role of farmers in traditional local politics changed in kind. Farmers became less patrons and clients and more lobbying businessmen, willing to exchange their votes for the policies best suited to their occupation. And their occupation was certainly worth the effort as their farms were thrust into a world of international business within the Common Market.

The most significant result of Ireland's accession to the Common Market was its loss of dependency on the British market. Irish industry and agriculture became tied to continental markets, under the jurisdiction of a supranational body that attempted to break down as many barriers to trade between nations as possible. Common Market policies, especially the CAP, had a greater impact in Ireland than in any other member, making membership in the European Community a milestone in Irish history. Due to guaranteed markets, prices and structural supports, Irish farmers did very well in the new "internationalized" economy. Agricultural policy making became the domain of elected representatives

and bureaucrats in Europe, taking agricultural policy away from Irish parties and politicians, thereby giving the Irish farmer-as-citizen greater freedom with his vote. The resulting volatility of Irish farming votes highlighted the degree of government and party weakness in the face of European centralization of capital and power. As this became apparent to the Meath agricultural elite, the traditional avenues of political maneuvering became less attractive. The sons of prosperous farmers have begun to ignore elected politics to pursue their political and material goals by other means. The 1970s witnessed a mass movement in support of one such way of achieving farmer goals, through the IFA. The "Big Business" of agriculture, a product of EEC membership, demanded newer and more efficient means of farmer organization. The IFA acted quickly to meet its membership's demands. According to one scholar (who himself now serves in the Dail) the IFA has become

One of the most effective and sophisticated pressure groups of its kind in Europe. It has adapted to the changed and pressurised conditions of the EEC better than any other Irish organisation. Its research, expertise and public relations is as good, if not better than most government department. It generally knows what it wants, what is in the interests of its members, and it knows where and how to make its case...the farmers' organisations, like the unions and business--only better than either--have adapted to the realities of power and the exercise of power in a modern quasi-corporate State" (Manning 1979:57-58).

The organization and influence of this newly militant IFA became apparent in Meath during the tax dispute that began in 1979. Subsequent local, national and European elections have demonstrated the importance of farming votes, farmers' shifting allegiances depending on promised policies, and their support for independent candidates. The overall support for Irish political parties has become problematical for Irish

parties, politicians, bureaucrats and scholars. It has yet to become a major concern for ethnographers.

The large farmers of Meath have represented a regional agricultural elite since the 18th century being part of a group of farmers who have wielded great power through successive stages of Irish history. The large farmers of Meath remain a representative sample of farmers of similar acreages and histories throughout eastern Leinster, but the proportion of farmers with big landholdings in Meath is the greatest in the country. Ethnographic fieldwork among a population defined by economic holdings, wealth, occupation and kin networks necessitated great mobility. My study was thus greatly limited to Meath, but often crossed over into Dublin, Louth, Kildare and Westmeath. The data and analysis I present for Meath I believe hold true for these areas as well, but regional analyses in anthropology, to be fully effective, must be done by a team of social scientists (ideally, of both sexes and from different disciplines). Any ethnography of power, whether locally or regionally based, must also involve mobility and flexibility, qualities in short supply in an individual ethnographer committed to a community study. My diachronic analysis of the many power domains Meath farmers have been part of over the last hundred years serves as a starting point for the understanding of that most ephemeral of Irish bogeymen, the "Large Farmers", who often are blamed for political wrongdoing but who can rarely be identified.

Finally, my dissertation also stands as a first step in the ethnography of power within the Common Market. Anthropologists have been slow to grasp the significance of the European Communities for the

populations they study so often and so well. Yet the Communities represent a level of political and economic integration that transcends the nation state, and which redefines most existing social relationships at the local, regional and national levels. European social scientists, especially within the ten member nations, have turned to new research designs and methodologies in an attempt to understand the many ways this new, peculiarly European, internationalization of capital, power, government, politics, business and finance has affected the lives of European citizens. From the policy making process in the Benelux countries to its effects on peasant villages, European scholars have considered every level of European Communities' activity and every facet of their organization and structure as worthy of scientific inquiry. Anthropologists persist in studying communities in political vacuums, unmindful of regional and national, let alone international, politics. If anthropology is to be an integrative social science, and social anthropology a field crucial to the understanding of group behavior in every place and time, then the workings of one of the most integrative political and economic bodies in Europe must itself become problematical for anthropologists. Over a decade ago one scholar working on peasant politics in France incisively predicted the importance of the Common Market in local society for both anthropologists and the populations they study.

The creation of a single agricultural market in the European Economic Community, with the concomitant transfer of authority for agricultural policy-making from national capitals in Brussels, the increasingly rapid decline of the agricultural population in all European countries, and changes in markets and technologies—all these will alter the terms on which the agricultural sector engages in national politics... The same process which shifts power for agricultural decisions to supranational institutions and thus

pushes peasants beyond national politics may at the same time increase rural demands for national action in the agricultural sphere when groups disadvantaged by the structure of a European market for their produce press the state to protect and assist them in the new distribution of rewards (Berger 1972:2).

Social anthropologists in Europe have not heeded her call nor followed her lead in the study of peasants forced beyond traditional politics. And if the population to be understood is one with power instead of one without, how much more relevant are the institutions of a supranational Europe for a complete ethnographic analysis of power.

In Meath farmers have begun to consider their material interests before their traditional political loyalties and have begun to use the ballot to protect their primary concerns of beef, milk and cereal. They could not have done this if Ireland had not joined the Common Market. The world of Meath politicians has become one in which the Irish Farmers Association can command as much support as the political parties. The political economy of Royal Meath changed irrevocably in 1973. This ethnographic study has chronicled much of that change. The role of the Common Market in the quality of life of the citizens of Meath, Ireland and Western Europe remains problematical.

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