

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTHERN IRISH AGRICULTURE.

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In the twenty-seven years since Ireland was divided there have been many developments both in the production and in the disposal of agricultural produce. On the whole both sections had the same initial structure of the industry, and it is a matter of considerable interest to trace the changes which have taken place in the North of Ireland during a time of agricultural revolution. I propose briefly to outline the position with regard to agriculture at the time of the Treaty, the development during the past 25 years and, lastly, the social condition of the farming community during that period.

The policy of the former Department of Agriculture was well set out by T P Gill, its secretary. "The ideal will be when your policy, best for the country as a whole, is demonstrably best for the individual farmer, the next best, possibly the best in practical efficiency, is to find a tendency in being which is immediately profitable to farmers and to transform it into an element of policy which is of national advantage. That is what has been happening here for the past 23 years."¹

World prices had been changing consistently in favour of meat and animal products over the past half century, the index (base 1840) standing at 118 for wheat in 1925 against 443 for fat cattle and 497 for eggs. More particularly when live stock, combined with tillage for live-stock feeding, gave a maximum of continuous employment throughout the year, the adoption of any other policy would have been to fly in the face of economic reason. Tillage and industry were considered subsidiary to the live-stock trade, so as not to raise its cost of production by protection. The policy was justified by an increase in output of 25 per cent between 1895-99 and 1913-17,² and McDonald-Frazer, of Perth, stated that the value of Irish cattle had advanced by 90/- to 120/- a head in value, after allowing for price fluctuations.

It would seem that there had been a fairly marked advance in agriculture before the Treaty, and given the data of the time

- (1) Ireland's natural advantages in climate for grass and live-stock crops and her nearness to the chief world market
- (2) A proved profit of the existing live-stock trade, and a proved loss in tillage
- (3) An assured demand for all that could be produced
- (4) Free trade with Britain, and the impossibility of protective tariffs
- (5) An average farm of 30 acres which must be intensively farmed to give a bare living

it is hard to see that any change of policy could be justified. In

¹Memo of Evidence to I F S Commission of 1922

²This seems to have been based on calory or starch-equivalent output, and would not be accepted by modern writers such as Prof Ashby; "Efficiency in Agriculture," Oxford, 1946, or J M Kirk, Proceedings of Agr Econ Society, 1946

fact both areas of Ireland continued their previous policy, unaffected in its main direction by the partition of the country

Partition cut off one-sixth of the area and one-third of the population of Ireland. But it did not, as is occasionally thought, separate the agricultural from the industrial parts of the country. In the 1926 Census of Production in Northern Ireland agriculture, with an output of £11 million was equal in importance to the linen industry and far greater than ship building with £1.5 million. Twenty-six per cent. of the occupied population were engaged in agriculture, while many more were dependent on the industry as rural shopkeepers and others in secondary or tertiary industries in the country districts. It is true, however, that there was a very much higher industrial concentration than in the rest of Ireland, where 53 per cent. of the employed were farmers.

The structure of farming was slightly different from the rest of Ireland. Holdings were slightly smaller on the average at 23.5 acres, which led to a rather higher proportion of tillage (18 per cent. against 9 per cent.), and greater numbers of pigs and poultry being kept, as is usual on smaller farms in Ireland. There was no area of large grazing farms to correspond to those in the centre of Ireland, so that the internal cattle trade was less marked, being towards the north-east from Derry and Enniskillen for fattening.³

Land was held under the Land Purchase Acts, which were concluded by the Act of 1925, under which all tenanted land was vested automatically in the Commission on the "Appointed Day".⁴ Besides this the farmers had long held the privilege of the "Ulster custom", which gave security of tenure and right of disposal of the tenants' interest in the land. This factor of security might easily account for a more independent and adaptable type of small holder.

During the nineteen-twenties a free trade policy was followed, agricultural produce being sold on the competitive market of Britain. Government intervention being limited to regulation of marketing and production. Samples of the action taken in this time were the Livestock Breeding Act of 1922, roughly corresponding to our Livestock Act of 1926, and in the Marketing Acts for eggs and potatoes, which gained many of the advantages foreseen by the Irish Free State Commission of 1922 (much reliance was placed on the findings of that body in the debates of the Northern House of Commons). An example of progress made under this system is seen in the 15 per cent. increase in milking yields in the herds recorded in Northern Ireland 1924-30, an improvement chiefly obtained by selection, not by capital expenditure.⁵ Except in the immediate proximity of the Border where some disruption to the trade of market towns by separation from their hinterland took place, there were no marked economic consequences due to the changes in Government.

In the agricultural crisis the position of the Six Counties was strikingly different from that of the rest of Ireland. Among the causes of the world surplus of food three were predominant: the improvements in technique leading to greatly increased production, the slowing down of population growth in the importing countries and unemployment, which led to a shrinking of the market, the

³Report on Marketing, 1932, p. 60

⁴The N. I. Land Purchase (Winding-up) Act, was passed in 1935, and the Commission ceased to exist on 1st April, 1937.

⁵Fr. J. Min. Agr., N. I., 1929, p. 65

growth of nationalism, which encouraged agricultural production at home, both for strategic reasons and for the alleged sociological advantages of country life. In any case it led to a strong reaction from free trade in Britain and a reservation of the home market by quota, levy and direct subsidy. Of this movement Northern Ireland gained at least her proportionate share on the British market, enabling her to expand her output in any range of commodities she chose, with the assurance of an almost unlimited demand. In effect she was isolated from the losses of a glutted market and was enabled to make full use of her specialised technique. As a result of the meat subsidy of 5/- a cwt introduced in 1934 there was a change in the emphasis of cattle breeding from milk to beef production, which was not counter-balanced by the Milk Marketing Provisions, as it was in England when liquid milk formed 70 per cent of the milk production and about 20 per cent of total farm output. The chief commodities affected were pigs, poultry and sheep, all of which increased considerably in numbers in the ten years before the war.

On the other hand, it must not be assumed that Northern Ireland was in a completely sheltered and prosperous condition. Her level of urban unemployment was consistently above that of Great Britain. The amount of direct subsidies was comparatively small—about £350,000 per annum, nearly all to cattle, before the war—and the quota system did not ensure large profits. Output of cattle declined, and the areas under all important crops declined also up to the outbreak of war: the total area ploughed being 636,000 acres in 1923, 535,000 in 1930 and 470,000 in 1939—the lowest on record and marking a drop of 12 per cent in nine years.

During the "Economic War", the British market was largely closed to the Free State by special tariffs which were added to the ordinary protection measures designed to protect her home market. On cattle, instead of a 5/- a cwt subsidy there was a 40 per cent tariff and a quota. Perhaps the only possible reaction, given the political circumstances, was to enter on a policy of self-sufficiency, but the home market was of very small dimensions, and the displacement of imports aimed at totalled only £4.5 million a year of which wheat was £2 million and maize £1 million. This was a shift of only 10 per cent, or 1.5 million acres in production, the equivalent of our exports of beer and stout. It led, however, to a change in the trend of agricultural production. The area under corn crops had fallen from one million acres in 1921 to 760,000 acres in 1931 but rose again to 950,000 in 1936, output of stock falling somewhat in the same period. Changes in relative prices over the period reversed the tendency for small farmers to shift from tillage for direct human consumption to live stock. Wheat was double the world price by 1936 and maize was 30 per cent dearer (£2 per ton) than in the North. This change in prices, added to the protection of industrial goods, raised the cost of production here so that Professor Johnston points out that it took 3d. worth of oats to produce 2d. worth of meat by stall-feeding⁶. This difficulty arose in Britain due to protection of home-produced grain, but there the added protection given to the pig industry, and other branches of live stock, counter-balanced the effect. Here, when export was the chief outlet for our live stock, the protection of both industry and agriculture produced what Rohke

⁶ *Economic Journal*, 1937, p. 683

describes as "the flagrant contradiction common to many agricultural countries."⁷

By 1939 the subsidy of first quality beef was already 7/6 a cwt. in the North, but nothing had been received of the £40 million paid in sugar subsidies by the Westminster Government in 15 years, and on wheat £0 7 million more was paid than was received in subsidy.⁸ It would seem that little of the comparative prosperity was due to this factor, but rather to the fact that there was an assured market for produce of the type suited to small farmers, and to the system of marketing introduced.

Perhaps it was in the marketing of agricultural produce that the earliest and clearest distinction showed itself as a result of Partition. The Free State Commission of 1922, like the Linlithgow Commission, had recommended a drastic change in marketing methods, which were, "antiquated, circuitous, and excessively costly." For Ireland, on much evidence too cumbersome to quote here, it was put forward as most urgent that steps be taken to remedy the lower prices obtained by Irish goods owing to variable quality and unsatisfactory marketing. One of the chief instruments was to be the National Mark, which had proved so beneficial in Denmark. While in the Free State the Government has shown itself more than hesitant in introducing compulsory measures—and others have tended to be ignored—the Government of the Six Counties has not been afraid to regulate the marketing of its agricultural produce.

Marketing policy in Northern Ireland had two distinctive features marking it off from that of Great Britain or of the Free State. In the first place arrangements were made compulsory and, secondly, they were State controlled. It would seem that the immediate effectiveness of the various marketing schemes was in great part due to the comprehensive nature of the legislation, which took in all traders and imposed penalties for non-compliance. As there were no strongly organised bodies of farmers corresponding to the N.F.U. in England, direction of these schemes devolved on the Government. The Marketing Boards so established were mixed in their composition, having representatives of producers, middlemen and of the Ministry, where the British and Scottish boards were primarily representative of producer interests. However regrettable the necessity may seem these compulsory schemes have had a greater success, and this due to their compulsory provisions. The Babington Commission recommends a continuation or extension of these schemes, with monopoly powers of purchase for all the pigs, milk, and fat stock for slaughter reserved to the Marketing Boards concerned.

In all, 29 statutes relating to marketing were passed before 1939, and even more sweeping changes have been made since by the various war-time regulations. The Marketing of Eggs Acts (Northern Ireland), 1924 to 1936, at once introduced the measures recommended by the Irish commission on a compulsory basis, by the licensing of all dealers, and the prescription of standards for grading and packing. There were penalties for the sale of unclean or stale eggs, and a quality maintained which gained a preference market in Britain. By the 1936 Act a system of pooled prices, under a committee of five representatives of producers and ten others was set up, fixing weekly prices, the enforcement of which was in the hands of the Ministry of Agri-

⁷ *Revue Economique Internationale*, July, 1938, p. 119.

⁸ Sir Basil Brooke, *H. C. Debates*, N. I., 27 Ap., 1939, col. 1150.

culture. No subsidy was paid under this scheme, and it was not one of bulk trading but only of price regulation. During the war the Ministry of Food has taken over all marketing arrangements, but a revival of the scheme is recommended by the Babington Commission.

Powers for control over the marketing of all potatoes were included in the Potato Marketing Act of 1934, but in fact were only applied to the County Borough of Belfast. The export trade in seed potatoes was regulated by the Act of 1928, which again set fixed standards for grading and established a reputation abroad for quality. Mansergh suggests that these Acts may have been *ultra vires* in their provisions,⁹ but their effects have undoubtedly been beneficial.

Protection for the pig industry was introduced in Great Britain on the recommendation of the Lane Fox Commission, on a basis which stabilised bacon supplies in Britain at about 10 million cwt. and, to maximise home production, limited imports by quota. This allowed an unlimited expansion in Northern Ireland, and in fact output was 811,000 in 1939 compared with 263,000 in 1932 when the Pigs Marketing Scheme was introduced. A curious position arose in November, 1934, when the Pigs Marketing Board took over the live-pig trade and dumped pigs on the British market, recouping losses by a levy in Northern Ireland.

Of the milk produced in Northern Ireland before the war some 60 per cent was sold to creameries for manufacture, particularly in Tyrone and Fermanagh. This prevented the adoption of the pooling of milk prices on the English or Scotch systems, instead licences were granted for three grades of quality in milk sold on the liquid market, for which prices were fixed by the Joint Milk Council. Milk surplus to the liquid market was disposed of to the manufacturers and a bonus of 2d. per gallon on the manufacturing price paid by the Milk Fund, which also maintained a minimum price of 5d. per gallon (summer) and 6½d. a gallon (winter). In 1934 the price had been 2d. per gallon. During the war the Ministry of Agriculture took over purchase and distribution of milk, and there was a very great increase in the production of liquid milk.

Disposal of Milk Output

	Liquid in Six Counties	Export	Separated	Dried
1939	15 m gal	nil	24 m gal	0.5 m gal
1945	35 „	3 m gal	18 „	15 „

There was also a very considerable increase in winter dairying, an object dear to the hearts of reformers for many years. This was, of course, at the expense of the creameries, for much liquid milk now came from the more distant areas under the flat-rate charges for transport, and owing to "nationalisation" many creameries were eliminated. Shipments to Scotland and latterly daily flights of milk to Great Britain were a new feature. An important development is the substitution of dried milk for butter, as prices realised are about three times as great per gallon—though how far these prices are artificial, and how far they will stand with competition from New Zealand is not easy to foretell. In any event there has been a remarkable change in the disposal of milk during the war, the liquid market is both more profitable and more secure, and the present

⁹Government of Northern Ireland, p. 191

scheme of collection by lorry from the farm at a flat rate has obvious attractions to any farmer who has had to spend valuable hours carting milk to the creamery. These changes would seem to be of a permanent nature.

Live stock only came under organised marketing during the war. It had been carried on without change in system for very many years through dealers who went to the fairs or made purchases on the farm. The Report on Marketing (1932) criticised this arrangement, which left farmers open to exploitation, but thoroughgoing reform was delayed till the war years. The Minister of Agriculture, acting as agent for the Minister of Food, purchased all fat stock coming on the market. Centres for the purchase of stock (68 for cattle and 66 for sheep) were set up, which opened on stated days and paid the stated prices after grading. Slaughtering of cattle for consumption in the country was carried out at 17 abattoirs, which enable greater use to be made of by-products. The Babington Commission is strongly in favour of a continuation of this centralised buying and slaughtering, pointing to the advantages of extending it to the export trade. T. Shaw, in an article in *Studies* (1946) has pointed out the advantages of a dead meat trade in employment given, and profit on sale of by-products in the producer-country, as well as the considerable loss of weight in live animals during transport. How far this reorganisation will meet with approval by farmers is not quite certain. Similar schemes in Great Britain have met with opposition on the grounds that farmers preferred direct contact with the purchasers and were averse to grading, etc. However, the marketing system is now under way, and, as is said in the Babington Report, it would be a retrograde step to abandon it. When prices are fixed for long terms much of a cattle dealer's "risk-bearing" function has become redundant, and centralised marketing merely brings the internal price in line with the export trade.

Careful studies in nutrition or production are little more than academic exercises in the absence of adequate arrangements for distribution. Our produce is often as good as any at the farm gate, but, due to careless handling, exploitation of the many producers by monopolist buyers,¹⁰ or the mere number of middlemen, each taking a small profit margin,¹¹ it fails to secure the best prices. G. A. Holmes has suggested that the reorganisation of the wool trade on the New Zealand system would save the farmers of England and Wales £2 or 3 million a year.¹² Of the many problems of Irish agriculture this is perhaps the most important and the one which would best repay study.

The outbreak of war entailed great changes in the agriculture of the Six Counties, but scarcely as great as in the rest of Ireland if we remember the vigorous attempt which had already been made to achieve self-sufficiency. It is true that wheat increased to 17,500 acres in 1941 before falling to 1,700 at the end of the war, while the total area under the plough increased by 68 per cent. In volume of output cattle fell by 20 per cent, sheep by 25 per cent, pigs by 85 per cent, and manufactured milk by 40 per cent, while poultry output increased by 20 per cent., eggs by 5 per cent. and liquid milk by 100 per cent. In terms of value there was an increase of 100 per

¹⁰ Vide *N I Marketing Report*, 1932, on cattle trades.

¹¹ T. Shaw, to British Society of Animal Production, *Times*, 26/2/45.

¹² *Revolution in Agriculture*, p. 92.

cent. for live stock and live-stock products to £23.9 million in 1944-45, and of 35 per cent to £8.7 million for field crops¹³

But in the rest of Ireland there was a considerable decrease in the volume of output of each type of live stock and their products except horses, and liquid milk (a 7 per cent. rise), while tillage increased by 66 per cent. From the volume index published in the *Trade Journal* this change would not appear unexpected in its trend, even if war had not taken place and the policy of 1933 had been continued

	1929	1938-9	1945-46
Live Stock and Produce	105	100	82.2
Crops and Turf	87.9	100	135.4
Gross Output Volume	100.9	100	95.1

The chief difference lies in the fact that Northern Ireland did not adopt a policy of self-sufficiency during the war. Wheat imports were maintained, and, while supplies of maize were cut off, the increased tillage area was largely given over to the production of food for animals, rather than for direct human consumption. A system of farming could be followed which allowed concentration on live stock and on specialised products such as grass seed, and seed potatoes (exports of which trebled during the war). This is in striking contrast to the experience of the First War when total tillage was greater, more emphasis was laid on wheat (22,000 acres in 1918, against 1,700 acres in 1945) and reductions in all live stock took place. We may say that, while the Twenty-Six Counties repeated the experiences of the First War, Northern Ireland was able to follow a new, and more profitable, course.

Capital investment on a large scale was encouraged, machinery and fertilisers being available in large quantities. Total supplies of artificial manures used averaged about 150,000 tons a year, compared with 47,000 in 1939, while greater quantities of natural manure may have been available as a result of larger numbers of milch cows kept. This may be contrasted with a fall in manure imports to the rest of Ireland from 168,500 tons in 1939 to 1,400 in 1942, combined with a decrease in available natural manures and a rotation wasteful of fertility by its repeated croppings of wheat. Tillage quotas were enforced in the North but a more balanced rotation could be followed, and tillage orders contained provision for dressing grassland with fertiliser and for reseeding with certain grass after tillage¹⁴. The subsidies for breaking old grassland were designed to encourage the ley farming so often recommended by agricultural reformers. Tractors increased in numbers from 858 to 7,301 in 1945, and other machinery increased in proportion. At the end of the war there were more than twice as many tractors in the Six Counties as in the Twenty-Six Counties, "which has almost the lowest number of power units, including tractors, horses and other animals, per acre of arable land of any O.E.E.C. country"¹⁵.

The Price Index of Northern Ireland rose from 87 (base 1927-9) in 1939 to 201 in 1946,¹⁶ and in addition subsidies rose from £899,000 to

¹³Figures from Appendix V of *Babington Report*, before addition of subsidy

¹⁴Vide Tillage Order, *Monthly Report*, October, 1944

¹⁵E. R. P., *Country Studies*, ch. VIII, quoted in "Basic Documents," published by the Department of Foreign Affairs, p. 134

¹⁶*Monthly Report*, Feb., 1948

£3,500,000 These subsidies were paid by the British Ministry of Agriculture in accordance with the 1938 Agreement, "made at the time of the Irish Trade Agreement" Despite the fact that agriculture in Northern Ireland is a transferred service, it is agreed that where agricultural subsidies are granted in Great Britain and circumstances are such as to justify corresponding subsidies to Northern Ireland, no objection shall be raised to the cost being borne by a vote on the Ministry of Agriculture of Great Britain¹⁷ These subsidies were in some cases very important, as in potatoes, which totalled £6.8 million in four years (1941-44), or an amount of 30/- a ton (*Monthly Journal*, Nov., 1946) Higher prices were also maintained by the consumers' subsidies which did not appear on the Estimates of Northern Ireland as Government payments Subsidies were used to guide production to ley farming by the ploughing grants, to greater meat production by the calf subsidy when the milk prices had caused unbalance¹⁸ The Price Index of the rest of Ireland rose during the war from 109 (base 1938) to 196, or by 95 per cent against 125 per cent in the North, and with lower subsidies

It is a subtle alchemy which could make the price of the same gallon of milk 1/- in Limerick and 2/6 (with free collection) in Fermanagh, the work of a Louth labourer worth 40/3 a week and that of his brother next door in Down worth 73/- With subsidies at £10 an acre for planting potatoes, and 1/- a dozen for eggs comparisons between apparently similar farms have almost ceased to be valid

Of the system of marketing brought about by the war I treat elsewhere in this paper It is sufficient to say that war-time controls make possible a speeding up of the programme of rationalisation, standardisation and control carried out by the Government In practice it has been found satisfactory, and the organisation is likely to remain

Post-war policy is closely bound up with that of Great Britain. Home production for the British market is to be increased to 50 per cent more than pre-war before 1952 Guaranteed prices are to be fixed well before the farmer makes his decision on production There will be an assured market for the protective foods in the production of which Northern Ireland has specialised, and whose increased consumption was recommended both at the Hot Springs Conference and by Government policy It would seem that in the transition to peacetime production Northern Ireland is in the exceptionally favoured position of having merely to continue her war-time expansion of agricultural production Little change is recommended even in her system of marketing, so that a continuance of war-time innovation or a revival of pre-war schemes is all that is required

Some changes in production, such as the installation of running water, aided by State grants have been found most beneficial¹⁹ and will be continued, as will drainage grants and manure subsidies Artificial insemination is carried on at Cookestown, and already pedigree bulls have been imported in accordance with the Babington Commission Report recommendations²⁰

The North of Ireland has invested extensively in the fertility and

¹⁷ Hansard, 12th May, 1935, 1,708

¹⁸ *Report on Slaughter of Calves, 1944*

¹⁹ *Vide* examples quoted in *Monthly Report*, April and August, 1948

²⁰ *Ulster Farm Journal*, Jan., 1948

capitalisation of her farms. She has reformed her marketing system, and has an assured market while Britain maintains her present price policy. This foundation on British domestic policy is the striking weakness in the North's position. Farm prices in Britain exceed import prices (f o b) by about 200 per cent for beef and 57 per cent for eggs, and subsidies cost £471 million a year²¹. Such a disparity with world prices must cause some uneasiness especially if import prices tend to fall and increased production raises costs at home. Nonetheless the policy pursued has been the one most likely to be successful in a competitive market, and is certainly most profitable now.

Progress in production and marketing are not sufficient in themselves, it is of much greater importance that we should inquire what standard of living and social development has been achieved in the community. For this purpose net output figures of the country are not as valuable as surveys which take in individual farms. An average figure per head, even if accurate, does not give any idea of the typical farmer, it is inclined to give too optimistic a picture where the majority of farms are small, with low output per head, and the larger output of workers on larger farms is shared among them in the bulk figure. For the North we have surveys made yearly since 1930 by the Ministry of Agriculture and published in its Reports, these include farms in most areas and costings of most products. Almost more useful for this purpose is the work of the Northern Ireland Council of the Social Services Incorporated in carrying out their close analyses of all the inhabitants of sample areas, over 1,000 families being visited. All these examples are limited in size, and too much should not be read into them, but they are straws in the wind and all point in the same way. On submission to the Farm Accounts Department of the Ministry of Agriculture, for comment, of J. M. Mogeys's figures the difficulties of giving considered opinion, in the absence of comparable statistics, were pointed out, but the general observation was made that his statistics seemed to err on the side of being too generous (p. 217). Where they could be compared with official figures, as in housing, a very high level of agreement was reached.

If we define standard of living as the amount of goods which people of a certain class may reasonably expect to obtain from society, we may take the level laid down by the Beveridge Report as a basis of comparison. Mogeys has made some calculations on this basis for the year 1944, taking rents and prices current in the country, and finds that, at the standard wage of 52/6 a week, a farm labourer could support a wife and four children²². Conditions have improved considerably since 1939, when wages were 15/- to 18/- a week in Fermanagh and 18/- to 25/- elsewhere. At that level a man with a family was certainly better off on the dole. In spite of the improved position, 29 out of 81 labourers' households were found below the standard, and in Fermanagh and North Antrim the proportion was about half. Of the Old Age Pensioners (120 visited) 48 were below standard. Added to this the Commission on Housing found 23 per cent of the houses unfit for habitation or overcrowded, and in Fermanagh the percentage

²¹K. A. H. Murray, *Lloyd's Bank Review*, Jan., 1949, p. 62.

²²Sir W. Beveridge, *Social Insurance and Allied Services* (1942), p. 6, *et seq.* J. M. Mogeys, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-64.

was 58²³ I do not mean by these figures that all these people were suffering from acute starvation, but that they failed to reach the standard which Sir William Beveridge judged to be that of subsistence, and which a British labourer is coming to expect when he is unemployed

For the rest of Ireland no comparable figures are available, but at the wage of 40/- in 1944, and making no allowance for the higher cost of living index number, or other differences in prices, we may suggest that a labourer in full employment could only support a wife and one child at this level.

Just how far the cost of living is lower in the country than in the city is not so easy to determine as may be thought. Dr. Cathcart, in his research in Scotland, 1936, found many articles, such as clothing, bread, meat and household utensils actually dearer in the country.²⁴ Anything which must be manufactured or transported is likely to be cheaper in the city, where it is made. One of the chief economies of country life, a lower rent, is largely unreal, since the accommodation is worth less, being without water or electricity and in worse repair. Perhaps living is cheaper in the country, but one may not live as well.

Another test of the standard of living is suggested by Professor Ely, as being the number and character of the wants which are considered more important than marriage and family. This is not, of course, a standard for every individual, but it is borne out strikingly by Mogeys's findings. In his report the "most married" areas were the most prosperous, such as North Down, where 65 per cent of the farmers were married and, of them, four-fifths had children. The proportion decreased with wealth, and in Hilltown, South Down, 52 per cent of the houses had a married couple and of them two-thirds had no family²⁵ (p. 92). In 1936 the proportion of unmarried men of 50 years and over was 27 per cent in the Free State, compared with 21 per cent in the North and 10 per cent in England. The figures for either area of Ireland are by far the highest in the world. Even allowing for the difficulties to marriage of sons in the system of land tenure, it would seem that the low marriage rate was caused by the economic reason that it was impossible to raise a family at what they considered a reasonable standard of living. In other words, they were "below the subsistence level."

Farmers' income is most difficult to know, especially in an area of small farms which are partly self-sufficient. In the North of Ireland we have farm costings carried out on small samples by Glynn-Williams and O'Hara before the war, and the more extensive figures for the war years published in the *Monthly Bulletin*. These farm results are not all on the same bases, those of Glynn-Williams leaving out some sources of income, and all those before the war being on very small samples, 75 farms in 1929 and 11 subsequently. During the war the sample was over 200 and, therefore, somewhat more comprehensive. The farms, however, are larger than the average and fairly well scattered in location, while it would seem that only comparatively advanced farmers will keep accounts, it seems unlikely that the income should have been underestimated. It is often said that a labourer is better off than many small farmers. Glynn-Williams found an average income per farm under 30 acres of £57 15s 3d a year, without

²³ *Housing in N. Ireland, 1944* (Cmd. 224)

²⁴ *Medical Research Council Report, 1937*

²⁵ p. 92

allowance for unpaid labour or interest on capital, in 1929²⁶ This, however, does not include all sources of income O'Hara found an average income per farm (average 70 acres) of £2 9s 0d a week in 1931-2, falling to 9s 9d in 1932-3, and rising to £2 10s 9d a week in 1936-7 In 1945-6 the farms examined, (219 farms, average size 57 acres) gave a profit of £246 a year, and in 1946-7 £402 (on 266 farms, average size 56 acres) (*Monthly Journal*, August, 1948) In their calculations, food consumed is credited at farm prices, and no allowance is made for unpaid labour, capital or management

In England during the pre-war period farmers had an income of about £3 a week on farms under 100 acres²⁷ In Ireland the costings of the Department of Agriculture till 1929²⁸ and of Professor Murphy and R O'Connor, while restricted in their scope, suggest a farm income of about £160 a year, 1924-30, a family income of £78 in 1937-8, £99 in 1938-9, and £191 in 1942-3, for Cork; £147 in Roscommon, 1945-6²⁹ In 1937-8 Professor Murphy found that it was only on farms over 60 acres that family earnings became greater than labourers' wages Even in 1940-41 he found average output 24/- a week and wages 21/- to 31/- a week.

Taking the 1946-7 figure of £402 net income before charging unpaid labour as a high peak of prosperity, we do not find any very excessive profit It includes wages for the manual labour of the farmer, his wife and perhaps the family, interest on capital of about £18 10s 0d an acre, and reward of management, which O'Hara estimated at £50 a year in the 1930's, or at 10/- to £1 in England, 1934³⁰ In the same period a skilled labourer in Belfast could be earning £10 a week without capital or risk-taking, working shorter hours and with less, or at least narrower, skill A bus driver can still earn almost double the wages of an agricultural labourer, for a week 20 per cent shorter It is often forgotten how skilled a successful farmer must be to do the ordinary manual work, direct labour, maintain tractor and machinery, and to plan his production Added to this he must be a businessman, keeping accounts and carefully watching the market With the rapid changes of technique in recent years, it is not enough to follow tradition, and, while the average farmer does not measure up to the ideal standard, it is hard to believe that the mass of city workers could better fill positions of similar responsibility In spite of this, farm labour is classed as unskilled all over the world, and his wages are usually half or one-third those of an average industrial worker³¹ The relative position has not changed much during the years, and has even improved recently³²

In living conditions the position is far from satisfactory The Housing Survey of Northern Ireland, 1943, found 28,000, or 17 per cent, of the houses unfit for habitation, and 23 per cent overcrowded The proportion overcrowded in England and Wales was 2 per cent³³ None

²⁶*Journal Min Agr*, N I, 1930

²⁷Hudson, Hansard, Jan 26th, 1944, Ashby, *J R S Arts*, 11th Dec., 1942, S M Makings, *Poor Land Arable Farming*

²⁸Quoted in Evidence of Banking Commission, p 1347

²⁹Average size of farms was somewhat over 150 acres

³⁰J Wyllie, *Wye College Report*, No XX, p 143

³¹Howard, L., *Labour in Agriculture*, p 204

³²Vide A I. Bowby, *Wages of U K in 19th Century*, and *Lowd & Cambridge Ec Survey*, May, 1947

³³*Rural Housing*, 3rd Report, 1938, p 61

the less, even the casual observer travelling from Leitrim to Fermanagh (which is the worst of the Six Counties) will notice the better condition of the farm houses. Internally the houses which have open hearths are not materially different from those of the Bronze Age. Electricity and running water are the perquisite of an insignificant number,³⁴ the position in this regard being perhaps the worst in Western Europe. One Fermanagh farmer remarked that the people's housing does not reach the level of the "standard" cattle byre, with its running water and good drainage.

In education both areas of Ireland are not only backward but apathetic. There seems unanimous agreement that the mental equipment of the Irish farmer is not sufficient for him to absorb information given as lectures,³⁵ and there is very little enthusiasm for the evening classes given—about 300 attending in the North last year—and only 55 students being at the University. Demonstration farms of the type found so beneficial by the T.V.A. are almost unknown, nor do they appear to find official favour. The rural schools are still taught on a curriculum designed for city children. In Holland the rural school teachers make a special study of agriculture and give evening courses to adults, in Denmark the Folkschools give technical education between the ages of 18 and 20. In this country we have few poorly attended adult classes and few means of advanced education. So far as I know, only £100 per annum is spent on the teaching of the economics of agriculture in all Ireland. The Irish Universities do not provide facilities for research on the lines of that done by British Universities, though useful work on farm costings is carried out by the Ministry of Agriculture. A comparison with Holland in the matter of education is instructive.³⁶

Students of Agriculture per 1,000 Farms, 1946-7

	Holland	Six Counties	Twenty-Six Counties
University	6	1	0.9
Veterinary	N.A.	none	0.8
Agricultural Coll.	20	1.5	0.8
Elementary Schools	75	none	none
Part-time	100	6	12.8

The Babington Commission³⁷ could see no justification for extending facilities in view of the limited demand for education.

Perhaps we in Ireland have taken our present course in education with our eyes open, but if the results are as bad as these facts would make it appear, the economic cost has been high. In a time of rapid technical change there is need of information and of general education as well as of hard work, and this need is not well filled.

It is admitted that farming is usually bad business, considered finan-

³⁴1% of farms were electrified in 26 Counties, 1940, compared with 90% in Denmark and Holland, and 75% in Germany. Consumption per head of population, 1936-7, in 6 Counties, was only slightly above that in 26 Counties and almost the lowest in Europe. (Figures from *Irish Year Book*, 1942)

³⁵K. Fitzgerald, *J.S.S.I.S.I.*, 1946, Glynn Williams, *J. Min. Agr.*, 1931 p. 62, J. M. Mogeey, *op. cit.*, p. 25

³⁶Figures for Holland and Six Counties from *Monthly Report*, Oct., 1948 for Twenty-six Counties for male students, *Report Min. Agr.*, 1946-47

³⁷p. 143

cially Even in exceptional places such as New Zealand wages are 15 per cent lower than in industry, yet there must be something which makes people follow that way of life. Partly it is from inertia, but that alone is insufficient. There is besides a feeling of integration in a community, the fulfilment of a "funktionen lust". The social life observed by Arensberg in Mayo³⁸ is precious to the people and they will not freely change it, for man prefers to form part of a society which he knows, unless the price is too high. Judging by emigration the price has been too high in the past. In addition, the economic need for "comhair" or mutual help, which was the basis of both farming and social life, is disappearing with the introduction of farm machinery. Mogeey has found several farms which had next to no contact with their neighbours throughout the year. This is especially noticeable in the more prosperous areas in the North, where mechanisation is more advanced.

The rural society is passing through a transition period, more advanced in the North-East than elsewhere. In the North the change has been accelerated by the war, so that the economy is now one of money exchange, rather than of self-sufficiency and mutual help.³⁹ The trend may be directed by co-operatives such as those at Bansha or Mitchelstown, or by clubs and community centres, but in one way or another a rural society must be formed.

The growth of population in the North is not extended to the rural districts. The whole Border area lost population at the rate of 9 per cent. or more between 1926 and 1937,⁴⁰ very little of the central area even maintained itself, the growth of population was confined to towns, and to the East coast. The flight from the land, even though it has been reversed during the war, is no less real than in the rest of Ireland. I would suggest that its cure lies not only in economic well-being but in a stronger social life.

Conclusion.

We have examined, very briefly, the developments of the past quarter century as they have affected agriculture in the Six Counties. The natural trend to intensive farming, producing live stock and specialised crops for exchange, was due to changes in price ratios, and also to the necessity of achieving a large output per acre from small farms. Government policy has sheltered and directed agriculture, but has never attempted to alter it. The policy has been that framed by the former Department of Agriculture.

Undoubted advances have been made in production, and mechanisation has reached a high level, as is shown by the numbers of tractors. Factories have been established for processing of milk, bacon and the by-products of the central abattoirs. Production figures have shown a fairly steady advance, in spite of a fall in yield per acre and of output of certain commodities during the war. Farmers' income is at a peak now, but even so the position in that respect, taking a view over the years, has hardly been satisfactory. It has, however, compared well with the earnings of other countries in difficult times.

This creditable record of Northern Ireland is due to two factors, one of which was special to its political position, and the other due to its own action. Firstly, the full advantage of British protection policy

³⁸Arensberg & Kumbal. *Family and Community Life in Ireland* (1940)

³⁹J. M. Mogeey, *Community Life in N. Ireland* Mar.-Aug., 1948

⁴⁰*Census Reports*

was obtained by a position inside the "home market", and, secondly, in the expansion of the bacon and poultry industries, even though little in the internal system of marketing was reformed

The special protection afforded to agriculture could hardly have been foreseen. Free entry to the British market when all other competitors were hindered by quota and tariff was of supreme importance was gained in the way of direct subsidy. During the war protectionist policy gave every opportunity to expand production by higher prices, subsidy and investment, but without imposing the necessity of sacrifice for self-sufficiency in growing crops for direct human consumption. The rate of advance was very much accelerated during the war, and the gains remain in the form of increased fertility and capital equipment. In the future it appears that further expansion, with the additional advantages of almost unlimited markets at advance prices, is guaranteed

Market reorganisation began as early as 1924. It has been marked by two traits that it had universal application with compulsory powers and, secondly, that it was usually undertaken by Governmental initiative, and controlled by mixed boards. The Government has a large degree of control over these marketing boards, but on the whole no serious protest has been raised, the results being satisfactory to all parties. Interference by the central authority may be deplored, but in the absence of other organisations large enough to undertake these functions it would seem the only way of rationalisation open to the reformer. In fact, the powers seem to have been used with considerable business ability.

The social problems arising with the extension of mechanisation and production for exchange have not been solved. It do not wish to say that the social system is in ruin or heading for chaotic disintegration, but that, after the housing difficulty has been solved, when farms are fully equipped and all economic problems solved, the social question of reorganising society after these changes—or letting it reshape itself—will still be outstanding. Technical advances have not yet led to a new society, yet they have undermined much of the bases of the old one. If the central authority is to hold control of farm production it seems that it must weigh carefully the influence its policies may have on rural life. The action should not take the form of maintaining a certain *status quo* by arbitrary price fixing, or by sheltering rural workers from being attracted by the higher wages of industry⁴¹. A solution will only be achieved when a satisfactory standard of living and social life has been achieved, making the country as attractive to the worker as the town.

DENSITIES OF CROPS PER 1,000 ACRES IN CERTAIN YEARS

	WHEAT		OATS		POTATOES		PLOUGHED	
	6 Co	26 Co	6 Co	26 Co	6 Co	26 Co	6 Co	26 Co
1925	1.5	2.3	138	56	65	32	243	131
1929	1.8	2.4	132	56	56	30	233	126
1935	3.7	14.0	116	54	54	29	204	124
1939	1.2	21.0	125	45	49	26	196	125
1945	0.7	55.0	193	67	32	32	327	206

⁴¹Scott Report, p 199

APPENDIX IV

FARM OUTPUT PER 1,000 ACRES OF CROP AND PASTURE LAND

Comparison of the output of the Six Counties and the Twenty-six Counties of Ireland in certain years

		Twenty-six Counties	Six
Cattle	1924/5	—	101
	1936/7	82	91
	1937/8	71	72
	1938/9	80	63
	1945/6	82	77
Sheep	1924/5	—	83
	1936/7	101	149
	1937/8	85	139
	1938/9	97	160
	1945/6	86	119
*Pigs	1924/5	—	71
	1936/7	130	313
	1937/8	112	330
	1938/9	118	341
	1945/6	51	57
Eggs (Gt Hundreds)	1924/6	—	1,447
	1936/7	822	1,818
	1937/8	790	1,784
	1938/9	771	1,727
	1945/6	593	1,928
*Milk (Liquid) Gals	1924/5	—	12,195
	1936/7	7,581	12,524
	1937/8	7,911	12,524
	1938/9	7,900	12,524
	1945/6	8,600	25,670
(Milk) (Far Mfg Gals.)	1924/5	—	22,765
	1936/7	18,952	21,469
	1937/8	17,369	20,789
	1938/9	16,917	21,008
	1945/6	15,736	15,670

*These products in Northern Ireland have since 1933 been marketed through organised marketing schemes

LABOUR AND OUTPUT.

Year	Numbers in 000's		Output in £ per head		Wages, £, p a	
	6 Co	26 Co	6 Co	26 Co	6 Co	26 Co
1926-7	131	597	107	109	—	66
1929-30	133	566	—	113	—	65
1939-40	123	531	129	97	74*	72
1945-46	126	522	209	191	171 to 190	105

* From Report on Conditions of Employment and Wages of Agricultural Workers in Northern Ireland, 1938, for "reasonably good conditions, inclusive of all perquisites"

No allowance is made for new Social Service benefits introduced in Northern Ireland during the war. Wages have since risen in Northern Ireland as well as in the Twenty-Six Counties.

DISCUSSION.

On the vote of thanks, PROFESSOR JOHNSTON mentioned that he and one or two others present had been members of the Free State Agricultural Commission of 1922 and were glad that some of their recommendations had found a fertile soil in Northern Ireland. He also referred to the great value of the Northern Ireland Ministry of Agriculture's monthly reports. He would like to see analagous publications down here, perhaps in co-operation with the Northern Government. He regretted that the paper did not contain fuller details of the Northern Ireland pig marketing and milk marketing schemes, which appeared to have been a great success, unlike the contemporary schemes in Great Britain.

As to mechanisation, he was aware of the great strides made in Northern Ireland as compared with us, but we were now rapidly making up leeway. He doubted if such mechanisation could be regarded as a cause of disintegration of the rural community. There were plenty of other causes disintegrating the rural community in Northern Ireland. Down here mechanisation, e.g., as operated by the creamery owned farms, had been a factor in increasing rural integration, socially as well as economically. In this connection he referred to Senator Richards-Orpen's scheme for "economic farm units". About a thousand such units, suitably equipped and fully mechanised, would revolutionise farming down here, greatly increase output, and improve social relations, promoting rather than impairing the spirit of individual as well as co-operative enterprise.

As to research by the universities, it is primarily a question of money. Give us the monetary tools and we will do the job of scientific research into agricultural problems that so badly wants doing.

MR D'ARCY said. In joining in the vote of thanks to Mr Smith, I would like to congratulate him on a very useful survey. Especially I think he deserves praise for his commendable self-restraint in avoiding a political approach and especially in refraining from "pointing the moral and adorning the tale."

Taking it all in all, what the North has done mainly has been to take advantage of a certain set of fortunate circumstances and to cash in heavily on the position. Mr Smith admits that no great innovations have been made, no new social organisation has emerged. But in their hard-headed, unsentimental way the Northern Government has made loyalty to the Crown pay for itself. They have narrowed the sea between themselves and Great Britain and have finally persuaded the National Farmers' Union that they are an integral part of Great Britain for the purpose of cash payments. This has been their State policy, but one that did not succeed without a good deal of hard work.

I have been on the edge of the ring when the fight was in progress between the North of Ireland and Whitehall, and the integration of the two agricultural economies was not won without a struggle. In passing, I would like to pay a tribute to that great public servant, the late Scott Robertson, whom I met occasionally on his missions in London during the war years and whom I suspect did more than one man's share in getting those real concessions from Whitehall which the farmers in the Six Counties enjoy to-day. It would seem now that there will be no going back on the matter and that the Six Counties from the point of view of Whitehall and Bedford Square is regarded for subsidy and market preference as the same as Scotland or Wales. On the other hand, ours has been a losing fight in that regard. It is doubtful if we ever did get round at any time or under either Government to the idea of integrating our agricultural economy with that of Great Britain. We have naturally been more concerned with the political aspect of our relations with Great Britain—the North's attitude was already cut and dried and unemotional. But in considering the possible removal in time of the Border, it would be unwise to lose sight of the vital importance of the present relative positions of the two territories in regard to Great Britain's agricultural economy.

I mentioned that the great achievement of the North was the business achievement of getting the highest price for their products, and that in other directions there appears to be little in what they have done to stir the imagination or to rouse emulation. Mr. Smith mentions 29 statutes relating to the improvement in the marketing of agricultural products in Northern Ireland. I have not counted the number of similar statutes we have here, but the body of legislation, I believe, is just as comprehensive—dealing with practically every major agricultural product that is subject to any rehandling, e.g., dairy produce, fresh meat, bacon and pig products, eggs, poultry, apples, etc. Our first enactment dealing with eggs was made also in 1924, and the first one which tries to take care of the eggs from the nest to the consumer—you might say from the cradle to the grave—was enacted in 1939. Much control in regard to the marketing of produce was forced upon Northern Ireland by the exigencies of the British market in war-time, and much the same thing happened here but without the same profit accruing. The export of eggs, poultry, rabbits, canned meat, fresh meat, etc., from here are all subject to strict export control and marketing regulations.

In general, however, the Six Counties on social reorganisation in relation to the agricultural community has been just as backward or as little advanced as we here. That kind of development is on the higher plane of social development, calling, as it does, for action for the sake of the well-being of people as such and not because a higher price will be got or even that votes will necessarily accrue. The question of real action in that regard will be as slow or as fast as the rate of enlightenment in terms of sincere Christianity in the country as a whole.

Before I sit down I would like to make a reference to the really spectacular development of the poultry industry in Northern Ireland. Considerable publicity has naturally been given to this by the North and especially as an indication of their help towards Britain's food supplies during the war. In 1923 the number of ordinary fowl in the Six Counties was about $5\frac{1}{2}$ million head, in 1939 it was $9\frac{1}{4}$ millions, and in 1946 it was over $18\frac{1}{4}$ millions, or a million head greater than the numbers in the Twenty-Six Counties. But here is the point I would

like to stress in 1945 the number of ordinary fowl was 16 million head, but the quantity of eggs produced was only $4\frac{1}{2}$ million gt. hd., while in the same year and with only 15 million fowl the Twenty-Six Counties produced $6\frac{1}{2}$ million gt hds of eggs. The Ulster Year Book attempts to explain this anomaly and puts it down to the absence of concentrated feeding stuffs affecting egg production, not to sales outside the law.

I would like again to thank Mr. Smith for his paper.