The Political Culture of Social Consensus and Social Conflict:
The Example of European Economic Integration and
Globalisation in Ireland and France.

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I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Master of Arts is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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Foreword/Acknowledgements

This thesis is the fruit of an extended period of work, and I should like to express my thanks to a number of those people who have assisted me in a variety of ways over the past few years.

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The Political Culture of Social Consensus and Social Conflict: The Example of European Economic Integration and Globalisation in Ireland and France.

Barry Hennessy

Abstract

The major public sector strikes which hit France in late 1995 saw their protagonists attack the government of Prime Minister Alain Juppé for introducing social security reforms in a bid to reduce the country's budget deficits in order to conform with the Maastricht convergence criteria for Economic and Monetary Union.

Thus, the wavering public support within France for the country's European policy, which had first exhibited stresses at the time of the Maastricht Treaty referendum in 1992, was confirmed as a significant factor in social protest in France, and illustrated the extent to which the sacrifice of a French model of economic and social progress for one which is pinned to international liberalism, can be a source of widespread public and political disquiet in that country.

This thesis examines and compares the evident French concerns and protests over such economic and social questions with the apparent absence of such concerns in Ireland, through an analysis of the political culture in both societies based on available theories, and observations regarding the factors governing their social and political consciences.

It concurs with the viewpoint that the apparent consensus regarding these issues in Ireland stems from a view that no other realistic option is open to the country, however it contends that factors such an historically weak left wing, the strength of Catholic social policy and previous experience of self-sufficiency are significant factors informing this 'consensus'.

Chapter 1

1.0 Introduction

This thesis sets out with an objective to analyse a number of issues which have interested me greatly over the course of this decade. Since the 1980s, the European Union has achieved renewed vigour in its determination to unite the countries and people of western Europe in an ever closer political and economic unit. This process has taken place against the backdrop of a number of developments. The advance of world trade talks aimed at a steady deregulation of international commerce has made many regions of the world look at the possibility of local alliances in order to be better able to compete in the global marketplace. Since the global market is fundamentally a liberal one, this attempt has, as in the case of the European Union, led to a steady erosion of existing barriers to the free movement, first of goods and services, and then of people and labour, within defined boundaries.

The trade element of the European Union is one which has always benefited from broad support, as most observers saw any move to facilitate commerce as being advantageous to firms within their own countries – even if it granted foreign firms similar rights to trade in their countries. However, as the European Union has developed and the full reality of the single market and ultimately economic and monetary union began to hit home, we saw the emergence in a number of countries of protectionist attitudes. This arose over the perceived loss of sovereignty inherent in aspects of the Union's objectives, and also the loss or erosion of certain national symbols or practices which were deemed to be out of line with a programme which was slowly moving from an intergovernmental to a somewhat more supranational view of Europe.

This thesis attempts to examine a number of questions. It is concerned with political culture. This is because I believe that the manner in which any society behaves when faced with such a prospect as an ever closer union of European

states, and the erosion of aspects of its absolute autonomy will be determined by a complex web of historical and cultural factors which make up the political culture of a country and ultimately frame political debate, discourse, protest and dissent within it. With regard to that point, one of my main interests concerns the differences which exist between the countries of western Europe as they strive to build a European Union which both reflects themselves and gradually gains coherence in the global context. Ireland and France are two republics which are members of the Union. Both of them are liberal democracies and are comparable as western European states. However, there are also considerable divergences between them, and it is the analysis of these divergences and their impact, first and foremost on the countries' relationship with the European Union but then on their attitude towards the broader changes occurring on the world scene.

Carrying out such an analysis has not been an easy matter, and I suppose that like every honest introduction, this one should contain the caveat that the best I have hoped to do here is present a number of perspectives and carry out a certain amount of discussion along the lines I have mentioned above.

In addition to this introduction and a conclusion, this thesis contains four main chapters.

Chapter 2 contains an introduction to methodological and theoretical perspectives for analysing political culture in a comparative manner. Given the particular concern of this work with questions of conflict and consensus, and its contention that on questions of an economic or a European nature, Ireland exhibits much greater consensus regarding the dominant direction taken than France, this chapter also discusses issues regarding the existence or conflict or otherwise within societies. It also discusses the manner in which such conflict is likely to express itself, taking into account the question of access to power in different countries. In this latter case, particularly attention is paid to the question of Kreisi's political opportunity structure.

Building on the groundwork laid in chapter 2, chapter 3 provides a detailed overview of a range of factors which, in the opinion of this author, have contributed to the contemporary political culture of both France and Ireland over the course of their modern history. Chapter 3 also serves to introduce the case study in chapter 4. The focus of chapter 3 has necessarily remained quite broad since I believe that the factors which contribute to the political and social profile of any country are wide ranging, and I freely acknowledge that those to which I have referred could be supplemented by others which I have not examined. What I have attempted to do is present an overview of those which I believe to be of particular relevance and attempt to maintain cohesion in comparison by examining these in the context of the other country as well. The specifics of both societies mean, however, that the relevance of the factors discussed varies against specific aspects of the history of both.

Chapter 4 is a case study chapter. The difficulty in doing a case study on a subject such as this is the availability of a suitable comparative issue. In an attempt to overcome this, I have wished to look more closely at an issue which reflects the desire of the governments and a large section of the élites in western Europe today to achieve greater levels of competitiveness in the context of European integration and economic globalisation. One key area within any country where conflict can erupt is in the area of labour relations, and particularly the relations between what are often referred to as the social partners – government, trade unions and employers. In late-1995, the French government proposed a series of reforms aimed at cutting down the country's budget deficit in line with the criteria for gaining access to European economic and monetary union. These reforms entailed social security cutbacks and also proposed interfering with the generous terms enjoyed by many public sector workers, such as early retirement schemes for railwaymen.

The result of this was a massive strike and protest movement within the French public sector in which criticism of aspects of the European agenda was rife. Not

long after this time, the Irish social partners sat down to negotiate a new partnership agreement, based on a model which has been in place since 1987. This approach, largely aimed at ensuring workplace stability whilst providing agreed pay increases for workers, builds on a range of initiatives put in place in Ireland over an extended period in order to provide the various social partners with a viable prospect of avoiding strikes and large scale loss of working days. It is, as we shall see, a system which the social partners have found useful, but there is dissent. So far, this has been marginal, but I put forward the argument that there is the potential for it to become more vocal if the partnership agreements do not continue to move with the times.

In chapter 5, I develop the question of the relationship between both countries and the European Union with a range of data and analysis to bring the historical and case study picture up to date. The aim of this chapter is to give a picture of how the European Union and its possible implications are viewed, both by the public and also by the political establishment in both countries. In particular, I look at the opposition to aspects of the European project in both countries, and look at its relative strength in what remains an overall favourable reaction to the European Union in both Ireland and France.

Before commencing with chapter 2 proper, I would wish to address one particular issue which has arisen in the editing of this work. The requirement that the thesis be submitted in either Irish or English, and the need to keep the length within some form of manageable limit obliged me to make a decision regarding the use of French in original quotes from French sources. I have decided, reluctantly, to rely on my skills as a translator and provide the English translation only, confident that the references provided will enable the reader to locate the originals without too much difficulty.

Chapter 2

Principles and methodologies in comparative political studies

2.0 Introduction

In order to begin a comparative study which has as its aim the better understanding of differences across two or more societies, it is first necessary to reflect on some of the approaches normally used in carrying out such a study and which more generally underpin comparative studies. In this first chapter, it is thus my intention to carry out an examination of a range of factors which are generally seen as being of importance when placing politics in comparative perspective. Among these are the approaches and methodologies commonly applied in carrying out comparative studies - the units of measurement, the assumptions behind them, the necessary caveats which if ignored would render the study meaningless. We must also consider the range of political parties and ideological currents which are generally found in Europe. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, it is obviously the case that both Ireland and France are part of Europe and it is within this theatre that their political systems must be analysed. Secondly, and more importantly, if we are to establish any meaningful basis for a comparative study between the two countries in political terms, we must at least establish some baseline against which to assess their political systems.

In addition, since one of the primary interests of this thesis is that of dissent and opposition and how, away from standard parliamentary opposition, these tend to manifest themselves more strongly in some societies than others, it is worth giving considerations to forms of more radical opposition seen in various countries, in particular social and new social movements and the factors which may influence their presence in certain societies moreso than in others. In doing so, we shall see how societies which adopt a more inclusive approach to a variety of interest groups, particularly those with varying economic interests,

will tend to be less prone to more radical forms of protest by social and new social movements since the mechanisms interest groups adapt in pursuing their agendas are influenced by the nature of the societies in which they operate.

It is thus through an examination of these factors in cross-national comparative studies that I hope to set the basis for the more specific Irish-French comparison which follows in the successive chapters.

2.1 Principles and methodologies in comparative politics

Aristotle referred to politics as the master science. It is worth considering which are the traits of science which may contribute to this description. For one thing, science is the attempt to understand and, where possible control, a variety of social phenomena. It relies heavily on theories in its attempts to do this, since science is virtually worthless unless the principles and observations on which it relies can be stated and defended as valid and accurate. Scientific research is thus clearly about supplementing established theories with additional definitions, and also, where possible inserting caveats or expanding on knowledge already available.

Clearly, when the issue is politics, providing definitions or theories which unequivocally stand as the rules of the game, is next to impossible. The gap between theory and practice is perhaps nowhere as wide as in politics. After all, a suitably qualified researcher or theorist in the natural sciences will be referred to as a scientist, a politics student will not be referred to as a politician. Rather, the expression 'political scientist' is used, since rather than being actively engaged in the processes he studies, the political scientist remains merely an observer of an activity whose parameters seem to be in constant flux. How often do we hear these very same observers tell us that we are in uncharted political waters? It seems the sands in politics do infinitely more shifting than settling.

In carrying out any comparative study, it is important to bear in mind the

existence of elements and aspects of comparative work which, of necessity, limit the parameters of the work which it is proposed to undertake. It is perhaps self-evident that in order for the research to have any value, the subject and the societies across which that subject is to be analysed, should provide a reasonable basis for comparative analysis. Thus, there appears to be little point in analysing the prevalence or effect of motions of censure in two national parliaments if one of them is in a liberal democracy and the other a totalitarian dictatorship! Similarly, there seems little point in comparing the extent of constituency pressures on the work of cabinet ministers in Ireland and France since in the latter case the minister has ceased to be a parliamentarian - if indeed he ever was one - and his constituency is now being represented by his running mate (*suppléant*).

How then do we resolve the issue of valid comparative frameworks? Gregory S. Mahler[1] has suggested that some of the most useful research on the subject has proposed that investigation be carried out based on two opposite perceptions of the issue. These are the 'most similar systems' design and 'most different systems' design. In the former, which is the more popular option for researchers, two political systems are chosen because of the overall high degree of similarity between them. Typically, research will then focus on a specific or a small number of differences between these societies in a bid to account for their existence within the range of similarities between the two polities.

Countering the 'most similar systems' approach is the 'most different systems' whereby researchers choose two political systems specifically as a result of the acknowledged differences between them. To specifically focus on Mahler's own example here, there may seem to be very little in common between the political systems of the United Kingdom and the United Arab Emirates, however should an observer or researcher notice a specific similarity between them, there will surely be an interest in accounting for it across the differences which generally predominate in any analysis of the two countries.

Bearing these examples in mind, Mahler then suggests a number of common focuses for comparative political research which takes into account the two designs outlined above. There is firstly a focus of attention, within the study of comparative public policy, on what governments do. There can thus be comparisons of government action in different countries according to different criteria such as the levels of development of the countries in question, or indeed changes in government action over a defined period. Additionally, such studies may focus on the means that governments use to implement their policies, the reasons why they act as they do and the stimuli which help governments to act in particular manners at particular times.

A second focus of study centres around political behaviour. Such studies may focus upon issues such as political stability, voting behaviour, leaders, party behaviour etc... The idea behind this approach is that when one has gained an understanding of how people behave in a political system, and indeed this applies both to politicians and the public, we then develop an understanding regarding the individual political systems in which this behaviour takes place.

A third focus will look at government institutions and focus upon anything from the legislature to the judiciary. It is clear that institutions are of key importance since it is in them that the most significant powers of the state are vested. Should they have the confidence of the people, they of necessity underpin the legitimacy of the state. A judiciary which is independent of government or political interference will in general inspire the confidence of the citizens in their chances of getting a fair trial should they be brought before the courts. The issue of the independence of institutions is, of course, a vexed one, particularly when those institutions sometimes prove themselves to be *too* independent for the political élites. There are many such examples in Irish law, such as the Supreme Court decision in favour of Raymond Crotty ordering the 1987 referendum on the Single European Act. The study of institutions may tell us much about the strength of the democratic foundations of a particular society. Where parliament is weak or dominated by one particular side, there is a strong argument for

suggesting that a stimulus will exist for more radical forms of political action since this may seem the only form of protest available. In some countries, controversies regarding the judiciary have seriously called into question its impartiality, and sparked allegations from politicians that magistrates and judges were pursuing their own political agenda.[2]

Finally, there are studies of countries themselves since the state - and in Europe the nation state - forms the traditional base unit of any transnational study. It is logical that we should envisage studies which accept the state as a valid unit of comparison. There are those who insist on the many differences and variations existing within contemporary states, and who look to increasing evidence of decentralisation as a calling into question of the historical influence of the state. However, insofar as we remain citizens of states, we have national parliaments and are subject to the state in terms of taxation, law and ultimately war, it seems ridiculous to deny the role of the state at the present time and for the foreseeable future. Such a focus on states may be referred to as the 'whole-unit approach', and this is described in more detail on page 14 in this chapter.

I see the first option as being undesirable since I am attempting here to examine attitudes in two states towards issues such as European integration and economic globalisation. Often, in terms of their approaches to these issues, governments act in accordance with international treaties and obligations or broker agreements through a range of deals with other states. Government action does not, therefore, provide us with an entirely satisfactory framework for examining these questions since governments often find their actions limited by their broader obligations.

Rather, the second option provides for an interesting starting point since gaining an understanding of patterns of behaviour in polities enables us to better appreciate the type of positions likely to be adopted in domestic debates and ultimately by the leadership where they have room for manoeuvre. The third option offers us little of interest here in this context, given the observation I

made above concerning the nature of brokering agreements at European or broader international level. However, the fourth point clearly ties in with the second, and the most desirable comparative framework for this thesis, since it looks to the state as remaining the traditional repository for the loyalties of the citizen, and consequently the focus for their hopes and fears regarding the future. This does not mean that the other studies outlined are irrelevant in comparative work. Rather, it simply underscores the importance of choosing an appropriate approach for the study in question, and since moves towards European integration and globalisation impinge on areas of the traditional sovereignty of nation states, and involve these states entering into agreements whereby the changes may be facilitated, it remains logical to look at behavioural issues in whole states as opposed to the other options put forward.

In this thesis, the objective is to study the two states since it remains my contention that if we wish to analyse the political culture of two societies, we must acknowledge that the primary allegiance and origin of the identity of the great majority of citizens is the state, and it is certainly the case that in both Ireland and France, the state is by far the most important level of political activity. However, deciding that Ireland and France as whole states are to form the basis for the study is only the beginning. We still need to establish the basis for our study of the two societies, and it is obvious that this can only be valid where the parameters are relevant and allow for a reasonable comparative study to be carried out.

Having decided on the state as the framework for this comparative study, we then need to give consideration to the manner in which we undertake a comparative study across states. A number are possible.

Ireland and France are broadly speaking comparable in terms of economic development and geographic location, although there are obvious differences. Sectors such as heavy industry are significantly less developed in Ireland than in France and in general the Irish economy is more limited in the range and extent

of sectors it comprises than France's. In terms of geographic location, both countries are in north-west Europe, however the fact that Ireland is an island sharing a border with Northern Ireland alone, whilst France shares land borders with seven states and a direct tunnel link with an eighth is important.

The one factor, which allows us to draw a direct and valuable comparison between Ireland and France, is the fact that both states are republics and members of the European Union. Their systems of government, as liberal democracies, thus conform to the EU norms. Since the European Union project stands for ever closer unity among the member states, the persistence of divergence between them is of particular interest.

2.2 Methods of undertaking comparative studies

Dogan and Pelassy have argued that there is no study of politics that is not comparable.[3] The argument behind this is that political science, as with all science, is based on the measurement and examination of events which are comparable in order to test for hypotheses based on the results, and thus to formulate probabilities or theories based on these tests. Clearly, in order to undertake such a study, we need to be clear regarding the approaches which it is possible to take. A number of different schools of interpretation may be considered.

As previously outlined, the basic unit in comparative political studies has tended to be the state. Clearly, a very large number of states are available to us, if we adopt the approach that all states are equal entities. However, the idealistic nature of the United Nations General Assembly which allows each member state one vote, does not underpin the reality of international relations at the present time. Even within the United Nations, the makeup of the Security Council has underpinned a world order dominated by the victorious World War II powers. A measure of the inequalities and the radical differences between states may be seen by the dimensions at the extremes. The Russian Federation covers

17,075,000 square kilometres and possesses a population of 147,021,869 people. At the other extreme, we make take the example of a state such as Nauru covering an area of 21.3 square kilometres and a population of 8,100. Even though both Russia and Nauru are states and have the same legitimacy in international law, finding a meaningful comparative framework between them will prove almost impossible.[4]

At the outset, I presented the 'most common' and 'most different' systems designs and suggested that each offered an entirely valid choice in terms of undertaking a comparative study. This is indeed the case, however the one limitation is perhaps in the extent of the analysis which it will be possible to undertake. It is surely desirable that the comparison focus on countries for which a significant number of common variables exist, accompanied by a reasonable amount of difference, thus requiring explanation in the context of the overall similarities of the two societies. Deciding on what we mean by a sufficient number of common variables is not in itself an easy matter. As with any choice, there is the risk that it may appear very arbitrary, and not as such in keeping with any recognised scientific principles. Below therefore are a number of possible criteria for a study of this type.

Area is one valid criterion for undertaking such a study, as is a similar population since these factors will often introduce elements of commonality into the relations between these countries. This premise will, of course, not hold at all true if the political systems of the societies in question are highly divergent. A totalitarian, police state may rule with greater effectiveness, even over a fragmented or ethnically diverse society, than a democratic, pluralistic government - factors such as area and population being roughly equal. Other criteria may include similar levels of economic development, in the context of which we may wish to consider such issues as the levels of democratic freedom enjoyed in two Latin American countries at similar points in their economic development and pursuing similar programmes for further improving their development. We may wish to examine the possible effects of geographic

location on political culture to see whether regional sensitivities or historical disputes with neighbouring states constitute a real impediment to the consolidation of democracy in some of the countries in question. Or indeed, we may choose two countries which are European liberal democracies, both full members of a significant transnational organisation such as the European Union but where attitudes towards this seem to differ and attempt to provide some explanation of this.[5]

A comparative study between states can be based any one of a number of different approaches including the whole-unit approach, the competing power centres approach and the local community approach.

The **whole-unit approach** by its definition implies the examination of both countries at state level. The aim is to compare all relevant structures in the two states that have aspects in common. This approach is best suited to a straight comparison between two states since any attempt to apply it to a multi-lateral comparison of necessity makes it extremely difficult to handle.

The **competing-power-centres approach** involves the identification of centres of political power and establishing the dynamics of competition between them and the powers for which they compete. One of the best known examples of this competition is the conflict between core and periphery. This conflict can arise both between and within states. In the case of core-periphery conflict within states, this is generally a direct consequence of the manner in which the state was consolidated either voluntarily or in an enforced manner. It is logical that in those states where there is greatest resistance to the powers of the centre, the cohesiveness of the state as a whole will be weaker. The competing power-centres approach, taking account of the dynamics behind the successful functioning of individual states whose degrees of federalism may be greater or less, leads to a differing weighting of powers either in favour of the core or the periphery as the case may be.

The **local-community approach** specialises in the examination of smaller units across national boundaries such as towns or cities. In essence, this approach will attempt to identify aspects of politics and political life within small, local communities in different polities to arrive at an understanding of how these operate, generally against the backdrop of the nature of the societies within which they are located. This approach was used by Rokkan and Valen to identify differences in size, scale, potential for political organisation across two societies.[6]

In the case of this study, it will be clear from the outline I've already presented here that the third of the approaches above will not be of particular use in carrying out this study. The first approach will be of use in understanding the attitudes prevalent in both states to the processes in question, whilst the competing-power centres approach is of use in looking upon the evolving relationship between the individual national capitals which may be seen as peripheral to the core of decision making in the increasingly global markets. The new core might, in EU terms, be seen as Brussels whilst in world commerce terms this may be seen as the World Trade Organisation.

I am aware that these descriptions may seem somewhat unorthodox in the context of the traditional core-periphery model, however the notion of competing power centres is, on balance, well applied.

In attempting to analyse politics in comparative perspective, we must have an awareness also of the broader methodological issues involved in the more general study of politics. These may be divided into normative and empirical approaches. The normative approach focuses on philosophical or theoretical considerations whereas the empirical approach concentrates on measurement and observation for its conclusions. Thus two political scientists studying the question of justice will differ fundamentally depending on whether their methods are normative or empirical. The normative approach may focus on questions seeking to establish the nature of justice, the concept of a just society and the

definition of just and unjust.[7]

The empiricist will not be directly concerned with such matters. Rather, his concerns will be the realities of these questions as they are perceived by those directly concerned by them. Thus, although he may ask any number of the questions mentioned in the previous paragraph, he will be asking them in the context both of the views of practitioners in the field of justice, in addition to analysing examples of the application of justice to check for consistency or fresh observations.

I believe that the two approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In the area of political culture, empirical examinations are likely to be somewhat unreliable, unless these are based on a series of examinations over an extended period of time and take account of the changes seen over this period. In reality though, empirical observations regarding political attitudes can be difficult to tie down, particularly since the public mood can be significantly affected by particular campaigns, and empirical studies would have to take this into account. A more reliable study of the political culture of a country will attempt to take into account a broader range of historical and cultural perspectives in the make-up of that culture. Thus, whilst an empirical element will be worthwhile in focusing attention on a particular manifestation of the political culture of a particular society, and allow us to view this in comparative perspective where possible, I believe that it is best backed up with a solid theoretical foundation in order to provide a necessary grounding for the empirical material discussed.

Arend Lijphart has put forward four methods of empirical examination, only one of which is based on experimental methods. The three non-experimental methods are the case study method, the statistical method and the comparative method. A **case study** is self-evident in terms of what it will generally encompass. It will contain an indepth analysis of a particular issue such as a public sector strike in France but will not necessarily arrive at a fully researched understanding of the broader dynamics giving rise to the occurrence of such a

phenomenon within the society under question. It may provide a highly detailed analysis of the conduct of the phenomenon under question and the affirmed ideologies of the participants, however it will almost inevitably fall short on its appreciation of the wider historical and cultural issues.

The **statistical method** of empirical analysis will take into account additional forms of measurement such as opinion polls and survey research. The inclusion of these elements is generally acknowledged to favourably contribute to the accuracy and relevance of an empirical study.

The **comparative method** is akin to a combination of case studies in which a particular aspect of political organisation or behaviour is selected and then examined across different societies. Thus, it is necessary that the study focus on a specific area or areas that are broadly speaking comparable in order not to lose its validity in comparative terms. It would not be valid to compare the Irish presidency and the French presidency in terms of their policy making influence, other than to conclude that the differences between them are so great as to render the comparison worthless. A far more worthy comparison would consider the comparative roles of the head of government - Taoiseach or Prime Minister - in both countries since both have a defined leadership role albeit one defined within certain parameters.[8]

My study combines these elements. Since it looks at two different societies, it is necessarily comparative. The case study forms the centrepiece of the work since it represents an extended analysis of the dynamic of interaction between a range of social actors in both Ireland and France. However, there is also a firm statistical dimension examining attitudes towards the European project in both countries, and illustrating the manner in which this perspective has evolved over time.

The concept of political culture has been with us at least since the time of Plato's Republic which observed:

"that governments vary as the dispositions of men vary, and that there must be as many of one as there are of the other. For we cannot suppose that States are made of 'oak and rock' and not out of the human natures that are in them."[9]

This, then, is central to our study since we are concerned here with the association of particular aspects of behaviour which have a political identity and the social attitudes and identity which underpin them.

2.3 Issues in examining political culture

At this point, we should perhaps first seek to arrive at a definition of political culture. Rather like in attempting to define culture, the task is not an easy one. Most of us have a reasonably clear idea of what we understand by culture, and would probably see this as the range of values, traditions, historical events and legends which contribute to a shared sense of identification or identity. However, culture is, as we know, a disputed term and is capable of being manipulated, dismissed, imposed or distorted as a function of the power and resources of the dominant élite at a particular moment in time. The difficulty indeed is to separate political culture from the general notion of culture since the conduct of politics in a particular society will inevitably be linked to many aspects of the culture of that country. Thus, one manner in which political culture may be defined is as representing the beliefs that shape a particular country/nation. It may also be interpreted by recourse to the term "political ideology" which may be described as a coherent way of viewing politics and government.[10] I prefer to suggest that political culture refers to the range of factors, cultural, historical and ideological which influence the range of political opinions operating in a polity and which inform and contribute to debate within it. I believe that this definition will be proven cogent as we analyse here the question of conflict and consensus in the political cultures of Ireland and France.

Charles F. Andrain and David E. Apter argue that the relationship between the rulers and the ruled in any society is made up of three analytical dimensions:

cultural beliefs, structure and behaviour. Cultural beliefs stress the purposes and interpretation of rule. Structural conditions focus on the organisations through which political leaders exercise their power and the behavioural dimension explains how political messages are interpreted by individuals and how these individuals then operate political organisations.[11]

Political culture is thus concerned with the psychological orientation towards social objects and the political system as identified through the cognitions, feelings and evaluations of citizens. Political culture may thus be expressed through such factors as the sense of national identity, the manner in which one views oneself as an individual member of a polity, attitudes towards one's fellow citizens, attitudes and expectations regarding government performance and knowledge and attitudes regarding the political decision-making process.

In order for a particular political system to function, it is necessary for it to attain legitimacy. It does so by manipulating a range of cultural values and beliefs necessary for support to be garnered within a particular society. For Andrain and Apter, cultural interpretations probe the meaning of texts. Language and rituals convey shared meanings that give meaning to political experiences such as anti-government protests. In a bid to perpetuate their own power, the élites communicate texts such as ideologies, nationalist myths, legal decisions etc…, to the people as a means of asserting the legitimacy – for them, often the natural legitimacy – of the régime. The central tenet of the régime's philosophy is that, for as long as it manages to sustain the belief in the public's mind that it is superior to all the alternatives, it believes that people with acquiesce in it and refrain from taking part in dissident or opposition movements aiming at fundamental change.

There is a key role to be played in this strategy of self-preservation by supporting institutions which exist to reinforce the legitimacy of the primary ones. These are many and varied but include the schools, churches, mass media, political parties that accept the legitimacy of the existing order, and others. Challenges

whose nature is fundamentally anti-system achieve success only when opposition leaders succeed in transforming the dominant principles of what is considered political legitimacy. This finality comes as the result of a process whereby support is garnered for the idea that the existing political situation is the root cause of whatever social problems are being experienced.

As with any such subject, it has had its detractors and its promoters since it was first mooted as an area of study in its own right during the 1950s. It was Gabriel Almond, an American political scientist, who argued that every political system was embedded in a particular pattern of orientations to political action.[12] Behind Almond and his fellow academic, Sidney Verba's use of this term was the assumption, based on a survey carried out across five countries (Britain, Italy, Mexico, USA, West Germany) in 1959 which provided data supporting the theory that a stable democracy required a specific set of attitudes based on a complex balance of subject and participant cultures and required high levels of system support and social trust fostered by overlapping membership of different groups. The study was called *The Civic Culture* and the data pointed to Britain and the USA as the paradigmatic 'civic cultures'. Among the other social scientists working in this area at the time was Seymour Martin Lipset who observed that enduring democracies were disproportionately found in wealthier and more Protestant nations.

An approach based on political culture came under attack from a number of quarters. One of the attacks suggested that the approach had become debased and confused with some seeing political culture as relating to the values of individuals whilst others saw it in group-oriented or institutional terms. Other criticisms fall within three broad categories:

1) **Hidden assumptions:** Left-wing critics accused Almond and Verba of celebrating existing Anglo-American democracy with its low levels of participation and deference to authority. In the same vein, there were allegations of ethnocentricity. With regard to stability, critics pointed out

that other forms of stable societies were possible outside the Anglo-American model.

2) **Specific methodological issues:** Critics pointed to the problems of using opinion polls for examining complex attitudes. With particular regard to transnational comparisons, they pointed to the difficulty in translating both words and concepts. How many Germans would admit to being 'racist' given the taboo nature of that word since the Nazi era in their country? Another related problem refers to the validity of measurements that may be made in carrying out a study based on political culture. Specifically, there is the link between the qualitative and quantitative aspect of the study. Studies are generally poor at identifying future trends and many of the concepts employed are difficult to define.

3) **Causality and primacy:** How are the various factors explained? What dynamic explains the manner in which change in the political process takes place? Essentially, whilst we may observe that the political culture of a particular society is made up by a number of factors or opinions, determining their proper causality is much more complex.[13]

In defence of the political culture approach, Eatwell quotes a leading student of the subject Dennis Kavanagh, who states that political culture is concerned with:

"*orientations* towards *political objects*. Orientations are predispositions to political action and are determined by such factors as traditions, historical memories, motives, norms, emotions and symbols. We can break these down into their component parts as follows: cognitions (knowledge and awareness of the political system); affect (emotional disposition to the system); and evaluation (judgment about the system)"[14]

Following from this, Ronald Inglehart said that the political culture approach argues

1) that people's responses to their situations are shaped by subjective orientations, which vary cross-culturally and within sub-cultures.

2) that these variations in subjective orientations reflect differences in socialisation experience, with early learning conditioning later thought.[15]

Reference is, in addition, made by students of the subject to the existence of three specific elements of political culture - a 'system culture', a 'process culture' and a 'policy culture.'[16]

The system dimension refers to attitudes towards the nation, regime and the authorities in control of power at a particular moment in time, i.e. the government. It also encompasses values regarding national identity, the legitimacy of the regime in question, the legitimacy of the institutions and the effectiveness of individuals holding public office or occupying significant political positions. Process refers to attitudes concerning the role played by the individual him or herself within the political system and the attitude regarding other political actors. The policy dimension refers to the results of policies as 'outputs' of the political system.

When dealing with comparing political cultures, as with comparing any other aspects of politics, we are faced with the considerable danger of establishing one of the cultures under examination as something of a standard, a concept which will necessarily lead to a highly subjective examination. In order to avoid ethnocentricity in a study, we must avoid the notion that there is a base culture against which all others may be evaluated. There may, of course, be times when a base culture or system may be valid, such as where this may be prescribed. It may be the case, for example, that laws or statutes drawn up by a central government may regulate the behaviour and competencies of local authorities, and it may be empirically observed that certain local authorities in peripheral areas are deviating from these. Thus, we may wish to acquire a knowledge of the underlying reasons behind this deviation, particularly if it appears to be systematic.

Perhaps a better example would be the compliance of different EU states with articles of EU law or with the adjudications of the European Court of Justice. In such cases, the legal requirements may be seen as a standard, and their non-application as a deviation. However, when we are seeking to compare aspects of

the political culture in two states, without there being any internationally prescribed political culture, then it is incumbent on us to avoid an approach based on subjectively assessing differences between those states.

Some mention of political development and modernisation ought to be included here, since it is inevitable that political culture, as with any kind of culture, will evolve over time. However, evolution can happen in two ways, and this is the distinction between development and modernisation. Development may be seen as a process whereby indigenous political institutions adapt to and control the processes of change affecting them. It is an idea which contains the notion of selectivity in terms of the type and pace of the changes which affect a country. Modernisation, on the other hand, tends to be a process which comes from outside, reflecting the dynamics of change in the wider world. Where a process of modernisation is not accompanied by a similar process of indigenous political or institutional development, it can have serious implications for the ability of the society in question to engineer modernisation should it wish to do so.[17]

A series of studies initiated in 1963 by the Committee on Comparative Politics at the Social Science Research Centre at the Centre for Advanced Study in the Behavioural Studies in Palo Alto, United States, referred to a number of different crises faced by all nations in the process of political development or nation building. These are the crises of identity, legitimacy, penetration, participation and distribution.[18]

Of these, two in particular seem relevant to the question of conflict and consensus as they may arise with regard to the questions raised in this thesis.

The **crisis of identity** refers to the manner in which individuals within a political regime affirm their sense of political identity. Do they pledge their allegiance first to the state and secondly to a subdivision such as a region or major city? From the point of view of the nation, fostering a sense of national identity has traditionally been seen as one of the most important tasks faced by emerging

nations, since the failure to develop a national identity among citizens may lead to the undoing of the nation-building efforts of the élite by conflicting loyalties in the larger community.

The **crisis of legitimacy** suggests the existence among the portion of the citizenry of the opinion that the government in power is fundamentally bereft of a right to exist. This is entirely different from run of the mill opposition to government policy or aspects of it. In a stable democracy, where a government has been elected in a democratic manner, its legitimacy as a government will not normally be questioned, even among its most implacable political opponents.

A crisis of legitimacy can arise, however, where a particular regime is in place which has not consolidated the support of a group or groups in society whose loyalty is towards another different form of government. This has been the case in France with those groups on the right who were converted only slowly to the republican cause. It must also be pointed out that there can be polities in which the opposition is a non-system opposition, i.e. where it is the stated aim of the opposition to overthrow the existing political system should they come to power.

It is my contention that there is considerably less evidence of a crisis of identity or legitimacy in the Irish context than in the French, with, as we shall see in later chapters, a high degree of consensus being expressed regarding the dominant political and economic course being taken by the country. Irish people have, as we shall see from Eurobarometer evidence, little difficulty with their sense of national identity, consistently expressing few if any fears regarding the effect of the dominant policy or the European project on their identity as Irish people or their ability to continue as a part of the same nation.

Similarly, the legitimacy of the government is certainly not seen as being challenged. It is difficult to realistically assert that the fundamental legitimacy of the French government or political system was being called into question by the social movements of late-1995 which form the basis of the case study in this

thesis. However, there was a mood among the demonstrators that France's ability to plan for its own future and the good of its own citizens was being compromised by acquiescing in a plan which proposed a drastic change in the social security system merely to reduce the country's budget deficits for a new currency. It may be suggested that the strikers were pointing to the imminent risk of a crisis of legitimacy if a policy, which did not represent the priorities of many French people, were to be followed.

2.4 Common heritage in European politics

Following on from the suggested principles and methodologies of comparative political analysis outlined above, I want to briefly analyse some of the factors contributing to what Yves Mény calls the common heritage in European politics. These are a number of the aspects which, despite the many differences that may and do exist between the different polities which make up the political map of Europe, can generally be seen as making up the fundamental common values held by the greater number of European societies. To an extent, these shared values allow us to consciously build up the list of elements which the western European countries have in common, despite the historical and cultural differences between them. The existence of these serves to justify the validity of a comparative study carried out between them.

The first of these is **economic pluralism.** Within the European liberal democracies, it has been customary for different agents to be allowed to operate within the economic marketplace. There is, of course, no such thing as a perfect market and European countries have been especially adept at imposing controls, either in the form of monopolistic or oligopolistic mechanisms or varying amounts of state intervention.[19] Thus, although we speak of economic pluralism, the mixed economy has tended to be the norm in western Europe with a blend of state intervention and free market competition.

The second aspect of the common heritage is **social pluralism**, requiring the acceptance of autonomous groups

"considered as normal, desirable means of organising individuals."[20]

Mény points out that there has been a degree of disagreement regarding this form of social organisation, particularly in countries such as France where the Jacobin tradition placed emphasis on the direct relationship the citizen could enjoy with the State, as opposed to one which was impaired by a role given to third parties. Evidence of this direct influence may be seen in the limited role of the French trade unions and the status enjoyed by direct internal bargaining particularly in the private sector.

The third factor is **political pluralism**, identified with the affirmation of certain liberties in the economic, social and political arenas. These would include the right of assembly, formation of associations, religious freedoms and the right to property. For Mény, recognition of political pluralism entails an important consequence – the recognition of freedom and choice and the right to defend this in a manner that is appropriate.[21]

Expression of choice is another of the necessary factors making up the common European political heritage. This involves the acceptance of electoral competition and a recognition that such competition must be governed by rules which are sufficiently strict and neutral not to appear to favour one particular group. The full extension of the expression of choice has been a somewhat tortuous one, as reforms have tended to be slow in coming. These have included the lowering of the voting age, the extension of suffrage to women, fairness in the drawing of constituency boundaries, and the financing of elections.

Respect for freedom of choice is also about respect for the principle of opposition, and respect for the right of the opposition to oppose the policies of the government of the day. The British model of opposition is among the most institutionalised, with the main opposition party being officially referred to as

'Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition'. David Denver has argued that this model is at its most robust when the traditional duopoly of parties in the House of Commons is at its strongest. He points out that this state of affairs has served to make the Opposition responsible, as it respected the traditional balance of power which established the roles of government and opposition and ensured respect for the principle that the government of the day had the right to govern and the minority party the right to oppose.[22] There are, however, equally solid grounds for opposing the idea of perpetual and irreconcilable opposition, as Denver acknowledges, particularly insofar as it prevents the development of a national consensus on the great majority of issues.

Such an institutionalised approach to opposition is not found everywhere however, and France is one of those countries where the prospect of the opposition coming to power has often been associated with the spectre of real régime change. The Fifth Republic was entirely a Gaullist brainchild and had been sharply criticised by many left-wing figures since its inception in 1958. When François Mitterrand won the Presidential Election in France in 1981, there was considerable suspicion on the Right that the Socialists still intended undoing much of the fabric of the presidential régime. However, Mitterrand scotched such rumours at the outset by stating:

"The institutions were not made to fit me, but I find them a perfect fit."

Limitation of powers is another aspect of the common heritage and refers, predictably, to the checks and balances that are built into a particular political system in order to avoid all the instruments in power being placed in the hands of a few. The most common forms of limitation of power are the division between the powers of the Head of State and the Government, and the government, legislature and judiciary.

The final factor is the **Rule of Law and Constitutionalism**. This has both a national and an international dimension and has been built up through a mixture of tradition (inertia) and codification. According to Mény, these rights have

gradually been built up through a succession of rights established in Europe and the United States forming the basis of International Law. This 'western' model of the rights of the citizen and the rule of law subsequently formed the basis for a variety of international legal documents and principles such as the Declaration of Human Rights, General Principles of Law and Higher Law. On a more localised level, in Europe it formed the basis of the European Convention on Human Rights.

We must argue from the above that the great majority of European Union countries share all of these provisions, the difference between them often coming down to the legislative provisions governing their implementation and the structures of the political institutions affecting their dynamic. If we are interested in looking at questions of conflict and consensus, it is necessary to look at the possibilities for access to political life and political institutions offered to dissenting views, and the manner in which their opinions are articulated within the particular framework of the society in question. With that in mind, I wish to move on now to look at the specific issue of interest groups in politics.

2.5 Interest Groups in Politics

One of my major concerns in this thesis is that of the role of interest groups in political life, since I believe that the manner in which this are active in different polities and the way in which they articulate their demands tell us a lot about the polities in question and their readiness to accommodate opinions and demands from outside the mainstream political sphere. The importance of this aspect of political life stems from the fact that it allows us to observe the extent to which a society is exclusive in the way in which it deals with challenges from organised groups – seeking to reduce or eliminate their influence and keep a firm hold on power for itself – or whether it exhibits a more inclusive approach, striving to integrate interest groups into the decision making process through structures which channel their views into the formulation of policy or forms of social partnership.

Interest groups come from across society and represent a cross-section of opinion. A number of them will tend to be very broadly based and will represent the interests of a large number of members. Among these are the major trade union federations, both representing white and blue collar workers and the more specialised professional unions such as those representing the teaching, medical and nursing professions.

A range of other interest groups will seek to have their views represented in society, and accommodating these will not always prove easy. Perhaps to the forefront among interest groups in most European societies will be the farming community which will constitute a powerful lobby. In most countries, the rural vote will be a key if somewhat elusive one. Whilst there is no reason why farmers should inherently be more in favour of one political party than the other, certain parties are seen as being traditionally closer to the interests of farmers in each country than others. Those groups which are seen as being more distant from the interests of the farming community will have to garner considerably more support in urban areas in order to make up for the shortfall in the rural vote. However, this can be a vicious circle since the support they garner in urban areas can reinforce the perception of their being distant from the concerns of the farming community. This is particularly the case of the Labour Party in Britain and is somewhat true in the case of many socialist parties across Europe.

Smaller interest groups represent a range of interests in society, both established and temporary, and many of these seek to have their standpoints recognised by the powers that be. The extent to which this will happen may depend on a number of factors; among them will be the desirability or necessity of including the views of these groups in the national decision making process from the standpoint of the government. Such a decision will take account of factors including the numerical and political strength of the group in question, but also the extent to which meeting its demands may meet with a positive reaction among the wider public. Consequently, groups which are numerically quite

small can come to enjoy considerable influence where their case has attracted considerable public sympathy. Groups in this category are those representing citizens who have suffered a particular wrong, often at the hands of the state, such as infection with a dangerous disease.

Often, admission into the decision making process will alter the way in which an interest group operates since it will be in a position to lobby the authorities much from its position of influence than before. However this is far from being always the case. In the particular case of farmers, regardless of the extent of their integration into the decision making process, they have tended to jealously guard their right to engage in protests to demand more concessions. In France, this has been translated by the existence of radical groupings on the fringes of the mainstream farming unions who have primarily been the ones organising the more violent protests which occur periodically involving French farmers. Known as the *enragés*, their function is 'institutionalised' in the sense that they form a radical fringe which without fail appears and stages radical protests when farmers are dissatisfied with their lot. Whilst Irish farmers tend not to resort to the same levels of violence – burning of foreign produce, attacking public buildings etc…, - as their French counterparts, they also resort to periodic street protests despite their easy action to government, and have on some occasions staged spectaculars such as releasing sheep in the lobby of the Department of Agriculture in Dublin.

Whilst interest groups generally tend to operate outside the conventional political arena, there are those who seek to enter it to advance their aims. The extent to which they will do this naturally depends on the opportunities afforded by the system for new parties or groups wishing to enter it. Certain systems such as first past the post make it particularly difficult for independent or single issue candidates to get elected since it will be difficult for them, under virtually any circumstances, to amass the sheer number of votes required in any one constituency to win the seat outright. The proportional representation system, such as that practised in Ireland, offers considerably better prospects to such

candidates to be elected, particularly where a number of seats are available in each constituency for proportional distribution. Thus it was that in 1991, four seats on Cavan County Council were won by the Cavan Road Action Group (CRAG), whilst at the 1997 General Election, a candidate was returned in the conservative constituency of Donegal South West representing a TV deflector campaign.

Another type of organisation which can become interest groups are the churches. It is important not to confuse the Church and the Christian Democratic parties which emerged out of the social Catholicism in a number of European countries. For one thing, the Christian Democrats experienced considerable difficulties gaining Church approval for their actions. Furthermore, although for an extended period during this century, the Christian Democrats did what they could to uphold the Catholic viewpoint in political debate, a number of reasons such as a move towards the right and increased secularism among their supporters or power-base led these parties to distance themselves from the Church over time.

In general, where there was a dominant religion, this tended to be Catholicism as a result of its unified nature. The Catholic Church as an institution and as a hierarchy has traditionally been a united and strong structure, able to propagate a strong and unambiguous message to a dedicated group of followers. Protestantism on the other hand, is much more fragmented. In many countries with large numbers of Protestants, these are spread out over a number of different churches and, since these churches themselves are often divided in terms of their beliefs - ranging from moderate Anglican to highly puritanical - there is not the same consistency and cohesion in their message.[23]

The reason why I believe that the relationship between interest groups and the political establishment is a key one, stems from the fact that more and more government action in today's Europe takes place against the backdrop of international obligations and is seen as less accountable than would previously

have been the case. The extent to which interested groups can gain access to power in a particular country and have their views listened to provides an indication, not only of the relative openness of the political system to challenges but also the extent to which it feels confident in its ability to adhere to its obligations whilst accommodating new challenges.

Inevitably there have been those groups which have felt more dissatisfied than others with the politics of the major forces and which have sought to enter the political arena with new and more radical forms of politics. These are often referred to as new social movements.

2.6 New Social Movements

New Social Movements (NSMs) is an expression which generally refers to those groupings on the fringe of the mainstream political establishment. By definition, they serve to articulate the views and feelings of those elements within a society who feel that their concerns are excluded from mainstream political or social debate. Needless to say, with such a wide definition, there can be any number of new social movements. They cover a wide range of forms of action, demands and political hues. In all cases however, they reflect viewpoints which are held with great conviction by their members and which are expressed, often with considerably more passion than is found within conventional, established political parties.

Many new social movements will be devoted to a single issue. We are all familiar with the major ones which have marked European political life over recent decades. In the nineteen seventies and eighties, the peace movement was one of the most potent NSMs in many west European countries. Its calls for nuclear disarmament often met with widespread success, particularly in those countries whose government's seemed most strongly devoted to the cause of the western alliance, and where opposition on the part of the mainstream political establishment was either muted or ineffectual. Two cases in point are Britain and

West Germany. In the former, the Labour Party was strongly associated with the peace movement due to a number of factors including the power of the left wing among its rank and file members, and parliamentary weakness faced with the huge 100+ majorities of Margaret Thatcher's Conservatives during much of the 1980s. In the latter, the situation was somewhat different. The exclusive nature of the political system in that country meant that large numbers of people who felt underrepresented by the major parties (CDU/SPD) and took to the streets in order to protest at the country being sandwiched in a bitter East-West arms race.

The example of the peace movement is perhaps a somewhat unrepresentative one, since it was a very large and very broadly based movement, bringing together large numbers of people who, in some cases, would not have been natural political allies. In the case of other NSMs, their activities are often quite different to that of the former peace movement.

The Swiss researcher Hanspeter Kriesi subscribes to a model for assessing the potential for new social movement activity within a given polity. This model is known as the "political opportunity structure" (POS) and it takes account of three specific dimensions which are the degree of openness or closure of formal political access, the degree of stability or instability of political alignments and the availability and strategic posture of potential alliance partners.[24]

The acknowledged expert in studies on new social movements, I believe that his perspective is of particular importance. Furthermore, the political opportunity structure offers a unique framework for examining the range of factors which can give rise to the prevalence of conflict in a society, and as such is useful in dealing with the central question of conflict and consensus which this thesis seeks to explore. For that reason, I am according it considerable space in this chapter.

Kriesi believes that the POS requires some modification in order to be relevant to the analysis of new social movements. He makes the point that the POS is not constant, rather it can undergo shifts over time, however these shifts cannot be anticipated by the individual actors who initiate political action in a social movement. Consequently, the new social movement takes account not of the possibility of change intervening, but merely of the situation in existence at the time of its formation. A new social movement is, thus, based solely on strategic, short-time calculations. It is worth noting that modifications in the political opportunity structure reflect changes that may occur in the general political culture over time. Consequently, alterations in the nature of politics itself can impact on the approaches adopted by those groups seeking to bring pressure to bear on political life.

Secondly, within the domain of the POS, Kriesi proposes to distinguish three properties of a political system: the formal institutional structure, informal procedures and prevailing strategies with regard to challengers, and the configuration of power relevant for the confrontation with the challengers. The first two categories provide the framework for the general setting which underlies the setting up of any new social movement, i.e. the nature of the institutions which challengers may take exception to and secondly the manner in which the challenges posed by a new social movement are likely to be faced by the establishment. This second property will significantly contribute to the type of new social movement which is likely to develop, since this will generally take account of the manner in which it is likely to be received within the polity.

The third property governs the likely strategies which the authorities will adopt when faced with the mobilisation of a social movement. These strategies, according to Kriesi, will themselves define (a) the extent to which challenging collective actions will be facilitated or repressed by the authorities or established parties, (b) the chances of success such actions may expect to have, (c) the chances of success of the movement if no hostile action is taken against it. These conditions will play a crucial part in the likely conduct of a social movement and

the tactics which it will adopt.

Kriesi argues that formal access to the state is a function of the territorial centralisation of that state. In particular, he argues that decentralisation increases the prospects for formal access to the institutions since significant decision making is carried out at a variety of levels. Consequently, systems such as Germany or Switzerland offer important possibilities for access at local level given the power configuration in those societies. A more centralised system greatly limits access at regional level and almost eliminates them at local level.

Secondly, he argues that formal access to the state is a function of the degree of concentration of state power. Where power is divided among a number of strong institutions, i.e. when the separation between the legislature and the executive, and between the executive and the judiciary is strongest, the possibilities for formal access are increased notably. The conditions just outlined amount to a system of checks and balances which is found in those countries where the powers of the executive are clearly curtailed by an executive which generally remains accountable to parliament. It is worth noting, as Kriesi does, that whereas such a system appears eminently desirable, and we may wish to associated with ideas regarding stable, developed democracies, it is not necessarily a practice that exists all over western Europe. Kriesi points to France as a country where the executive is all powerful.

Thirdly, he points to formal access to the state as a function of the coherence of the public administration. Where the public administration is most coherent, co-ordinated internally and professionalised, formal access will be more limited. Again, he points to France as an example of where this is the case, and here we see clearly how the state can be seen by potential protesters as something akin to an unassailable monolith when they wish to express a grievance against it. The centralised, universalist model which prevailed in France, virtually unchallenged until the decentralisation laws of the early 1980s, produced a state élite fiercely devoted to the ideal of the homogeneous French state in which

regional diversity which called into question aspirational the republican sameness of all regions of the country was regarded as a threat.

Finally, Kriesi contends that formal access is a function of the degree to which direct democratic procedures are institutionalised. Clearly, Switzerland is an example of a society where direct democracy enjoys a privileged position through the right of anyone to campaign to have a referendum organised on any question which concerns them through popular initiative. In the case of Switzerland, should a campaign receive a certain number of signatures, the government is obliged to hold a national referendum on the issue.

When analysing the question of formal access to the state in an attempt to ascertain the likely dynamics and extent of social movements within a given polity, it is worth bearing in mind that the factors governing access to the state apply to inputs to the political system but that the framework in which they operate also impacts on the outputs from that system. Thus Kriesi points out that federal, fragmented and incoherent states with direct democratic institutions have difficulty in arriving at decisions and imposing them on society. Consequently, social movements will look upon weak states with weak structures as fertile ground for the mobilisation of collective action.

Depending on the structure of the state in question, challengers such as social movements will be met with strategies which are exclusive (repressive, confrontative, polarising) or integrative (facilitative, co-operative, assimilative). The approach in question will, naturally, be the result of a long established tradition in each country.

Kriesi puts forward the following as a model of the institutional structures of four case study countries.

	Weak State	Strong state
Exclusive	formalistic inclusion - formal, but no informal facilitation of access; strong repression - possibility of veto, but no substantive concessions (Germany)	full exclusion - neither formal nor informal facilitation of access; strong repression - possibility of neither veto nor substantive concessions (France)
Inclusive	full procedural integration - formal and informal facilitation of access weak repression - possibility of veto, but no substantive concessions (Switzerland)	informal cooptation - no formal, but informal, facilitation of access weak repression - no possibility of veto, but substantive concessions (Netherlands)

Obviously, one is tempted to ask whether one approach, inclusive or exclusive, is 'better' than another, and naturally this question cannot be easily answered. This is as a result of the historic underpinnings of the approach adopted in each individual country, and the cultural reasons behind this. It may be argued that where the institutions of the state are at their strongest, repression can be most effective since social movements are facing a tough battle to impose their will on a monolithic state. However, this, as with virtually any theory in political analysis, is only partly true. Kriesi refers to the periodic eruption of serious social protests in France as evidence of the manner in which, although the state may succeed in containing discontent for a certain period, the discontent will manage to surface occasionally and often in a spectacular manner. The massive numbers of people these heads of steam bring on to the streets frequently force French governments into embarrassing policy U-turns.

2.7 The POS and the incorporation of interest groups in political structures.

It is, in the first instance, important to clarify aspects of the POS insofar as they relate to the particular cases of Ireland and France. Whilst Ireland is a country with a very centralised form of government which would, thus, justify the assumption that it would adopt an exclusivist approach to new challenges, it must also be pointed out that referenda are frequently used to address major political issues in the country. A certain number of these referenda are necessary since altering the Irish constitution requires popular approval. It is also the case, however, that certain groups in Ireland, particularly those active from a moral standpoint, have succeeded to forcing referenda to deal with questions through constitutional changes which might, in other societies, have been addressed through other approaches such as legislation in parliament. A particular example of this is the question of abortion where a plan to insert a constitutional ban on this practice was actually successful in 1983. Divorce had also been forbidden by a constitutional ban, but this was finally lifted in a referendum in late-1995.

The recourse to referenda in Ireland, required by the provisions of the constitution, has opened up the way for a variety of interest groups to use a referendum campaign or the prospect of one to seek to advance their particular agenda in this way. As we shall see later in this thesis, one of the particular issues raised in this way has been the country's European policy and, in particular, the future of Ireland's tradition of neutrality. A variety of groups, generally on the left-wing but also including the Green Party and a number of 'community' groups, became vociferous in their claims that the path being adopted towards European unification would lead to the end of Irish non-alignment and a variety of undesirable consequences such as wholesale conscription and Irish soldiers risking their lives in foreign battles. The fear of undesirable outside influences stemming from our European involvement also attracted the attention of those groups campaigning on the more traditional moral issues of divorce and abortion. Fear of continental morals contaminating Irish ones played its part in gathering a range of interest groups together to oppose

certain European referenda.

Despite the assumptions contained in the POS model which would lead to the supposition that the Irish model might be exclusivist – particularly the absence of effective decentralisation of powers to local government and other bodies –, there has in fact been the steady development of partnership structures in Ireland aimed at incorporating a range of interests into national economic and social planning. The circumstances behind this process will be detailed in the next chapter. However, suffice it to say at this point that, although much of the partnership process still involves actors with a primarily economic brief, the National Economic and Social Forum has as one of its remits the broadening of the partnership process and the inclusion of groups who have thus far been excluded from much of the action.

With respect to France, the argument is made that the more closed POS allows for the inclusion of new actors only when this can be of specific use to one of the established political parties. Thus, the willingness of the Socialist Party to accommodate a range of new social movements during the 1970s as it carried through a range of internal reforms was seen as an effective way of sidelining the Communist Party which had traditionally been seen as being more sensitive to the concerns of these groups. During its prolonged periods in government, however, Kriesi contends that the policy of the French socialists was at worst exclusive and at best one of what he terms repressive pre-emption. Indeed, we see a particular difference between France and Ireland in the manner in which the presidential system of government brought in by the Fifth Republic sought, explicitly, to limit the array of political issues which could be impinged upon by the range of political actors and opinions in the country, whilst in Ireland the manner in which referenda are needed to change the constitution – and thus necessary on a range of issues – points to a system which positively encourages direct, public participation on a range of questions. In this way, the required recourse to referenda, although often seen as divisive, actually serves to include the greatest possible range of opinion in the making of particularly important

decisions, and may actually be seen as a legitimising force in the same way as the partnership programme today.

2.8 The political culture of conflict and consensus

We looked earlier in this chapter at the central ideas behind political culture and its examination. I want to move on here to a discussion of the issues raised in analysing the political culture of conflict and consensus as it affects this thesis.

Analysing structural conditions is concerned with the power of governments, political parties, social groups and transnational institutions over the policy process. Effective political action by protestors is dependent on the existence of favourable structural conditions. Resource mobilisation theorists contend that, if structural opportunities outweigh structural constraints, there will exist an impetus for people to take part in opposition movements aimed at transforming the status quo. Inherent in this belief is the view that opposition movements need access to certain resources in order to achieve their aims. These resources can include money, information, weapons etc... If state repression is only limited and the groups are able to attain a high degree of freedom from state control, then the conditions will exist for organising effective forms of political protest against the State. If, however, the State is powerful and repressive, it is much more difficult for dissident groups to move against it. The mixture of fear and intimidation that can arise in such cases can lead to fragmentation among the opposition groups who disagree regarding the best forms of protest to engage in.

An analysis of the behavioural aspects of political protest attempts to focus on the manner in which individual behaviour within a protest or dissident movement is impacted on by cultural values or socio-political structures dominant in that society. Central to these values is the extent to which people believe their protests are likely to achieve success. The theory that people make rational choices in terms of their political choices and participation leads inexorably to the conclusion that, in terms of their acquiescence or otherwise in protests,

people assess what the likely outcome of such protests will be. In addition, even when people believe that participation in protests will actually achieve results, there will be divergence over the nature of these results and the desired beneficiaries of them. Purists will participate in movements because of the intrinsic worth of certain values or principles thereby being defended or promoted. Pragmatists will participate because they view the protests as being an effective mechanism for achieving tangible benefits which they believe will impact on their lives in particular, such as lower taxes or a better way of life for themselves or their families. This is not to suggest that protesters anticipate a change in the attitude of the authorities at the time they set initiate their action. Rather, they view their action as being the only way to achieve such a change and they determine the type of action they will engage in on the basis of the desired result and the anticipated level of difficulty in bringing this about.

Social conflict may become deeply rooted in society as a means of bringing about social change. As such, it becomes a cultural phenomenon seen as part and parcel of the political process. In the particular case of France, we may argue that social conflict has been a facet of the country's political culture since the Revolution in 1789. Although the revolution may have had as its aim the emancipation of all men in the values of the Enlightenment, the new structures put in place – *département, préfet* – had the effect of putting in place a new élite which in time was to become the focus of protests not dissimilar to those which overthrew the previous régime.

The main division which emerged during this period in France was, however, that between Left and Right. Douglas Johnson points out that, at a meeting of the Estates-General in 1789, the nobles, believing they were entitled to a place of honour, took their seats to the right of the President, thus leaving their opponents with no option but to take their seats to his left.[25] For Johnson, this event presents the inevitable view of the country as being in a state of permanent conflict between two Frances: on the right the traditional elements deriving their culture from the heritage of the aristocracy, the Church and a certain view of

France's cultural and historical importance. They were opposed in revolutionary times by an alliance of officials, professionals and notable figures of non-noble backgrounds who managed to ally themselves with the peasants, artisans, shopkeepers and others in order to overthrow the hegemonic power of the Right.

For Johnson, it is possible to carry these divisions forward and use them in order to provide an explanation for the evolution of the major divisions in French society over an extended period. Whilst he accepts that it is facile to propose a division of France into two unchanging, opposing camps, at great moments of national tension for more than two centuries, the country has, rather than uniting, shown a discernible division into Left and Right. He provides a framework for this division:

> "Clerical and anti-clerical; Bonapartist or republican; monarchist or republican; nationalist or anti-nationalist; Dreyfusard or anti-Dreyfusard; Vichy or resistance. Sometimes the dichotomy has been shifted, so that the two Frances were more geographically defined, thus there was rural France and urban France. France north and south of the Loire, or the France that was Paris and the rest of France (*'le désert français'*) as it was strikingly called. Sometimes the geographical dichotomy was more economic, and there was a France which was divided between those *départements* which were dynamic and active and those *départements* which were stagnant and somnolent."[26]

The Left/Right cleavage is, of course, the most common one across the established western European liberal democracies but it is reasonable to argue that it originated in France. It went through something of a modification in the aftermath of the Second World War when a large section of the Right joined the republican fold for the first time, largely as a response to the shame of Vichy which saw the more conservative elements in the country supporting the Pétanist régime in its collaboration with Nazi Germany. Much of the new support for the Republic from elements on the Right was a direct consequence of the role played by General de Gaulle whose perfect right-wing credentials reassured many about the respectability of the Republic.

If we compare the French situation with the Irish, the inevitable conclusion that we arrive at is that Ireland's political culture is significantly less radical and sharply divided than is the case in France. A key question that arises surrounding this notion concerns the fact that the Irish nation was born of a revolutionary impulse and might, consequently, be assumed to be more revolutionary in its outlook. For Brian Girvin, however, the fact that independent Ireland was born of violence should not be taken as implying that the underlying political desire in the country was to achieve great social change. He argues that the great bulk of the groupings who backed the final push for independence were actually highly conservative in their outlook in social and economic terms. Thus, in Ireland, argues Girvin, the revolution itself was not revolutionary.[27]

The conservatism evident in Irish political culture stems, at least in part, from the role played by the various churches in the country, and particularly the Catholic Church, from the eighteenth century onwards. A number of distinct, religious-based cultures existed in Ireland at this time. There was the Anglican élite that controlled the political, economic and social life of the country and depended on the link with Britain for their power. There was the Presbyterian tradition, concentrated primarily in north-east Ulster and which became increasingly radical and democratic during the eighteenth century under the influence of the Scottish enlightenment. Sectarian tensions, ever prevalent in rural Ulster, prevented the Presbyterians from making significant overtures to other faiths. Finally, there was the Catholic tradition which developed in a number of ways from the nineteenth century onwards as a result of the Devotional Revolution. Girvin argues that the failure of these groups to achieve a union on radical republican lines during the 1790s paved the way for them to splinter into different factions with different aims and this splintering was to mark the troubled development of Ireland over the intervening centuries.

Insofar as Irish Catholicism is concerned, it did present a liberal face in the early part of the nineteenth century with Daniel O'Connell's drive for emancipation in the context of enhancing democratic freedoms for all citizens of the United

Kingdom. By later in the century, however, the tone had become much more conservative. The Devotional Revolution in the Irish Catholic Church imposed the full doctrine of Rome on a Church which, hitherto, had been characterised by its folk identity. The main development with characterised the Devotional Revolution was institutional development, the building of large numbers of new churches, a significant increase in both clergy and laity, the enforcement of clerical forms of dress on the clergy, and an insistence on doctrinal orthodoxy and clampdown on many 'folk' aspects of the religious observance among the faithful. This emphasis on doctrine and an insistence on strict Catholic moral teaching was practised in the context of a society which had remained overwhelmingly rural and proprietorial. The consequence of this was to posit Irish society as distinct and better than those societies such as Britain, which were Protestant, urban and secular. Irish Catholic identity became an illiberal one, which considered itself to be clearly superior to the liberal and urbanising attitudes prevailing elsewhere.

Such a framing of national identity led to the development of an anti-intellectualism and an isolationism in Ireland from many of the values of modernity espoused elsewhere. It would be wrong, however, to suggest that no modernising influences were present in Ireland during the nineteenth century. Joe Lee contends that a number of vital modernising factors were in place in Ireland by the mid-nineteenth century including, of particular note, the education system. Whilst I accept this argument advanced by Lee, I feel it is important to clarify it by stating one of the vital considerations here is the fact that the Church was central to both the education system and the health system, and consequently was able to enforce its own doctrinal outlook on these institutions.

The suspicions held by the Catholic Church in general regarding new forms of democratic governance could take second place only to a proposition which actually presented it with the possibility of enjoying greater influence than under the existing system of government. The influence enjoyed by the Catholic

Church in Ireland, and its identification with the nationalist people, meant that it would enjoy a key role after independence. After all, the aforementioned health and education systems that had already been put in place prior to independence represented an infrastructure which was to prove all too valuable to the new state. Consequently, the Church was happy to immediately recognise the legitimacy of the new Irish Free State, and those who had fought for freedom were happy to concentrate their efforts on the simple issue of securing independence rather than on more fundamental questions of social reform.

Michel Peillon has described this state of affairs very ably as a blend of 'cautious realism and nationalist rhetoric.' The major political parties in the country had their origins in the Civil War that followed the foundation of the State, and consequently voter allegiances to them and their own stances on important national issues had been directly influenced by that defining moment in Irish history. However, Peillon adds:

"Many doubt, and with good reason, whether treaty politics play a significant role in everyday political practice, where government decisions tend to be dictated by short-term pragmatic considerations."[28]

Peillon continues:

"The predominance given to Irish political culture in explaining political phenomena may be attributed to the need to account for the political stability that has so far characterised political life in the Republic."[29]

Peillon asserts that one of the reasons which may be put forward to explain the stability of the parliamentary order in Ireland is the sense of continuity between the end of the British administration and the beginning of self-rule. There was also widespread literacy, a communications system linking villages and towns, an efficient administrative machine and, importantly, a programme of land reform – nearly completed and in place – by 1922. Indeed, the importance of the latter point is key, since many of the issues which had caused such conflict among the peasantry just a few decades before were almost completely resolved

by the time the first native government took office. Although these did resurface prominently in inter-party rivalries after independence, they never aroused the same passions as had been witnessed in the periods of agitation of the late-nineteenth century. In addition, the influential Catholic Church put its full force firmly behind the State from the outset, thus ensuring that there was never the risk of a serious confrontation between the State and an institution which commanded the allegiance of the overwhelming majority of people in the country.

Another key suggestion in Peillon's analysis is that certain authoritarian tendencies in Irish life have contributed to popular support for parliamentary institutions. However, he freely accepts that social change has made this explanation steadily less plausible over the intervening decades. One of the more compelling explanations provided by Peillon's study returns to the idea of continuity when the country gained independence. Ireland had, after all, been fully integrated into the British parliamentary tradition for over a century by the time it gained independence, and whatever the Irish may have thought of British rule, they had gained extensive experience participating in parliamentary democracy and had come to trust it through the various electoral reforms that had been introduced throughout the nineteenth century. The fact that the first Dáil was made up of representatives elected to the British parliament in 1918 shows the extent to which the democratic system was accepted and granted legitimacy by the people. As with so many of the other great institutions such as the education system, hospitals etc..., there was an established tradition in place before the foundation of the State, thus leading these to be accepted by the people without difficulty.

2.9 Conflict, consensus and political stability

In analysing political culture in the context of conflict and consensus, I have deemed it appropriate to include some discussion here of ideas of political stability, since there is clearly a link between societies which we view as being

conflictive and our idea of their stability or otherwise. Summarising a number of values often seen as being linked to assumptions of political stability, Leon Hurwitz has described these as (a) the absence of violence, (b) governmental longevity/duration, (c) the existence of a legitimate constitutional régime, (d) the absence of structural change and (e) a multifaceted societal attribute.[30] Huntingdon and Dominguez have suggested that the concept of stability contains two elements, namely order and continuity. They state that:

> "The first involves the absence of violence, force, coercion and disruption from the political system. The second identifies stability with a relative absence of change in the critical components of the political system, a lack of discontinuity in political evolution, the absence from the society of significant social forces and political movements which wish to bring about fundamental changes in the political system."[31]

The major difficulty in discussing or attempting to define such a concept as political stability is the fact that semantics plays a major role in how any individual will perceive the central notion which the term implies. A person living in a liberal western democracy which is well established, in which the same institutions, conflict resolution mechanisms, cleavages and ideologies have coexisted over an extended period of time will believe himself to be living in a stable régime. Indeed, this assumption will probably be correct. The problem is that the notion of stability is hereby applied to a particular set of circumstances, to which are probably applied also notions of democracy, individual freedoms, equal treatment before the law and the resolution of all disputes by non-violent means. Is it, however, reasonable to suggest that these are the only criteria by which stability may be measured? I would suggest that the answer here would have to be 'no'.

There are plenty of countries in which force, coercion, the infringement of civil liberties and violence are employed without these countries necessarily considered as being fundamentally unstable. Is it reasonable to consider many countries of the Arabian peninsula which are profoundly undemocratic and often repressive as unstable countries? Furthermore, is it really true to infer that the

mere existence of significant anti-system forces is an indication of an unstable country? How do we measure significant? If 20% of voters in an election vote for anti-system parties, we may well consider this as significant. However, if the other 80% of voters support parties largely in favour of working with the status quo, we surely have to contend that the society in question is, broadly speaking, perfectly stable.

Consequently, a better definition of stability is perhaps put forward by Bridge and Farlie who suggest that political stability refers primarily to régime continuity:

> "The continuity of basic features of a régime seems to form the only viable and truly general definition of stability, while their non-continuance constitutes régime change."[32]

Here we move away from notions that one type of political system is intrinsically more stable than another, and towards what appears to be an acceptable comparative framework for looking at stability. Taking the definition further, David Sanders suggested the following:

> "The extent to which a political system may be characterised as 'unstable' at any given point in time varies in direct proportion to the extent to which the occurrence or non-occurrence of changes in, and challenges to the government, régime or community deviates from the previous system specific 'normal' pattern of régime/government/community changes or challenges; a pattern which will itself vary over time."[33]

Patterns of conflict and consensus are, thus, not reflections on the stability or otherwise of a society. They reflect aspects of the political culture of a country, and of the dynamic between the various groups within it. Based on their history and the relationship between the range of political actors, countries will adopt measures which will have the effect of either facilitating the inclusion of various political or interest groups in the decision making protests, or hindering this, as described in the political opportunity structure presented by Kriesi. Societies which are characterised by social conflict, either on a periodic or ongoing basis, are thus not necessarily unstable societies. Rather, they can be societies where a

strong and exclusive state limits the influence pressure or opposition groups may enjoy, forcing these groups to resort to a variety of forms of protest in order to advance their cause. Indeed, it is often the case, particularly in the French context, that concessions are granted in the aftermath of a concerted protest movement which would not have been granted in the absence of such a movement.

There are reasons why certain societies may act in this exclusive manner towards pressure groups. In cases such as France, a presidential and exclusivist system has been seen as being necessary in order to achieve stability which was lacking in periods of more parliamentary rule. In addition, certain countries, such as Germany, limit the type of parties who may participate in their parliaments in order to exclude elements which had previously undermined the nature of their democracy, or which threaten to do so. In such cases, the parties which participate in the life of the nation will tend to occupy a broad middle ground of political opinion, thus generating the conditions for more fringe elements to flourish outside the conventional structures and a range of extra-parliamentary measures to pursue their cause.

2.10 Conclusion

The political culture of any country is determined by a range of historical and cultural factors. It impacts on the manner in which individuals within a polity perceive it and their role within it, and, as we have seen, is likely to impact upon the manner in which demands are articulated and pursued within it. Certain countries will have an open political culture in which new demands or groups seeking access to the mainstream will be accommodated relatively easily. Other countries are more restrictive, and the model put forward by Kriesi, on the basis of extensive research, presents an overview of the opportunities for gaining entry to the political arena in a particular country. In the next chapter, we shall take a more in-depth look at a number of the historical factors which have contributed to the social and political makeup of contemporary Ireland and France.

[1] Mahler, G.S., *Comparative Politics: An Institutional and Cross-National Approach (second edition)*; Englewood Cliffs, N.J. : Prentice Hall, 1995, pp 6-11

[2] I am referring here particularly to the allegations in Spain regarding illegal funding of the Socialist Party under Felipe González, and allegations of a dirty war against Basque separatist guerillas under the same government.

[3] Dogan., M., and Pelassy, D., *How to Compare Nations: Strategies in Comparative Politics*; Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 1984, p.3

[4] Calvert, P., *An Introduction to Comparative Politics*; Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993, p.20

[5] See Lane, J.E., and Ersson, S., *Comparative Politics: An Introduction and New Approach*; Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994, pp 36-43

[6] Calvert, P., *op cit.*, pp.20-22

[7] Mahler, G.S., *op cit.*, p.4

[8] Lijphart, A., 'The Comparative Cases Strategy in Comparative Research' in *Comparative Political Studies* **8**, 1975

[9] quoted in Mahler, G.S., *op cit.*, p.15

[10] http://ps.ucdavis.edu/classes/ire001/cult/polcultu.htm

[11] Andrain, C.F. and Apter, D.E., *Political protest and social change: analysing politics*, London: Macmillan Press, 1995, p.2

[12] Eatwell, R., 'The importance of the political culture approach' in Eatwell, R., eds. *European political cultures: conflict or convergence?*, London, New York: Routledge, 1997, p.1

[13] ibid., pp 2-4

[14] Kavanagh, D., *Political Culture*, London: Macmillan, 1972, pp 10-11.

[15] Inglehart, R., *Culture Shift*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, p.19

[16] ibid.

[17] ibid., p.16

[18] Mahler, G.S., *op. cit.*, p.15

[19] Jenkins, B. and Copsey, N., 'National Identity in France' in Jenkins, B., and Sofos, S., eds, *Nation and Identity in Contemporary Europe*, London & New York, Routledge, 1996, p.113

[20] Mény, Y., Government and Politics in Western Europe; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996, p.3

[21] ibid.

[22] Denver, D., in Kolinsky, E., eds., *Opposition in Western Europe*, London & Sydney: Croom Helm Ltd, 1987, pp 78-79

[23] For further discussion on Christian Democracy see Mény, Y., *op. cit.*, and Gallagher, M., Laver, M., and Mair, P., *Representative Government in Modern Europe*, New York: McGraw Hill, 1995.

[24] For this and all references to Hanspeter Kriesi see: Kriesi, H and Koopmans, R, *New Social Movements in western Europe: a comparative analysis*; London: UCL Press, 1995, pp 167-197

[25] Johnson, D., 'The Two Frances: The Historical Debate' in Wright, V. eds, *Conflict and Consensus in France*, London: Frank Cass, 1979, p.3

[26] ibid., p.4

[27] Girvin, B., 'Ireland' in Eatwell, R. eds., *European Political Culture: Conflict or Convergence?*, London, New York: Routledge, 1997, pp 122-126

[28] Peillon, M., *Contemporary Irish Society: An Introduction*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1992, p.121

[29] ibid., p.123

[30] Hurwitz, L., 'An Index of Democratic Political Stability: A Methodological Note', *Comparative Political Studies*, **4**, pp 41-68

[31] Huntingdon, S. and Dominguez, J.I., 'Political Development' in Greenstein, F.I. and Polsby, N.W., (eds) *Handbook of Political Science*, Volume 3: Macropolitical Theory, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1975, pp 1-114

[32] Budge, I., and Farlie, D.J., 'Predicting Regime Change: A Cross-national Investigation with Aggregate Data 1950-1980', *Quality and Quantity*, **15**, pp 335-364

[33] Sanders, D., *Patterns of Political Instability*, London: Macmillan, 1981, p.66

Chapter 3

Historical and social factors in the contemporary political culture of Ireland and France

3.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented an overview of the prevalence of conflict and consensus in the political cultures of Ireland in France. I would now like to develop this somewhat by deepening the historical analysis of both countries and by painting a picture of the role of the state and different social actors in both of them. It is worth noting that the major differences between both countries have much to do with their distinctive histories and the way in which the State has developed and consolidated its power in each. The dynamics in question are complex and arriving at an explanation which will describe these fully is not an easy, or indeed a finite task. Nonetheless, a number of distinct dynamics exist in both societies, and by tying these together, we may reasonably expect to arrive at a better appreciation of both countries.

As I have suggested above, historical factors will play a key role in providing an overview of both Ireland and France. The French state we see today is the result of an evolution which has taken place over an extended period between the time of the Revolution of 1789 and today. It was consolidated in an extended by an extended push by the authorities to put in place secular institutions at the expense of the Catholic Church, which was hostile to the Republic. In consolidating its power, the Republic merely aggravated the hostility of Church elements towards it by steadily seeking to deprive them of those influences which they still held in society as a whole. From the very moment of the Revolution, there had been the emergence of a Left/Right cleavage in French society, as described by Douglas Johnson earlier. The Left was always represented by those more progressive elements whilst the conservatives belonged to the Right, and remained deeply

suspicious of the secular state over an extended period – indeed until after the Second World War.

In the case of Ireland, the State developed and forged an identity radically different to its French counterpart. For one thing, the Irish nationalists who gained independence in 1922 were, for the most part, devout Catholics who recognised the role played by the Catholic Church among the populace in the century prior to independence, and also its support for the nationalist movement. In particular, the network of institutions set up by the Church, such as schools and hospitals, constituted a resource which was badly needed by the new State and which it suited its founding fathers to conserve. Consequently, there was little incentive to provoke a dispute with the Church over their identity post-independence. Whatever the merits of this approach, and indeed it may legitimately be questioned in the sense that it is questionable for a state to consciously entrust such an important responsibility as education, it did secure for the nascent state the support of the Catholic Church, and this support was particularly important in the life of the new state.

3.1 Ireland: The development of a nation and the role of the Catholic Church

I wish to begin by looking at the Irish situation, and particularly the question of the role of the Catholic Church and the manner in which it may be seen as something of a state substitute in terms of the range of services it has traditionally operated, very much in place of the state.

In France, the republican state has traditionally been seen as the agent of modernity. This view of the state stems from a number of factors including the principles of the revolutionary era whereby the citizen was vested with a range of rights which would have been inconceivable under the *Ancien Régime*. In addition, however, as the republic consolidated its influence into the nineteenth century, there was the development of a range of sectors guided by the founding

principles I referred to above. Perhaps of most significance among these was education, which was set to become a highly contentious issue over time as we shall see. State schools were based on the idea that science should predominate over any denominational or confessional influence. Thus, there was no possibility of an Irish style situation existing whereby the Church would be allowed to operate 'state' schools as I shall describe.

The Irish Catholic Church has adopted the practice, as seen in other predominantly Catholic countries, of seeking to have a continued, strong input into moral issues both among its own followers and at state level in general. It has historically been a strong force, associated as it is with the memory of the repression of the Catholic faith during the time of the penal laws and its role from the period of the Land League to the final push for independence. Another factor placing the Catholic Church at the centre of Irish society is its role as a modernising force, particularly insofar as the provision of education is concerned. From the outset, the Catholic Church has been centrally involved in the provision of education to Catholics, both through fee paying schools and the charitable work of various religious orders. As such it was seen as relieving the subordinate situation of Catholics by providing them with the most vital means known to escape from their inferior status - education.

This view of the Irish Catholic Church as a modernising force is of key importance in analysing the contribution of the Church to Irish society over the past 150 years. Historical factors, most notably the Penal Laws, had seen Irish Catholics denied an education and prospects for social advancement since the eighteenth century. In the aftermath of the Famine, a number of changes were initiated which saw the Irish Catholic Church undergo significant change, in terms not only of its pastoral but also of its social role.

It is an often overlooked fact that the growth of organised religion in Ireland is a relatively recent phenomenon. The traditional faith, which is generally traced back to the arrival of St Patrick in c. 432, survived over the centuries in a very

localised form. Religion was as much about Christian faith as it was about the incorporation of diverse aspects of local traditions dating from as far back as the Celtic period. Such characteristics of Irish religious practice as wakes, pilgrimages to the Shrines of local saints and patterns date from the traditional period which lasted up to the middle of the nineteenth century. In addition, church attendance was significantly lower than that to be seen in later years. In the major cities it is estimated that Mass attendance ran at between 50% and 75%, however in rural areas the figure was understood to be as low as 25%.[1]

The event, or rather series of events that changed this, are now referred to as the Devotional Revolution. The origins of this period are generally attributed to the immediate aftermath of the famine, however there had been a number of developments before this time, such as the foundation of certain religious orders such as the Sisters of Mercy and the Christian Brothers in the earlier part of the century. However, it was in the aftermath of the famine than matters begun to take off.

Peadar Kirby identifies the characteristics that have defined the Irish Catholic Church since the famine, and the burdens with which it has struggled, as institutionalism, clericalism and devotionalism.[2] The institutional development of the Irish Church was marked by a huge growth in the number of churches and similarly in the numbers of religious orders and the membership of them. In addition the numbers of priests and the role they played evolved similarly. Kirby recalls how, at the turn of the nineteenth century, nuns were practically absent in Ireland and there were only 400 male religious. Priests did not wear distinctive clothing and, as such, were indistinguishable from the local community. At the heart of the institutional development of the Irish Church were the bishops, who spearheaded the drive to bring the Irish Church more in line with conventional Roman teachings and practices. The success of the Bishops' crusade was to result in the complete transformation of the priests and religious of Ireland into a disciplined and obedient unit, whose adherence to the structures of the Roman Church could no longer be called into question.[3]

Some statistics from the period show that by the 1860s, there were 2,339 parish churches in the country, of which 2,000 had been built since the beginning of the century. The number of diocesan priests rose from 2,183 in 1840 to 2,938 in 1901.[4] The growth in the numbers of institutionalised religious was coupled by the development at this time of the Catholic presence in other aspects for society. Throughout the early to mid nineteenth century, religious orders were involved in setting up institutions such as homes for the poor, hospitals and schools.

In addition, there was the growth of seminaries. The legacy of the penal laws and the folk nature of the Irish Church, meant that clergy had hitherto received their training at seminaries on the Continent. From the end of the eighteenth century there had been moves to establish new seminaries at home. Carlow and Kilkenny were set up in 1793 and Maynooth in 1795.

The new growth of the Irish Catholic Church as an institution accompanied the major effect on Irish society of the famine, and the resultant commencement of the process of emigration which has continued in various waves until this day. The change occasioned by the famine led, I would argue, to two major phenomena occurring. The growth in the number of churches and religious accompanied an ongoing, continuous fall in Irish population levels. As a result, the institutional Church could be closer to its flock than ever and have a much more direct input into the matters affecting their daily lives. Secondly, the movement of Irish people out of the country, into societies in which Catholicism was either a minority faith or one battling for its identity within a melting pot of other beliefs, meant that the Irish Church needed both to shape the religious faith of those destined to emigrate and provide them with clergy once there.

Education has long been a key priority for the Catholic Church in many countries. We know that Christian Democrat parties, the majority of which were established to defend Catholic interests, took a very strong line on this issue given the importance attached by the Catholic Church to the principle that

Catholic children should receive a denominational education. The debate regarding denominational versus state education, and the funding and operation of education, was a contentious one involving the Christian Democrats in Italy, the former West Germany and, as we know, France.[5]

The Catholic Church thus began setting up hospitals, schools and other institutions operated and often staffed by religious. In this manner, given the fact that the overwhelming majority of the people had hitherto been excluded from such services, the Catholic Church effectively was setting up some of the key institutions of the Irish state some seventy years before the state itself was established. Whilst this may seem like a debate between secularism and devotionalism, my argument is that it goes much deeper than this in the Irish context. As we have seen earlier, the relationship between Catholic beliefs and a hostile state was a phenomenon in various continental countries, and contributed to the growth of Christian Democrat parties. In Ireland, the contributing factors were somewhat different.

In the nineteenth century, the Church's problem was not a secular state, rather it was a state with an established religion but which had repressed and then failed the Catholic people, thus creating the incentive for a range of Catholic institutions for the Catholic people. Indeed, as I suggested above, with the foundation of the Irish Free State, any tensions between Church and state were set to lessen yet further, as Catholic institutions continued to flourish albeit under state tutelage. By this expression, I mean that religious orders remained the owners of those schools and other institutions they had built and conserved a high degree of autonomy over their management, however they received state funding since their schools were, in the great majority of cases, operating as public institutions, and of course teaching the curriculum as prescribed by the Department of Education. I do not wish to deviate excessively here on to some of the more tragic revelations of recent years concerning mistreatment and indeed sexual abuse of children by members of religious orders. This is likely to be the result of various factors including the lack of adequate screening for men and

women entering religious life. I would just say, however, that when we consider the very large degree of confidence which was placed in religious orders in the administration of a wide range of services particularly regarding children, we are almost inevitably faced with the old maxim that if power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely. The only difference here is perhaps that the word power ought to be replaced with trust.

It is necessary to balance this analysis with a more general perspective on the secularism, and an attempt to interpret it in the Irish context. In a recent article, Nikki R. Keddie addresses the relationship between secularism and the state in an attempt to move towards a broader comparative framework. In her article, she compares Ireland and Poland in the sense that nationalism in both countries has been tied to the Church.[6] Indeed, Keddie goes on to point out that most nationalist identities are secularist and that the religious toleration that tends to be favoured by governments is tied to a weakening of belief primarily as a hedge against fundamentalism. Keddie also points out that most modern states wish the primary loyalty of the citizen to be to the state or nation concerned and not to the Church or other institution. Indeed, she points out that nationalism may be seen as a substitute for religion, and she alludes to the French distinction between religion and modernity by pointing out that most seventeenth or eighteenth century religious conflicts had come to be seen as "bloody, indecisive and inimical to national unity."[7]

In order to better situate the position enjoyed by the Catholic Church in Irish society, it is helpful to look at a number of the specific stages and events which have marked the course of Irish history in this regard. I stated earlier that Catholic institutions essentially represented a layer of Irish Catholic statelike structures in place well ahead of the actual state itself. In arriving at a better understanding of the historical situation, it is also important to bear in mind that the years before independence were marked by a number of stages of administration which themselves contributed to the final shape of the relationship between Church and state, particularly in the field of education.

Following the 1918 General Election, the victorious Sinn Féin MPs refused to take their seats in the House of Commons and set up the first Dáil in Dublin. In the climate which prevailed at the time, Dáil Éireann was not in a position to appoint 'ministers' with responsibilities for all the conventional portfolios associated with fully functional governments. Nonetheless, this did not prevent the formulation of distinct priorities for Irish education during this period. In his book *Church, state and the control of schooling in Ireland,* E. Brian Titley recognises that "it would have been financially impossible to replace the national school system."[8] However, he goes on to point out that plans existed during this period to supplement national schools with new Irish-speaking primary schools. Although it would have been in the government's power to establish such schools under state control, this was not considered. Indeed, it was reported that the bishop of Waterford had been invited to act as patron of one such school. As Titley remarks:

"**The managerial situation was not to be interfered with, even in the cause of Irish.**"[9]

The ties between the Catholic Church and Irish education after independence stem from much of the work on curriculum development which was undertaken during 1921 and 1922. A strong bond links three strands of the elaboration of education policy at this time. These strands are, perhaps not surprisingly, nationalism - Titley even suggests chauvinism -, the Irish language and religion, specifically Catholicism. The first two are obviously closely related, although nationalism as such rears its head in the case of history where the call was made for the teaching of the subject:

"**...to develop the best traits of national character and to inculcate national pride and self-respect. This will not be attained by the cramming of dates and details but rather by showing that the Irish race has fulfilled a great mission in the advancement of civilisation and that, on the whole, the Irish nation has amply justified its existence.**"[10]

With regard to Irish, the recommendation was made that:

Any discussion on the Church side of these developments must, in Titley's analysis focus in on the presence and role of two men: The Rev. Timothy Corcoran S.J., professor of education at University College Dublin and Eoin MacNeill, Irish Free State education minister. In the immediate period preceding independence, it is to Professor Corcoran that we must turn. He first came to prominence in the planning of the future Irish education system in the aftermath of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation Annual Congress 1920, when a conference was called regarding the design of a new Irish curriculum. Various groups including the Dáil's Irish department *Aireacht na Gaedhilge* agreed to participate and the National Programme Conference on Primary Instruction met for the first time on January 6 1921. Professor Corcoran agreed to act as adviser to the conference.

The recommendations of the conference were as outlined above, and they bore the strong influence of Professor Corcoran insofar as the whittling down of English influences was concerned.[12] Professor Corcoran also agreed to serve as adviser to the Dáil Commission on Secondary Education which sat from September 24 1921 to December 7 1922, and reported to the then Free State education minister Eoin MacNeill. At its first session, Frank Fahy, on behalf of Dáil education minister J.J. O'Kelly placed before the delegates - who included representatives from the Catholic Headmasters Association and the Christian Brothers - a view of what it was they were expected to come up with.

"He informed them that the purpose of their inquiry was to determine how best education could be structured in order to revive the ancient life of Ireland as a Gaelic state, Gaelic in language, and Gaelic and Christian in its ideals. "[13]

In many respects, this may be seen as summing up the entire philosophy which came to underpin the Irish educational system, and in placing their trust in Professor Corcoran the INTO, the Dáil and the other bodies involved were

choosing a powerful advocate for those values. It is not the within the scope of this chapter to discuss the nature of the curriculum that emerged from these discussions. Rather, I wish to look at another aspect of the terms of reference of the secondary commission, which was the requirement that it consider the coordination of the whole education system. Titley reports that this task was apparently left to a seven member coordinating committee presided over by Professor Corcoran. This grouping seems to have considered its mandate to be the coordination of educational programmes and as such it ignored questions of structural reorganisation.[14] Whether this was merely a matter of innocent interpretation, or a concession to Church interests cannot be assessed here. No copy of the commission's report remains in existence and the report itself has not been documented in an indepth way. However the Church's position was not to be challenged, a point reinforced by a statement from the Central Association of Catholic Clerical Managers on October 20 1921 as both the secondary commission and primary conference were engaged in their deliberations.

> **"We are confident that an Irish government established by the people for the people, while safeguarding the material interests of the new State, will always recognise and respect the principles which must regulate and govern Catholic education. And in view of the impending changes in Irish education, we wish to reassert the great fundamental principle that the only satisfactory system of education for Catholics is one wherein Catholic children are taught in Catholic schools by Catholic teachers under Catholic control."[15]**

Thus we see the strong ties that bound the new Irish State to the beliefs and outlook of the Catholic Church even before its official birth, and which meant that the Church was destined to play an important role in its consolidation in the decades after independence.

This state of affairs is, of course, in marked contrast to that which prevailed in France, and I shall turn to analyse this a little later. It is worth noting, however, that there is more than a contented Church to be borne in mind when looking at the consensus which, I wish to argue, has come to characterise Ireland today, and has its roots in the past. The broader left/right cleavage which characterises most European liberal democracies has also been absent Ireland. It is possible to

relate this to the events of 1918, when the Irish Labour Party, the oldest established political force in the State, held back from standing in order to allow Sinn Féin a clear run. This eclipsing of class based politics by the national issue has been a key element in Irish political culture over the course of this century, and has basically meant that the primary divisions in the country were on the national issue, as opposed to on social or redistributive concerns.

3.2 The Irish Labour Party: a victim of itself or of the society which evolved around it?

The extent to which the Labour Party became cast in its role as a party unable to pursue the type of agenda seen elsewhere was clear from many of the statements of its leaders around this time. Their statements seemed to echo the corporatist terms of the Catholic social movement which was gaining momentum in Ireland from the 1930s forward. This statement from the party leader from 1927-32, T.J. O'Connell, is indicative:

> **'Our ranks must be as comprehensive as our policies, uniting farmer and town worker, wage-earner, salary-earner, professional man, shop-keeper, industrialist, housewife, in the bonds of genuine political conviction, realist patriotism and patient enthusiasm for social progress and reconstruction.'[16]**

However, even though the Irish Labour Party never resembled other left wing movements in Europe in the scope of its militancy or effectiveness, Whyte points out that the militant legacy which led to the birth of the party in 1912 continued to play a role over several decades. It is perhaps paradoxical that we must note here the reality that the statement from T.J. O'Connell quoted above should have been made before the publication of *Quadragesimo Anno*, whereas during the 1930s when the impact of the Pope's encyclical was making itself felt very strongly, Labour should have been seen to move away from the national acceptance of the Pope's teaching.

During this period, a reference to a 'Workers Republic' appeared in the party's constitution, and against the backdrop of the Pope's teaching this caused grave concern to many elements within the party, including one of the more confessional affiliated unions, the I.N.T.O. The teachers lobbied the Labour leadership to alter the reference, a concession they succeeded in obtaining. Indeed they report that for having done so, they received "the express commendation of the general body of the Bishops."[17] The phrase 'Workers' Republic' was replaced by the following:

> "The Labour Party believes in a system of government which, while recognising the rights of private property, shall ensure that, where the common good requires, essential industries and services shall be brought under public ownership with democratic control."[18]

Although there was some internal dissent within the party to such an obvious act of deference to Catholic values, Whyte reports that it was a move which proved electorally advantageous to the party, with significant gains in both local and general elections over the following years.[19] The consolidation of Labour's conversion to Catholic social teaching came during the early 1940s as a result of a bitter conflict between a prominent party member William O'Brien and the experienced labour movement leader Jim Larkin. Larkin had remained outside the party fold until the 1940s, being significantly more militant than the party's position. However, he joined the party in the early part of the decade and succeeded in being approved as a Dáil candidate for the 1943 General Election. O'Brien, whose animosity towards Larkin was long standing, saw this as an excuse to fan the flames, and given the fact that Larkin had once been a communist, circulated stories of a communist plot to infiltrate the party. Militant Catholic opinion was thus mobilised, and The Standard obliged with stories supportive of O'Brien's position. This led to a split which lasted until 1950 and further affected the Labour Party's prospects of gaining enhanced influence and prestige in Irish politics.

The sheer measure of the Labour Party's tameness and lack of willingness to adopt radical postures was perhaps best summed up by Panitch. He categorised Labour as an:

"integrative political party, fulfilling systematic functions like representation and brokerage, demand conversion and aggregation, imbued with a conception of the social order as being basically unified rather than fissured, and effecting a compromise between the sectional interests of various classes in the society by means of policies 'in the national interest.'"[20]

This notion of national interest is one which tends to arise in Ireland in a manner which is particularly interesting. With the major 'socialist' party hemmed in as a result of allowing the national issue to take centre stage, and the country in desperate need of furthering its economic development, it was possible for Éamon de Valera's Fianna Fáil to appeal to a sense of national interest in pursuing a policy of economic self-sufficiency which was much less about a sense of practical economics than a desire to reinforce the country's sovereignty. This it did, first with the Economic War in the 1930s, and then with the broader policy of import substitution which gained a particular impetus during the Emergency. Fianna Fáil has been characterised by political scientists as a 'national party', appealing to the people and to other political forces to put aside sectional differences in favour of the national interest. To this extent, its role in the developing industrial relations mechanism in Ireland is interesting, and we shall look at this later. It is, however, reasonable to suggest that although the links between Irish nationalism and the Catholic Church were strong enough to represent a challenge to a strident left-leaning Labour Party in any circumstances, Labour never made much of an attempt in post-independence Ireland to recover from its self-imposed sidelining in 1918 and challenge the dominant policies in the country. It thus remained a weak, if inoffensive force generally, and failed to establish a clear niche for itself in Irish societies for several decades.

3.3 Catholicism in France: a vision divided

From the late-nineteenth century onwards, the development of Catholic social teaching had influenced the labour movement in a number of European countries. The Papal encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, published in 1891, presented the idea of relationships between employers and unions which were not necessarily conflictual, but rather could be based on certain common interests such as the success of the company, common Christian values and social justice.[21] The Catholic trade union movement started about this time and it adopted the name it has retained to the present day - CFTC - in 1919. A number of organisations were founded to spread social Catholic doctrine and there was also the development of a social Catholic press whose best known title was the Lyons-based *Chronique sociale de la France*. However there was to be a stern rebuke coming from the Vatican for those whose interests in Christian Democracy were leading them too far down the political road. In the aftermath of the founding of one of them, the influential *Sillon* movement by Marc Sangnier in 1899, Pope Leo XIII issued his riposte in a 1901 encyclical *Graves de communi* in which he stated that Christian Democracy, rather than indicating an endorsement of any political régime, merely meant 'beneficial Christian action among the people.'[22]

The story of French social Catholicism is one of a movement made up of people with the most honourable of intentions but whose efforts were repeatedly frustrated by their fellow Catholics. The interwar period was of particular significance for both major factions of the French Catholic fold. A new political party, the Parti Démocrate Populaire, was founded in 1924. On a resolutely Christian Democrat footing it appeared to offer considerable promise if the extent of its ideological grounding was anything to go by. It considered the family to be the bedrock of society - an idea that went right back nineteenth century liberal Catholics such as Marc Ozanam and Frédéric Buchez. In addition, the party proposed protective legislation for children, measures aimed at stimulating the birth rate and social insurance schemes. Its leaders were also influenced by the example of popular democracy being given in Italy by Sturzo which, based on

what he termed 'intermediate bodies' such as family, profession, commune and region which would act as a buffer between the state and the individual.[23]

The PDP did not however unite French Catholics. It was unmistakeably a liberal party, and as such it was completely at loggerheads with the right wing Catholic organisation *Action française* led by Pierre Maurras. In addition, Marc Sagnier was by this stage back on the scene and although heavily involved in international work on behalf on the League of Nations and other causes, he was at the head of another liberal Catholic organisation called *Jeune République*. In his view, PDP was still too far to the right and he could not pledge his support to it. Sagnier believed in the establishment of full scale dialogue with the moderate left, and he believed there was no appetite for this among most of the PDP. In fairness, there were those within the PDP such as Cornilleau who were prepared to countenance such a dialogue, but Sagnier tended to discount their commitment.

Whatever the merits of their policies and organisation, the PDP was not a success in electoral terms. In 1928 it scored seventeen deputies, however it lost seats in both 1932 and 1936 by which time it was down to just thirteen seats.[24] It would be easy to pin the blame solely at the door of conservative Catholics for the very muted success enjoyed by the proponents of social Catholicism. In reality, the attacks launched against Catholics by anticlerical republicans did much to fan the flames of discontent between Catholics and the dominant secular elements in France. Thus when, in 1850, the legislative assembly debated a bill promoting Catholic schools put forward by the royalist education minister the comte de Falloux, it sparked an inflammatory reaction by Victor Hugo:

"Your law is a masked law. It says one thing and will do another. It has the look of liberty and the intention to enslave. That is your custom. When you forge a chain you say: Here is a liberty!

...

"So, you wish to be given peoples to educate. Fine. Let us see your pupils. Let us see your products. What have you done to Italy? What have you done to Spain? ... Spain has lost the secret of strength that she held from the Romans, the artistic genius she held from the Arabs, the empire

that she held from God. And in exchange for everything you have lost for her, you have given her the Inquisition."[25]

In this context, it cannot be surprising that many French Catholics adopted a similarly hostile attitude towards the republican values which men such as Victor Hugo stood to defend. Thus, in 1870, Louis Veuillot, editor of the Catholic publication *Univers* claimed that France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian war was a direct punishment from God for France's decision to stray into the paths of materialism, liberalism and secularism during the nineteenth century.[26] The interpretation of contemporary events as punishment for the revolution did not end during the nineteenth century. As late as 1940 one Catholic newspaper claimed, with regard to the country's fall to Germany, that:

"what has collapsed so lamentably is a house which people tried to build without God."[27]

Although Marshal Philippe Pétain was not himself a practising Catholic, he nonetheless gave support to this view of matters when he made the following statement shortly after coming to power:

"I hate the lies that have done us so much harm ... Our defeat is explained by our laxity. The pleasure principle destroys what the principle of sacrifice has built up. It is to an intellectual and moral reflection that I urge you first of all."[28]

The final dimension of French social Catholicism which it is useful to analyse is the role played by intellectuals and the Catholic press. One particularly key figure here is Emmanuel Mounier, the founder, in 1932, of the review *Esprit*. Although clearly on the left of Catholic thought, Mounier was not a particular friend of those seeking to establish conventional Christian Democrat parties operating within the republican régime. If anything, his primary concerns were spiritual, and indeed he described himself and his colleagues as revolutionaries in the name of the Spirit. As such, they sought as their primary objective to dissociate spiritual matters from politics and in particular from the right wing. In fact, in describing Mounier as left wing, we must really view this as a reference to his liberal outlook, since the position adopted by his publication tended to

avoid outward support for any existent political formation. Although he attended a conference in Rome which dealt with the fascist corporatist state, Mounier came away from the event convinced that the Italians had made a serious mistake in placing greater importance on the state than they did on the individual. Even if he subsequently never wavered in his opposition to fascism or Nazism, Mounier nonetheless looked upon the Third Republic as an established disorder and he was concerned with finding a third way in politics away from the traditional right/left cleavage in France.[29]

Another review, more radical than *Esprit* was *Terre Nouvelle* which was founded in 1935 by Maurice Laudrin. Laudrin was unashamedly a socialist, and the fact that he had joined the SFIO and published a book calling on Christians to reject the power of money saw him dismissed from his role as personal secretary to the Archbishop of Paris in 1931. *Terre Nouvelle* sought to reconcile Christianity and communism and when in 1936 the French Communist Party offered a hand of friendship to Catholics, Laudrin's publication stood virtually alone in not rejecting it.[30]

In addition to these two reviews, there was also an important role played by newspapers from a Catholic perspective. The chief figure in Catholic journalism in the inter-war period was Francisque Gay, an old collaborator of Marc Sagnier and leading Catholic journalist and publisher. His credentials as a liberal were to win him the ire of conservative Catholic figures, in particular Maurras after the latter's organisation *Action française* had been condemned by Pope Pius XI. Gay's weekly newspaper *La Vie catholique* fell in resolutely behind the papal line, a not insignificant stand to take given the paper had a weekly circulation of about 40,000 until it eventually went to the wall in 1938.

In addition to this, Gay was also co-director of the daily Catholic paper *L'Aube* set up in 1932 as the voice of Christian Democracy. *L'Aube* had an explicitly political mission and broadly speaking aimed to undermine the image of Catholic politics in France being associated with nationalism and reaction. The reality

was, however, that for all their worthy efforts, the social Catholics and Christian Democrats of the interwar period could never overcome the underlying difficulty in France whereby the historic divisions between left and right in France, and the climate of anticlericalism that still existed, made many Catholics wary of being seen to associate clearly as Catholics in just about any manner. Additionally, the success of secularism in France had been to greatly reduce the numbers of practising Catholics at any rate, thus greatly limiting the potential audience social Catholics and Christian Democrats could hope to enjoy.[31] Thus, for all the frenetic activity within their ranks, the divisions among French Catholics prevented them from ever attaining the kind of power necessary to represent a coherent force on the political scene. A little like the divided trade unions, their moments of glory were at best sporadic, and more often than not limited to the issue of Catholic education.

3.4 The Irish State: a developing corporatism?

The Irish situation was, as I have already described, rather different. Firstly, the relationship between Church and State could hardly have been described as antagonistic. However, the influence which the Church was allowed to conserve in society was to make itself felt in a number of specific ways. In the first instance, the Church held a particular position regarding communism and socialism. Its outward hostility towards these phenomena had a particular effect on the conduct of left-wing politics in Ireland over an extended period. As we have seen, the difficulties involved in advocating strong left-wing views in Ireland led the Labour Party to adopt a more integrative agenda and to openly state an aversion to interclass conflict, something which, in the broader European context of the twentieth century, is quite extraordinary. It is also the case that the Catholic Church managed to wield its power over the Irish government on occasions when it felt the latter was trespassing in areas over which it felt it had moral control. A particular example of this was the Mother and Child Scheme of 1951 which saw the Church successful force the government to withdraw a scheme which would have introduced free health care

for mothers and young children. The moral opinion of the Church was that it was not for the State to decide as to the healthcare requirements of individuals in society, but rather for the individual themselves according to the tenets of their faith.

The holding of such a view by the Church, and the fact that it was able to prevail, essentially contributed to the fact that the Irish State was much more limited in its direct intervention into matters of the economy or society then elsewhere. This is not, of course, to suggest that such intervention did not happen in an indirect manner. Obviously, underlying policies such as self-sufficiency and import substitution speak for themselves in terms of their impact on the way the country did business. There was also the setting up of the semi-state companies which, although owned by the people through a shareholding vested in the most appropriate government minister, have generally been able to independently take most of the decisions directly affecting them. By and large, however, the State in Ireland has preferred to act in an auxiliary capacity, and this has particularly characterised its approach to industrial relations.

Away from the specific difficulties the Labour Party had in pursuing an openly left-leaning political agenda, the Irish trade union movement had a decidedly adversarial background. This was largely due to its origins in the British trade union movement, and the strong ties which bound the two, largely thanks to men such as James Connolly and Jim Larkin, both of whom had been immersed in British trade unionism before bringing their radicalism to Ireland.

From the foundation of the state up to the 1960s, free collective bargaining was the norm within the industrial relations system in Ireland. The state's policy as an auxiliary actor was consistent, and it was content to allow the employers and unions to resolve their differences among themselves. However, from the late-1950s onwards, there was a move towards state planning of the economy as the worst of the recession of that period took hold. Although free collective bargaining had succeeded in bringing about significant improvements in real

income, this was to the detriment of the overall economic wellbeing of the state. In particular, inflation was on the increase at a time when problems of unemployment were becoming chronic as protectionist policies such as import substitution became steadily less viable.

We do know that the advocacy of Catholic social views in Ireland from the 1930s onwards found many sympathetic ears in Ireland. The University College Cork academic and newspaper editor Alfred O'Rahilly, who published the Catholic weekly *The Standard* ran an edition in the early-1940s which featured a number of European leaders of the time who came from a 'Catholic' standpoint, such as Franco and Salazar. Away from such extremes, it is the case that the attempts by the Catholic Church to promote its vision of the social order took hold to an extent that is sometimes unacknowledged. Archbishop John Charles McQuaid of Dublin was the churchman most closely in touch with the government as Primate of the Republic. During the Emergency, the Archbishop set up the Catholic Social Services Council (now Crosscare) in order to assist the needy of the Archdiocese. During the 1930s, the fortieth anniversary of the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* saw the publication of *Quadragesimo Anno* which restated many of its principles and which was used by the Irish hierarchy as something of an inspiration for its own drive for Catholic social teaching.

The leading Irish journal from a Catholic perspective of the period – and indeed today – is the Jesuit run Studies and this regularly carried articles on forms of governance and social order in Catholic countries, such as corporatism. It is know that Studies was avidly read in government circles in Ireland, including by figures such as de Valera and Seán Lemass. Lemass in particular was, as we have seen, concerned with questions of national planning and the establishment of forms of agreement between the major social actors.

The consciousness on the part of the Irish government that a new type of economic order was called for was being mirrored elsewhere in Europe at that time. Governments, conscious that collective bargaining, whilst popular with

unions, was doing little to foster continued expansion in the wider economy, sought to limit its scope either by going down the road to neo-corporatism or by jettisoning the commitment to full employment and re-introducing market discipline. During the 1970s indeed, it became something of a trend for European governments to preside over the evolution of corporatist structures within the framework of liberal democratic institutions.

Neo-corporatism is perhaps best described as a more voluntary approach to collective strategy making than its predecessor. The state seeks to co-opt the leadership of social interest groups into policy formation in return for a commitment from these groups that they will seek to 'deliver' their respective constituencies when it comes to implementing agreed policies. There are, however, two variants of neo-corporatism which may be discerned when discussion corporate state involvement in industrial relations.

- **The legislative variant** in which the state defines and controls the operations of corporate bodies.
- **The social contract** in which the state establishes corporate structures in the context of bargained voluntary agreement and joint commitment to embody the 'common purpose' in new institutions and reforms.[32]

Bill Roche points out that the traditions of Anglo-Irish industrial relations are such that if the government were to resort to regulatory laws, this would be perceived by unions as an act of hostility to organised labour and antipathy to 'common purpose' or 'social partnership'. For this reason, Irish efforts at neo-corporatism have tended to place a continuing importance on the voluntary nature of the institutions and negotiations, albeit making threats to legislate if it was felt this would heighten co-operation.[33]

The first steps in this Irish version of neo-corporatism were made in 1946 when the Labour Court was established. This first phase was a long one and was characterised by the consolidation of the role of the Labour Court through a

number of measures. As early as 1948, de Valera spoke of the need for a national agreement on pay to be negotiated through the Labour Court, and although the defended the voluntary principle on which the court had been established, he indicated that the government would impose a statutory norm if an agreement could not be found through Labour Court co-ordinated bargaining. There was, thus, the establishment of a 'threat-response' pattern of state influence over collective bargaining which came to be something of a norm up to the 1970s. Although it may appear a somewhat negative negotiating tactic, the reality is that its strongest point was the fact that it managed to consolidate the place of the Labour Court as an honest broker in the field of pay determination.

As the years passed, however, we have seen that there was a growing mood in Ireland and elsewhere in Europe in favour of state planning of the economy, and thus a desire for institutions which would advance that objective. Consequently, from the 1960s onwards, the unions were enticed into consultative bodies. As has already been indicated, there was a natural hostility towards corporatist arrangements on the part of most of the traditional parties in Irish industrial relations. However, they did see the possibilities stemming from national economic development, and they were thus willing to trust the state to pass on to them the profits accruing from their co-operation and restraint. They were, in addition, convinced to give up their commitment to free collective bargaining because of the proportion of the national product, and thus the social wage, determined by government taxation and expenditure and which were increasing during the decades of growth.

Considerable disagreement exists over whether Ireland has followed a corporatist or a voluntarist agenda, and we shall see later what the view from the Irish Congress of Trades Unions is on that question. Dr Gary Murphy of the Dublin City University Business School has put forward the view that it is corporatist, and indeed he has developed this view in a working paper.[34] He attributes the moves towards such a change to the particular vision and work of Seán Lemass who was engaged in a long-running internal battle within Fianna Fáil to arrive at

a significant change in the party's economic thinking. It is worth pointing out here that Lemass' particular experience in economic matters had doubtless fuelled his desire to try a policy which differed from the traditional protectionism which was the hallmark of Fianna Fáil economic policy at that time. During the Emergency – the euphemism used in Ireland to describe the World War II period, Lemass had been in charge of supplies. The difficulties of the period, with Ireland's traditional import markets being closed off, meant an intensive programme of rationing and the compulsory introduction of tillage farming on all available and suitable land. This provided Lemass with valuable experience in the implementation of a policy in the national interest, although clearly many countries, regardless of their divisions, have had to do this at different points in their history.

Lemass was an early convert to Keynesianism in the post-war period during which it gained rapid ground throughout Europe. However, he was one of very few in a party which was rigid in its deflationist and, within the confines of protectionism, market driven approach. The particular quandary Lemass faced was that although he was heir apparent in Fianna Fáil, he could neither afford to let those with whom he profoundly disagreed have free reign over economic policy, nor be seen to oppose them too vigorously lest he fatally compromise his own position in the party. Consequently, when Fianna Fáil was out of office during the period of the first Inter-Party government in 1948-51. he opposed the somewhat more liberal policies of the new administration, including the setting up of the Industrial Development Authority, with all his vigour. By Fianna Fáil's return to power in 1951, he needed to see some agitation within the Parliamentary Party. This arose through a number of factors. Seán MacEntee was appointed Minister for Finance and he immediately set about placing the party back on its traditional economic footing, ably assisted by the conservative Secretary of the Department of Finance, J.J. McElligott. In opposition, Fine Gael proved weak and it was thus up to Lemass' allies within Fianna Fáil to provide the opposition to this conventional economic thinking on the part of the dominant wing of Fianna Fáil. In January 1953, a meeting of the Parliamentary

Party devoted its entire attention to issues of economic policy. During the discussion, de Valera explained that the party's policy was to pay its way and that anything over and beyond this could only be achieved through additional taxation. Furthermore, the Taoiseach insisted that increased production from the land was the remedy for most of the country's problems. Needless to say, this did not prove satisfactory to the Lemass wing who continued to call for reform, and within six months, twenty deputies put a motion to the parliamentary party declaring that:

"The party is of the opinion that in present circumstances a policy of financial austerity is no longer justified and requests the government to frame a progressive policy suited to the altered situation, with a view especially to putting an end to the undue restriction of credit by the banks, and making low interest loans available for farmers and house purchasers."[35]

However, the matter was either fudged or simply repressed. It dragged on over several months, and finally in January 1954 it was discussed again. The minutes of this meeting record simply that:

"after a number of teachtaí had contributed to the debate, the acting minister for Finance, Proinsias MacAogáin (Frank Aiken), replied and An Taoiseach made a comprehensive statement on the party's financial and economic policy. Deputy Carter withdrew the motion on behalf of the teachtaí who had signed it."[36]

Lemass and his allies were, in fact, deeply influenced by the developments they saw elsewhere in Europe where states were urging more co-operation between the different economic actors in the interest of the state and its overall economic development. Lemass realised that for this to happen it was necessary for the government to be the hegemonic player in the administrative system; he also held it in the highest importance that he be at the head of such a system. In order to do this, Lemass needed a long-term economic strategy that would return Fianna Fáil to power in 1957 and improve the economic fortunes of the country. He saw it as necessary to establish more concrete arrangements between the government and the various actors in the economy, such as the employers and unions. Furthermore, Lemass, although he was firmly of the belief that political interests should lead in the country, bemoaned the lack of independent thinking

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being done within the civil service. It was ultimately a fortuitous meeting of minds between the new Minister for Finance (Lemass) and the young Secretary of the Department (T.K. Whitaker) that provided the documentary framework for a change in Irish economic policy in 1958 with the publication *of Economic Development.*

The chronological order of the developing economic relationships in the country in the years following is somewhat roundabout. Despite the relative importance of agriculture in the Irish economy and the desirability of improving relationships with the farming lobby, the presence of a coercive Minister for Agriculture in Paddy Smith – even after Lemass became Taoiseach – made establishing a fruitful relationship with them difficult. Instead, it was in the relationship between itself, the employers and the unions that the government made the first real progress. For Murphy, the crucial moment in the relationship between these three came with the setting up of the Committee on Industrial Organisation in 1961. This step could have been considerably less important had the ICTU been left out, as was the initial intention. However, having had to ask to be included, Congress was. Garret Fitzgerald, who was then acting as an advisor to the Federation of Irish Industries (FII), maintained that it was only ever due to an oversight that the unions were omitted.

"They proved to be the most constructive partners. Indeed, insofar as tensions existed within the committee they proved – as I had anticipated – to be between the Department of Industry and Commerce on the one hand and the rest of us, with Finance, the CII and ICTU endeavouring as a troika to nudge that department into psychological acceptance of free trade."[37]

The impact of the CIO lay in its success in making the various social partners aware of the need for reforms in order to face the considerable challenges ahead. It pointed out the inadequacies of industry to cope with the transition from a protective framework to an interdependent economy Its findings led all parties involved to the recognition that there could be no return to the former protectionist position and they resolved to adopt a trilateral approach in their attempt to revolutionise the Irish economy in the light of new free trade

conditions. A consensus developed that it was better to face the future as a member of an economic alliance rather than as an isolated economy and economic growth should be sought through an export-led initiative.

The extent to which this new outlook was not just confined to the corridors of the CIO was apparent in the statements made by individual participants, such as John Conroy, General President of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union who pointed out that:

> "freer trade is coming and unless we all realise this and prepare we will find that every workshop and factory not fully and efficiently equipped will cease to produce to economic requirements and all the employees will find themselves unemployed."[38]

It was a remarkably frank statement for a union leader of his generation to make, but it marked the new sense of realism which abounded in Ireland in the period after the economic shift of 1958-9. Such statements also grew out of determined coaching on the part of Lemass and the government, urging acceptance by the unions that changes were necessary. What is of particular interest is that, in his contacts with the social partners, the particular issue which Lemass stressed was Ireland's application to join the then European Economic Community. He placed great importance on the fact that the traditionally privileged trading relationship with Britain was coming to an end and that business must assume that tariffs would come to an end by 1970. As it happened, the initial EEC application was unsuccessfully because of General de Gaulle's refusal to admit the UK, however Lemass' views regarding the wider world and economic progress stood nonetheless, and, as we have seen, were broadly speaking successful in modifying the business culture in the country. Indeed, Murphy points out that by the early-1960s, Europe was the goal of the majority of politicians and interest groups and even the Catholic Church was voicing no overt protest.[39]

Thus, there was a progressive change in the industrial relations framework in Ireland. It is worth reminding ourselves here though that the 1960s was not all sweetness and light as regards the relationship between the trade unions and the

interlocutors. During the 1960s, there was a greatly increased volume of industrial unrest, inflation rose steadily as unprecedented gains were achieved through decentralised bargaining. Meanwhile, the government continued to pledge its support for the principle of the auxiliary state and free collective bargaining. However, it had continued to extend its influence through moral persuasion and threats to legislate. Congress moved in a similar direction by stating that the objectives of trade unionism would require action in the political and legislative spheres, and its leadership sought to gain support for a concerted pay policy.

During the 1970s, attempts were made to put in place a more corporatist structure to regulate the relationship between Ireland's employers and unions. This was done against the background of the negotiation of a series of central agreements – nine between 1970 and 1980 – concerning pay restraint and the consequent control of inflation. Four of the agreements negotiated between 1971 and 1980 were concluded on a bipartite basis and the other four on a tripartite one. Bill Roche points out that opposition to a more formalised, corporatist style approach was based on a prevailing view within the trade union movement that the greatest gains were still likely to be achieved by the freest possible form of bargaining, and that if social partnership was to be envisaged, a higher price should be charged that the restraint which the unions were showing in the virtually annual negotiations on pay issues.[40]

There were moves towards a more structured approach in the late-1970s, with a very particular role being played by sub-committees of the Employer-Labour Conference who were involved in monitoring and administrative functions. They adopted a role of 'non-adversary inquiry' on pay issues for the first time, an indication of the amount of progress which had been made since the earlier attempts at bipartite and tripartite negotiations a decade earlier. However, towards the end of the 1970s, the negotiations on agreements became steadily more difficult, despite efforts by the Fianna Fáil government elected in 1977 to encourage matters through the setting up of a Department of Economic Planning

and Development. By 1979 matters were critical, despite the best efforts by trade union leaders to keep them on the rails. The General Secretary of the ICTU announced a new programme of 'National Understandings' flanked by government leaders. However, the pressures from PAYE workers arguing for greater tax concessions were becoming too great, and at a Special Delegate Conference of Congress, the whole system temporarily collapsed, only to be revived, in characteristic fashion, by a coercive response from the government threatening to impose a 7% limit to pay increases.[41]

By 1981, though, the pressures were becoming too great for the existing structure of agreements and partnership to survive. From the point of view of employers, excessive wage rises fuelled inflation and accelerated unemployment. Unions, on the other hand, felt that unemployment was a reflection, more than anything else, of deficient demand and should be addressed through expansionary policies. In addition, the lack of any durable affinity between the various trade unions and the parties to government also meant that there was little formal backup in national politics to support the standpoint of the unions and lend it further strength. Moreover, despite commitments given regarding the importance of job creation, unemployment continued to grow, thus indicating that in that regard at least, partnership was failing. All of these factors contributed to the failure of the existing model by 1981.[42]

During the early- to mid-1980s, there was a return to decentralised bargaining during which workers achieved real improvements in pay, albeit against a backdrop of increasing inflation and unemployment. This disengagement on the part of all parties – and the state in particular – represented a return to the default position in Irish industrial relations, since the system had always been based on voluntarist principles. In addition, the crisis in the state of the public finances during the 1980s left the state little margin for conceding large scale pay concessions in the public sector, whatever the case in the private sector. The idea of a national agreement which was more beneficial to private sector workers

than their public sector counterparts was inconceivable, and this thus served to reinforce the reserve of the government during that period.

By 1987, when Fianna Fáil were returned to government to replace the Fine Gael/Labour coalition, the country was in a very serious economic state. Unemployment was soaring, there was high inflation, and emigration had again reached crisis levels. Charles Haughey's return to power was accompanied by a commitment to the idea of national recovery, and he encountered a trade union movement which was willing to do business with his government.

The Irish approach based on the principle of social partnership between the employers, trade unions and government – as the primary groups – has gained in standing in the twelve years of its existence in its present form. It is, however, an approach which is likely to surprise those who recall the traditionally adversarial nature of the relationship between the different players in the Irish industrial relations system. In an attempt to gain a better appreciation of the rationale behind the Irish model of partnership, I carried out an interview with Paula Carey, the research officer with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. The agreed transcript of that conversation now follows:

Interview with Paula Carey, Irish Congress of Trade Unions
ICTU Head Office, Raglan Road, Dublin 4

1. We appear to have arrived at a point in Irish industrial relations where the great bulk of the unions are involved in a 'don't rock the boat' consensus with the government and employers. How have we got there?

The Irish trade union movement has learned the hard lessons of the 1980s, as has the rest of Irish society. We have had to ask the question, 'how effective is rocking the boat'? Irish trade unions have emerged from the classical British model of trade unionism, which is a confrontational model. In the past, this legacy was translated by the traditional reliance on collective bargaining. Although collective bargaining often brought about impressive wage increases, during the 1980s it was in fact accompanied by a real drop in living standards as a result of rising inflation. Between 1980 and 1987, in the absence of any form of national agreement or understanding, living standards dropped by some 20%. In addition, the Irish trade unions were observing developments elsewhere. In particular, looking towards the UK, the saw the massive drop in influence suffered by the British trade unions as a result of the sweeping legislative measures introduced by the Thatcher government. The movement looked for models in order to plan its future course of action. It saw in the models of a number of northern European countries models which it felt it could learn from. In particular, the Nordic countries seemed to propose a model for finding solutions which benefited not only their members but the economy in general. Consequently, the ICTU saw the possibility for attempting such an approach in Ireland. There are many specific factors in the Irish case. Since a consensual model was not part of the Irish industrial relations inertia, much work was required of Congress in order to garner support from among the unions themselves.

2. How do we assess the importance of voluntary bodies i.e. the Labour Court and policy-discussion bodies in laying the groundwork for the current model?

It is important to note that every body is a product of its time, just as every agreement is also a product of its time. The Irish voluntarist system has worked extremely well, not least because of the high level of respect for the Labour Court which exists within the industrial relations framework. However, we must set any observations regarding bodies in period. In the 1980s when there was a large amount of conflict, the Labour Court was jamming up with the backlog of cases being brought to its attention. This was one of the factors which led to the establishment of the Labour Relations Commission, with its new set of rules including a mandatory four week cooling off/initial mediation period before referral to the Labour Court.

The Employer Labour Conference was a very useful structure during the 1970s and early-1980s for keeping an eye on parity between public and private sector pay for example. However again, it is vital to assess the importance of any one particular body against the background of the particular circumstances pertaining during the period in question.

3. Does the ICTU see Ireland as being engaged in a corporatist or voluntarist industrial relations environment?

There is still a healthy respect within the trade union movement for the voluntarist nature of Irish industrial relations. The extent to which this question arises and remains a major talking point may be seen in the debate surrounding trade union recognition in Ireland. Corporatism requires an amount of legislation in order to function, and with the discussion of trade union recognition in Ireland, it is inevitable that resorting to legislation in order to enshrine the current industrial relations framework would involve raising the question of union de-recognition in addition to union recognition. This situation would not necessarily be more advantageous to the unions. Nonetheless, Ireland is moving in the direction of corporatist arrangements, and there is the likelihood of some form of statutory regulation in the years ahead.

The Irish partnership model has evolved in an ad hoc manner rather than in a structured manner as is the case in continental corporatist models. Unions make a strategic decision to enter into partnership over a defined period, understanding that if the conditions offered to them when a new partnership is being negotiated are not to their satisfaction, they can withdraw. Ireland is heavily influenced, in business terms, by the United States and consequently it is important that the structures put in place be flexible enough to adapt to changes in the global economy which the US dominates. The works councils, which are so much a part of the German system of corporatism have proved to be an inflexible structure and would thus be unattractive in the Irish workplace. In addition, such a structure of workplace negotiation is not well embedded in the Irish industrial relations system. Although a system of works councils may eventually be put in place in Ireland as part of the consolidation of partnership, these would need to be flexible enough to deal with the reality of the Irish economy.

Ireland may be moving towards something of a corporatist model, however the intention is that this would be flexible corporatism.

4. Is there still a perceptible difference in the attitudes towards partnership of the British-based unions? What is it?

There are certain unions which are vocal in their opposition to the partnership model, such as the ATGWU and MSF in particular. A certain number of their arguments are perfectly valid, and indeed it would be positively unhealthy if the renewed participation of the unions in a partnership were to occur without any dissent or discussion. However, sometimes the unions which oppose partnership on the grounds that particular aspects of the previous accord had not been fulfilled or its inadequacy in satisfying their desire for a larger pay increase, miss the big picture regarding the broader achievements of the partnership approach.

The ICTU seeks a mandate to negotiate a new partnership agreement at a special delegate conference, and this process affords all affiliated unions the opportunity to engage in a genuine debate on the proposal. A particular difficulty with the British-based unions is that many of them have their headquarters in Belfast and a large membership in Northern Ireland as opposed to in the Republic. Since the partnership agreements apply to the Republic only, it was necessary to change the ICTU constitution in order to prevent Northern Ireland members from having a say in an agreement which did not concern them.

5. Does the ICTU foresee a return to a freer form of collective bargaining or more conflictive industrial relations in the future?

The ICTU has worked hard in order to put in place a consensus-based system. It has set to stress the advantages of a genuine spirit of partnership between employers and unions through the setting up of the PACT scheme, operating in eight regions and comprising representatives of the employers and the unions from eight companies in each region which have succeeded in achieving a stable form of partnership within their company. However, despite the efforts made to promote the partnership model, the reality is that it is still not fully embedded in Irish society.

Abandoning partnership would be difficult after the progress that has been made. However there is a range of problems. The lynchpin of each partnership agreement is the pay deal. This has been heavily bolstered by tax reforms up to now. However, a serious question arises over the amount of scope which remains for further tax cuts in the years ahead. The only way that a new agreement could offer similarly attractive benefits to workers would be if the pay deal came bolstered by some form of profit sharing or employee stakeholding in firms. There is also the need to further advance the question of union recognition.

It is clear then that the Irish trade unions are quite specific in their analysis of the prevailing economic order. Their vision is characterised by a consciousness of the economic history of the country in the period since independence and also of the realities of the global – and particularly American-dominated – economy at the present time. This consciousness is hardly surprising. Ireland is a small society, and the spatial distance between those formulating policy and those at the receiving end of it is never too great. Free collective bargaining which results in large pay increases for some whilst making the economy less competitive for the majority and thus driving away investment, will not go unnoticed. The Irish have a history as regards making conscious economic decisions which take account of the country's economic history. This was, after all, the case with T.K. Whittaker's *Economic Development*, which the political élite received virtually without demur in the aftermath of the economic catastrophe of the 1950s. It is, however, interesting to come across such a frank admission as was provided by Paula Carey that the Irish trade union movement gives special consideration to the standpoint of major US-based corporations in formulating its approach to subjects raised in partnership negotiations. Moreover, the fact that the Irish trade union movement was concerned by the legislation it saw being enacted in Britain indicates the end to which fear of the government's options in the event of encountering an uncooperative trade union movement had become ingrained over the development of the voluntarist system in Irish industrial relations.

Ferdinand von Prondzynski has identified a number of important facets of Irish trade unionism and industrial relations more generally which are useful pointers to the evolving but dominant influences in the way Irish society looks at politically divisive economic issues. First and foremost, he points to corporatist tendencies[43] which he attempts to associate with Roman Catholic teaching and traditions which existed in continental models such as Franco's Spain or Salazar's Portugal. He also concludes, however, that Irish industrial relations may be characterised as voluntaristic, antagonistic, non-participative – in the sense that ordinary workers play little or no role in general, and they are only

represented at management level through worker directors in the semi-state sector -, centralised, non-flexible – a point with which I must disagree -, and institutionalised. Von Prondzynski does however draw particular attention to the role played by what he terms 'institutions of the middle ground', such as the Labour Court and Labour Relations Commission. With reference to the Labour Court – although I am sure this could be applied more generally – he summarises its role as being one of using its good offices to persuade and cajole parties in dispute in order to achieve a peaceful settlement.

Von Prondzynski acknowledges the role played by these institutions, however he also points to an interesting phenomenon whereby there can be an excessive reliance on these institutions to produce solutions and their failure to do so can leave the parties somewhat lost for answers themselves, as in the case of the 1991 ESB strike.

The obvious risks associated with such a distancing from traditional adversarial trade unionism were also addressed by the senior official of the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU), Des Geraghty in an article in the Irish Times on the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Jim Larkin. Geraghty grappled with the difficult task of asserting that today's SIPTU was remaining loyal to the legacy of the father of organised Irish trade unionism. Geraghty pointed out that Larkin's trade unionism:

> "had a lot in common with the great industrial movements of the early years of this century in Britain, the United States, Russia and central Europe where, armed with a new creed of socialism, Bolshevism and militant syndicalism, labour leaders began to challenge the older and more conservative craft unions as well as the exploitation of employers."[44]

Larkin's trade unionism was thus one of conflict, whereby the movement fought long and high-profile battles to defend the rights of its members. Political and industrial action were combined and new patterns of striking such as going out in sympathy and the boycott of "tainted goods" - the produce of scab labour. There

may be little apparent connection between the form of militancy promoted by Jim Larkin and today's Irish trade union movement. However for Des Geraghty:

> "He bequeathed that sense of vision which allows the modern trade union movement to move beyond a defensive pay bargaining agenda to seek a new role for workers in the 21st century workplace. ... Larkin organised labour and bargained for its price. Our labour movement now bargains about everything which determines the quality of life. It's a qualitative change, a ripening of the seed sown by Larkin and his peers. The modern trade union movement uses collective intelligence more than collective muscle, but demands recognition of workers as full, intelligent human beings."[45]

That sums up the change which has arisen as regards the mainstream Irish trade union movement today. Whether Geraghty really can claim the right to be considered as an inheritor of Jim Larkin's legacy is, in my view, very dubious. It is clear that on a day to day basis, SIPTU (as the clear descendent of Larkin's unions) is now far removed from wage conflict and far more concerned with reaching a consensus than were the trade unionists of former times. Of course, the clear argument exists that were it not for the tougher battles of that period, today's trade unionists would not be in a position to focus on newer issues and priorities. However, it is clear that the agenda has moved on and is now likely to look much more closely at issues such as work organisation, employee participation in decisions, participation of women etc... Indeed, an issue which is exercising the minds of the trade union movement to a particular extent at the moment is that of the minimum wage.

3.5 France and Social Partnership: unwilling or untrustworthy partners?

In France, we know that this form of partnership has not been in evidence. But how do we go about explaining this? Essentially, the French trade union movement has been dogged by a number of persistent problems. Mirroring the broader divisions in society, it is sharply divided along political lines and is thus faced with major difficulties in terms of effectively acting in concert. It is also numerically very weak and appears almost incapable of attracting larger numbers, particularly in the private sector where it is, in many cases,

practically absent. Janine Goetschy and Patrick Rozenblatt[46] point out that France loses relatively few days due to stoppages when compared with Italy or English-speaking countries. However, what the authors do concede is that where strikes do take place in France, they tend to involve large numbers of workers reflecting a CGT and Communist Party tactic of mass demonstration strikes to influence aspects of the political agenda.

John Ardagh reports that only 15% of the French labour force is unionised, a figure which compares with 51% in Britain and 38% in Germany.[47] The strengths of the major individual unions are similarly weak as a consequence. The largest single French trade union is the communist controlled *Confédération Générale du Travail* which can accurately lay claim to some 900,000 members, although it attempts to claim many more. It is traditionally the most hard-line of the French trade unions and is particularly favourable to large scale strikes and protest movements. The main rival of the CGT is the Socialist *Confédération française démocratique du travail* which has some 800,000 members. Like its larger rival, it is a revolutionary union in that it is dedicated to the overthrow of capitalism, however as we shall see from our case study, it has been adopting a much more conciliatory approach over recent years. As the CFDT has moderated its approach, there has been evidence, again addressed in the case study, of a more radical position being adopted by the third union force in France, *Force Ouvrière*, traditionally seen as a more moderate pair of hands in the French trade union environment. These are the three major French trade union federations however they have a range of problems of their own to deal with.

The CGT is a large and powerful force however there is a predictability in its approach which deprives it of something of the element of surprise. It always comes *parti pris* in the sense that it has tended to slavishly adhere to the Communist Party line. Thus, in times past when the party attempted to justify Soviet policy in Poland or Afghanistan, the CGT dutifully rowed in. Given such close ties between the CGT and the Communists, there appears to be little to be

gained from attempts to convince the union to adopt its own independent stance should it be accommodated in any formal conciliation structure. The CGT's primary strength lies in nationalised industries and also in the large-scale blue collar sector, i.e. in heavy industry.

The CFDT is traditionally more white collar than the CGT, and has always been seen as somewhat more moderate. However, as I stated above, it is a revolutionary union in the sense that it calls for the overthrow of capitalism, and as such as distinctive from a number of other union federations which its members may well have been attracted to join. The CFDT's membership grew consistently until 1976 when it stood at over 800,000 members[48] at which point it experienced a significant off having reached about 600,000 at the end of the 1980s. Over the course of the 1990s, the CFDT may be said to have had some difficulty finding the appropriate course of action to take on a number of the major questions which have concerned the wider trade union movement. Thus, in the case of the December 1995 social movement, its General Secretary Nicole Notat was conspicuous in her lack of support for the movement and was, consequently, sharply criticised by her counterparts in other federations. Given the widespread popular support for the 1995 strikes, it can only be assumed that Notat and her colleagues called the situation badly and all in all, the episode was a rather bruising one for the CFDT.

Force Ouvrière's pedigree differs significantly from the two union's discussed so far. It is the result of a split in the CGT in 1948 and as a result its identity has tended to betray the bad feeling existing between the two unions since then. FO has never been a revolutionary trade union, and this fact is expressed through a marked anti-Communist stance and a belief in negotiation with the government in order to achieve its aims. This standpoint was most strongly articulated and indeed reinforced by the union's long-serving general secretary André Bergeron who, in addition to opposing the use of the strike weapon save as a last resort and believing in concerted negotiation with the government, also believed that trade unions should insist on remaining independent from their political masters.

The problem with all of this is of course that in a trade union environment such as France's, it will take more than a benevolent stance on the part of one trade union to transform the manner in which business is transacted with the state. Furthermore, faced with a more conciliatory approach on the part of the CFDT, FO with its current general secretary general Marc Blondel has itself appeared to harden its stance, playing a full part in the 1995 social movement and joining in the chorus of criticism of Nicole Notat.

Another reasonably important trade union in France is the *Confédération française des travailleurs chrétiens*. This union is Catholic in its origins and outlook, and was formed in 1964 as a breakaway group from the CFDT, with whose policy of secularisation it disagreed. The CTFC tends to view strike action as something which must be envisaged only as a last resort, and it derives most of its inspiration from the social doctrine of the Catholic Church.[49]

One of the primary factors affecting the amount of influence that the trade union sector in France can wield is that of the fragmentation and dissension within its ranks. As a result of the differences in outlook of the major unions which I outlined above, finding common ground between them on any kind of long term goal or objective is difficult if not impossible. This reality comes against the background of what Vincent Wright has referred to as the 'highly individualised, atomised and anomic' society of France whereby belonging to large groups is seen as depriving an individual of his individuality.[50] If this explains the low levels of unionisation seen in France, it also provides us with a framework for appreciating why unions with differing origins, often born of a succession of splits, have been so reluctant to co-ordinate their activities on anything other than the sporadic national protest movements over issues of government policy which provoked debate on the broader political level as well as among the unions. The entrenched divisions among the trade unions have had a knock-on effect on the attitude of the authorities towards them. Faced with trade unions who could not bring themselves to work together and overcome their differences in the interests of their members, the government knew that any effort to work

with the trade unions on an ongoing basis would be something of a wild goose chase since establishing common ground would prove virtually impossible.

There is also the perception of the trade unions, as with other pressure groups in French society, as defenders of acquired privileges which hinder attempts at 'progress' on the part of the state. The Fourth Republic was referred to as *le régime des intérêts* as a result of its instability and perceived inability to stand up to the demands of the interest groups. Since one of the founding principles of the Fifth Republic is that it should be strong enough to withstand the very pressures which hindered the government of its predecessor, it follows that the state views the gap between it and the interest group as unbridgeable, and indeed as a challenge to repress the latter.

In his previously cited book, Vincent Wright provides an overview of a number of theories which have been advanced in a bid to explain the nature of relations between the State and the pressure groups under the Fifth French Republic. The first model presented is the **domination-crisis model**, largely associated with Stanley Hoffman and Michel Crozier, and anchored in an analysis of French attitudes towards authority and change. A number of the points made echo those which I have put forward myself above. Specifically, in an individualised society such as France, there is a tendency towards fragmentation and a hostility towards any genuine effort towards dialogue and fruitful interdependence. Each individual group exists solely for the defence of its own interests and its members and defends its rights against others as well as against the state in any bids it should make to challenge these.

On the reverse side, the state authorities view the groups as 'delinquent communities' or 'subservient clients' whose normal servility in the face of authority allows them to be treated with authoritarianism and indeed contempt. However, there is a basic realisation on the part of the state that many of the traditional rights of the pressure groups must ultimately be respected as a result of their potential for revolt should this not be the case.

This model thus presents an image of a society which, for prolonged periods, sees a largely peaceful society avoid the type of conflict which seems to erupt sporadically. Where conflict does erupt, it does so as a result of an attempt to impose some sort of reform which threatens the acquired rights of the groups in question, and without which it appears almost impossible that the reform would be pushed through.

Another model presented by Vincent Wright is **the endemic and open conflict model**. This model rests on a number of the assumptions shared by the previous model, concerning the authoritarian nature of the state and the fragmentation evident among the groups, however it differs from it in the central thrust of its argument. In the parliamentary régime of the Third and Fourth Republic, the strength of the assembly made it the natural valve through which the range of feelings evident in the country could be expressed and provided a forum through which the different interest groups could hope to be heard through the influential voices of those parliamentarians close to them. The greatly diminished role of parliament under the Fifth Republic and the development of a disciplined pro-government coalition has led to a very distinct change in the dominant political culture of France which has become more exclusive in its approach towards those outside its ranks.

Deprived of their traditional influence within the previous régime, the interest groups were forced into various forms of extra-institutional pressure. It is possible to place this type of pressure into a number of categories. The first and most obvious one is strike action, of which France has tended to see more of than countries such as Britain or Ireland. However, although disruptive strike action is an effective and popular weapon of protest in France, it is worth noting that French strikes only very occasionally prove to be long and drawn out matters. The fundamental weakness of the French trade unions means that they are rarely able to mobilise their divided ranks for anything more than a short and sporadic display of defiance. Consequently, there has tended to be a preference

for the successful formulae of *journées d'action* or lighting strikes where normal business is severely disrupted or indeed paralysed over a period of a few hours.

Away from the traditional and internationally followed principle of strike action, other more radical forms of protest have found their strength anew in contemporary France. Farmers have tipped or poured agricultural produce onto roadways in protest at imports or low prices, industrial workers such as those in the steel industry have taken part in spectacular antics such as burning down public buildings, taken managers hostage or even disrupting the Tour de France cycle race. Other radical forms of protest have come from quarters such as the ecology lobby which has blocked the routes of proposed motorways, closed ports to protest at oil pollution and occupied the site of proposed nuclear plants.

Wright makes the observation that many of the better organised and more threatened pressure groups in France today present two very distinctive outward images. On the one hand they have their moderate spokespersons whose job it is to negotiate with the government and other authorities, and their more militant members or *enragés* who take part in the extra-institutional forms of protest which have so often been a feature of the Fifth Republic. Thus, we find that commandos or *brigades* engaged in violent and even paramilitary activities against anyone from government ministers and local officials to tax inspectors, are also card-carrying members of major, organised federations such as the respected farmers union, the FNSEA.[51]

It is clear that the role of these groups of *enragés* is largely to press home the demands of the major established federations which they are, at least loosely, tied to. In a society in which the federations can never be sure of the influence they can carry from day to day or year to year, the threat of violence or street demonstrations has often swayed matters in their favour. On the fringes of large demonstrations, there are often those more physical elements, frequently referred to as *casseurs* whose actions have led to considerable amounts of damage across many French population centres. The street has had its victories.

In 1986-87, pressure from the train drivers brought about major concessions from the government. A series of major demonstrations in 1993 led to the withdrawal of the *Plan Balladur* on the employment conditions facing young people, whilst in 1995-6, a similar outcry led to the withdrawal of the *Plan Juppé* on social security reform.

The reality is though that, whilst activity of this nature may be considered a part of French political culture, it is not by any means successful on all occasions. On some key political issues, the government has held its ground, most particularly when faced with OAS violence in the latter stages of the Algerian War. Furthermore, the fundamental strength of the government under the Fifth Republic, and the increasing exposure of France to both internal and external market pressures has meant that, whilst extra-institutional pressures may have impacted on policy at particular, defined moments, they have rarely been able to prevent the object of their protests becoming a reality over time. Thus it has been in the case of artisanal bakers opposing the sale of cut-price bread in large supermarkets, and small shopkeepers opposing the development of large supermarkets to cite just two obvious examples.

The fact remains though that France is a society in which recourse to mass protest and even unrest in a bid to bring about concessions is seen as simply part and parcel of political activity under the Fifth Republic. One of the difficulties however about approaches which aim to portray this activity as being simply a consequence of the political reality of the country at the present time, is that they fail to recognise the much deeper entrenchment of these in French political life over a very long period of time. Fundamentally, we must recognise that taking to the street, often in an angry crowd, to push forward one's claims goes right back to the time of the Revolution of 1789 and that many of those who today engage in such practices would trace their legitimacy back to that same period. The revolutionary legacy is thus the basis for the belief that the French people may take their destiny into their own hands if and when they so choose, and they do this by engaging in protests of the kind which I have described above.

3.6 Labour Relations in France

The form of protest that many observers often associate most closely with France is strikes. The lay observer might be forgiven for thinking that the French trade unions possess an extraordinary ability to mobilise large and often irrepressible protests. However, the reality is somewhat different. In this section, I wish to take an overview of the French trade unions.

In France, the principle of trade union membership is enshrined in the Constitution, as is the right to strike. There is a very high degree of pluralism with a variety of unions holding highly divergent positions, all stemming from the starting point that labour is not merchandise. Overall, collective bargaining has been seen as week in the French industrial relations system. The adversarial nature of the relationship between employers and unions has had a direct impact on the nature of bargaining undertaken in France. This is despite a significant amount of legislation designed to improve the environment for collective bargaining passed between 1919 and 1982. It was only in certain sectors and during exceptional periods when the balance shifted in favour of the unions, that collective bargaining could be imposed on a reluctant management. Often, bargaining arose only when social conflicts became prolonged or broadened, and then under considerable pressure from the state. Collective agreements have, thus, primarily tended to be end of conflict agreements.

The French state has attempted to set an example for other actors in the economy by advocating improvements in industrial relations practices in the country. The standard terrain for such initiatives was the very large public sector in which levels of unionisation were at their highest and which comprised many of the country's largest corporations. As a result company agreements on pay and conditions became common in France from the 1950s, and by the 1970s the public sector was being used to give a renewed impetus to collective bargaining.

By the 1980s, some of the larger French industrial groups, still in public hands, were among the first to set up European Works Councils of their own accord.[52]

The state obviously plays the dominant role in the introduction of legislation aimed at modifying and revising work practices and laws. The newly elected socialist government of the 1980s revised a third of the existing labour code (*Code du Travail*) in just over 2 years. The working week was reduced from 40 to 39 hours a week, whilst the statutory retirement age was lowered from 65 to 60. There was also an additional week's statutory holiday entitlement. There was also the introduction of the Auroux Laws, designed to place collective bargaining at company level on a mandatory footing. Another concern of legislative measures is the status of interest organisations and collective bargaining. The main five union confederations have all obtained representative status under the terms of the 1950 Act on labour relations. The right to representation implies certain privileges such as the right to participate in multi-industry and sectoral bargaining, the right to representation within the company and the right to nominate candidates for election as *délégués du personnel* and as members of the works council. The right of representation amounts to a legal recognition for the confederations which is essential for their participation in the various tripartite consultative bodies set up by the government, and for receiving financial assistance to train representatives. There are, however, some limits placed on the representative status attained by the confederations. The FEN has representative status within the education sector only, whilst the CFE-CGC is viewed as representative only for white-collar, managerial and supervisory staff.

The main problem in relation to representation concerns the steady erosion of the level of the vote obtained by the recognised union confederations in elections to the works councils. The primary victim of what is being seen as a process of de-unionisation is the CGT. Between 1982 and 1996, the proportion of non-union representatives on works councils rose from 18.4% to 26.6%. Indeed, in 1996 non-union representatives won more votes than representatives of any single confederation for the first time ever. There has also been a progressive falling

off in the percentages of workplaces with at least one union representative on the works council. Between 1989 and 1992 this figure fell from 55% to 50.7%. The reasons for this are broadly speaking those which serve to explain the overall weakness of the Irish trade union movement as a whole.

We can cite the high proportion of small to medium-sized family-owned companies, the existence of an active anti-union policy on the part of many employers and the resistance to any expansion of union influence within firms, conservatism and excessive politicisation within the unions, and a reluctance of unions to engage in active recruitment and retention of members in favour of mass mobilisation at particular moments. There are other factors too, such as the poor relationship between the unions and political parties, thus limiting the real influence of trade unions outside periods of specific industrial conflict, and the persistent intervention of the state which, through its attempts to compensate for the weakness of the unions, may have reinforced this weakness in its eagerness to push through improvements to workers' rights on their behalf.

In looking at collective bargaining in the French context, we are faced with an inevitable paradox. Particularly since the 1982 Auroux Law which made collective bargaining at company level compulsory, some 92% of French workers have in fact been covered by a collective agreement, the highest rate within the OECD.[53] However, the actual amount of real bargaining going on in the economy is extremely limited. The main reason for this is the large amount of extension which is carried out. Under this practice, an accord reached between management and unions in one sector can be extended, by the government, to cover other firms or workers in comparable sectors where no such accord exists. However desirable it may be to bring more firms and workers 'in' on the benefits of collective agreements, here once again we have an example of the government undermining the potential benefits of collective bargaining by engaging in the arbitrary extension of an agreement reached in just one sector or part of a sector.

In addition, the actual regulations governing collective bargaining in France are somewhat nebulous. There is, under the 1982 law, a requirement on employers and unions to engage in collective bargaining, however there is no time constraint imposed on such bargaining and no requirement that agreement be reached. In addition, any agreement reached does not have a specific expiry date and does not contain a specific clause prohibiting strike action or other forms of industrial conflict whilst the agreement remains in force. Consequently, it was incumbent of one of the parties to call for renewed talks in order to review the agreement. The obvious consequence of this approach is that it tends to trigger small-scale conflicts within companies as the unions in particular pursue their demand for talks.

There have been a number of developments in the area of French collective bargaining over the past two decades. For some time up to the early-1980s, most agreements were central ones. However, the importance of these accords then declined. There was however a very important increase in company-level accords. There are a number of reasons for this. The aforementioned Auroux Law of 1982 made it compulsory for employers to negotiate with union representatives on a yearly basis on issues of pay and working hours. By 1985, 71% of firms were negotiating an agreement in this regard. The initial success which followed the passing of the 1982 law also served to endear more companies to the idea of company level bargaining, particularly since within a weakened union environment there was little chance of the accord frustrating the management's plans. In addition, employers were entitled to a derogation from certain statutory norms regarding overtime and working hours if they negotiated a company-level agreement with union representatives. In short, companies have found that company-level bargaining actually increases the level of flexibility which they enjoy in running their business.

The increase in the number of company-level agreements has not, however, undermined the role played by industry-wide agreements. The question is often one of the roles played by the different agreements. Over the course of the

1980s, industry-wide agreements became framework agreements facilitating the subsequent company-level bargaining. Thus, whilst the ground rules are set by the industry-wide accords, the company agreement adapts these to the circumstances of individual corporations. As a result, company agreements focus more on management problems than on those of workers.

In theory, the range of workplace institutions in France should provide for a coherent framework for consultation and negotiation on pre-determined issues. In reality, the low level of unionisation in the country has created a situation whereby it is often the same people who sit on the different bodies. The law allows for worker representatives in a number of different capacities. The longest established function is that of the *délégué du personnel*, mandatory in companies with ten or more employees. Their task is to investigate specific complaints by employees regarding wages and working conditions, and to monitor compliance with labour legislation and collective agreements. The have the power to call in the labour inspectorate should a dispute become severe. The *délégués du personnel* do not represent individual trade unions. They are elected by the workers as a whole and must represent the entire workforce. They are elected each year and voting by secret ballot takes place over two rounds. In the first round, the recognised trade unions put forward their candidates, however should these not obtain 50% of the votes cast, a second round is held in which any employee, irrespective of trade union membership is entitled to stand.[54]

The members of the *comité d'entreprise* or works council serve as a consultative body between the company management and its employees. In reality, the works council has very few precise powers. It is required to meet on a monthly basis and must grant its approval to the employer before he can take certain measures regarding changes in individual working schedules and the profit-sharing scheme. Otherwise though, their role is basically consultative and they are appraised of key decisions to be taken in the company regarding working hours, employment terms and changes in staffing levels. The works council receives information on such areas as purchasing, sales, production and finance

every four months and an annual report on the general state of the company. The council members are elected in a manner similar to the *délégués du personnel*.

The *délégués syndicaux* or trade union representatives have by far the most significant role in terms of the decisions which their intervention may lead to. Provision for them was made in the aftermath of the upheavals of May 1968 and the necessary legislation and agreements were passed in 1969. Trade union representatives are entitled to carry out their functions during working hours. In addition to this, there are entitled to engage in the collection of membership dues, the distribution of leaflets and the organisation of monthly meetings outside of working hours. In addition, they have special protection against dismissal. They have the exclusive right to engage in collective bargaining with the employer. Trade union representatives are significantly more likely to be found in larger companies.[55]

Broadly speaking however, the French system remains characterised by a number of specific problems regarding the role played by trade unions in the industrial relations system, and the continued existence of a conflict approach as opposed to one which seeks or even envisages the arrival at a consensus between the employer and the unions. I have outlined above the specific difficulties and shortcomings of the French trade unions which have contributed to their weakness as a standing force. In addition, faced with this reality, the state has a tendency of seeking to extend where possible collective agreements in order to secure industrial peace. However laudable this approach is, it does obscure the reality that the actual depth of collective bargaining remains unimpressive. For as long as French trade unions appear unable to overcome their weakness, and the extent of collective bargaining remains limited, there appears to be little prospect for any centralised partnership-type agreement at national level.

We saw previously how there is a splintering in French society which may be traced back to the period of the 1789 Revolution in terms of the main Left/Right cleavage, but which has obviously become more complex over time as the left

has been split by communist and more social-democratic forces. There has, of course, also been a very real splintering on the right between the Gaullists, who have evolved as a more secular and interventionist police force, and the more Christian Democratic UDF which has been a more centrist if also liberal – political movement.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to build on the theoretical overview provided in chapter 2 to offer a historical and analytical overview to the range of factors which have contributed to the existing political cultures in both France and Ireland. We have seen that the existence of a political culture which is conflictive or consensual is the product of a wide range of factors which are both historical and cultural. It is possible to relate much of this to the cleavage which dominates politics in a particular society. We have seen how a left/right cleavage predominates in France, and how this situation has been reinforced rather than lessened in the period since the 1789 Revolution. In Ireland, we have seen how the national issue eclipsed economic concerns at the time of independence, and how a range of factors since then have contributed to a situation where a climate of relative consensus is possible on matters of economic and industrial policy.

A number of contrasts between Ireland and France may be drawn based on the evidence supplied in this chapter. In the first instance, there is the very powerful role played by the Catholic Church in Ireland whose influence over the people was such that it contributed greatly to the stability of the new state by granting it its unquestioning allegiance from the outset. Another important role played by the Catholic Church was in its opposition to Communism. This strong point, allied with the party's own decision to give way to the national question in 1918, had the effect of stunting the growth of the Labour Party as a socialist movement, and consequently contributed to the lack of emergence of a left/right cleavage in Irish politics. When we compare this to France, we immediately see how the anti-clerical attitudes of many French republicans had the effect not only of

marginalising the French Church, but also of engendering deep divisions between liberal Catholics and the strong conservative wing of French Catholicism. The Catholic Church, rather than contributing to the absence of a left/right cleavage as in the case of Ireland, actually became caught up in such a cleavage in France, and generally associated with the right wing and indeed the most reactionary elements in the country.

In terms of the existence of social consensus or social conflict in economic and social matters, we have seen in this chapter how there was a concerted effort over several decades by the government to impose a sense of the national interest on the trade unions and overcome the turbulent labour relations history in the country. They have broadly speaking succeeded in doing this, however we have seen how given the adversarial history of trade unionism in Ireland, there has been a preference for a voluntarist rather than a corporatist approach. In France meanwhile, a range of factors such as the existence of conflict in society – as presented by Vincent Wright and others – and organisational difficulties within the trade union movement have meant that little prospect exists of developing the kind of structures seen in Ireland, thus leading us to conclude that period conflict seems set to continue in France.

From the data contained in this chapter, this thesis will now go on to present a case study, the objective of which is to provide an empirical study based on much of what has already been discussed. To analyse the French conflict model and the particular relationship between French labour relations and politics, I have chosen to focus on the 1995 strikes, or rather social movements, which opposed a plan for social security cuts in order to assist France in meeting the so-called Maastricht criteria for European Economic and Monetary Union. It is essential for me to introduce the European picture here, since I believe strongly that the European Union, and the international context more generally, provide a unique framework for looking at how two societies address issues which are affected by their interaction with the wider world. In the case of the 1995 social movements, we get a clear picture of how the imperative of qualifying for the

Euro currency, laid down by a right-wing government, caused a large wave of protests from the left. These protests both focused on the defence of the status quo and also served to highlight the extent to which a gulf can exist between the different elements of French society.

In the case of Ireland, we shall see how the negotiation of the Partnership 2000 deal once again highlighted the extent to which the country's prosperity was seen as being dependent on its ability to arrive at a pact which would link pay increases to a broader agenda of partnership between government, employers and unions. Such an approach builds on a legacy of such thinking extending back several decades, and appears to underline the view that for Ireland to become wealthier, the country must both be competitive and present an image of economic and industrial stability to the wider world. With a history of high unemployment and emigration, the partnership approach has broadly been welcomed in Ireland, although we will see that there is a degree of opposition from certain sections of the trade union movement.

After the case study, chapter 5 will examine broader evidence regarding the relationship between Ireland, France and the European Union and build on the notion that the greater left/right division in France and the very different economic history of the country leads to considerably more debate regarding the whole project than is the case in Ireland. Once again, however, in the case of Ireland, we will see that whilst they appear to be convincing reasons regarding why a broad consensus has existed regarding the European Union up until now, there are reasons why this may not be the case to the same extent in the future.

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Chapter 4

Case study

4.0 Historical context

The building of the new Europe had been riding on a tide of consensus in both France and Ireland virtually since both countries first jumped aboard the European train. Everything in France pointed to a country in the driving seat of the European process from the 1950s onwards into the 1990s. The reasons for this are clear and well documented. Central among them is the Franco-German alliance and the role defined for both powers within it. Throughout the entire post-war period, and indeed up to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the east-European communist régimes, France was the clear driving force in the relationship between the two strongest powers within the EEC. Through the particular set of circumstances which prevailed at the end of the second world war, France had once again found itself on the "winning side", thus ensuring that it would provide the veneer of respectability for the future Federal Republic of Germany which would itself seek to pin its aspirations firmly to the common European mast. France, with its permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council and international credibility provided on unlikely front for the new Germany at international level. Insofar as French attitudes to Europe were concerned, this was no bad thing.

For as long as France seemed to be holding all the political and diplomatic cards whilst being, itself, buoyed up by the perennially booming German economy, few within its borders were likely to complain about Europe being in conflict with France's own interests. Indeed, they clearly had no reason to. Up until the launch of the 1992 project for a Single European Market in 1984, the EEC was a rather docile, inoffensive and intergovernmental nebulous, never really going to upset anyone, least of all its leading member states.[1] French self-assuredness about the protection of the country's interests was further enhanced during the 1960s by de Gaulle's "Non" to Britain's membership, which again showed that

the EEC was unlikely to run counter to French interests, save for an unfortunate error.

However, during the early part of the 1990s, a number of key events occurred which altered the balance significantly in terms of the traditional role occupied by France and Germany within what was then becoming the European Union. In the first instance, the structure and nature of the union itself had been undergoing significant change over the latter part of the 1980s, as the drive towards the completion of the Single Market led the community to take on much more of the supranational character for which it has become known today. Under the stewardship of Jacques Delors, the European Commission assumed an increased role as instigator of policies and regulator of their implementation once approved by the Council of Ministers or the Council. As such, Europe became somewhat less about amicable decisions between its leading statesmen - although the major decisions were still made in an intergovernmental fashion - and more about the role played by a supranational executive backed up by a Court of Justice to assist it in enforcing the rules. As the Single Market became a reality and the rules governing the behaviour of individual governments became tighter, so the Commission came to be seen more and more as a *de facto* European government.

The second major change was the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the communist régimes throughout eastern Europe. The reunification of Germany was, we know, a source of disquiet to both Britain and France, who had grave reservations about a resurgent Germany. Nonetheless, the reunification went through, but with it came another very significant change. The formal occupation of western Germany by the United States, Britain and France was declared at an end even though the scaling down of troop numbers continues to this day. The restoration of German self-confidence which accompanied the country's rehabilitation on the international stage marked the end of France's assured domination of the Franco-German alliance. The reality was further rammed home in France by the depth of the recession to which the economy sunk

during the early to mid-1990s whilst Germany largely escaped the immediate impact of the downturn.

The other major change which occurred and which is related to the first point I made earlier, concerns the change in the perspective of closer European unity as contained in the Maastricht Treaty. Whereas the benefits of the Single Market were for the great majority an extension of the logical benefits of being part of Europe in the first place, the Maastricht Treaty envisaged a number of proposals where clearly went much further than the mere creation of transnational structures for the greater good of all. It proposed a reduction of national sovereignty insofar as the drive towards economic and monetary union was concerned.

It is important to consider here the implications of all of this for France. In addition to the previous reservation with which France might be associated - namely the loss of its traditional interventionist role in economic matters - there is also the necessary consideration of the role of Germany, since it is the Deutschemark which will form approximately 30% of the new European currency. The convergence criteria for Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) have had particular effects for France. In order to satisfy the criteria set down for convergence and made particularly strict at the behest of Germany, France found itself obliged to reduce its budget deficits, a requirement which led the reshuffled government of Prime Minister Alain Juppé to bring in an austerity package known as the Plan Juppé in late October 1995.

This move caused one of the biggest waves of social protest to be seen in France for many years, and served as a potent symptom of the ideological problems posed for the country by a drive towards a liberal economic framework which represented a major break with the traditions of French economic management. France, as already pointed out, has long been a bastion of economic interventionism. In the aftermath of the second world war, the country engaged in a prolonged period of economic planning. At the outset, this was aimed at

rebuilding a country languishing in its wartime ruins. However, the planning process continued as a major plank in French policy right up to the late 1960s and early 1970s. It served as the backdrop for the period known in France as *les trente glorieuses*, the thirty glorious years of economic growth and prosperity which continued virtually unabated until the global economic tensions caused by the first oil crisis in 1973. From the initial reconstruction phase in the direct aftermath of the war, during the 1950s and 1960s, the process of economic planning served as the motor of the economic expansionism which saw France become a major world economic player.[2]

Les trente glorieuses had an important effect on French morale, accompanied as they were by a number of other developments of importance, such as France becoming a major industrial player through indigenous and domestically funded economic growth in a period where such growth could still be managed within a domestic economic framework, protected from the rigours of today's more open and globalising markets. As I have already pointed out, the developing EEC in which France was a driving force due to its special relationship with Germany, and the absence of Britain from the EEC scene were merely an extension of French economic policy at this time. President de Gaulle knew very well how to use France's veto at community level, and in the case of his relationship with Britain, he knew that France held all the political cards.

4.1 The context of the French public sector strikes of 1995

The strike by public sector workers which affected France in late 1995 rapidly became one of the most serious disputes in France for many years. The actual reason behind the strike was the *Plan Juppé* brought in by the government following a major reshuffle in October 1995, just five months after President Chirac's election victory. It is useful to give some consideration here to what the nature of this plan was, and why it generated the reaction it did. As has already been stated, the overriding aim of the plan was a radical reduction in French budget deficits which had been growing steadily and when needed to be lowered

if France was to qualify for EMU. From a deficit level of FRF 61 bn in 1995, the government intended to achieve a figure of FRF 17 bn for 1996. Under the Maastricht convergence criteria, France was required to achieve a budget deficit of less than 3% of GDP for 1997. In addition, spending on health was to be limited to an increase of 2.1% for 1996 as new restrictions were imposed on prescriptions on the state health scheme. The aim of the latter was to combat France's soaring social security deficit - colloquially known as the *trou de la Sécu* - which by late 1995 stood at FRF 250 bn.

In order to achieve these objectives, it was clear that major spending cuts were necessary, and these were clearly going to be in the public sector. The seeds of conflict had already been sown in the education sector where agitation had been evident since the *rentrée* at the beginning of October. The persistent problem of overcrowding in French universities had shown itself to be as serious as ever, and there had already been protests regarding this situation. To this underlying state of affairs must be added the contentious contents of the Plan Juppé itself.

As the largest and most inclusive public sector in western Europe, France's has traditionally been awash with special treatment for its workers when compared to those earning their living in what is euphemistically referred to as the *secteur exposé*. The plan Juppé thus sought to reduce some of these special conditions. In particular, the special retirement scheme for railwaymen attracted the plan's attention. As is fairly widespread within the French public sector, the railwaymen have a defined status as *cheminots*. As a result of their working conditions and the historical inertia of their status, they had long held the right to retire on full pension after 37.5 years of service as opposed to the 40 years which applied to most other grades.

For many observers, the 1995 strikes will be remembered particularly for the disruption occasioned to the national rail network. This recollection is an entirely justified one, since it was on the railways that the strike proved most solid and of most inconvenience to firms outside the public sector. For

approximately one month, France's rail system ground to a complete halt, despite an early government u-turn on plans to tamper with the pension arrangements of the *cheminots*. The austerity package in general kept the strike going on for longer as it signalled, from the point of view of the strikers, the starving of fresh investment in the public sector and thus, in the view of the railwaymen, indicated the risk of a period of neglect in areas such as the railways.

4.2 The factors underpinning the strike

There seems to be little doubt that the 1995 strike was a strong protest over the trends evident in French government policy, in the great tradition of major French industrial disputes. Tracing the origins of the discontent in a manner that would allow us to pin it down to one or two precise factors is obviously enough going to be difficult. In terms of European policy - important for reasons that will become clear - there had been vocal discontent in France at the time of the September 1992 Maastricht referendum which was carried by less than 1%. However, in terms of the specific conditions which led to the strike movement which is the subject of this analysis, it might be advisable to look to the presidential election campaign of April and May 1995.

For many observers, Jacques Chirac won the 1995 poll on a platform which was far removed from the position that they had seen him espouse over the greater part of his political career. His campaign had an almost social-democratic ring to it, as he spoke of *La France pour tous* (France for all) and in particular of the now emblematic *fracture sociale*, the divide in French society which excluded many from the benefits enjoyed by the majority. In a country which had been dominated since 1993 by the restrained liberalism of Edouard Balladur which combined new privatisations and free market opportunities with an overall conservative economic policy, Chirac cleared appeared to promise the sun, the moon and the stars. Out of the window went the caution of his lieutenant and fellow presidential candidate Balladur and in came the radical language of

relance. In the end, however, the Chirosceptics undeniably won the day when the plan Juppé was drafted after the president granted an interview on internal policy matters in late October 1995.

4.3 The 1995 strike as interpreted by commentators and protagonists

How then must we interpret the range of ideologies, angers and hopes that made up the December 1995 strikes and how do they represent a French phenomenon which is comparable with similar dilemmas in other countries? Throughout the period of the strikes, the *Horizons-Débats* column of *Le Monde* provided a rich forum for debate of the issues involved among intellectuals and other notable figures in French society. This was in addition to the paper's standard reporting of events, which also provided useful insights into the spirit of the strike movement.

"The anger of the street makes itself felt more effectively than the sum of all discontent."[3]

Stéphane Israël seems to have found the correct tone in his article published in *Le Monde* on December 6 1995 and entitled *Vive le mouvement social.* It is one of many articles which best express the manner in which the strike movement struck a chord in the France of the time and set the tone for a reassessment of how changes in the European and world economies were set to affect France, by focussing on their impact on the government policy which spawned the *plan Juppé*. Referring to the rail strike, Israël states rhetorically:

"It is without doubt an intolerable privilege for a métro driver who spends half his life underground and who only sees the light of day when night comes, (sic) to stop working at fifty."[4]

That comment provides a clear illustration of the kind of debate that characterised the analysis of the strike on the part of intellectuals and prominent left-wing figures. Among the many commentators giving their reactions in *Le Monde* was Jacques Attali. On December 15 1995, he published an article clearly relating the strike to questions of French sovereignty and the level of control French people have over their destiny.

'No people can live long without a clear idea of its role in history'[5]

Attali places the responsibility for creating this clear idea and facilitating its adaptation to the circumstances of the moment at the door of the nation's élites. It is they who are charged, in Attali's view, with ensuring the perennity of the civilisation in question.

Attali bases his ideas on his interpretation of the role of nations and civilisations through history. He states that there is an

'almost automatic link between the ability of a people to devise an image of its future and its rate of growth.'[6]

Thus, for Attali, when a long term view of the country's development is set out, which clearly presents the sacrifices required of the populace in a structured manner in order to realise objectives which may be regarded as legitimate, then the people will do what is necessary.

However, and with clear reference to the *plan Juppé*, insofar as it demanded sacrifices from the people for a project which Attali plainly does not consider as falling into the previous category, Attali makes the following remarks:

'When, on the contrary, that same people has no more than a vague idea of what it will have become in two generations time, when it confuses the ends and the means, it lets itself go, ignores its heritage, leaves nothing to its children, declines, emigrates and forgets itself. That has happened to many countries in Europe and elsewhere.'[7]

Unfortunately, Attali does not provide us with any concrete arguments to back up his case, thus leaving us to interpret it as we will. Nonetheless, he sees in the 1995 strike movement echoes of a defining historical event of 200 years before. He states:

'When France came to doubt her future, she did not give up, she did not emigrate, she did not even change dreams, but rather she changed her élite; that was called a revolution.'[8]

It is here that Attali makes reference to one of the key differences I have chosen to insist upon between the contemporary societies of Ireland and France. Attali paints the picture of the developments which have dominated France since the end of the second world war:

'Since the second world war, France's political gameplan was relatively clear and simple. Its aim was to train the citizens of the Republic and integrate them into a strong economy among the most powerful in the world, a player in a common, united European market in the face of the Soviet threat. To achieve that, she had defined an agenda, shared by more or less all the political, economic, social and cultural élites.'[9]

Attali goes on to observe that the situation prevailing since the fall of the Berlin Wall and in the face of rising unemployment coupled with the ever greater role of Europe, had led to a very different situation. Globalisation has, he argues, led to a situation where the French see a less optimistic future staring them in the face. The country is no longer big enough to stand as a large independent power without radical reforms. In Attali's view, the future for France is clearly defined as being at best the equivalent of England and at worst that of Argentina, both of which were great economic powers during the first part of the twentieth century. The central plank of Attali's argument, which we will return to with other commentators later, revolves around a stinging critique of the inability of France's élites to come up with a vision of France's own destiny as a nation into the next century and beyond. He suggests that being

'incapable of facing up to the need to redefine a programme of work for the next thirty years, they are in general satisfied to administer aimless sacrifices imposed by the world markets, Europe or any other reason totally unrelated to a plan which France could have for itself.'[10]

Here is a fundamental critique of what in France is known as *la contrainte extérieure*. This seemingly innocuous expression meaning 'external obligation' belies a much more complex notion in France whereby those in power in France manage to push the blame for unpopular decisions on factors or organisations at international level, thus attempting to evade responsibility for them.

Clearly there are those who will accept the *contrainte extérieure* as a 'higher obligation' and put forward the logic that France as a player in the international economy cannot afford to remain immune from the conditions and pressures experienced by other European governments. That view had, it must be acknowledged, been in the majority in France among mainstream forces during the early 1990s. It was, arguably, the lack of real debate over it which contributed to the strikes of December 1995. Another contributing factor, as mentioned above, was the plan Juppé itself. With regard to the reform of the social security system which constituted a major part of it, Attali adds that this question:

> 'at the heart of the debate on national identity and solidarity could only be technical and devoid of a sense of direction, and felt as a unilateral calling into question of the social contract.'[11]

This debate over the existence, or the lack of it, of a model was expressed also in *Le Monde*'s December 12 edition when the *Horizons* section ran an interview with the sociologist and prominent intellectual Alain Touraine and Dominique Strauss-Kahn, former socialist minister and one of the better known thinkers within the Socialist Party. It is interesting that the issue of a vision and also of means and ends as they affect the single currency are also raised here. Touraine reminds us of the reconstruction of the French economy on a model very centred on the state, and above all very distinctively French. The state was the modernising agent and one of its principal interfaces as such was its social security system. Social security, for Touraine, was social progress and it was a model which worked well in its time.

That time ran until the mid-1970s when the international marketplace began to undergo a process of opening up, into which France went but without modifying its structures. To quote Touraine:

'France entered into a new liberal model in the worst way since there were neither political parties, unions (practically), employers - with the important exception of the government of Michel Rocard -, and few intellectuals who understood the necessity of a global model in order to avoid rampant ultra-liberalism.'[12]

Despite the differences between them that emerge during the interview - Strauss-Kahn plays his card as acting politician quite clearly when he defends the Socialist Party against some of the allegations of complacency raised by Touraine - the two men seem to coincide on a key point which is their analysis of economic liberalism. This French viewpoint is a clear illustration of the gulf in perceptions that can exist between two societies over the nature of an economic or social system.

For Strauss-Kahn, liberalism is:

'a phase of retreat, a social disorganisation between two periods of organisation. As one is leaving a period of organisation, one awaits the next. Intellectuals and politicians must invent a new form of regulation for thirty or fifty years. We are still caught in that middle period.'[13]

Touraine goes further:

'I have often written ... that there is no liberal society. Liberalism is a transition, a breakdown, the passing from one type of social control of the economy to the other. However, here there is the absence of a model of reconstruction. People prefer the former model to no model at all. Juppé's plan has failed because the French refuse to enter into a liberal transition without the prospect of social advancement.'[14]

It is this absence of a model and the lack of viable future prospects which are stated again and again in the *Le Monde* articles on the December 1995 strikes. On December 9 1995 again in the *Horizons* column, Laurent Greilsamer wrote on this topic in an article entitled *Schizophrénie à la française*. Based on its tone, there is an argument for suggesting that is article is less overtly sympathetic

towards the strikers than some of the others I have referred to. It is, if anything, an attempt at explaining the favourable reaction of the French to the strike, even though many of them had their lives turned upside down by the all out public transport strike, particularly in Paris and some of the largest cities.

Greilsamer's definition of schizophrenia appears thus to be based on the fact that even though the majority of workers particularly in the private sector showed no willingness to actually go on strike themselves, no great understanding of the complex issues involved, they yet proved supportive of the strike, with some 60% in favour of it throughout the period.

Looking at the conditions which were supposedly under threat in 1995 - generous pay and conditions for public sector workers, and their equally generous retirement schemes, Greilsamer takes up the issue of the insecurity felt by many regarding future developments:

'Is that France not gone? The French, worried sick, believe it is and are no longer quite sure about how to express their fear. Two fears are haunting them: the spectre of seeing the majority of young people unemployed or reduced to earning FRF 5,000 per month, and that of seeing retired people miserable, broken down and indeed homeless. It is as if mother France, once so generous, offering milk and wine has nothing else to offer now other than a cup of black coffee.'[15]

The strike movement mobilised intellectuals to a significant extent, although there didn't seem to be significant differences between some of the analyses put forward. The sociologist from the Collège de France and prominent commentator, Pierre Bourdieu, entered the fray on December 12 1995 when he and a group of fellow intellectuals attended a meeting in an SNCF meeting room. Bourdieu referred to the strike as:

'an historic chance for France and for all those who refuse the new alternative: liberalism or barbarism.'[16]

Bourdieu also attacked the élites and technocrats referring to them as:

'this state nobility which derives its conviction of its legitimacy from its educational qualifications and the authority of science - particularly the science of economics.'[17]

Essentially, therefore, Bourdieu's stance is a reactionary one. He is more concerned with attacking the end of a particular vision for France than he is with stressing the need for a new one. If anything, Bourdieu appears to concluded that liberalism is an option open to France and it may be assumed from this that he is acknowledging the existence of liberalism as something more than a transitional phenomenon between the two kinds of regulation as has been suggested by other commentators.

The contrary perception is taken up, and even expanded upon by a number of the figures I have mentioned already. Returning to Laurent Greilsamer at this point, he again stresses the fact that the world, as it was known to that point, was becoming undone. Thus he combats the impression - again as part of his 'schizophrenic' argument - that the striking public service workers were in some way the ambassadors of their private sector counterparts, "forced to work in order to keep their jobs."[18]

For Greilsamer, the public sector workers could not have been anyone's ambassador, since a mission[19]:

'presupposes a clear future to be built with precise proposals. Yet the railwaymen and the non-strikers are merely building together, through an equal contribution, a nostalgia for a comfort which is threatened. No matter how modest, this was a well established form of social organisation promising better health, better social life and better well-being'[20]

Here again, despite the apparent distance taken by Greilsamer's article, is this affirmation of the absence of a clear alternative which could have served as a tangible rallying call for the strike movement. It is in this manner that the December 1995 strikes may be seen as reactionary, more than a coordinated movement demanding progress in certain defined areas. Of course there is

debate about this point, and some of it is indeed very convincing. In their *Horizons* article published on December 11 1995, Régis Debray and Sami Nair refer to the liberal debate saying:

'Some say "France must be a full player in the globalised economy", whereas the movement replies strongly, "We are the living society. Monetary logic should be decided for us and not us for it."[21]

In his *Le Monde* interview alongside Dominique Strauss-Kahn, Alain Touraine makes the point that:

'French trade unionism has been almost entirely reduced to defending the public sector. For a policy of the future, two themes are fundamental. The first is solidarity. The second theme is the absence of diversity. France has a unifying model. It is a country in which feminism has disappeared; where in the name of an abstract universalism, immigrants are rejected. Our society needs to learn about diversity and not close in on its own identity, in other words on the state. The left has not yet carried out its cultural revolution, its opening up to the world, its acceptance of diversity, its recognition of the problems of solidarity. Mine is a call for the renewal of the model, and the time we have to do it is very limited.'[22]

4.4 Opposition to the strike movement

The social movements of late-1995 represented a period of political instability which was certainly the most serious seen in France since the winter of 1986, and which indeed drew comparisons with the momentous events of May 1968. This case study has already looked at the reasons why the movements came about. Broadly speaking, public sector workers felt they were being unfairly singled out in the governments bid to reduce the public deficit ahead of France's entering Economic and Monetary Union. Additionally, they were opposed in principle to the government's plans to address the debt-ridden social security system by imposing limits on what doctors could prescribe. Considerable debate went on regarding whether other workers in the private sector were tacitly supporting their striking compatriots by not reacting negatively towards them. By and large, ordinary workers in the major cities, deprived of public transport made heroic efforts to get to work, many prepared to walk for hours in order to get there and back.

I have carried out an extensive search on a range of electronic sources, including CDROM bibliographical databases, the online catalogue of a variety of Irish university libraries, and an extensive personal search through back editions of journals such as *L'Expansion*, Modern and Contemporary France, *L'Esprit*, *Les Temps Modernes* and others. In addition, I have carried out repeated searches on the Internet using the most reliable search engines, such as Yahoo! (www.yahoo.com), Yahoo! France (www.yahoo.fr) and Altavista (www.altavista.com). These searches have only served to confirm the view which I have advanced throughout this case study that the strike movement enjoyed widespread support.

Most of the publications that I have been able to find on the subject of the strike movement have focused either on providing something of a narrative of events, much as this case study has, or on analysing the reasons for such a calling into question of the approach being followed by the nation's élites in placing the emphasis on France's qualification for Economic and Monetary Union at the expense of some of the traditional generosity the country had shown its public sector workers. Few if any sources looked at the issue of outright opposition to the strike movement, and indeed it is my recollection, as somebody who lived through the period in France, that there really was little serious protest against it, with most people actually showing understanding for the values which the strikers were defending. Whilst French television made considerable capital during the course of the strikes on the images of the average citizen battling their way to work, and sometimes staying over in major cities with people they hardly knew, this coverage broadly speaking bore out the manner in which, far from developing a hostile attitude towards the strikers, most people seemed to take the inconvenience in their stride.

Among prominent philosophers, there was a degree of sympathy for the initial aims of the Plan Juppé. On November 24, L'Esprit published an *"Appel pour une réforme de fond de la sécurité sociale"*. This had the support of a number of

figures including the journal's editor-in-chief, Pierre Rosanvallon and the prominent philosopher Paul Ricoeur. In doing so, they were clearly siding with the position of Nicole Notat and the CFDT, which is more or less the position with which L'Esprit may generally be associated. However, these thinkers quickly found themselves overtaken by events on the ground, as the social movement gained in strength and in seriousness. By December 5, having amassed some 300 signatures, they found themselves having to clarify that their support of a reform of the social security system was not intended to condemn of social movement that was ongoing at the time. One of those who signed the Esprit petition, and who has already been quoted in this chapter, was Alain Touraine. As we have seen, Touraine was concerned with the need for a model to accompany the liberal path of the policy being proposed by the government during this period. During a televised debate on the *Plan Juppé*, he accused those who wanted to go back to an ultra-protectionist stance of creating the Soviet Union instead of the European Union.

An interview with Paul Ricoeur published in the Swiss magazine *Construire* during 1997 shed some light on his views on the developing global economy.

In the first instance, Ricoeur believes that the economy must remain competitive whilst not losing its soul. He says that he is particularly conscious of the difficulties inherent in doing this as a result of the dominant position currently enjoyed by capitalism in the world It is for this reason that he opts for a solution which he freely accepts may be characterised as that of least suffering. This is the development of a large and powerful European Union which is able to hold its own in the world.[23]

We see, therefore, a commonality with the view put forward by Alain Touraine – and which will be better explained again later in this chapter – that the problem does not concern the necessity for reform, but rather the manner in which that reform or course of action is explained, and the model which accompanies it.

4.4.1 Organised opposition to the strike movement

It would, however, be wrong to argue that there was no organised opposition to the strike movement, since clearly a situation never arises in a democracy where there is unanimity on a subject of such considerable importance. What is important to note in relation to this strike movement in particular, however, is the sparse nature of this opposition and also, I venture to suggest, its almost comical nature, given the evidence of direct government collusion in the setting up of groups to oppose the strikers' actions.

On a party political level, the two governing parties obviously remained behind the prime minister in his attempts to reform the social security system, spurred on by the newly elected president which they had both supported. Perhaps of more interest is the position of the extreme right National Front since, obviously, it found itself in the position of being an opponent of the government, but also with a philosophy which differed considerably from the parties of the left which were four square behind the strike movement.

Early in the strikes, the FN attempted the double feat of criticising both the *Plan Juppé* and the actions of the trade unions. Both Bruno Mégret and Jean-Marie Le Pen had advanced the argument that the deficit in France's social security system was the result of root causes which were not being addressed by the Plan, primarily those related to unemployment, immigration and European policy. Indeed, Le Pen suggested that the Plan would solve nothing, and only serve to worsen social injustice. With regard to the situation in the universities, Le Pen attributed this to the failure of government policies aimed at bringing the number of young people obtaining their *baccalauréat* up to 80% of the school leaving population. The *Front National* favours a much stricter selection process for university entry than that currently in force in France.[24] In another speech, Le Pen engaged in a stinging criticism of the trade union movement, accusing it of striving to protect its 'caste privileges' and of engaging in a 'scandalous stirring up of popular discontent.'[25]

In the political arena, as the strikes went on there appeared to be a feeling of desperation among government backbenchers at an apparent lack of leadership in the midst of a situation which appeared out of control. These tensions within the majority became particularly apparent in the middle of the month when two French pilots who had been held for over 100 days by the Bosnian Serbs were released into the hands of the French Army's chief of staff. The prime minister's announcement of their release caught deputies entirely by surprise, and in the corridors of parliament, *Le Monde*'s sketchwriter managed to capture the view among RPR and UDF parliamentarians that their leaders were failing them.

4.4.2 The views of government backbench politicians

It is clear from their remarks that they did not all see eye to eye on the manner in which their constituents and supporters express their concern about events. There were those deputies who tended to play down the impact of the strike, arguing that their own constituents saw through the protests. Jean de Gaulle (RPR, Paris) said that he had been inundated by telephone calls from people who were fed up with the strikes, however he argued against a reaction which would be perceived as being too firm, arguing that such an approach could have the negative effect of pitting one group in society against another. A more hard-line approach was envisaged by de Gaulle's party colleague from the town of Meaux, Jean-François Copé, who called for the setting up of a committee for the freedom of work and the defence of the town's public transport users, adding that the town hall had been inundated with calls from members of the public calling for alternative means of transport. His colleague from Seine-Saint-Denis, Senator Christian Demuynk, said he had been presented with 80,000 signatures from public transport users.[26]

In their hostility to the strikes, the deputies on the government side appeared remarkably divided on the measures which should be taken either to resolve the strike movement or to combat it. Some expressed the realisation that public opinion regarding the strikes was surprising lacking in radicalism given the

extent of the disruption being caused. For Thierry Mariani (RPR Vaucluse):

"Public opinion is expressing mixed feelings. There is a sense of irritation towards the strikers, but that doesn't prevent there from being a certain amount of sympathy as well, as a result of blind fear."[27]

His colleague, Jean-Paul Anciaux (RPR Saône-et-Loire) echoed his sentiments:

"We are at a defining moment. People are unsure, neither fundamentally for or radically against the movement. Many feel that civil servants are basically priviliged, but they are also telling themselves that they may have something to gain from the demands the civil servants are putting forward."[28]

This uncertainty which deputies were noticing among their workers found itself mirrored in their own suggestions for how to deal with the movement. Some, such as Yves Nicolin (UDF-PR Loire), advocated a hard-line approach insisting that:

"Juppé should concede nothing on his reform plans, even if negotiation is possible on their implementation. If we relent this time, we'll have demonstrations against any reform we try."[29]

This view met with support in the words of Jean-Michel Fourgous (RPR, Yvelines):

"There is no question of continuing to negotiate with people who have shown the disdain they have for the country. It's a question of morale. Those people will have to tell us to which race they belong."[30]

On the other hand, there were clearly those who advocated a 'softly softly' approach in terms of dealing with the movement, fearing the possible negative repercussions of being too rash. This was particularly so in relation to what I will analyse in more detail later, namely the attempts by the RPR to instigate counter-protests by concerned citizens, particularly the users of public transport. The RPR's Denis Jacquat declared that:

"...it would be a risky strategy which might only fan the flames."[31]

Several deputies pointed to the growing sense of concern evident in the country regarding the extent of the strike movement, and to the increasing impact it was having on their constituents. As has already been evidenced by the statement from deputies representing the broad Paris region, the impact of the movement in its developmental phase was primarily an urban one, and indeed very much a Paris-centred one. However, this situation evolved over time as the postal service became steadily more disrupted around the country. Additionally, as the transport situation in the Paris region remained serious, and large numbers of long distance lorry drivers became involved in the dispute, many companies began experiencing serious supply problems. This worsening situation was reflected in a hardening of attitudes among rural government deputies in mid-December. This feeling was reflected by Adrien Zeller (UDF-FD Bas-Rhin) who asked:

> "What is Chirac doing, what is the President of the Republic doing? That's what the grassroots are asking me. It is the President's responsibility, in his paternal role, to explain and to reassure whilst preserving things as they are. We need that."[32]

There were further indications of frustration on the government back benches, and surprisingly close to the government as well. One of the major gaffes of the period was made by the RPR deputy for Indre-et-Loire, Philippe Briand, who had been responsible for youth affairs during the Chirac's presidential campaign. He was hauled before party whips after making a public statement which appeared to strongly call into question the Prime Minister's abilities:

> "We need to garner public support for our reforms, and there is a real Juppé problem. The relationship with the public hasn't worked. It's not really a communication problem. We need a visceral relationship."[33]

Aside from this variety of parliamentary opinion, one of the more interesting aspects of the opposition to the strikes was the manner in which the French government attempted to orchestrate this in a manner which was very blatant and which no real attempt was made to cover up.

At the beginning of December, the national executive of the RPR, which included Alain Juppé as party president, sent a note to the leaders of the party around the country which detailed five practical steps in mobilising local action groups against the strikes in the public transport sector. The leadership advised its faithful to ask citizens to sign a petition, the text of which stated that they did not want to be taken hostage and asking to be allowed work. It was also proposed that leaflets be distributed calling on people to take part in a demonstration of 7 December. Neither the address of the local party, nor any mention of the RPR, was to appear on these leaflets, and it was suggested that a P.O. Box be opened to serve as the address.

The fact that the party was willing to organise such a form of protest seems surprising given the obvious risks that it could further inflame the situation. It also seems obvious that the risk inherent in such an approach was only heightened by attempting to form organisations which were essentially clandestine in character, outside the formal structures of the party, but yet entirely manipulated and controlled by it. It also seems obvious that the only reason for engaging in such a desperate measure is a realisation that a protest movement of that kind is unlikely to come about of its own accord. The survey evidence regarding the level of support among the public for the strikers, their principles and their aims, provides a solid argument for believing that the French public, however inconvenienced, at no point became so angered as to countenance a large scale revolt against the strikers whose actions were forcing them, in many cases, to walk for several hours per day. Indeed, considerable amounts of anecdotal evidence in the media pointed to a large degree of stoicism and solidarity among Parisians in particular. Frankly, the attempts by the RPR to stir up unrest among public transport users appeared to reflect little more than the disarray caused in the government circles by the extent of the movement, as evidenced by the variety of opinions expressed above by backbench deputies.

4.3.3 Opposition from within the business world

Within the business world, opposition to the strikes came from a number of quarters. The national employers confederation, the CNPF, actually remained relatively modest in its pronouncements, contenting itself in the early part of the strike with carrying out a survey among its members to assess the extent of disruption. It did, however, remain behind the government's plans and made calls on the government to be firm in its resolve whilst also calling for a quick return to normality in the country. Other business federations were more outspoken in their denunciation of the strikes. The small and medium sized business association, the CGPME, issued a statement on November 29 announcing:

"Strike leaders, be aware that you are starving us."[34]

Other federations representing similarly exposed sectors of the economy also spoke out. In the building and metalwork sectors, the *Fédération parisienne du bâtiment* and the *Groupement des industries métallurgiques parisiennes* pointed to the damage being done to their members by the strike. For the latter, there were problems of disorganisation and supply difficulties. Another union to show its frustration was the *Union des industries textiles.*

It is also worth noting that coverage seeking to criticise the set of circumstances which gave rise to the strike movement tended to analyse the reasons for the strike, and the sense of discontent which gave rise to it, rather than engaging in outright attacks on the strikers themselves. This does not, however, mean that there is not a body of opinion in France which sympathises with the aims of those who seek to reduce the country's dependence on a large and costly public sector and to see further rationalisation in the apparatus of the state. Figures such as Michel Godet are vocal in their calls for lower numbers in the civil service. Writing in L'Expansion in March 1999, Godet argued that the range of sectors into which the French public sector penetrated was simply anachronistic in the European context. He calls for a 'progress contract' which would see the number

of civil service positions reduced in return for an improvement in civil service pay. In concrete terms, he calls for a reduction of 10% in the civil service workforce over ten years to be achieved through natural wastage. He also wants to see performance related pay for public servants. Godet also calls for the private sector to be given the chance to experiment with the management of certain parts of the public sector, up to and including the SNCF.[35]

The same edition of L'Expansion contained the views of a number of thinkers on how to kick start or simply wake up (*réveiller*) la France. It is characterised by the views of liberal thinkers, and some of the most provocative opinions are put forward by Charles Wyplosz and Jérôme Gautié on the question of combating unemployment. They propose a significant reduction in the costs of employing someone, particularly in the case of work which is not particularly well qualified. They also propose a measure which was the source of public unrest in France when it was first proposed several years, namely the creation of a *smic jeunes* – a minimum wage for young people which would be at a different level, and by definition a lower one, to that paid to older people. Charles Wyplosz argues, however, that if such a measure were accompanied by a form of workplace training, it would play a constructive role in reducing youth unemployment.

The authors also suggest a new form of contract which would allow a worker to work alternately for a number of employers. The idea behind this is the requirement of employers to have greater flexibility in their workforces requires an alternative to the unemployment/employment cycle that can occur. An attempt by employers to offer contracts which would include a provision for alternative employment elsewhere in the case of a downturn is suggested as an alternative for this cycle. On a personal level, I find this suggestion somewhat bizarre since it is difficult to see how an employee would become loyal in a situation where they could simply move on to another company were they no longer needed by one employer.

These are the ideas of the liberal fringe in French economics and they remain somewhat on the margins. Elsewhere in this thesis we encounter the views of Elie Cohen who may be seen as the doyen of the ultra-liberal lobby in France at the present time. Well formulated and passionate as these opinions may be, they have tended to carry little water in the real world of politics where policies even remotely based on them have attracted large scale public protest and have, as we have seen, had to be shelved on a number of occasions.

4.5 Interpretation of the issues raised by the strike

It is clear, therefore, from the arguments as they were presented at this time, that the December 1995 strikes raised two important issues in France which had been somewhat neglected. The first is the clear attachment of workers in the French public sector to certain conditions of employment and service which the government, through the *plan Juppé* wished to revise. In addition to this, the attempt to deal with the serious social security deficit - the so called *trou de la Sécu* - proved highly controversial since the public health sector in France had, along British lines, been a very wide ranging and generous one. Inevitably, any attempts to limit and recover losses in the health sector was going to be highly controversial. We only need to recall the importance of the health issue in the 1987 and 1989 general elections in Ireland to appreciate the key importance played by health matters in any country. In a nation such as France it is reasonable to assume that the generosity of the state, particularly in the health sector, will be seen as indicative of its attitude towards its citizens and measured against the standards of treatment they have come to expect. Clearly, in a France known for large scale state involvement at all levels of the economy, the modifying of long standing arrangements for a project as diffuse in the public mind as EMU provoked a reaction, the intensity of which few had anticipated.

The second issue is the question which has dominated a large part of the discussion in this chapter so far. That is the issue of the model within which France operates, and its relevance in a changing world. We have already seen

how Alain Touraine and others believe that a need exists for France to adapt its national model to changed circumstances. He has even spoken of present day France defending an abstract universalism, thus opening up the debate on an aspect of French identity, namely the ideas that emerged from the enlightenment and which have constituted the philosophical basis for French republicanism for the past 200 years. Universalism, linked in the French mind to modernity, provides the rationale behind the idea of the homogenous nation state. It is the defence of society as a social actor which guarantees equal rights and freedoms to all those living within it and which - by extension - opposes the notion that there must be those who are left outside the homogenising, unifying, centralised forces which characterise French universalism in its standard form.

It is thus at the base of the *volontarisme* which is to be found in French society, and which is may the seen through the operation of the *Etat jacobin* insofar as the state's intervention in a wide range of matters in concerned. The desire and search for a model that is apparent from the comment on the December 1995 strike by French writers provides evidence of the extent to which, even those who have arrived at a position of hostility regarding the present framing of universalism - Touraine being a preeminent example - are exponents of the continued existence of a model and reject the notion of liberal society as an end in itself but view it rather as a transitional step in the search for a new model of social progress.

4.6 Further theoretical perspectives on the French model

Touraine expands further on these themes in his 1992 publication *Critique de la Modernité*. It is clear that his hostility to liberalism is no less marked than his opposition to the continuation *ad infinitum* of the model which France has followed thus far. Looking at liberal society, Touraine chooses particularly to castigate the United States which he describes as a society where down-and-outs have ever fewer chances of rejoining the fast lane, and where social inequality is on the rise regardless of the rapid increase in wealth visible among the middle

classes. He describes this pattern as going beyond what is traditionally referred to as modernity and entering the realm of the postmodern which he describes as:

'the dominant mode of management of our society in this end of century period.'[36]

Aside from the somewhat generalised critique of liberalism which he accuses of being too centered on individual gain and thus removed from any idea of the common good, Touraine puts forward the view that the biggest danger with liberalism is that it appears to be the greatest protection against all the attempts by various powerful élites 'particularly those claiming to speak in the name of mankind and society.'[37] Touraine goes on to suggest that money:

'can take on the appearance of being the least brutal of masters since it appears the least personal, detached from the imposing manner and powerful ambitions of men with grandiose plans.'[38]

In the same vein as many of the comments made before the December 1995 strikes by himself and other commentators, he formulates the critique of the liberal approach which is surely one of the most interesting arguments to have come out of the movement in France at that time.

'It reduces society to a market and a continuous flux of exchanges, but it does not take into account the types of behaviour which escape from this reductionism. It does not explain the defensive search for identity or the search for balance. It understands neither national passion nor the culture of the excluded. In one word, it is the ideology of the élites who lead change and who feel sufficiently confident to prefer movement to rest, offensive action to defensive action, the impersonal nature of communications systems to subjectivity. These are élites whose ability to lead the silent majority must not be underestimated.'[39]

Whereas Touraine seems convinced of the need for a renewal of the universalistic model to take into account changed circumstances, an opposing view may be found in the writing of Jean-Claude Guillebaud. In his 1995 book *La Trahison des Lumières*, he sets out to demonstrate that the legacy of the ideas of the Enlightenment is anything but obsolete. Modernity, he argues, is being questioned not as a result of its loyalty to the Enlightenment, but rather because of its betrayal of it.

Guillebaud appears primarily concerned with identifying the hallmarks of this betrayal of the ideals of Enlightenment as they manifest themselves at the present time, and with using these as an argument not for the replacement of the Enlightenment and its values with a new model - as seems to be the view of Alain Touraine - but rather as a launching pad for an appeal simply for a return to the ideas of Enlightenment as they are expressed in their most traditional form. To put it simply, Touraine acknowledges that a critical point has arrived in terms of the model which has shaped France and that the necessity of a replacement for that model has arisen. Guillebaud looks at many of the developments of interest to Touraine as simply the betrayal of fundamentally valid ideas and - to quote a much misused expression - calls for a back to basics approach.

One of the analyses in Guillebaud's book - a phenomenon which undoubtedly exists and which merits careful consideration - is the apparent return of the "local" in the face of the globalising ethic. He begins his analysis of this with reference to an article published in Spring 1994 in *The Washington Post Providence* referring to demands by students living on university campuses to be housed separately on the basis of race, sexual orientation or religion.[40] Guillebaud muses on the manner in which "without explosions, without anger or even heated discussion"[41], the melting pot which constitutes the founding principle of the American dream is challenged. The parallel with France is interesting since the American dream and universalism are remarkably similar ideas insofar as the homogenisation of American society was comparable in its social importance to its French counterpart.

Guillebaud presses forward in this vein by examining the reappearance of dialects and the vitality of folklore and the 'roots revival' evident in culture 'from Moldova to the Inuit territories of the Canadian arctic.' He also invites us to consider "the unprecedented vigour of the patriotism of principalities, micro-nations or provinces." This is a worthwhile consideration when we consider that the European Union which is accused of calling sovereignty into question also

places great importance on the idea of a Europe of the regions. It is interesting, I feel, to note that this growth of a regional identity seems to go hand in hand with globalisation, as if one is merely a compliment to the other. It is as if the link between economic globalisation and liberalism is inextricably tied in with heightened individualism, a factor which does not entirely appear absent from those regions which most clearly embrace the idea of a Europe of the regions. I am thinking of Catalonia and Lombardy as two particular examples. Considering globalisation, Guillebaud examines the countries most swayed by the idea. Doing so, we find strong support for globalisation among the countries of the G7, whilst countries like Mauritania and Burkina Faso remain aloof.[42]

In my view, however, Guillebaud's analysis does not necessarily stand up insofar as he fails to take note of a vital aspect in the correlation of globalisation and the increased role played by local or regional identity. It is worth noting that regional identity is much more likely to be a luxury of the rich than the poor, at least in Europe. Why are Catalonia, Lombardy and Scotland among the strongest examples of this local revival? Surely at least in part because they feel strong enough to embrace this and not lose out. Why will the next Spanish UN peacekeeper to the killed be more than likely from Extremadura or Andalucia and not from among the Catalan middle class? Nationalism of course plays a role, as does the propping up role of the universalist nation state in the regions which cannot afford to break away from it. The local and the global are not too sides of a situation, rather they are on the same side. The Europe of the Regions dimension is also the story of the Euroregion. It is the resurgence of a local identity whilst embracing the global marketplace.

4.7 The 1995 French strike – an analysis of the role of the trade unions

Returning to the 1995 French public sector strikes, the role played by the trade union movement was obviously key. It is worth mentioning that many commentators have stressed the bottom-up nature of the movement, with grassroots trade unionists often encouraging their leaders to play a full part in the

strike. Writing in *Les Temps Modernes*, Jean Pons referred to what he termed *"la chance perdue des syndicats"* - the missed opportunity of the trade union movement. For Pons, this missed opportunity concerned the manner in which the term 'general strike' was used by trade union leaders at the beginning of the period of social unrest on October 10 1995 in Paris[43] only to be somewhat discarded later.[44] Indeed, when the movement was at full strength, union leaders showed evidence of shying away from the term, even though it was being used on the streets by their grassroots members. Pons directs his ire most specifically at the CFDT which he accuses of going against the wishes of its members in not supporting the strike.

In his article in *Les Temps Modernes*, Pons initially enunciates the aspects of the strike which he found to be of most interest. He refers to the toying with the notion of general strike as being of interest since it calls into question the traditional image of strikes being controlled from the top or by coordinating committees. He suggests that this gap between the positions adopted by union leaders and those adopted by rank and file members points to a new departure whereby the conduct of the strike on a day to day basis was being planned on a bottom up basis by the rank and file and being communicated to the union leadership. This approach also highlighted what for Pons is the major problem of democracy - that of representation.

Pons quotes the general secretary of the metalwork section of Force Ouvrière from *Le Monde* on December 3-4 1995 as saying:

> 'workers no longer believe in the ballot paper. The strike is now the only weapon they have to express their desire for change.'[45]

Pons gives consideration to the meanings of the strike movement and concludes that the argument that it was merely a rejection from ordinary workers and the provinces of the Parisian political élite is too shallow an interpretation to draw. Rather, he suggests that this represented a call by the grassroots for these élites to improve their practices. In particular, Pons suggests that their reduction of

complex macroeconomic theory to the level of home economics actually came across not as a desire to communicate with even the most modest of French citizens, but as a lack of understanding of the voters and an insult to their intelligence.

However, this calling into question of the political system clearly does not address the situation regarding the French trade union movement itself. In Pons' view, clear similarities exist between the grassroots distrust of the political establishment and the bottom up nature of the strike movement itself. The common thread here, for Pons, is the crisis of representation. Trade unionists, caught up in the distrust being expressed of the political establishment and the ballot paper, may have felt that the best way of maintaining control over the movement was through maintaining direct control over their leaders. Pons states:

'there were never as many faxes being sent between the grassroots and the top in a complete reversal of the normal flow of communications.'[46]

Pons looks upon the 'discredit' of the trade union movement as being much less certain or defined than that which affected political parties. Whereas an increasingly cynical electorate is ever more aware of the small amount of real power it has over elected politicians, the expectation still remains that trade union leaders will be the spokespersons of those people whom they are elected to defend. Pons makes the point that the economic logic that underpins so much of government policy and that led to the strike movement seemed a little too similar to the logic of the company accountant that they were forced to work with on a daily basis. In fact, the whole conflict, in his eyes, was not so much a problem of economic argument *per se*, argues Pons, rather it was the case that the 'pseudo simplification' of major government policy resulted in economic discourse being devoid of its scientific foundations and reduced to the analysis of the company accountant.

Pons is critical of the trade unions on a number of levels, all of which concern their reaction in terms of politics, party, ideology and action when faced with a

social movement which was clearly a call for new and radical political positions to take into account the desire for a radical answer in the face of the government's espousal of the liberal economic agenda. He criticises them for failing to show greater leadership insofar as calls for a general strike and the assortment of grievances coming from the members were concerned. He is particularly critical of the CFDT for not having listened to its members and in particular for resorting to ballots when protesters in the street were demanding action. He says that the clear message to both politicians and trade union leaders was that the solution put forward by the *plan Juppé* was not the right one and that others were required.

To reinforce all of this, he quotes from Rousseau:

> **'The general will which should direct the State is not the will of times past, but rather the will of the present. The true characteristic of sovereignty is that there is always an agreement of time, place and effect between the direction of the general will and the use of public force.'[47]**

4.8 1995 - A strike *in defence* of the Republic?

External and internal perceptions of the December 1995 strikes obviously different. To all intents and purposes, the movement took on the appearance of a revolt against the course of the French state within Europe. The comparisons with the situation of May 1968 abounded and there was talk of a break being made with the ideology of the élites. From an internal point of view, the international comment and analysis of the disruption being caused by the movement was not the dominant point of view.

In *Les Temps Modernes*, Robert Redeker presented an analysis of the strikes which made mention of the notion of *grève républicaine*. It is an idea which, from on Irish standpoint, merits some explanation. Fundamentally, it represents a split from the idea of a strike demanding a clean break or radical reform instead sets out to defend and reinforce the republic. Redeker thus puts forward the idea that the 1995 strike was defensive rather than offensive. Whilst this may not

appear particularly unusual, there is a difference between a strike movement which seeks to defend the sectional interests of those taking part in it, and one which seeks to defend an entire social model. For Redeker, this is the distinction between a *'grève républicaine'* and a *'grève prolétarienne.'*

'A proletarian strike is based on the idea of class struggle; it considers itself to be a step on the road to a revolution to come. A republican strike, however, instead of being concerned with the idea of class, is mainly concerned with the idea of the people and with the maintenance in the present of the principle of a past revolution.'[48]

Redeker expands on this argument by conceding that the December 1995 strikes contained elements of a proletarian strike insofar as the disruption of economic life was concerned. One of the main differences, with regard to past action, in 1995 was the tactic used. Halting production no longer held the same importance as previously, given that it is no longer the centerpiece of economic activity. Therefore, the strike also affected communication - SNCF etc... - transmission (teaching) and services.

Throughout his article, Redeker refers to the strikes as something of a revival of republican values and traditions, as if these had in some way been lost in time. The battlefield is marked out by Redeker when he states that:

'these republican values are combatted by the financial markets which wish to globalise the "anti-social". They are combatted by the government through its fanaticism for privatisations, through which the property of the French people is sold off at knockdown prices.'[49]

The strike was, for Redeker, an opportunity to break from the existence whereby the citizen is merely a consumer or commuter and as such it afforded people the chance to rediscover both community and society. Indeed, there was even a progression evident as the specific demands of particular communities blended into the broader national movement. The process mirrors the origins of the French republic itself since the hitherto varied and disparite regions came together to form a national community - or society.

From Redeker's perspective, the sense of threat facing the public sector was exacerbated by the media treatment of the strike movement which seemed totally alien from the feelings of the hundreds of thousands of people taking part in the demonstrations. He singles out in particular the economist Jean-Marc Sylvestre who, in addition to his television work on *TF1*, also appeared daily at breakfast time on the public service radio station *France-Inter*. The manner in which Sylvestre attacked public sector workers over their perceived privileges, and referred to stable employment, retirement benefits, equal access to social security and dignified working conditions as being taboos which must be overcome[50] shocked the author who, in a footnote, added his view that the guarantees of the public sector should be the norm to be imposed on the private sector.

Redeker reaches the core of his argument when he states that what many of the élites who are influenced by 'Asian, Anglo-Saxon and German models' need to appreciate is that there is:

'a French model unique in history: the republican model which is, mutatis mutandis, what the strikes were pointing out and defending.'[51]

He continues:

'The republican ideal is not an economic ideal of administering technocracy and management. Rather, it is a political idea under which economics are subsumed. The two ideals - the economic and the political - generate two types of existence. One is economic, centred around work and consumption; and the other is political and involves active participation in public affairs.'[52]

This viewpoint is one which tallies with discourse regarding attitudes towards social exclusion in France as opposed to in other countries, and which I will return to in the next chapter.

Redeker is in no doubt about the effects of a world where economics are allowed to become the dominant force:

'A world dominated by economics is a world which has taken its leave of history. It is a post-

4.9 Irish industrial relations - a model of social partnership and consensus?

We have seen in the previous paragraph that Irish industrial relations at the present time revolve around the social partnership model. The negotiation of the present social pact, Partnership 2000, was completed in December 1996. This pact was the replacement for the Programme for Competitiveness and Work (PCW) which had covered the period 1993-97 - the successor to the Programme for Economic and Social Progress (PESP) and the Programme for National Recovery (PNR).

Writing in the Irish Times on December 19 1996, the paper's Industry and Employment Correspondent, Pádraig Yeates stated:

'Partnership 2000 is more than a pay deal. It sets out to create a new social contract.'[54]

The pact was negotiated against the backdrop of sustained economic growth which had seen large levels of job creation and significant increases in inward investment in Ireland, primarily from US based multinational corporations. This growth had come against the backdrop of Ireland's continued membership of the European Union, and along with considerations such as a suitably qualified workforce, low corporation tax and lower labour costs made Ireland an attractive European base for many of these corporations.

Thus, it was an agreement born out of a different set of imperatives than those which had gone before. The social partners no longer found themselves bound by some great moral code to generate the conditions necessary for some elusive period of prosperity. Now the period of prosperity, albeit of recent origin and still uncertain prospects, was there and as a result the need was to generate a new accord which would not only lay the groundwork for continued prosperity based on prudent economic management and conservative wage management. The

increased prosperity exacerbated demands that workers see the fruits of their labour in a manner which they had not before - through significant taxation reforms - and it also placed an emphasis on measures to increase social inclusion through policies aimed at providing relief for those groups in society which had not seen their lot increase during the preceding period of economic growth.

Returning to the analysis of the Irish Times journalist Pádraig Yeates, Partnership 2000 emerged as an ambitious looking agreement since:

'for the first time it provides an integrated package of pay rises and tax cuts that will enable trade unionists to calculate the value of the deal.'[55]

The social inclusion element of Partnership 2000 was clearly designed to appease sectors of the trade union movement, anxious to see progress on spreading the fruits of increased prosperity among those who had not benefited from the upturn in the economy. The Conference of Religious of Ireland in a plan taken up by the National Economic and Social Forum suggested a job creation plan for the long term unemployed. This idea was expanded under Partnership 2000 and now aims to give people who have been unemployed for at least five years a chance to do socially meaningful work at the going rate. As we shall see later, discontent over the extent of the social exclusion package proved to be one of the major talking points in the progress towards ratification of the agreement.

On the pay front, there was real pressure on the unions to deliver a pay increase that reflected the changed realities of Irish society and took into account the fact that, particularly among PAYE workers, there was a strong desire to enjoy more of the fruits of their labour than had been possible during the more difficult times of several years earlier. In the case of Partnership 2000, a total pay deal of 9.65% was agreed, which was not too far off the 10% opening demand of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. It compared reasonably favourably with the 8.25% cumulative pay award under the Programme for Competitiveness and Work. However once again, this had not been without controversy, particularly since the final 2% of the award is conditional, based on the performance of the

company in question and ultimately a matter for local bargaining.

From the point of view of the employers federation IBEC, the deal once again offered the scenario of continued industrial peace for three more years, the maintenance of stable wage costs more or less in line with those of Ireland's EU neighbours. Any increases were to be offset against reductions in Corporation Profits Tax and changes in PRSI.

Another interesting departure in the Partnership was the creation of a National Centre for Partnership and Change. This initiative was to have the support of the ICTU, IBEC, the Labour Relations Commission and other state agencies and its objective was to provide joint training for trade union officials and human resource managers.

The Irish economic model seems to be built on an idea of consensus which we will go into in more detail later The pacts and partnerships which have characterised it have, as we have seen, been set up in the interest of creating or protecting national economic growth. It is perhaps understandable that the model would not have been questioned very much in the past when stable management of the economy was seen as essential for necessary progress. However, during the process of ratifying Partnership 2000, new voices were raised injecting scepticism into the debate. The fundamental strength in the albeit limited movement against Partnership 2000 lay in the hope that the country's largest trade union SIPTU might decide to reject it. A move against the Partnership had surfaced within SIPTU, and this was as much an internally focussed protest at the direction taken by the union, as an outward looking protest aiming for the rejection of the Partnership model overall.

4.10 The opposition to Partnership 2000 - an influential minority?

The formal "Campaign against Partnership 2000" was launched in Dublin on January 16 1997. Its most prominent figure was Mick O'Reilly, Irish secretary

of the Amalgamated Transport Workers Union. O'Reilly called for workers to reject the agreement and for trade unionists to return to local bargaining, adding that "the sky won't fall in"[56] if the partnership were rejected. O'Reilly's demand originated in the viewpoint that partnerships inevitably meant less for workers than if they were free to fight their corner more independently. He is one of many trade unionists who agree with the principle that negotiations on a partnership are not necessarily a bad thing since they establish a floor for future claims. However, the central plank in O'Reilly's argument was that following the breakdown of national agreements in the early 1980s, increases of between 12.5% and 20% had been won for workers following the abandonment of the 12% ceiling contained in the national programme.[57]

An interesting observation was made at the same launch by Mr Des Bonass of the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed. He stated that the executive of the INOU was calling for critical acceptance of the new agreement, simply because it did not wish to be left out in the cold. In other words, being inside the system of pacts and partnership entails having a voice. Dissenters are not recognised as legitimate interlocutors and so cannot take part in the mechanisms for negotiating, implementing and monitoring an agreement. It is almost as if one's legitimacy in terms of one's position depends on one's desire to be part of an agreement. Thus is perhaps defined Kriesi's Political Opportunity Structure in the context of present day Ireland.

Three days later, however, the INOU national executive council decided to reject the Partnership as a result of what it considered the insufficient emphasis placed on the social pillar - specifically minimum rates of social welfare. The social inclusion element of the agreement became one of the major points of contention in the aftermath of its publication, as the trade union movement was preparing to make its decision on ratification. Central to the concerns of the INOU was the issue of income adequacy on which the organisation had felt the government had not yet provided satisfactory reassurance. In addition, the INOU was seeking an increase in the number of employment schemes on offer to

those out of work.

Indeed, the formal launch of Partnership 2000 was cancelled as a result of the disagreement over the social inclusion question and the only way out of the impasse was a reversal by the government of its previous policy on December 20, 1996 whereby the social inclusion element was boosted by £25 million.

For many observers however, opposition within the trade union movement to Partnership 2000 will for a long time remain associated by Carolann Duggan. Ms Duggan first came to light at the same meeting of the campaign against the Partnership reported by the Irish Times on January 17, 1997. Described as "a SIPTU member in Waterford", Ms Duggan stated:

'The country is booming, the employers and the banks are making a fortune in profits, up 45 per cent according to Billy Attley. Yet the workers who created all the wealth are being told to take a rise of 7.4% over three years and three months.'[58]

The Carolann Duggan phenomenon was as much about SIPTU and the broader Irish trade union movement as it was about Partnership 2000. Ms Duggan is an assembly line worker in her thirties at the Waterford plant of a multinational corporation Bausch and Lomb which manufactures compact lenses. A member of the Socialist Workers Party, she affirms her commitment to class struggle. However, at the time of her coming to prominence, she had the dubious credentials of not being a shop steward and never actually having been on strike. Duggan became a representative figure for a large proportion of SIPTU members disenchanted with the partnership model and holding the view that it (the model) had done very little for the underpaid.

Elementary mathematics reminds us that percentage increases in pay will always bring more to higher earners than lower earners if the agreed increase is to be across the board. Adjustments to tax rates and tax free allowances can however balance matters somewhat in favour of the lower paid. However, it is clear that Carolann Duggan tapped into a feeling among lower paid members of SIPTU

that they were not benefiting from partnership arrangements to the extent they might. However, as I have already stated, there was also a strong undercurrent of criticism of her own trade union's structures and functioning in Duggan's remarks.

What is important to note, in the case of Carolann Duggan and the issue of trade union opposition to Partnership 2000, is just how close the deal actually came to rejection. One of the biggest single setbacks to the ratification of Partnership 2000 came when Mandate - the union representing many shop workers - decided to oppose it. Since the workers represented by Mandate are very often low paid, this decision clearly sent out a message to other low paid workers. The social partners will doubtless have been further dismayed by this, given that the ICTU had managed to get the issue of trade union recognition on the agenda.

SIPTU represents some 197,000 Irish workers. It is clearly a massive movement in Irish terms. The union is active both in the public and private sectors and is thus a powerful voice in defence of the interests of its members when it actively advocates them. The only major difficulties SIPTU has been encountering in terms of its presence in Irish industry, concern its access to some of the recently established multinational corporations present in Ireland - particularly in high tech sectors - and also its appeal as a union among workers in such firms.

However, the major problem facing SIPTU is arguably - and perhaps paradoxically - its size. As a mass union it is run on a very professional footing. It leading officials are full time professionals and many of them are paid salaries not dissimilar to workers at management level in large companies. It would clearly be impossible for SIPTU to behave or go about its business like a small craft union, however Carolann Duggan's campaign identified a distance between the workforce and the leading members of the trade union movement that had not previously been effectively addressed.

There thus existed something of a perception among lower paid workers who

were members of SIPTU that the union had become something of an establishment player, there to act as a voice for its members in its dealings with the ICTU and other social partners certainly, however challenged in terms of its relationship with many of its own rank and file and as a mirror of the broad diversity of its nearly 200,000 members.

Within a couple of months of SIPTU's members agreeing to ratify Partnership 2000, the extent of internal dissent within the union became apparent in SIPTU's presidential election. The SIPTU top brass were in for shock by the challenge posed by Carolann Duggan who managed to secure a nomination for the election which she contested against the senior official Jimmy Somers. The first and most interesting thing to note with regard to the success enjoyed by Ms Duggan's candidacy was that she achieved a vote of 43%, almost identical to the no vote to Partnership 2000 among SIPTU members.

In an interview with The Irish Times published on April 11 1997 she stated:

'I believe that workers should control the unions and I believe that at the moment we don't control them.'[59]

Referring to the union leadership she added:

"I think they're shook up (sic) and they will now have to listen to what's going on on the factory floors and to know what it's like to work in a factory and live on eight, nine and ten thousand pounds a year. ... The economy is booming, the bosses are making a mint, the banks are making millions. Workers have created that wealth and we're getting nothing."[60]

This sentiment was addressed in an Irish Times editorial on July 8 1997 which dealt with the question of Trade Unions and Partnership:

'The partnership approach has been designed to offer an alternative path to traditional wage militancy; but it requires reciprocity at national and local levels if it is to succeed. According to the general secretary of the ICTU, Mr Peter Cassells, workers have failed totally to penetrate the citadels of capital and ownership in the workplace, through profit-sharing, share option schemes or other forms of stakeholding.'[61]

4.11 The impact of dissent on the trade union leadership

In the aftermath of Ms Duggan's unexpected success in the SIPTU presidential election, the union set about a process of what can only be described as damage limitation. Clearly conscious of the demands from within its ranks for greater militancy regarding pay issues and the terms of Partnership 2000 in particular, the union issued a circular advising members to seek pay rises over and above the 9.25% sanctioned by Partnership 2000 before conceding extra productivity or changes in work practices.[62] Although the circular, which raised the ire of the employers federation IBEC, was issued by Jimmy Somers before he became president of SIPTU. it was not withdrawn clearly because SIPTU did not feel in a position to adopt a more conciliatory approach given Ms Duggan's strength at that time. Under Partnership 2000, 7.25% of the pay award is to be given to workers across the board with no preconditions, whereas the remaining 2%, whilst it is intended to be paid, can be withheld in extenuating circumstances. In return for payment of this final 2%, employers can seek extra productivity or restructuring in the workplace.

This apparent hardening of SIPTU's line in response to the presidential election result was clearly designed to impact on the minds of the union's members in advance of the next key test of the union's cohesiveness - the election of vice-president due in Autumn 1997. I would suggest here that the leadership of SIPTU was extremely conscious of the temptation that would exist on the part of Ms Duggan and her supporters to muster as much support as possible in the vice-presidential race and possibly upset the applecart with a win. The added attraction here, as pointed out by Pádraig Yeates in *The Irish Times* on September 8 1997, is that the union's vice-president has responsibility for industrial relations and has the power to issue members with strike sanctions.

However, a number of factors conspired to ensure that Ms Duggan's influence waned considerably in the second poll. The leadership's candidate, Mr Des Geraghty, was one of the most popular and effective trade unionists in the

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country. Geraghty's long track record in trade unionism was clearly not seen in a negative light, despite the charge by Carolann Duggan that he and his fellow candidates were "middle aged apparatchniks embedded in union structures."[63] In the aftermath of the result of the election, Des Geraghty gave an interview to the *Irish Times*, his answers in which were commented upon by Pádraig Yeates. Geraghty presented himself as both an innovator and a traditionalist, defending this view of himself by asserting that:

> "trade unions must become a focal point to assert the values of solidarity, equality, equity and democracy in the world of work - and in the wider community. We have to challenge the value systems of the global money market that protect rich and powerful financial institutions. That means we have to think globally ourselves. We have to organise globally and, equally, know how and when to react to local problems."[64]

Showing his grasp for the broader range of issues, and clear sense of vision, Geraghty adopts a considered approach to the issue of pay militancy as practised by trade unions. He is of the view that militancy on the pay issue does not of itself produce improvements in living standards. Recalling earlier battles, Geraghty points out that he negotiated very large increases in pay in the 1980s but that these were "eroded by high inflation and taxation."[65] Reflecting this desire to address broader issues, Geraghty points out that one of his current areas of concern is house prices which he views as one of the factors which render improvements in the economy less effective than they might otherwise be.

> "We have members who are paying £700 to £900 a month and mortgages for relatively modest homes. It is pointless talking of pay rises ahead of inflation if this sort of thing is allowed to reduce the real take home pay of workers."[66]

It is clear that Des Geraghty places tremendous importance on the necessity for trade unions to grow and expand into organisms which are capable of operating in a broader range of sectors as is demanded by changing times. His campaign was marked with calls for the kind of reforms already mentioned here, but also by calls for another £500 million in tax cuts for the PAYE sector, greater child support services for working parents and, reflecting his concern over the housing issue, government action to curb house prices for young home-buyers.

To put it simply though, the reason why Carolann Duggan proved no match for Des Geraghty was the latter's ability to portray himself both confidently and honestly as an experienced fighter with an impressive track record of holding out under pressurised strike conditions. In addition, he was able to show a firm grasp of the wider agenda and sense of vision. Carolann Duggan was seen essentially as a protest candidate who shook the establishment up in the presidential election but who, in terms of the wider issues of organisation, strategy and tactics, was not a serious match for Des Geraghty. In addition, the fact that for all her radicalism, Duggan was not even a branch shop steward and had never been involved in a strike almost certainly did nothing to reinforce her standing with members who may have wanted to see her as a champion of campaigning trade unionism.

However, although the influence of Carolann Duggan within SIPTU was waning during all of this period, she did not disappear totally as was proved during what may be judged as a somewhat vindictive debate at the SIPTU conference in Ennis, Co. Clare in early October 1997. A motion supported by the union's leadership proposed that in future any member seeking to seeking to run for election to general office in the union be nominated by at least five branches or 5,000 members. The rule prior to this was one branch provided it had at least 500 members. This was clearly an attempt to limit the possibility of a candidate like Duggan achieving a similar degree of success in the future, however the bid failed. Much as this showed an attachment among SIPTU members to internal democracy and pluralism - values close to the heart of Des Geraghty as we have seen - the Ennis conference also proved the extent to which Duggan's support was merely transient and of a protest nature. In particular, when motions were presented condemning the scope of the salary reforms for top officials these were strongly defeated.[67] Thus SIPTU, having appeared to teeter on the brink of taking a radical swing away from conciliatory tactics, proved itself to be far more attached to a fundamentally consensual approach both internally and externally than had earlier appeared to be the case.

4.12 The lessons of the Partnership 2000 negotiations

We saw clearly in the previous chapter the range of factors which have contributed to Ireland's transition from a country where an adversarial relationship was considered normal in industrial relations, to one whose industrial relations mechanisms are based on a system of social partnership. However, the frictions which accompanied the negotiation of Partnership 2000 gave an indication of the potential shortcomings of such an approach, and seem certain to resurface as the Partnership's successor agreement is negotiated in the months ahead. It is possible to contend that the reliance on such an approach to industrial relations is inextricably linked to Ireland's status as a poor country. We have seen how Lemass and others contended that controls were necessary if the country were to grow to achieve anything like its full potential. The current series of partnerships and programmes grew out of the serious economic crisis in which Ireland had found itself in the 1980s and the need for serious corrective action to be taken in order to steer the country out of that situation. The nub of the problem as regards such agreements can be found in Carolann Duggan's assessment that not enough was being gained by workers at a time when the country as a whole was booming.

Who could deny that strictly limited pay increases appear difficult to comprehend against the backdrop of the type of economic figures which are being *reported ad nauseum* at the present time? The country is running an increasing budget surplus, the numbers at work are at unprecedented levels and an increasing body of opinion suggests that we may have reached de facto full employment. And yet, the government and employers continue to appeal for restraint. The reasons behind such an approach make sense in the conservative logic of international business, to which Ireland is so much a part, however somewhat less so to figures on the left of the trade union movement. For the government and employers, wage restraint will allow the country to retain its competitive edge and ensure that multinational investment and job creation will continue to come

Ireland's way. To people such as Carolann Duggan and Mick O'Reilly, this merely provides evidence of a Celtic Tiger economy which is not properly attending to the needs of all its cubs.

It is worthwhile here to ponder on the comments of Paula Carey in the last chapter. She referred to the ad hoc or flexible nature of voluntarist industrial relations in Ireland, and the fact that the various institutions which existed did so to meet the needs of their particular time. She was also adamant that negotiating a new agreement to replace one which is expiring is not a foregone conclusion. It is perhaps the case that in this context, as in others which we will examine in the next paragraph, changed circumstances will present challenges for Irish society that have remained unmet up until now. Conscious of the broader needs of partnership, there have been moves to incorporate more wide ranging issues. The National Economic and Social Forum is an example of an organism which exists to consider a variety of issues of concern to the various social partners and society in general. However it seems certain that much remains to be done if the full potential of partnership is to be realised.

As has already been mentioned, the crucial issue of trade union recognition in all workplaces will almost certainly be raised by the trade union side in the negotiations for a replacement to the current partnership. At present, the pay aspect to the partnership deal is binding across the economy, despite the fact that many employers who implement it do not recognise trade unions within their own companies. This is particularly the case with regard to the multinationals which, after all, make up such a vital part of the Irish economy today. There is thus a situation where those employers reap the benefits of the unions' participation in partnership without according them anything in return. I mentioned previously that the development of broader partnership structures was important. In reality, however, what matters most to those who are sceptical about the benefits of partnership is the bottom line, in terms of what pay deal can be achieved.

It is likely that this is where the fault line will emerge in the next round of negotiations and it will not be an easy question to resolve. The partnership process to date has proved itself in terms of the stability it has brought and the tangible benefits achieved by workers. However, with the economic prosperity being enjoyed by Ireland today, the question legitimately arises regarding whether workers are receiving enough reward for their contribution to economic success. Partnership in good times is surely different to partnership in bad times, and it will be most interesting to see what new accommodations are inserted into the new pact. For it is my view that one will emerge. I believe the remarks of Paula Carey provide sufficient evidence of the commitment of the union side. I simply contend that the pressures from the left will be more acute and ultimately harder to rebut given the spectacular continuation of the country's economic growth over the past two years.

4.13 Conclusion

Whilst the two events which form the core of this case study may not appear entirely compatible at the outset, they do provide us with an interesting snapshot of the contemporary labour relations situation in Ireland and France, particularly in the manner in which it interacts with more general issues of national economy policy. The Irish partnership model is seen as providing the basis both for sustained national economic growth and for inspiring confidence among potential international investors or companies considering locating their operations in Ireland. In the case of France, the more confrontational situation described herein reflects both the more confrontational nature of the relationship between the labour movement and society's élites and also the latter's unwillingness or inability to take into account the views of such movements and their supporters in the framing of policy. It would, however, be erroneous here not to remind ourselves of the low levels of unionisation seen in France overall, and the fact that the unions are almost absent in the private sector. Rather, their large scale actions are of a much more political nature and they are able to mobilise very large numbers of people who may normally be totally apathetic to factory floor

trade unionism, in support of particular causes.

The lines of division are clearly drawn in terms of the relationship between the government, unions and employers in larger issues of French economic policy, and it is on these questions that the unions have the greatest success in mobilising their strength, particularly against a right-wing government. The reality in Ireland is as we have seen different, but partnership negotiations serving as the forum for the airing of a range of issues and their incorporation into a national agreement. In both countries, however, the spectre of Europe looms large. In Ireland, as we shall see in the next chapter, Europe has been associated with increased prosperity for the country and has generally been seen as a positive thing. In France, Europe has also been seen in a predominantly positive light, however this chapter has demonstrated that this is not always the case, particularly when it calls into question rights or benefits which are important to the French people or nation.

We will see in the next chapter how the question of Europe is viewed more generally in both Ireland and France, and this will enable us to have a clearer understanding of how the issues dealt with in this thesis so far are reflected both in public opinion and in political debate on the issue of Europe.

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[1] I accept that Margaret Thatcher's early 1980s battle over the size of Britain's contribution to the community budget is a worthwhile exception, however this battle was waged at intergovernmental level as opposed to with the Commission.

[2] See Estrin, S and Holmes, P., *French planning in theory and practice*; London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983.

[3] Israël, S., 'Vive le mouvement social' in 'Horizons/Débats', *Le Monde*, 6/12/1995

[4] ibid.

[5] Attali, J., 'Horizons/Débats', *Le Monde*, 15/12/1995

[6] ibid.

[7] ibid.

[8] ibid.

[9] ibid.

[10] ibid.

[11] ibid.

[12] Touraine, A. and Strauss-Kahn, D., interviewed in 'Horizons/Débats', *Le Monde*, 12/12/1995

[13] ibid.

[14] ibid.

[15] Greilsamer, L., 'Schizophrénie à la française', *Le Monde*, 09/12/1995

[16] *quoted in Le Monde, 13/12/1995*

[17] ibid.

[18] Greilsamer, L., *op cit.*

[19]A better translation here than 'embassy' but with similar diplomatic meaning.

[20] Greilsamer, L., *op cit.*

[21] Debray, R. and Nair, S., 'Horizons/Débats' in *Le Monde*, 11/12/1997

[22] Touraine, A. and Strauss-Kahn, D., *op cit.,* 12/12/1997

[23] http://www.construire.ch/construire/SOMMAIRE/9739/39entret.htm#5)

[24] *Le Monde*, 1/12/1995

[25] ibid.

[26] ibid.

[27] ibid.

[28] ibid.

[29] ibid.

[30] ibid.

[31] ibid.

[32] *Le Monde*, 14/12/1995

[33] ibid.

[34] Le Monde, 2/12/1995

[35] Michel Godet, Professor at the CNAM writing in *L'Expansion,* 4-17/3/1999, p.50

[36] Touraine, A., *Critique de la modernité,* Paris: Fayard, 1992, p. 235

[37]ibid

[38]ibid

[39] ibid.

[40]Guillebaud, J-C., *La Trahison des Lumières,* Paris: Seuil, 1995, p.101

[41]ibid.

[42]ibid., p.105

[43]One day stoppage, particularly successful in the education sector.

[44]Pons, J., 'La chance perdue des syndicats' in *Les Temps modernes*; Paris: Les Temps modernes, Jan/Feb 1996, p.25

[45] ibid., p.26

[46] ibid., p.27

[47] ibid., p.29

[48] Redeker, R., 'Décembre 1995: Une grève républicaine' in *Les Temps modernes;* Paris: Les Temps modernes, Jan/Feb 1996, p.7

[49] ibid., p.8

[50] comments attributed to Jean-Marc Sylvestre on France-Inter. No date given and independent verification not carried out.

[51] ibid., p.14

[52] ibid.

[53] ibid., p.14

[54] *Irish Times*, 19/12/1996

[55] ibid.

[56] *Irish Times*, 17/01/1997

[57] ibid.

[58]*Irish Times*, 17/01/97

[59]*Irish Times*, 11/04/1997

[60]ibid.

[61]*Irish Times*, 08/07/1997

[62]*Irish Times*, 29/04/1997

[63] *Irish Times*, 08/09/1997

[64] *Irish Times*, 19/09/1997

[65] ibid.

[66] ibid.

[67] *Irish Times*, 08/10/1997

Chapter 5

Ireland and France: Different perceptions of a common European Union

5.0 Introduction

This thesis has so far addressed a number of issues. We have looked at issues which contribute to the political culture of European societies and in particular the manner in which these have historically arisen in both Ireland and France. We have done this through a process of analysis which took account of a number of factors often seen as being associated with the development of political culture and also with its comparison across societies. After that, I presented an historical overview of the political and social development of both Ireland and France, with a view to describing the role played by a number of groups in the makeup of the political culture which has come to exist within them. The case study chapter of this thesis was intended to provide a practical overview of a dynamic of social conflict versus social consensus as I have seen it operating in both countries, and now in this chapter I wish to continue down the broadly empirical line developed in the case study by bringing the relationship between both countries and the European Union, an important element in contemporary debate, up to date and looking more closely at the key stages in its development in both societies.

We have seen that both Ireland and France have experienced very different patterns of development, even though we can point to the range of common factors or characteristics identified between them in Chapter 2 as providing a suitable basis for comparison between them. We have additionally seen that they are faced with a common issue in terms of their membership of the European Union, which supposes that the countries of Europe which it chooses to admit have a commonality of interests in terms of the manner in which they seek to address their own future development and that of the other countries of the Union in the context of an evolving world order. However, the European debate in

both countries, or the issues raised by Europe, have exhibited a range of differences.

We may seek to explain these differences simply in the context of the historical differences between both countries if we wish. It is very likely that the answer will lie in such an explanation at any rate. Or we may suppose that a broader range of real issues are involved, which are needless to say historical in origin, but which reflect a different outlook on the future and the desirability of certain outcomes for the future development of the country.

What I therefore wish to do in this chapter is present a range of evidence and argument regarding both countries and their European links. I will start with an overview of the results in the Eurobarometer surveys carried out across the EU with a range of respondents in each country. The advantage with this survey is that it allows us to look at answers to common questions provided at the same time across the European Union. I will then present other more contemporary survey evidence for France, pointing to particularly relevant developments since 1995 in an attempt to depict the development in that country's relationship with the European Union since the period of the social movements described in the case study.

In the case of Ireland, our task is somewhat easier. The relative enthusiasm for the process of European Union as described in the Eurobarometer findings is broadly speaking borne out by a range of popular votes on European issues in Ireland, brought about by the necessity of a referendum to amend the Irish constitution with which many EU treaties would initially be in conflict. Thus we have an electoral record on European issues in Ireland which does not necessarily exist in the case of France.

This chapter also includes an overview of the relationship between the European Union and French industry which is important in order to better appreciate the specific concerns raised in the previous case study chapter, and which adds to

the perspective from which the relationship between France and Europe may be better understood.

5.1 Why the question of perceptions of Europe?

The European Union is made up of fifteen member states, the great bulk of which may be defined as nation states in the sense that they are home to a defined national community. Given the status of the nation as an imagined community, each of these countries has its own history, culture and range of nationalist myths and shibboleths on which it bases its identity. The same is not true of the European Union as a whole. Thus far, there has not been the development of a European cultural history or identity with which the citizens can identify on the same level as those of their particular nations.

For Roger Eatwell, however, this does not permanently hinder the prospect of the development of a European identity. He quotes the French academic Ernest Renan who stated that in nation building it is more important – even in the business of distorting history favourably for one's side – to forget than to remember. One of the dimensions to European identity on which Eatwell focuses is Europe's relationship to socio-economic modernity and progress. This is the idea of Europe as the home of the Industrial Revolution and also of the extensive welfare state. The latter has been called into question with the advance of globalisation, with several countries such as Germany and France attempting to push through some cuts in their social security systems. Nonetheless, as we will see later in this chaper, the European Union has now put a particular focus on job creation.

This is important, since if the European Union is seen to go against the traditional values of many member states by opting for an ultra-liberal agenda, this can give rise to fears regarding the negative effects of the Union and ultimately put pressure on national governments. For this reason, Eatwell proposes that it seems more sensible to imagine Europe as an open identity,

willing to learn from others, linked to the creation of an economic programme which avoids the worst scenarios of globalisation or Fortress Europe.

5.2 Eurobarometer and attitudes in Ireland and France

The Eurobarometer survey carried out twice yearly by the European Commission is a regular survey of the opinions of the citizens of the European Union member states. As such, it stands virtually unique in its role as a comparative examination of views on identical issues across Europe. Among the questions asked by the Eurobarometer survey on a regular basis are those concerning citizens views of the influence they can bring to bear on their respective national governments and also the confidence they place in a variety of institutions both local and national.

In addition to the rolling Eurobarometer poll, the Commission regularly publishes a concise overview of the trends observed in the polls over an extended period. One such overview covers the period from 1974 to 1994, undoubtedly the years during which the EU went through its most lacklustre period followed by a radical renewal under the stewardship of the Commission president Jacques Delors. The findings in this collection of surveys reveal a great deal about attitudes to Europe across the member states during these periods, and can also be used, in tandem with other data, to draw out comparative information between any number of member states.

Firstly we shall look at figures concerning *attitudes regarding each country's membership of the European Union* during this period. Looking at France, we see approval ratings generally consistent in the high fifties or low sixties percentage wise up to the mid-1980s. Then there came the period of renewed European construction under the presidency of France's Jacques Delors, and the figures began to rise. By 1987, approval for French EU membership was touching 70%, and the reasons for this are not hard to imagine. This period preceded the reunification of Germany and the concern this aroused in France.

The fact that Jacques Delors was French lent a certain gallic hue to the whole process of reinvigoration he brought to the then EC, and consequently the idea of Europe as a French project was reinforced.

Some rather wide variations were recorded towards the very end of the 1980s with figures ranging anywhere between 63 and 70%. After 1992 however, the positive findings fell back substantially. Over the course of that year they went from 59% to 55%. The aftermath of the Maastricht referendum - which saw France accept the Maastricht Treaty by a razor thin 51%/49% margin - did not spell the end of the calling into question of France's very participation in the EU. By April-May 1994 just 50% of French respondents could say that they considered France's EU membership to be a good thing. This figure did recover substantially to reach 58% by late that year.[1] However, the decline had not been arrested. By spring 1996, just 48% of French respondents considered the country's membership of the Union to be a good thing. A very significant 33% said they could not say whether EU membership was good or bad for France.[2]

A similar falling off was seen in figures concerning *the benefits or lack of them to France of the country's membership of the EU*. These were generally in the high fifties in the period post-1987, having been somewhat lower prior to this. However 1992 once again found itself marking a turning point. The second and final poll of 1991 recorded a percentage of those claiming benefit of EU membership of 51% and by mid- to late-1992 this had reached 45%. The fall continued, dropping to 39% in April-May 1994 and recovering three percentage points by the end of that year. Significantly, the numbers of those confident in the assertion that France had not benefited from its EU membership were at all times much higher than those who simply had no opinion on the matter. When, in 1994, just 39% of respondents felt EU membership had been of benefit to France, 40% stated the contrary. In the previous survey, 40% felt the country had benefited from membership as opposed to 39% who did not.[3] By spring 1996, the number of those believing France had benefited from being part of the EU stood at 44%.[4]

From 1988 onwards, Eurobarometer measured opinions regarding *the hopes people had regarding the single market*. Possible responses were very hopeful, rather hopeful, rather fearful or very fearful. The first incontrovertible finding is that, among French respondents, the most common response was rather hopeful. The numbers of those saying they were very hopeful fell virtually constantly between March-April 1989 and April-May 1994. From a figure of 23% in the former it had reached 5% by the latter survey. It is particularly significant that evidence from the statistics showed that not all of those who stopped being very confident went on to swell the ranks of the rather hopeful. Both the rather fearful and very fearful categories recorded significant rises during the period under examination. Matters improved somewhat in late-1994 and in December of that year, 12% of respondents said they were very hopeful regarding the single market. All in all, mean responses throughout the period 1988-1994 show those very hopeful accounting for some 13% of respondents, the rather hopeful at approximately 37%, rather fearful 30%, very fearful 11-12% with in the order of 7.5%-8% not proffering a reply. In the spring 1996 survey, 9% of French respondents felt very hopeful, 42% were rather hopeful, 24% were rather fearful whilst 18% were very fearful. 7% said they did not know.[5]

In the case of Ireland, *support for European Union membership* has consistently been strong. In the first ten years after we joined, the number of those viewing our membership as a good thing generally stood at about 50%, and on some occasions it was notably higher, hitting 67% in October 1975. As in France, it suffered something of a falling back during the early- to mid-1980s as the Union appeared to stagnate. From 1988 onwards, support for Ireland's membership literally boomed, and figures above seventy percent predominated.[6] By December 1994 support for EU membership in Ireland stood at 82%. Just 5% thought our membership was a bad thing, 10% said it was neither good nor bad and 3% did not answer.[7]

In terms of *the benefits or otherwise accruing to Ireland from EU membership*,

there has been a practically constant progression in terms of satisfaction. The figure remained in the eighties through the early part of the 1990s and in December 1994 it hit 90%.[8] In spring 1996 it stood at a still most impressive 86%.[9] It is reasonable to say that Europe became a high profile news item during this period. Jacques Delors' drive towards the completion of the single market by 1992 received widespread progress, and it was accompanied by a series of high profile developments involving Ireland at European level. The country's 1990 presidency of the European Council came in the immediate aftermath of the fall of the communist régimes of central and eastern Europe. In particular, the question of German reunification was on the table, and the holding of a special European Council meeting in Dublin in March 1990 provided the Taoiseach Charles Haughey with an opportunity to demonstrate the pivotal role that Ireland could play in wider political affairs at European level. The Irish presidency was determined to stand by the desire of the German government to secure European backing for the reunification project. Chancellor Helmut Kohl has repeatedly stated his gratitude for the role played by Haughey and the Irish officials in achieving the desired outcome. In addition to this, Iraq's August 1990 invasion of Kuwait, although it occurred after the end of Ireland's presidency, afforded the Irish government another high profile opportunity to prove the benefits of Europe through its participation in the Troika. This grouping of EU foreign ministers composing the present, last and next countries to hold the presidency, was active in terms of the shuttle diplomacy which characterised the months between the invasion of Kuwait and the commencement of hostilities by the international coalition assembled in Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf.

Europe remained on the Irish political agenda with the Maastricht Treaty referendum which was enthusiastically ratified by the people in the referendum of June 18, 1992 (69% yes/31% no). The promise of a massive cash injection of £8 billion by the EU at this time doubtless reinforced the widespread feeling that Ireland was most definitely benefiting from Europe!

The issue of the single market is another which has recorded widespread support

among Irish Eurobarometer respondents. There was a certain euphoria about expectations from the single market which was evident in the years during which it was not yet a reality but was a subject of constant discussion in the media. In 1988 and 1989 for example, findings of Eurobarometer surveys carried out among Irish respondents showed that some 28% of those interviewed with very hopeful regarding the single market, 50% were rather hopeful, 10% were rather fearful and 2% were very fearful. 10% did not reply. Over time, the figures showed something of a levelling off as the single market became an everyday reality. In general, 20% of respondents said they were very hopeful, again 50% remained rather hopeful, approximately 10% were rather fearful and 4% were very fearful.[10]

As would be expected, similar levels of euphoria were reported concerning people's general attitude towards the single market. In 1988/9, a massive 70% of Irish respondents considered it to be a good thing, 15% felt it was neither good nor bad and just about 8% felt it was a bad thing. 5% did not offer a reply. By 1992, the figures had levelled out at 55% believing the single market was a good thing, 25% saying it was neither good nor bad and 6% believing it was a bad thing. 14% did not reply.[11]

The Eurobarometer figures covering the period from 1974 to 1974 clearly show differences between France and Ireland insofar as attitudes to Europe are concerned. Later in this chapter we shall see more survey evidence and analysis of political attitudes to Europe in both countries. However, the evidence presented thus far omits the period directly covered by the 1995 social movements in France which formed much of the basis for the preceding chapter. The difficulty with this evidence is that taken in isolation, it is difficult to extract any concrete conclusions from it which improve upon those we may draw from the previous evidence. Just to complete the picture therefore, the findings of the Spring 1996 Eurobarometer poll showed scant difference between the Irish and the French in terms of their perceived influence on their national governments. Both of them came in slightly above the EU average but still recorded low

findings. Just 26% of Irish and 24% of French respondents felt they could influence their national governments with the EU average standing at 22%. When it came to their perceived influence on the EU, the findings were even worse. The EU average of perceived influence stood at 18% with Ireland at 19% and France at 17%.

One reasonably interesting finding which does deserve a mention concerns the difference between French and German respondents concerning perceived influence on the European Union. The figure was 23% of Germans believing they were influential and 71% believing they were not. Given the known French reservations regarding German reunification, and the reappearance of Germany as a political as well as economic player on the international stage, it is interesting that such a divergence could exist between two partner nations. This finding must surely underline the viewpoint that French voters no longer view the European Union as something which they can automatically hope to impose their will on. This fact was reinforced by the Spring 1998 summit decision which saw President Chirac fail to impose a French candidate as first president of the European Central Bank. In order to avoid a French veto, Chirac's candidate will succeed the successful Dutchman, who will retire before the formal end of his mandate.

In looking at these figures, one could adopt various approaches. It is inevitable that in the case of Ireland, the view of Europe that is conditioned by the considerable financial benefit accruing to the country from membership had tended to be paramount. As one of the smaller member states, Ireland's priority over most of its time in the Union has been to maximise the general economic benefits of membership, through skilfully handling the various funds available to the country as a result of its comparatively disadvantaged status within the entity. The very apparent EU funding of infrastructure improvements, particularly regarding the road network and later the railways and Dún Laoghaire seaport lent a very evident face to the money that the Union was investing in Ireland. In the sphere of agriculture, the advent of policies such as the Common Agricultural

Policy and practices such as intervention gave farmers a much greater degree of economic security than they would hitherto have known. It is also worth mentioning that in the political sphere, the EU has allowed Ireland to broaden its foreign relations by lessening the country's traditional dependence on its links with Britain.

The reality is that precious little media coverage is given to many questions regarding the broader political agenda of the European project in the Irish media, and internal developments in individual member states. This is not necessarily due to ineptness on the part of Irish journalists covering European issues, since with particular regard to coverage on RTE television and radio, it is clear that most correspondents are very well abreast of their brief. Rather, the priorities of European coverage - from experience I can assert that government pressure is often firmly behind these - centre around the direct financial benefits accruing to Ireland from negotiations on a variety of issues. That there would be benefits has not generally been in doubt since Ireland has always been a net beneficiary of EU funds, as opposed to wealthier nations such as France which have been net contributors. It is, in my view, reasonable to assume that with allocations of structural funds set to diminish very significantly by 2006, the consensus regarding the benefits of EU membership to the country will reduce somewhat. It is certainly the case that an effort by the Irish government to raise awareness and support for the broader agenda underpinning the European Union is seriously overdue.

Almost inevitably, France will not exhibit the same kind of blind europhilia evident in Ireland. This is not as such to do with the fact that the French as a nation are any less gullible or naive in their expectations than the Irish. Clearly, the *volontarisme* which we have spoken of previously will give the lie to that notion, since in terms of what they believe it is possible to obtain from protests, the French go much further than the Irish. Rather, the French perception of Europe takes the broader line and encompasses greater concern with the overall political process than does the Irish one. France cannot as such point to direct

monetary benefits from being part of the European Union. Like any member state, it can point to the benefits that accrue simply from being an EU member, in terms of participation in a strong single currency and the anticipated economic clout to be derived from association with a transnational institution as apparently determined in its objectives as the European Union. The hard reality is that France often did not have as much success imposing its own agenda on the European Union, particularly in most recent years. The French interest in generating European industrial champions where once there had been French ones has not been a priority shared by many other member states. In the area of research, development and innovation there has additionally been a reluctance at European level to back initiatives seeking to set new European standards in a range of technological areas. One French proposal, relating to High Definition Television, was given a trial in the early-1990s, but has since been buried.[12]

5.3 French economic and industrial policy in the European context

At this point, I wish to move away temporarily from considerations of attitudes among the French populace towards the European Union, to look in more detail at the manner in which Europe has impacted over the years on France's economic and industrial policy. I believe that this analysis will compliment the information already provided with regard to France throughout this thesis, and will prepare the ground for my concluding remarks on contemporary French political culture later. I wish to justify this focus on French industrial and economic policy to the exclusion of Ireland on the basis that, in order to understand a significant aspect of the rationale behind the French perception of Europe, we need to consider the economic niche that France was attempting to carve out for itself in port-war Europe.

Hussein Kassim divides France's relationship with Europe into two major periods. The first concerns the years from the 1950s to the 1980s, and the second, the years which have elapsed primarily since the Single European Act, but also since the re-emergence of a strong German political identity in the

aftermath of the collapse of the Communist bloc.[13]

The earlier period which, in Kassim's analysis, continued until 1986, saw Europe contribute to France's achieving its two great post-war objectives. The first was economic modernisation and the second the containment of Germany. For Kassim, the former was arrived at through the development of the common market and the great economic changes that occurred in France during the 1950s and 1960s. These changes saw France move from being a predominantly rural economy to a largely urban one. As this was happening, it was necessary to retain the support of farmers whose sector was now losing its traditional importance, but whose support was necessary to see the change through. The government managed to do this by supporting the adoption of the Common Agricultural Policy.[14]

Insofar as containing Germany was concerned, for Kassim this was achieved through co-operation with the country's eastern neighbour in policy making endeavours.[15] However I feel that there was significantly more than this involved. Clearly, the German state from the post-war period to the beginning of the 1990s was one which showed little appetite for a large scale presence at international diplomatic level. Germany appeared far more content to enjoy its phenomenal economic recovery and bask in the respectability of the developing EEC and its alliance with France. Indeed, it is entirely fair to say that if Germany put all of its huge economic clout at the service of its alliance with France and of Europe, throughout this period the 'political' respectability of the new Germany was very largely French in origin. A constant undercurrent points to the view of many German leaders that the country's successful participation in international organisations on a 'one among equals' basis, contributes to containing the demon within. Germany simply did not have the political will to make its presence felt internationally.

During this period, Europe was merely a tool at the service of French interests. Not that this was the intention of the community as a whole. France was merely

able to use its membership to ensure that French interests would be protected within it. France's interventionist policy continued unabated, a strategy which according to Elie Cohen may be defined according to the following criteria. Firstly the economy of administered financing whereby credit was strictly supervised by the state. Secondly came an inflationist social compromise, which Cohen has described as 'the consensual refusal of the state, the trade unions and the employers to control nominal changes in incomes and prices'. Thirdly came the pursuit of *grands projets*, with the state intervening in support of national champions in industries selected for their strategic importance.[16]

It was during the 1980s that things began to change. Undoubtedly the most significant change in terms of the medium to long term development of the French economy was that occurring outside France. Increased openness in the international economy meant that domestic economies were steadily becoming too small. In order to compete, most countries began to favour anti-inflationary policies. This, naturally, signalled change in France.[17]

In addition, a number of changes took place in France. There was the abandonment of the principle of 'Keynesianism in one country' which had been adopted by the French socialists in the aftermath of their 1981 election victories. A restructuring was undertaken of the banking and financial system, first under Jacques Delors and then under Edouard Balladur. The state also commenced its retreat from the interventionism which had characterised its operation since the post-war period. Kassim discerns three strands of continuity in the European policy pursued by French presidents from de Gaulle to Mitterrand.

Firstly, he points to European integration as being a way of containing Germany. Secondly, the role of European institutions in providing an instrument for the achievement of French policy objectives, particularly those which could not be achieved at national level. Thirdly, there has been a commitment to an intergovernmentalist conception of integration - the *'communauté forte aux institutions faibles.'* This last point may be understood as a French attachment to

the idea of a Europe in which the rules would be fixed by sovereign governments at summit meetings, with France enjoying its usual high degree of influence. Strengthening the Union's supranational institutions naturally supposes a watering down of the intergovernmentalist approach.[18]

The Single European Act represented the first major challenge to France's control of its European affairs. As Kassim points out, France was a supporter of the Act, seeing in it potential to develop one of its priorities which had not been dealt with up to then. The French wished to see European industry gaining a competitive advantage in world markets through Europe becoming an economic force with which to be reckoned. The internal market would allow European firms to develop continental economies of scale and expose them to market disciplines, thus forcing them to increase their productivity and efficiency. Furthermore, France sought collaboration in research and development at European level, and called for the single market to have a social dimension.[19]

France was to be disappointed by Europe's response to its vision. Rather than the promotion of a European level industrial policy and the creation of European level champion firms on the model which France had adopted at home, priority went to the promotion of trade within the single market area. For Kassim, the failure of the European Commission to allow the takeover of de Havilland, Boeing's Canadian division, by Aérospatiale and Italy's Alénia, provided evidence of its lack of willingness to assist European firms to compete effectively in world markets.[20]

But perhaps the level on which the Single European Act is best known for having presented France with a challenge, is that of deregulation and economic liberalisation. That the Community should opt for a drive towards deregulation in the aftermath of the adoption of the Single European Act was hardly surprising. What was, however, significant, was the way in which it pushed ahead in an ambitious manner, aiming to open up sectors which had traditionally been bastions of protectionism and anti-competitive agreements. One of the

Community's key weapons in this strategy was its competition powers. By steadfastly applying Articles 85 and 86 of the SEA, governing anti-competitive agreements between firms and the abuse of dominant positions by firms, in addition to the EEC Treaty provisions on the control of state aid, and the adoption of a new instrument for regulating mergers and acquisitions, the then EC made significant progress towards completing the single market.[21]

Whilst France was by no means alone in being affected by these changes in European policy, the result of their implementation was to impact in a particularly potent way on the country, since it affected a number of sectors in which the French state was still involved such as the car industry and air transport. Specifically, in the case of firms requiring state aid such as Bull, Renault and Air France, and de Havilland's proposed merger, the French were instructed either to meet certain criteria or to drop their plans to intervene altogether.[22]

Whilst the EC had long been a factor in French policy making, the aftermath of the SEA meant that the country was now destined to enjoy a very different relationship with Europe, in which once a policy was adopted at the intergovernmental level, the Commission's role as guardian of the common good - at least insofar as the observance of treaties and decisions were concerned - was to see it call the shots as regards the French in a way which had not hitherto been the case.

In tandem with these changes in France's relationship with the EC/EU, significant changes were occurring in the Franco/German alliance. These changes started with German reunification, a subject on which France shared the reservations expressed more openly by Britain. Yet, France found itself fairly powerless to prevent Germany from reunifying[23], and instead decided to continue its policy of promoting further integration to continue its approach of containing Germany. This suited Germany as well, which, after all, saw the continued development of the European Union as essential for keeping in check

those forces within its borders who would favour a more go-it-alone approach. At any rate, Germany's approach to Europe was modifying as well. Its confidence bolstered by reunification, it now felt itself more in the driving seat, pushing for more supranationalism in the Maastricht negotiations.[24]

In the currency debate, France's support for EMU came under pressure from German economic policy in the aftermath of reunification. High German interest rates in order to fund the cost of reunification, and France's rejection of a German offer to adjust parities, led to heavy speculation against the Franc. Financial reforms in France in its attempt to meet the Maastricht convergence targets engendered large scale hostility, the continuation of a questioning of Europe's role in French affairs which started with the divisive 1992 Maastricht referendum.

This overview affords us a useful perspective on how issues with a social and a national sovereignty dimension are closely tied to economic matters in France, and it is clear to see how frustration with the new limitations being placed upon the state - particularly when the result of these is a government imposed austerity package - can boil over as escape hatches which were once viable options are no longer so.

The link between the social and the economic here is surely linked also to the history of French economic planning which is considerably different to its Irish counterpart in a number of respects. As pointed out above, the legacy of *Les Trente Glorieuses* and the extended period of prosperity it brought about contrasts sharply with Ireland's experience of protectionism. Furthermore, dirigism itself played a central part in the economic planning of the *Trente Glorieuses* period, which saw France manage its economy with a series of national plans which, right up until the oil-crisis of 1973/4, ensured that the state in France would be seen as a father figure acting in defence of national interests and all times and capable of ensuring well being and social progress, even against a backdrop of political uncertainty, such as that which was in

evidence as the Fourth Republic crumbled.

However, pressures from outside and the steady realisation of the limits of the French state have over a number of stages led to changes within. The liberal economic reforms which have taken place within France since the mid-1980s have largely been marked by waves of privatisation. Yet, in analysing the extent to which this apparent recourse to liberalism represented a break with France's *dirigiste* past, Maclean suggests that 'it is perhaps *nationalisation* which should be seen as the aberration, albeit brief, in the continuum of French *dirigiste* rule.[25] The firm found its rehabilitation in the privatisation process, as a State, which had exceeded the limits Laurent Fabius had warned it not to in 1984, found its empty coffers more potent than any ideology.

However, as Jack Hayward remarks, the question of trade liberalisation has caused sporadic panic among sectors of the French élite. The realisation during the course of the 1990s has been that globalisation was gaining the upper hand internationally. Government efforts to bring in a more liberal, competitive agenda sparked a protectionist backlash, embodied by the 1993 report on the fiscal and economic effects of delocalisation of French industry and services by Senator Jean Arthuis - later to become Finance Minister under Jacques Chirac in 1995. The report predicted eventual job losses of up to five million people by correlating unemployment with free competition, foreign investment and delocalisation, welfare provision and loss of competitiveness.[26]

5.4 France and Europe today

As we have seen, both from the figures presented in the overview of Eurobarometer findings above, and the evidence in the case study regarding the European dimension to the strike movements of late-1995, Europe has come to constitute a source of political division in France much more than in Ireland. Admittedly, there are grounds for suggesting that this has not always been the case, but rather that it is the result of a transformation in more recent times.

Referring to the 1992 referendum on the Maastricht Treaty which was carried by a margin of 51%-49%, Pia Christina Wood points out that:

"the tenor of the debate, the high level of interest demonstrated by the public, and the closeness of the vote appeared to support the conclusion that "Europe" had been transformed from a quasi-foreign policy issue into a domestic issue of primary importance."[27]

It is necessary to look at French attitudes to Europe in recent times, and particularly to bring these up to date to gain a clear impression of where the country's European identity is going now. When President Mitterrand came to power in 1981, it is fair to say that Europe was not apparent as one of his major campaign priorities. There had been discussion of Europe at the 1979 Congress in Metz when the Socialists had appeared rather split over Europe. On the left of the party, the CERES[28] group led by Jean-Pierre Chevènement came out as being strongly opposed to further European integration, adopting an anti-European and nationalist stand. Further to the right of the party, (although with prominent left-wing members), a group led by Michel Rocard and Pierre Mauroy advocated support for European integration, and in particular the development of a workers' Europe. Mitterrand's own faction steered a middle course including the protection of French sovereignty and independence, the reinforcement of the powers of the European Parliament without weakening national parliaments, enlargement but only with protective economic preconditions, and dislike of the EMS. However, in the immediate run-up to the Presidential Election, Mitterrand shifted somewhat towards the CERES position, following a challenge for the presidential nomination from Rocard. In the *110 propositions* document on which Mitterrand won the election, only three proposals referred directly to Europe. Following his victory, the new President chose to focus his domestic policy on the Socialist economic agenda, and his foreign policy on NATO and France's leadership role in developing countries.[29] Among the first government of Mitterrand's long tenure as president, there was a clear division between pro- and anti-European integration ministers. On the one hand, men such as Pierre Mauroy (Prime Minister), Claude Cheysson (Foreign Affairs) and Jacques Delors (Trade) clearly represented the pro-Europe side in

the cabinet, they were outweighed by Chevènement and the four Communist ministers. Wood argues that the integrationists did not finally win the day until Mitterrand's decision to maintain the franc in the ERM in 1983.

Having reinforced his control over France's European policy, President Mitterrand then decided to push the European agenda as part of the repositioning of his administration. In a speech in Strasbourg during the European Election campaign of 1984, the President made a groundbreaking speech during which he advocated support for the proposed European Union Treaty. This treaty seemed to run contrary to many of the values which, up to then, had been dear to the heart of French Socialists. It proposed numerous measures of institutional reform, including strengthening the powers of the Commission and the European Parliament and increasing majority decision making. Such measures had previously been viewed by the government as being detrimental to national sovereignty. Indeed, in February 1984, French Socialist MEPs had voted against the draft European Union Treaty. However, here was Mitterrand clearly reversing the party line.

However, the 1984 campaign was dominated by domestic issues, and consequently the President's speech was not the major campaign issue it perhaps ought to have been. Nonetheless, the parties of the Right did express their views on European issues in their formal declarations on the campaign. Although the RPR and UDF presented a common list to electors, clear divergences emerged between them on key issues. The RPR reiterated its traditional position that the EU should never be allowed to undermine French sovereignty and thus opposed all moves to increase the supranational nature of its operation. The UDF, for its part, found itself in a delicate position, as a part of the main opposition but yet with a much more pro-European outlook that its fellow candidates in the RPR. This division between them was one of the main reasons why the UDF campaign at that time focused on European issues.[30]

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It would be remiss to mention the 1984 European elections without making some reference to the National Front, since it was then that it first emerged as a potent national force. However, once again its campaign focused on domestic issues, and in terms of its European focus was hostile to an EU which threatened French sovereignty. It did, however, see the EU as being a positive development in the face of a common enemy – the USSR.

Between 1984 and 1989, there had been many major developments in the European sphere, particularly the Single European Act and the development of the Delors framework for completing the single market by 1992. Consequently, it was possible in 1989 for the election debate to espouse a much more resolutely European agenda. The feeling that France was in the driving seat of a European train which, overall was serving it well, led to the presence of something of a rush among the major parties to appear the most Euro friendly. This was so much so that the prominent UDF politician, Simone Veil, broke away from the main UDF-RPR list, to form her own list dubbed *les centristes*, arguing that the main opposition list was made up of two fundamentally contrasting views of the future of European integration. However, it was in 1989 that divisions between the major parties over Europe appeared to have reached the point of a virtual consensus.

This was of course broken by the Communists, National Front and Greens. Wood reports that the Communist Party was the most openly hostile to Europe in 1989, despite the insistence by the *tête de liste* Philippe Herzog that the Communists were not opposed to European integration. However, their campaign called for 'constructing Europe differently and a different Europe' and accused the SEA of 'hampering France's liberty and sacrificing its economy to German domination.'[31] Indeed, the Communists tried to wave the Gaullist banner, arguing that they were the sole defenders of French sovereignty.

In that latter context, they were joined by the FN. It is worth bearing in mind that, in 1989, the RPR's official line was decidedly pro-Europe. Although the

slogan it championed, along with the UDF, was 'A Strong France in a Strong Europe.', it openly supported initiatives such as monetary union with a single currency, and protection of a social Europe. Consequently, a space was opened up for the FN to occupy traditional Gaullist ground, and this it did by advocating subsidiarity as the best approach for constructing EU policy and suggesting that the Union itself should remain something of a confederation. Le Pen adamantly opposed what he termed 'a cosmopolitan and multiracial Europe', however he supported a common European defence and security policy, a common European currency, and a regulatory institute similar to the board of the US Federal Reserve. However, many aspects of the FN's campaign focused on domestic issues where it had established a presence, namely immigration and law and order.

It is clear that between the European elections of 1989, and the Maastricht referendum of 1992, something happened to rock the consensus on European issues among the major political forces in France. On the one hand, there was the ground covered by the PCF, FN and Greens in 1989, and their attempts – certainly in the case of the first two – to hoist the Gaullist banner of national sovereignty and the national interest. Wood reminds us that a range of developments had occurred to change the political face of Europe in the intervening period. The communist régimes of eastern Europe collapsed, and those countries began to embrace democracy. Meanwhile Yugoslavia broke up and descended into violent interethnic combat, and Germany reunified. The reunification of Germany posed particular dilemmas for major countries such as Britain and France who had become accustomed to a Germany which, on the international stage, was politically weak as a result of the established post-war order. Ancestral fears of a resurgent Germany were very much in evidence in early-1990, and President Mitterrand was anxious to ensure that the country would pin its colours firmly to the European mast, rather than seeking to pursue its regained power through more independent means. This was of particular importance since the number of foreign troops on German soil was to be drastically reduced, and its official status as an occupied country ended.[32]

I do not intend here to provide an overview of the provisions of the Maastricht Treaty; these are well known and are easily available. What I want to do is illustrate the new range of political opinions which prevailed in France surrounding this referendum. The political developments of spring 1992 were, by any definition, disturbing for Europe's political leaders. Whilst questions relating to national sovereignty were always going to be on the agenda, they could scarcely have imagined the extent of the dissent that would be voiced. Throughout 1991, the traditional opponents of further European integration within France were vocal in their opposition to the thrust of Mitterrand's policy and the treaty in general. They were joined by a variety of figures from the RPR, led in particular by Philippe Séguin, who argued that the Maastricht Treaty would severely compromise French sovereignty. In a decision for which he was later to be criticised by many pro-Europeans and domestic political commentators, President Mitterrand reacted to the dissent by agreeing, on June 3, 1991, to hold a national referendum on the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty. Although within the National Assembly, the vote on amending the constitution to ratify the Maastricht Treaty was passed by a large majority, this was not the case when the matter was put to the country.

Wood reminds us that RPR dissension over Europe was nothing new. The Gaullist party held a traditionally trenchant view of the authority of the nation state and thus generally opposed moves of a supranational nature. She quotes the noted political commentator Alain Duhamel:

> "The Gaullist family has the cult of the French difference, the obsessive fear for France's identity, and a terror of French obliteration."[33]

There had in the past been differences within the RPR at the time of the introduction of the Single European Act, but now the party's internal differences over Europe were supplemented by an additional major fear: what would be the effect of this new treaty on the balance of power between France and Germany within Europe? Would France now be less in a position to control a resurgent

Germany than before? What of the provisions of the Treaty: the European Central Bank, additional powers for the Commission and the European Parliament, and the right to vote for all citizens of the Union? In the eyes of Philippe Séguin, these were all dangerous steps leading to the end of the nation-state in Europe and the development of a federal structure.

As might have been expected, the UDF was more united on Maastricht than the RPR, however it did have its prominent dissenter in the person of Philippe de Villiers, leader of a movement known as *Combat des valeurs*. Once again, he presented many of the same criticisms as Séguin, but added an increased degree of xenophobia, denouncing plans to allow foreigners to vote in France and expressing concern over further breaking down of borders which would lead to an inflow of refugees and immigrants.

Not surprisingly, both Séguin and de Villiers were joined in their hostility to Maastricht by the National Front. Many of Le Pen's arguments were very similar to those of the other two men, however they did take on a more racist character, with the leader of the FN alleging a global conspiracy which would lead France to national suicide, and provide for only more immigration, insecurity and even AIDS. Jean-Marie Le Pen additionally complained that the treaty would allow the foreign representatives of big capital, stateless bankers and Brussels technocrats to gain greater control over French decision making.

The Communist Party also opposed the treaty, but Georges Marchais was quick to point out that the kind of Europe he wanted was neither isolationist nor based on the Maastricht provisions, but rather something completely different. The main tenets of their opposition to the treaty were: 1) the idea of a supranational Europe dominated by Germany, 2) the negative domestic social impact of Maastricht: higher unemployment, lower wages, fewer jobs from greater competition, increased social tension accompanied by rising nationalism leading to a profound crisis, 3) The link between the treaty and the policies of *la grande bourgeoisie*.

It is true that the Maastricht referendum was carried by virtually the narrowest of margins in France, and that the score obtained by the 'no' camp represented a stunning success for a collection of opponents of the treaty who were challenging the assumed consensus on Europe that had been seen in France in the preceding years. However, it is also worth noting that, in achieving a victory, the 'yes' campaign also recorded a not insignificant political achievement, given the fact that a precedent had been set earlier in the year in Denmark when the electorate had rejected the treaty in a surprise outcome, which proved particularly embarrassing since the country held the rotating EU presidency at the time.

However, Maastricht marked a major turning point in the sense that, according to Wood, it marked the inclusion of Europe as an element of debate and disagreement in the domestic political arena for the first time, as opposed to its perception as an issue which was by and large one of foreign policy, and thus an area outside the hurly burly of domestic concerns.

The event which forms the focal point of the case study of this thesis, in the French context, is the social movements of late-1995. It is therefore of some interest here to look at the presentation of Europe in the presidential election campaign of 1995.

By and large, the campaign did not particularly focus on European or international issues, with the exception of that run by Philippe de Villiers. Jean-Marie Le Pen did refer once again to the issues of the Maastricht referendum, but predictably focused much of his venom on his old reliable topic of immigration. The three main candidates centred their campaigns around issues such as unemployment, salaries, taxes and defence which, although they do have undoubted European connections, were presented in a primarily domestic context. Indeed, on European issues there was a broad measure of agreement on the need for European integration among the three main candidates. They were, however, vague on the substance of their European vision, with Chirac happy to

refer to Europe as 'a necessary ambition' in the current era, Jospin describing it as the natural framework for the action of the French government, and Balladur viewing Europe as indispensable for the future of the country.

Both Balladur and Jospin restated their allegiance to the Maastricht Treaty, whilst Chirac was somewhat more reticent, arguing that he still viewed a renegotiation of Maastricht as desirable, however standing by his rather reticent 1992 support for it. Indeed, in terms of political relations within Europe, the Franco-German alliance seemed to be given the highest priority by the three candidates, Jospin declaring that Franco-German relations were 'the essential axis of European construction', and Chirac devoting a whole article in *Le Monde* to the subject, albeit under the headline *Une volonté pour l'Europe*. Evidence of differences over the speed of European integration appeared in relation to the timetable for the single currency. Balladur, who was Prime Minister at the time, and who directly linked France's prospects for economic recovery to its role in Europe, pressed for the rapid introduction of the single currency by 1997 if possible. Lionel Jospin, the Socialist candidate, felt that France would have difficulty in meeting the Maastricht convergence criteria in time for a 1997 start to the single currency, and suggested that 1999 was a more realistic start date. But Chirac was the most non-committal of the three insofar as fixing an exact date was concerned. He simply argued that the single currency ought to be introduced once all of the criteria outlined in the treaty had been met. Chirac devoted much of his attention between the first and second rounds of polling to the idea that there existed a *fracture sociale*, causing social exclusion, and he seemed most concerned with taking radical steps on the domestic front to alleviate this. Indeed, even if Wood tends to play down the differences between the major candidates over Europe in her analysis – pointing to the strong adherence to European policy by the Chirac administration in the year after the President's election – I believe the key fact is that a man who had seemed less concerned about establishing timetables for European integration when he was seeking election then seemed to embrace the fast track approach absolutely within a few months of taking office. There was a clear shift of focus there.[34]

In the event, the French elected Chirac as their new president in May 1995, opting for a man who in the eyes of many was a recent and unconvincing convert to many of the social justice arguments he was presenting. As I have outlined earlier in the case study, Chirac revised much of his policy and reshuffled his cabinet late in 1995 with his announcement that the social security system would have to be radically reformed and the country's budget deficit cut in order to meet the Maastricht convergence criteria. It is useful then to trace the relationship between the French and Europe over the intervening period, and in particular to explore the relationship with the broader phenomena of global economic change.

During the course of the 1997 General Election campaign, the noted economic liberal Elie Cohen was interviewed in *L'Alsace* newspaper on the theme of globalisation, and how it was viewed by the French. In the early part of the interview, Cohen nails his pro-European colours firmly to the mast in these terms:

"During the last GATT world trade talks, France used strong arm tactics, in Paris, threatening to use its veto. But in practise, it was European solidarity which allowed us to save face, since Europe accounts for 45% of world trade. A delegate who speaks for that 45% obviously carries much more weight than one who speaks for France alone, which accounts for just a tiny part of world trade. If France can, today, still consider herself as a power, it is only because she speaks in the name of Europe."[35]

His interviewer, Francis Laffont, asked Cohen if France was the European country with the greatest sense of fear regarding globalisation:

"There is, in that regard, a real French exception. I have found it amusing to look at the extent to which we blame globalisation for all our problems, and drawing up a list of them is almost like naming the ten plagues of Egypt. Globalisation is the cause of our unemployment, the erosion of our public services, the loss of our economic sovereignty, the development of inequalities etc... And behind the great scapegoat of globalisation, there is a secondary scapegoat: European integration. It is seen as the factor which accelerates globalisation."[36]

Cohen goes on to provide his own explanation for this, citing the perception of the state that existed in France in the aftermath of the liberation at the end of the

Second World War. There was an insistence on technical progress, the State and the Nation. Great technical progress was seen as a way of strengthening national sovereignty, and the role of the state in flagship industries such as *Electricité de France* was seen as representing a rationale superior to that of the market.

This model worked well, Cohen points out, until the 1970s, when the oil crises affected economic progress around the developed world. The French government, under President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing – who was, by nature, a liberal in cultural matters, resorted to policies of state interventionism in his economic response to recession, and taxation went up, on average from 35% to 42% over the period. For Cohen, it was paradoxically under the Socialist government elected in 1981 that the French private sector was encouraged to look to more liberal approaches in doing business.

In Cohen's judgement, this proved to be a positive experience. By the end of the 1980s, large French firms in the private sector were adapting well to the exigencies of an increasingly global market and were becoming more and more competitive. Indeed, even during the difficult economic times of this decade, many large French companies continued to enjoy healthy profits, having adapted their operations successfully to the rigours of the international marketplace. The problem, though, was with the still very large public sector. This had remained practically static in terms of its *modus operandi* as the private sector and the rest of the world had undergone significant changes.

In their attempts to push through changes, the French political élites have, as we have seen, attempted to justify these by the need to adapt the country to the changing situation internationally. In Elie Cohen's view, such a policy is profoundly misguided. He argues that reforms which are forced through, and in particular, which are based on a fundamental lie, will not work. This is because globalisation or European integration are not the only factors requiring France to reform itself. The need to reform is much more fundamental. Cohen argues:

> "If globalisation was our problem, we wouldn't have such trade surpluses."[37]

He goes on to argue strongly that the many social ills for which globalisation is blamed are not, in reality, a consequence of this phenomenon at all. Essentially, Cohen's explanation for high French unemployment revolves around the country's high labour costs and excessive regulation for part-time work.

Elie Cohen is thus attempting to present here an explanation for why globalisation and European integration are not the source of France's ills. However, what does this tell us about the nature of the relationship between the French and Europe over recent years?

Cohen has usefully stated above how a number of economic problems have affected France which have not necessarily had a link to Europe. Yet we know that European integration or the demands of the global marketplace have often been cited in France as justifying the need for reform. As the case study has shown, the insistence on carrying through reform merely in order to satisfy an external requirement was always likely to meet with sustained resistance at some point, and during the course of the 1990s there was a more significant body of public opinion in France likely to question the course of the country's European policy than had been the case before.

The Chirac/Juppé government's move to resolute support for the process of European integration, budgetary rigour and Maastricht convergence criteria thrown in, opened up a space in mainstream French political discourse which, needless to say, proved attractive to the Socialist leader, Lionel Jospin, striving to formulate a policy which would clearly distinguish between him and his predecessor in the Elysee, François Mitterrand. Thus, when President Chirac took what transpired to be the ill-advised decision to dissolve the National Assembly in spring 1997, the Socialists were presented with an opportunity to present another vision of Europe than that presented by the outgoing government.

They seized the opportunity to do so at the end of April, with a joint declaration agreed with the Communist Party. The occasion was a rally in the Palais de la

Mutualité at which Lionel Jospin and Robert Hue set out on a common platform for the general election. Two points set out in this programme were to become major issues pushed by this coalition after it had, unexpectedly, won the election. These were: (1) following discussion with the social partners, the introduction of a law aiming to reduce the length of the legal working week to 35 hours, (2) give Europe back a meaning by going further than the conditions of the Maastricht Treaty. Another path should be followed in order to arrive at a European social policy, harmonising national legislation.

Here then was an attempt to refocus policy at both a national and a European level on the idea that problems of unemployment could be solved by reverting to approaches which were clearly interventionist, and designed to at least partially to leave the rules of the market behind.[38] It was an approach which bore significant fruit with the electorate, who reaffirmed their confidence in the party they had virtually annihilated at the polls just four years previously.

Once back in power, the Socialists set about giving effect to their reforms, with calls for a European summit on jobs. This concession was one of the first given to the new government on the occasion of the Amsterdam summit just a few weeks after the second round of the election held at the end of May 1997. It appears that the French government pushed its point with considerable alacrity in Amsterdam, judging it wise to point out that the Council had formally recommended greater consultation with affected workers when major layoffs were proposed, such as in the case of Renault Vilvoorde in Brussels. Dominique Strauss-Kahn, the Finance Minister in the new government, said he European colleagues had been particularly sensitive to France's problems during the talks, illustrating just how much the shifting political sands in the country were viewed with suspicion by its European partners.[39]

Before the summit actually happened, the French found a willing partner in the Italians who also had a left leaning government at the time. At the 17th Franco-Italian Summit in Chambéry in October 1997, both sides agreed a common

declaration on reducing the length of the working week. Of particular interest is the satisfaction expressed by President Chirac, who stated that he had spent over two years endeavouring to ensure that Europe was exemplary in social matters.[40]

The actual summit itself was a businesslike affair. It adopted an ambitious text setting out a plan of action for all EU countries to deal with their unemployment situation over a five year period. Each country was obliged to draw up a national plan of action aiming to provide, at the end of a five year period (an extension possible for those countries with the greatest unemployment problem), a job, training programme or other occupation for young people unemployed for more than six months, and older people unemployed for more than twelve months. In particular, it is intended that training be provided to 20% of unemployed people as opposed to 10% according to the European average at the present time. These national plans will face an annual roundtable review at European level, although no specific sanctions were envisaged for non-compliance.

One major sticking point in the summit was the issue of labour market flexibility. Significant changes were required to legislation which the Commission argued would create 12 million jobs in Europe in 5 years if adopted. The main problem was the French attachment to job security and the term *flexibilité* was anathema to that. In the end, the term *souplesse* was adopted, whose meaning is roughly the same in English but distinct in French.[41] Despite the differences that might have been anticipated between a Gaullist president and a Socialist government on this issue, there was no public falling out over the results of the jobs summit. President Chirac did make a comment warning the government against *expérimentations hazardeuses*, however his official spokesperson was anxious to insist that this was a general remark and not a criticism of a specific aspect of the government's work.[42]

It would seem then that some lessons were learned from the protests which surrounded the government's drive to reduce deficits in order to meet the Euro convergence criteria, and its attempt to depict these criteria as an end in

themselves. The push for Europe to take unemployment and social policy more seriously was accompanied by a general bid by the European Commission to devote more attention to the EU's interaction with the ordinary citizen. One major Europe-wide initiative underway during this period was Citizens First, an energetic programme which involved widespread dissemination of information leaflets, information over the Internet, and also freephone telephone numbers to inform citizens of the range of entitlements they had in the EU.

The French Foreign Ministry has introduced a yearly survey of attitudes to Europe in France, which is carried out by the noted polling organisation Ipsos. The results of the 1998 survey confirmed objectively that public opinion regarding the European Union in France was once again becoming more favourable. The 1997 survey had revealed that approximately two thirds of the population had a positive view of Europe, whilst one third had a negative one.[43] In 1998 however, 77% of people (a 9% increase on the previous year) believed that Europe was overall a good thing for their country, whilst 71% (+7%) believed it was a good thing for people like them.[44] Specifically, the survey revealed an increase in positive attitudes to Europe among socio-professional categories who had previously been more reticent: women, workers and staff of private sector companies. The traditionally Europhile sectors of the population remained so: students, senior managers, high-earners and those having achieved a third-level education. Of particular significance would appear to be the fact that much of the increase in those expressing a positive view about Europe were people without a political affiliation, whilst members of parties traditionally cold to aspects of European integration such as the Communists or the National Front remained sceptical about the benefits of Europe to people like them.

Regarding the emotions people feel when they think of the *la construction européenne*, there has once again been an increase in positive attitudes. Overall, these increased from 59% in 1997 to 67% in 1998.[45] Some 25% of people expressed either a feeling of enthusiasm or confidence regarding the process, a

rise of 10%, whilst 42% of respondents said that the emotion they felt was one of hope. 21% expressed a feeling of worry, but this figure, although high, recorded a decrease of 8% compared to the previous year. The one major exception here concerned supporters of the Communist Party where a feeling of fear (43%, +5%) overshadowed that of hope (36%, -14%)

Of particular interest in these figures is the perceived relationship between the European Union and economic globalisation. As we have seen earlier in the interview with Elie Cohen, and in the case study, there has been an association made between globalisation and European integration, and the assumption made that the two were virtually co-terminous, as regards the agenda they were pursuing and the economic model they espoused. The emphasis put on job security and the fight against social exclusion at European level by the French government was clearly aimed at combating this.

It will therefore have proved heartening for the government to see in the 1998 survey on the European Union that the people did not equate globalisation and European integration. 73% of them saw the European Union as a means of protecting the country from the effects of globalisation, whilst just 25% held the opposing view. Even a majority of Communist and National Front supporters subscribed to this point of view – the figure in the case of the latter was particularly worthy of note with a full 60% of FN supporters viewing Europe as providing a shield for France against globalisation. There was also an increase in the numbers of people expressing the view that Europe would be beneficial to France in the long term.[46]

In terms of the conclusions drawn by the authors of the report, the impression given is of a country (France) which is steadily reconciling its differences with Europe after a difficult period. The only points in the survey which point to lingering differences over Europe are in the areas of:

1) Enlargement – 57% of UDF supporters and 51% of RPR supporters are favourable to accepting new member states to the union, with both figures

showing a noteworthy increase over the previous year. 69% of Socialist supporters were of the same opinion, however among Communist supporters, 55% of respondents were opposed to enlargement, an increase of 8% over the previous year.[47]

2) Attachment – the notion of European citizenship has made little progress in France, with 41% saying they are first French, and 15% first stating they are European. Indeed, the survey marks an increase in respondents affirming their allegiance to a town, city or region ahead of the country. 49% of respondents cited Europe in fourth – and last – place in terms of their allegiance to a geographic or political entity. Just 25% of respondents considered European citizenship to be something very important. Among Communist and National Front supporters, the numbers of people viewing European citizenship as being important or very important actually declined significantly. Among the Communists, 10% less of respondents saw EU citizenship as being of importance, whilst among FN supporters the figure was down by 22%.[48]

In its conclusions, the report thus highlights these divergences, and indeed states that there is evidence of increased polarisation between those forces who are favourable to European integration and those who are against. Thus, although there was a significant recovery in overall support for the European project between 1997 and 1998, there was also a hardening of attitudes among those groups hostile to the development of the Union.

The increased satisfaction rating with the course of European integration was also reflected towards the end of 1998 in a major opinion poll on attitudes towards the entering into force of the Euro which was to happen some weeks later. The survey was the latest in a regular series of polls carried out by IPSOS for Agence France Presse on European public opinion. Carried out across the five largest EU powers (France, Germany, Spain, Italy and the United Kingdom), the survey revealed that the French had become the most favourable to the single currency. In just a two month period, 6% more French respondents

(69%) saw the Euro as something positive. The average across the five countries was 61%, with Germany at 56% and the United Kingdom at 48%.[49]

5.5 Ireland and Europe

Discussing the relationship between Ireland and Europe appears, at face value, to be an easy task. As we have already seen from the Eurobarometer figures, the benefits of European Union membership appear to be widely appreciated in Ireland, at least in economic terms. The fact that the country's economic progress since 1973 was so evident in terms of the development of infrastructure, the rise in per capita earnings, and direct subvention across a wide range of economic activity, meant that few could call into question the positive impact of Ireland's membership of the Union. Additionally, we have figures for Ireland which are more reliable than for France in many cases as a result of their being the results of frequent referenda on European issues.

There has, however, been a persistent strain of opposition to EU membership in Irish society, from the outset to the present day. In many respects, the faces at the forefront of this opposition have remained the same down through the years, although the precise issues have tended to vary somewhat. John Coakley, Michael Holmes and Nicholas Rees have written on the persistence of opposition in Ireland to EU integration. Their analysis centres on:

1) Irish public mass and élite attitudes towards Europe in the context of the Irish nationalist tradition.
2) The development of opposition to the integration process from the period immediately before accession to the present day, focussing especially on referendum campaigns.
3) The patterns of opposition that have emerged among political and other élites.[50]

In the first category, they point out that one of the main contrasts between

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Ireland and most of its EU partners over the course of this century has been the preoccupation with national sovereignty and independence – a direct consequence of the fact that the country only gained its independence in 1922 and really only managed to consolidate it in 1937. Ireland got involved at an early stage in the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation and the Council of Europe (1949), however the country's participation was limited and considerably more energy went into establishing national identity and independence. By the time Ireland joined the EU in 1973, public attitudes towards this new departure in overseas relations were more positive. The authors suggest that four characteristics of the Irish nationalist tradition may serve to explain this.

1) There has firstly been a diminishing of nationalism among the public and the élites. The notion of 'unfinished business' in the relationship with Britain that was evident in the country in the post-independence period gradually gave way from the 1940s onwards as the country's independence from was established and Irish unity developed into a long-term political goal, rather than one whose realisation was seen as potentially achievable in the immediate for short-term future. This allowed other, more everyday issues become prominent, particularly in the run-up to elections. Moreover, the switch from a protectionist economy to a more open one from the late-1950s onwards reflected a clear abandonment of the traditional objective of aiming for maximum self-reliance in economic matters. There was also a reappraisal in the Republic of the nationalist stance with regard to Northern Ireland. During the 1970s and 1980s there was a steady abandoning of state sponsored nationalist symbols and rituals in the Republic, and a less nationalist image of the past was cultivated in the schools.

2) Persistent nationalist attitudes have been anti-British rather than anti-European. Indeed, Ireland has proved itself able to take pride in its historic links with continental Europe which are extensive, from the travels of Irish monks around Europe, to exchanges involving scholars and manuscripts, and the granting of exile in many European countries to members of the Irish

gentry over the centuries. For an extended period, most Irish clergy and many members of the gentry were educated on the continent, in institutions such as the Irish colleges in Louvain, Rome and Salamanca. Links with those institutions have survived down through the centuries.

3) Anti-British attitudes are not incompatible with the development of Ireland's relations with Europe. Indeed, there was a realisation that these offered Ireland the chance to free itself from the extreme dependence on Britain that had characterised its trading situation for centuries. In 1961, Britain accounted for 61% of Irish exports and 46% of imports, and a large amount of the remaining trade was with Northern Ireland. The effect of joining the EU on this state of affairs was clear. By 1990, just 28% of our exports were going to Britain and only 38% of our imports were from that country. In addition, there had been substantial direct financial assistance to aid the agricultural sector in particular, and also to develop the country's infrastructure.

4) Surviving nationalist views may be portrayed as compatible with European integration insofar as the acceptance of political links with the EU raises the prospect of enhanced political autonomy. Even though sovereignty in certain areas would be shared with the institutions of the Union, Ireland would have a voice in the decision making process. This could thus be perceived by the Irish élites as exchanging an enduring situation in which the country was dominated in the economic and cultural fields by Britain, for one in which we enjoyed a looser, multilateral association with the other states of western Europe. Thus, there was a link between Irish nationalism and Europeanism insofar as removing the country from British domination was concerned.[51]

As already outlined, attitudes to external relations in Ireland went through a number of developments in the decades following independence. There was an extended period during which the consolidation of national sovereignty took clear priority over foreign policy initiatives, and indeed throughout much of the 1940s and 1950s, the question of partition continued to play a deciding role in the politics of the Republic. The political élite at this time showed only sporadic

interest in European integration, and this was a matter of even less concern to the general public. Ireland continued with its wartime policy of military neutrality by shunning the possibility to join the NATO alliance in 1949. It did however join the Council of Europe as already mentioned, and in 1955 the United Nations, and membership of both of these bodies was positive for the State's standing internationally.

The decision by the government to apply for EU membership in 1961 attracted little debate. There was little effective opposition among the major political parties and Labour was the only party of any significance to oppose the move and call for a different form of association with our European neighbours. Attitudes in the country were changing rapidly, and pro-EU attitudes were on the increase among the growing middle class and government officials who supported moves to modernise the country's economy and reduce its dependence on Britain through access to a larger European market. The initial application did not proceed as a result of France's veto of Britain's application, which had been submitted at the same time as Ireland's. The application was renewed in 1967, and this time there was even less opposition to its submission. In debate in Dáil Éireann, amendments were brought to the government's motion by Fine Gael and Labour, when it came to a vote, the House agreed to proceed with the application without a division.

5.6 Ireland's European debate

From 1967, it was to take seven years before Ireland would finally join the EU, and it was in that period that the first principled opposition to the country's membership of the Union surfaced. The questions which divided the people were perhaps predictable, but they proved remarkable in their longevity and potential to divide. They were:
1) the extent to which Irish sovereignty would be impaired
2) the degree to which the country could retain its neutral status
3) the economic effects of joining the European Union.[52]

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These issues formed the basis for most of the debate in the referendum which was organised in 1972 on joining the European Union, and were debated by the range of forces which mobilised in a bid to win over the Irish people. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael continued their support for European integration by advocating a 'yes' vote to membership. They were joined by the Department of Foreign Affairs, which did not hide its eagerness to see the referendum passed, and which published a white paper on accession to support its view. The main lobby group advocating a 'yes' vote was the Irish Council of the European Movement which assisted in the co-ordination of a strong campaign. Business and farming organisations also came out in favour of a 'yes' vote. One rather unlikely party advocating a positive outcome was the tiny Irish Communist Organisation which argued that western European unity was inevitably a part of capitalist development, and its advent would serve to hasten the socialist revolution.

The 'no' campaign was led by the Labour Party, even though a number of the party's key members were known to favour accession. "Official" Sinn Féin – the party that would in time become Sinn Féin The Workers' Party, The Workers' Party, Democratic Left and merge with The Labour Party in 1999 – also opposed the referendum, as did the Communist Party of Ireland. Two small parties, Aontacht Éireann (made up mostly of former members of Fianna Fáil) and "Provisional" Sinn Féin (broadly speaking the Sinn Féin of today, although without figures such as Ruairí Ó Brádaigh who left in 1986) also opposed EU membership.

We will see later how the concerns raised by the opponents of EU membership, which I enunciated above, came to be remarkably persistent in terms of their appearance in subsequent campaigns. In 1972 however, the odds were stacked heavily against the 'no' supporters, given the line-up of parties advocating a 'yes'. No less than 83% of the electorate voted to join the EU, with 17% voting against. This proportion of the population voting against compared to 36% in Denmark and 53% in Norway which both held referenda on EU membership at

the same day.

The authors point out that such a high degree of acceptance of EU membership, and the conservative consensus in support of the EU in the country, rapidly earned the Irish the reputation of being enthusiastic Europeans. This image was further reinforced by their high degree of participation in the first European Parliament elections in 1979. At 63.6%, turnout was above average for the nine member states at that time, however the figure needs to be clarified for a couple of reasons. In the first instance, the election was held on the same day as the local elections, and the turnout recorded was roughly in line with the norm for such polls, and compared favourably with that recorded in 1974. Additionally, the European Parliament campaign saw itself dominated by mostly domestic issues, and this was reinforced by media coverage which was, by and large, ambivalent to the broader European dimension of the poll. One significant change that had occurred between 1972 and 1979 concerned the position of the Labour Party. Now allied at European level with the Socialist group, it found itself part of a broader political family which was much more committed to the process of European integration than it had previously been, and indeed moreso than Fianna Fáil which was allied with the conservative European Progressive Democrats.

Neither the 1979 or 1984 European elections saw the development of significant degrees of opposition to the country's membership of the EU. The elections were contested by a limited number of parties – Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, the Labour Party and Sinn Féin The Workers Party – in 1979, with three more parties putting forward candidates in 1984 – the Democratic Socialist Party, Sinn Féin and the Green Alliance, the latter of which would later become the Green Party. However none of these minor parties secured more than 2% of the vote.

Where opposition to Europe resurfaced, and with surprising intensity, was regarding the ratification of the Single European Act in 1986/7. This affair, which came as a bolt from the blue for the political establishment, started off

innocuously with the Fine Gael/Labour government's decision to ratify the Act, having signed it on February 17, 1986. The remaining requirement, as far as the government was concerned, was to have the Act ratified by both Houses of the Oireachtas, and lodge the instrument of ratification with the Italian government which held the rotating presidency of the Union at that time. Before the instrument was lodged, however, Mr Raymond Crotty, a lecturer in Agricultural Economics at Trinity College, Dublin, acting as a private individual, took a court action attempting to have the SEA declared unconstitutional. This case went to the Supreme Court and on April 9, 1987, the five judges of the highest court in the land ruled by majority verdict that the provisions on foreign policy co-operation of the Single European Act were unconstitutional, and that a referendum was thus necessary in order to ratify the Act.

This decision was completely unanticipated by the political classes in Ireland. "The reaction to the decision among the political establishment was one of incredulity."[53] Such were the assumptions that the decision would go in favour of the State that no-one, even on the anti-SEA side, had made plans for the referendum which was necessarily to follow very quickly. The Supreme Court judgement posed particular difficulties for the recently elected Fianna Fáil minority government. Charles Haughey, who had returned as Taoiseach after nearly five years in opposition, had expressed fears from the opposition benches that the provisions of the SEA could endanger national sovereignty. During the Dáil debate on the ratification of the Act, Fianna Fáil had sought to have safeguards for regional aid and neutrality inserted into it, however these moves had been unsuccessful. It was anticipated, however, that Fianna Fáil would attempt to append a statement on these questions to the SEA before the referendum, but this was not to be. Instead, the new government announced its intention to seek ratification by the people of the initial SEA which it had, in part, opposed in opposition.

An interesting array of supporters and opponents assembled for the referendum

campaign. Once again, the two largest parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael came out in support of the SEA, and they were joined by the recently formed Progressive Democrats. The Department of Foreign Affairs was once again anxious to see a 'yes' vote, however it was less active in 1987 than the Government Information Service, which was responsible for spending a budget of £345,995 on the campaign.[54] The Irish Council for the European Movement was, once again, the pre-eminent interest group calling for a 'yes' vote and formally led the campaign. Farming and employers' organisations also called for a 'yes' outcome.

Perhaps of most interest in 1987 however, were the opponents to the referendum. The Labour Party did not adopt a formal position on the referendum, allowing individuals to make up their own minds. Otherwise, the party political opposition to the SEA was from the usual quarters. It was outside party political structures that the most interesting opposition was to be found. The Irish Sovereignty Movement provided the nationalist opposition to the Act, and it was joined by Irish CND which campaigned on the issue of Irish neutrality. A number of activists on the issue of Third World development campaigned on a similar platform, arguing that Ireland should have less to do with blocs which were only exacerbating the dependent status of the developing world.

The Green Party raised issues of nuclear party and safety, whilst a range of conservative Catholics, led by Family Solidarity, expressed fears that secularism and liberalism throughout Europe could led to the introduction to Ireland of European abortion and divorce laws.

I have some recollection of the 1987 campaign, and a good one of later campaigns on European issues in Ireland, and I endorse the view put forward by the authors that referenda campaigns seem to split the 'yes' and 'no' camps into the most polarised positions possible, the rationale behind this being that in order to win a referendum, the arguments for and against must be presented in

absolute terms, and the position defended by the opposition must be seen as a threat. Thus, the pro-SEA campaign was characterised by its insistence on the benefits to Ireland of EU membership to that point, and the threat to these should the country reject the Single European Act. Indeed, some spokespersons went as far as to suggest that Ireland's continued membership of the EU was in question. The variety of groups opposing the Act got together into two campaigning coalitions. The Constitutional Rights Campaign campaigned on a broad base, putting forward nationalist, economic and other arguments against ratification of the SEA. A second group, the Cosainthe Coalition for Peace and Neutrality was primarily concerned with world peace and development issues. Just as the 'yes' campaign presented absolutist or maximalist perspectives arguing that Ireland's whole course of economic and social development was at stake, the 'no' campaign argued that ratification of the SEA would inexorably lead to the end of Ireland's neutrality.

In the end, although it was vocal, the 'no' camp did not really succeed in bringing over large numbers of voters to their side. One week before polling, an opinion poll showed 70% of the Irish people were planning to vote 'yes'. It is worth noting however that the numbers opposed had risen from 17% in 1972 to 30% in 1987, thus indicating that despite the changes which had occurred in the country as a result of EU membership, there were those who believed the country was compromising its independence and its standards by its association with the Union. Indeed, I believe that this interpretation is an appropriate one to draw, since the positions enunciated by those opposed to the Single European Act – and other EU developments – often suggested that Ireland was losing something of itself as a result of the EU.

Raymond Crotty, who had won the Supreme Court action that forced the referendum, saw the EU as an association of powers with a colonial history, and argued that Ireland as a former colony would be much better radically reforming its internal structures to shed the colonial legacy, than joining up with powers from whom its history fundamentally differed. This argument based on the

country's colonial history had a clear link to arguments on neutrality and even on the developing world since many activists on the latter issue saw the European powers as colonialists whose policies were still to the detriment of the developing countries.

As indicated by the opinion poll, the people voted by a clear majority to ratify the Single European Act. However, the divisions raised by that campaign, and the fact that the many disparate opponents of Ireland's European policy had found strong spokespersons in Raymond Crotty and Anthony Coughlan to name just two, and the ability to organise themselves into fairly coherent coalitions pushing a range of arguments which, although considered unconvincing by a clear majority of the electorate, converged reasonably successfully to make a coherent campaign.

Such was the coherence indeed that these groups did not simply disappear after the poll, but rather remained in place to contest the 1989 European election campaign. In Munster, the combined energies mustered against the mainstream EU policy led to the creation of Ireland's only political movement set up to campaign exclusively on European issues, and to fight European elections only: People First – Meitheal. As with the coalitions who fought the SEA referendum, thus group drew its support primarily from a range of left-wing, ecology, development and peace-groups. Although candidates standing specifically on EU issues polled poorly in 1989 – Raymond Crotty in Dublin securing 5.7% of the vote and Joe Noonan of People First – Meitheal in Munster 3.2%, there was a significant vote for parties whose general position was hostile to Europe. This was, in particular, the election in which the Green Party began its breakthrough into Irish political life, and its Euro-candidate Trevor Sargent achieved 8.3% of the vote in Dublin. In Leinster, significant parts of which follow Dublin voting trends, the Greens achieved 6.3%. The Green Party added a particularly European dimension to its campaign with the participation of leading Green figures from the continent, including the high-profile German Green deputy, Petra Kelly.

European issues continued to play a surprisingly important role in the developing moral and social fabric of Ireland in the years ahead, and if the spectre of Ireland's obsession with moral issues such as abortion and divorce had already raised itself in European matters in 1989, it was to do so again in 1992 in the most unanticipated setting. Since ratifying the Maastricht Treaty required a change to the Irish constitution, the plans for a referendum were already in train in the early months of 1992. Then, the attorney general secured a High Court injunction preventing a fourteen-year-old girl who had been raped by an adult male from travelling to Britain for an abortion on the grounds that the State was obliged to do all it could to uphold the constitutional ban on abortion approved by the electorate in 1983. The effect of this development was to bring the abortion question once again to the fore in Irish public affairs, and to cause it to become confused with the Maastricht Treaty. Specifically, the Irish government had managed to insert a protocol in the Treaty whereby the Union could not enforce changes to Ireland's abortion laws. As the courts debated the affair of the 14-year-old rape victim – which became known as the X Case – it went to the Supreme Court, which ruled that Ireland's ban on abortion was not watertight, and that it in fact it actually permitted abortion in certain circumstances. Thus a new abortion referendum was necessary to clarify matters.

However, before that could be held, there was the Maastricht poll, and fears that the protocol which the Republic had inserted in the Treaty could be either too restrictive to social change or too weak to prevent eventual changes to Ireland's abortion laws. Of the major political parties, the dissent was most serious in Fianna Fáil, when one T.D. and one senator were expelled for voting against the party on Maastricht during the passage of the White Paper through the Oireachtas. However, the possible damage arising from these defections was lessened when the Labour Party rowed in behind the Maastricht Treaty, clearly putting its support behind an extension of European integration for the first time.

The Maastricht Treaty was carried by a margin which, once again, touched 70% in favour. However, the manner in which that result was achieved was to become a problem in itself as a court case was taken by Patricia McKenna of the Green Party arguing that the government should be precluded from using public funds in a referendum campaign, or that funding should be provided to both sides from state coffers. Essentially, the debate in 1992 was particularly bitter, as a result of the enmeshing of the traditional hot potato of abortion with the coherent anti-European integration camp that had resurfaced in Ireland in 1987. The Irish Council for the European Movement was considerably less prominent in the Maastricht campaign, and instead the Government Information Service mounted a massive campaign for a 'yes' vote, using public funds. Clearly, this is a questionable tactic in a democracy where the function of the State is surely to organise democratic polls in a neutral manner. It is then, surely, the role of political parties and interested groups and individuals to campaign for either side and to come up with the funds to do so. The Green Party Dublin Euro candidate, Patricia McKenna, successfully brought a case to the Supreme Court arguing that the spending of State funds on one side of a referendum campaign was unlawful.

As a result of the McKenna judgement, the Government Information Service has now withdrawn from campaign duties, and a referendum commission is put in place to co-ordinate the public information campaign in advance of a referendum, proving equal airtime and opportunities to disseminate information to both sides.

How do we then assess the proper nature of Irish opposition to European integration? It must be acknowledged in the first instance that access to resources can be a major factor, and the McKenna judgement highlighted the glaring imbalance between the resources available to the mainstream political establishment in terms of pushing the pro-integration agenda. Faced with the consensus in the ranks of the major political parties on European issues, those opposing the thrust of European policy were always fighting an unforgiving battle as far as attracting large numbers of votes was concerned. I believe that it

is also necessary to look to the social position occupied by these groups in Irish society to develop a greater understanding of the difficulties they faced in gaining broadly based support.

Much has been made of the 'hegemony' of the conservative parties in Ireland, and when we discuss conservatism, we must be aware that the term can be employed in both economic and more moral terms. In the economic sphere, the greatest difficulty faced by opponents of the position held by the main parties, involved finding arguments to counter the reality that Ireland had enjoyed significant material benefits from Europe, and these were of importance in a country which had traditionally enjoyed a standard of living well below the European average.

The issue is rather similar to the role played by multinational firms in the Irish economy. The practices of these firms – such as profit repatriation – are well known, but insofar as they provide employment in an economy which badly needs it, there is a reluctance to criticise them excessively. Ditto for the European Union. The high moral ground promoted by many of those campaigning on an anti-Europe platform seemed difficult to reconcile with the benefits accruing to the country as a member of the Union. Was the possibility that Europe would attempt to adopt a defence framework at some future point really a reason to vote against a treaty which aimed to complete a single economic market offering greater trading prospects to Irish business? Additionally, some of the issues which were being advanced by the 'no' side were distant, and rather academic, from the standpoint of the average citizen. Raymond Crotty's view on radical economic reform, such as a high tax on land ownership in order to encourage productivity in agriculture and the removal of income tax and a consequent fall in gross pay, were interesting theories on paper but ultimately highly unorthodox and suspect in the context of a conservative society.[55]

However, I believe that there is an interesting blurring of the conservative and the liberal in all of this, since although the economic policies and social outlook of the main parties in Irish society may be seen as generally conservative, we have already seen how the changes in Irish society which allowed the country to revise its foreign policy outlook arose from a maturing process in which traditional nationalism lost much of its hold, and in which Europe was seen as enhancing national sovereignty, by allowing the country to participate, broadly speaking, as an equal in a community of states which would lessen the traditional dominance of Britain in the country's trading and political relationships. The country had resorted to policies based on an open economy after a disappointing experience with protectionism in earlier decades. There did not appear to be much desire in the country to go back down that road.

By and large, opposition to EU integration in Ireland has tended to have a number of targets. The most trenchant opposition has been hostile to virtually any form of European integration on the grounds of national sovereignty and autonomy. The Irish Sovereignty Movement is the best known of the groups adopting such a standpoint.

Somewhat less trenchant are those who oppose the European Union in its present form and outlook as opposed to the principle of European integration. These are, broadly speaking, left-wing groups who oppose what they see as the right wing policies being pursued by the EU and what they see as its capitalist development.

The third level of opposition looks to specific EU policies and opposes specific measures, or the threat of measures, to erode matters such as Irish neutrality. Many of those who state their opposition on these grounds to the EU belong to third world or development groups, and beyond these specific issues, they do not tend to offer a fundamental vision of European integration.

A range of principles thus appears to characterise the only significant threats to Ireland's attitude to European integration. Some of these principles are likely to

be revealed in time as receiving more public support than others. Specifically, the question of neutrality appears to be the issue most likely to cause significant divisions. In the most recent European referendum in Ireland – on the Amsterdam Treaty – the proportion of voters voting 'yes' slipped to approximately two thirds in the aftermath of a bitterly fought campaign, which saw pro-neutrality campaigners draw particular attention to the aspiration in the treaty that the Union would examine the prospects for moving towards a policy on defence.

Ireland is, however, perhaps better known for its pragmatism in economic and general political issues, and high-minded radical principles seem less convincing than the more flexible if conservative outlook of the major parties. This is particularly so when people see the economic benefits of the more pragmatic policy and compare these to what they may get out of going with the principles advocated by fringe elements calling for a more principled standpoint. The result across a range of referenda and European elections bear this argument out, however I do suggest that the gradual gain in support that these groups are enjoying could imply that in a referendum on a purely military or sovereignty related issue, the result could well be much closer than has been the case to date.

5.7 Conclusion

If we are to look at them in the European context, we must first conclude that Ireland and France have approached the European Union project from very different perspectives and backgrounds. In the post-war period, France, as a country which was devastated during World War II attracted to ideas which would promote co-operation with other states, both to help in its own reconstruction process and to enhance its prestige as a leading European state. Thus it was two French elder statesmen who were most closely associated with the formative plans for the European project: Maurice Schumann and Jean Monnet. We have seen earlier how the French attitude to Europe over several decades was to look upon the Union as a potential extension of France's sovereignty and autonomy in the European context. As we saw particularly in

the brief overview of French industrial and economic policy, even when faced with the Single European Act which vested a range of regulatory powers in the Commission, France pinned its hopes on the pursuance of policies to assist European firms become major world players, support collaboration in research and development and promote a social dimension to the single market.

The response to this, however, was disappointing. The main emphasis was on trade, and free trade at that, within the single market area and, as we saw, France actually ended up having its knuckles rapped under competition regulations on several occasions. We have seen earlier in the Eurobarometer findings that Jacques Delors' tenure as European Commission president was accompanied by an increase in positive attitudes towards Europe. However, this sense of satisfaction waned somewhat during the 1990s as the impact or potential impact of the Maastricht Treaty and the Euro divided the French political establishment and a large section of public opinion. It was in this period that Europe became a subject of real political debate in France, as opposed to a major foreign policy issue falling largely within the presidential domain.

Essentially, as we have seen, the problem has been one of how France and Europe interact and the impact that each one can have on the other. The Socialists clearly saw the problem and, as we have seen, they brought forward initiatives particularly to deal with the employment issue. There has been a recovery in survey attitudes regarding the French and Europe in the recent past, and the government is surely hoping that this will continue in the light of its European policy and domestic policies such as the 35-hour working week.

Ireland's relationship with Europe has been different to France's in the sense that the central issue as presented by the mainstream parties has been the benefits – financial primarily – accruing to Ireland from EU membership. Given the economic history and state of the country, this argument was a particularly cogent one, and one which largely could be delivered on given the country's disadvantaged status in comparison with the EU average. Opposition to EU

membership has largely centred around a range of sovereignty-based arguments linked to questions of neutrality, the environment, and alternative means of combating the country's economic underdevelopment. There was clearly a considerable distance between the two arguments, and given the electoral strength and popular appeal of the two major parties – Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael – both of whom supported the European project, results of referenda on Europe were rarely in doubt. It is, however, worth noting that popular support for Irish neutrality remains strong, and were a referendum to be held where this clearly was the issue at stake, it is difficult to predict what the outcome would be.

Ireland is a country which experiences considerable consensus on European matters for the reasons I have summarised above. However, matters are changing. The loss to the country of a large amount of the funding which has been coming its way over an extended period may well result in Europe becoming a more contentious issue in the future. It is also becoming clear that contentious issues such as defence and security will have to be addressed. A variety of social problems in states bordering the EU, most particularly in former Yugoslavia and the wider Balkan area, have lent a sense of urgency to that issue. It is also the case, however, that the country's ability to hold on to and provide a livelihood for its young and educated population should enable the political class to broaden the overall European debate and prepare society for the changes ahead. The European dimension to Ireland's economic success should be of assistance in this regard.

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[1] European Commission, *Eurobarometer : public opinion in the European Union; trends 1974-1994*; Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1995, pp. 59-60
[2] European Commission, *Eurobarometer 45*; Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1996, p.20
[3] European Commission, *Eurobarometer : public opinion in the European Union; trends 1974-1994* op. cit., pp. 92-93
[4] European Commission, *Eurobarometer 45* op. cit., p.14
[5] European Commission, *Eurobarometer · public opinion in the European Union; trends 1974-1994* op. cit., p.189
[6] ibid., pp. 59-60
[7] European Commission, *Eurobarometer 45* op. cit., p.21
[8] European Commission, *Eurobarometer : public opinion in the European Union; trends 1974-1994* op. cit., p.93
[9] European Commission, *Eurobarometer 45* op. cit., p.21
[10] European Commission, *Eurobarometer : public opinion in the European Union; trends 1974-1994* op. cit., p.190
[11] ibid., pp. 196-197

[12] See Kassim, H., 'French autonomy and the European Union', *Modern and Contemporary France* (1997), **5**(2), p.171

[13] Kassim, H., 'French autonomy and the European Union', *Modern and Contemporary France* (1997), **5**(2), p.167

[14] ibid., p.169

[15] ibid.

[16] Cohen., E., *quoted in* ibid.

[17] ibid., p.170

[18] ibid.

[19] ibid., p.171

[20] ibid.

[21] ibid., p.172

[22] ibid., p.172

[23] Chancellor Kohl has openly praised the 1990 Irish EU Presidency, and Charles Haughey in particular, for its role in gaining momentum for the reunification process at the special March 1990 Dublin Summit on the question. It is been reported that the Presidency pushed hard to allow the Germans reunify, largely as a result of Haughey's perception of the issue as one of partition, similar to the Northern Ireland problem.

[24] Ibid., p.175

[25] ibid., p.218

[26] Hayward, J., *The state and the market economy: industrial patriotism and economic intervention*, Brighton, Sussex : Wheatsheaf Books; Distributed by Harvester Press, 1986, p.156

[27] Wood, P.C., 'French Political Party Opposition to European Integration, 1981-1996: Myth or Reality?', in Cafruny, A.W. and Lankowski, C., *Europe's Ambiguous Unity: Conflict and Consensus in the Post-Maastricht Era*, Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997, p.131

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[30] ibid., p.136

[31] ibid., p.138

[32] ibid., p.141

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[34] Wood, P.C., *op. cit.*, pp 144-146

[35] Cohen, E., quoted in *L'Alsace*, 30/5/1997

[36] ibid.

[37] ibid.

[38] *Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace*, 30/4/1997

[39] *Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace*, 17/6/1997

[40] *Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace*, 4/10/1997

[41] *Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace*, 22/11/1997

[42] ibid.

[43] http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/europe/sondage/conf.html

[44] http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/europe/fr_europe/sond98.html

[45] http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/europe/enquete/plan3.html

[46] http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/europe/enquete/plan9.html

[47] http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/europe/enquete/plan6.html

[48] http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/europe/enquete/plan1.html

[49] http://www.canalipsos.com/archives_fr/1298/opubeuro08.htm

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[51] ibid., pp 211-213

[52] ibid.

[53] Keatinge, P., 'Annual Review of Irish Foreign Policy', *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 2, no. 4 (1988), p.82

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Chapter 6

6.0 Conclusion

I have sought to do a number of things during the course of this thesis. The central one has been to present an overview of the issue of social conflict and social consensus as viewed in the contemporary political culture of Ireland and France – with particular regard to developments in the European Union and changes in the global economy. Drawing specific or important conclusions from this analysis is not a particularly easy thing to do. however since it is the job of a study such as this to draw conclusions and suggest possible interpretations. this is what I now wish to do in this final chapter.

Chapter 5 provided us with evidence which shows that. in general. the European Union project remains viewed in a positive light in both Ireland and France. By and large. the benefits of belonging to it are acknowledged. there is a good deal of support and attachment to the broad ideals of European unity and we have even seen how. in France. it is not seen by a majority of the people as being co-terminous with globalisation. Indeed, we have seen from survey evidence that there is a trend whereby positive views regarding Europe are actually on the increase in France, despite the developments of recent years.

This finding cannot, however, mask the more substantial evidence regarding concern in France at an erosion of aspects of sovereignty as a result of European Union policies. A number of points ought to be re-stated here. The existence of a dominant left-right cleavage in France means that a fundamental conflict exists on key issues of politics. and this conflict is rooted in the history of the country as it has evolved over the past two centuries. The legacy of the use of force or demonstrations in France is a strong one. and its use under the Fifth Republic is connected to the exclusive style of polity that France has become. in which more power is vested in the executive president and less in the hands of the people's representatives in parliament. We have seen how the European Union which. as

part of France's foreign policy, had largely fallen within the presidential domain, has become a topic of much greater debate and dissent as it began to have a negative as well as a positive impact on the manner in which France wished to expand its influence in the world. The particular crisis which erupted in late-1995 was an example of how great the attachment can be within France to values or established rights which have built up over time, and how abandoning a specifically French model for an outside one which seems to offer less protection can incite an angry backlash.

To a significant extent, I believe that we can attribute this to France's history as a prosperous country in the European context. When you have built your country up after devastating wars and become a wealthy and highly prosperous country, offering good careers to your citizens and levels of education and training worthy of the best countries in the world, this naturally creates a certain inertia, and we have seen that in the case of France this inertia was *les trente glorieuses*. The alarm raised in France by the strikes of late-1995, the calling into question of Europe during that period – but also since the Maastricht poll –, and the prospect of more of the same ahead at some future point, sent out a profound message to the French political establishment. France's insistence on a greater focus on job creation at European level is one positive result to have come out of all this, and the manner in which the EU has sought to pay more attention to citizens' concerns appears to have reaped benefits in the increase in positive opinions regarding Europe in recent surveys.

It is on this last general point that I believe we need to draw the most striking contrast with Ireland. Clearly as a country which has historically been much poorer than France, Ireland will look upon the economic benefits of Europe in a different way. We must also consider here Ireland's overall economic outlook, which is much different to France. The legacy of mass emigration and the inability to provide sustained employment for the people means that any incentive which attracts jobs to Ireland is welcomed. The European Union is clearly seen as part of that process, since the country serves as a European base

for a variety of multinational corporations, attracted by a range of factors including tax incentives, but also the fact that Ireland is a fully fledged member of the European Union. Despite the acknowledged drawbacks with multinationals, such as the repatriation of profits to the home country, the job creation potential of those companies is often seen as the most important. The country's more general relationship with the European Union is, I believe, seen in remarkably similar terms. We have seen how opposition to the EU in Ireland has often played the sovereignty card, and regardless of this the great majority of the people, with the backing of most of the significant political parties, have consistently affirmed their faith in the country's membership of the EU through a variety of referenda.

The benefits of EU membership have been particularly obvious in the Irish context, and the national media has also played a role in ensuring that this is so. Large scale transfers of funding to Ireland, associated with infrastructure development have been the public face of the EU. And this has done its job in terms of the public perception of Europe. Indeed, the Eurobarometer evidence has shown us the extent to which the Irish people are satisfied with the country's progress in Europe, but my central argument is that this satisfaction comes against a very different backdrop to France, both in terms of the country's economic and political history, and in terms of the manner in which the tangible benefits of EU membership to Ireland have manifested themselves. It might be said that in the Irish context, sovereignty is all very well, but if qualified young people cannot find a future in their own country, a certain loss of it might be a price worth paying.

I wish to return to political cultural concerns here by way of bringing this thesis to a close. The main political cleavage in Ireland has, as we have seen, concerned the national issue. As such, one might have thought that more opposition would surface to Europe than has previously been the case. Yet we saw in the last chapter that Europe has been seen as one way of distancing the country from its traditional dependence on Britain whilst acknowledging the

realities of the real world which required more co-operation with other countries. The European Union was not seen as being associated with the national question. It has rather been seen in Ireland in much more economic terms, and we have seen that the main cleavage in the country has not been about economics. If Europe has had a political dimension in Ireland, it has if anything been about distancing ourselves from the yoke of the national question and maturing as a state through the development of more complex relationships with the world around us. Despite the importance of Europe, and the significant debate regarding it elsewhere, it has thus tended to be a fairly non-contentious issue in Ireland – except with regard to securing funding!

I believe that it is in this sense that we arrive at a reasonably coherent conclusion regarding the differences between Ireland and France. The questions of cleavage, sovereignty and the role of the state are seen in a different light in both countries. I have already dealt in this conclusion with the issue of cleavage and I believe that this has been substantially addressed throughout the thesis. With regard to sovereignty, I believe that we must conclude that given France's very different history – particularly in economic and social terms – it exhibits much of the attachment to its own sovereignty that we can expect to find in countries with a long, independent history, a colonising past and a successful economic track record. Acknowledging the need to sacrifice any of these can be difficult, particularly where the replacement for them is not particularly well defined. In the case of Ireland however, where the country was not significantly better off as a result of independence, there was less to lose and a lot more to gain from going down the European road.

The role of the state comes in here as well. In the case of France where the state has traditionally played a major role in many aspects of the life of the citizens, there will be a range of expectations regarding its role in defending the perceived interests of the state and of the people. Where, as in the case of France, there exists a divergence of opinion regarding aspects of the state's activities – such as in the case of the Gaullist government's approach to reducing the country's

budget deficit and the opposition from the trade unions and parties of the left – this can become a genuinely sensitive political issue. In the case of Ireland, where the state has always shared its responsibilities with other actors, particularly the Catholic Church, there is considerably less debate over the role of the state, although it is reasonable to insert the caveat that there has been a certain amount of concern caused by plans to privatise or part-privatise parts of the semi-state sector such as Aer Lingus or Telecom Éireann.

We have thus a different political culture and a different formulation of political debate between Ireland and France. These matters should not be viewed as static however. As Ireland becomes wealthier, so the Irish government will come under pressure to do whatever is necessary to preserve that wealth and it is very likely that, as direct EU aid to Ireland dries up, there could be more criticism of the European Union in Ireland, particularly if questions such as tax harmonisation were to force Ireland to abandon many of its incentives which have proved so useful in attracting foreign investment to this country.

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