

## Introduction

JOHN H. GOLDTHORPE\* & CHRISTOPHER T. WHELAN†

\* *Nuffield College, Oxford; Fellow of the British Academy*

† *Economic and Social Research Institute, Dublin*

THE PAPERS collected in this volume were (apart from the last) initially prepared for a conference held at Nuffield College, Oxford, in December 1990. This conference itself had its origins in ties built up over two decades between Nuffield and the Economic and Social Research Institute, Dublin. These ties were first formed by Irish students who came to Nuffield, with support from ESRI, in order to undertake graduate work, and who were then instrumental in bringing into contact other social scientists in the two institutions whose interests were in important respects complementary.

At ESRI sociologists and applied economists were concerned to develop an understanding of contemporary Irish society that was both theoretically informed and of relevance to policy issues. At Nuffield there was a long-standing interest in current theories of industrial society and in the possibility of testing these theories through systematic comparative research. It readily became apparent that the Irish experience of industrialisation offered a valuable opportunity for extending such research, while the critique emerging from Nuffield of both standard liberal and Marxist theories of modern industrialism proved illuminating in the Irish case.

It was, then, in order to further collaboration on these lines that the 1990 conference was arranged. A majority of those who participated had affiliations with ESRI or Nuffield (or both) but the opportunity was taken to involve others, in particular, sociologists of religion and political scientists, who were able to widen the range of issues addressed.

No attempt was made to impose a uniformity of approach on those invited to prepare papers, apart from the request that they should, implicitly if not explicitly, situate their treatment of whatever aspect of the Irish case they dealt with in the larger context of debates on the nature and development of industrial society in general. This request was readily

complied with, but, as will be apparent from the pages that follow, in a variety of styles. Thus, some authors base their arguments on wide-ranging reviews of the relevant literature, while others concentrate on the more detailed analysis of findings from their own research. One consequence of this is that papers differ in the demands they make on readers' technical capabilities. We recognise that, for some, regression analysis and loglinear modelling, not to mention Voronoi tessellations, may appear as rather alien and forbidding notions. However, general readers should find sufficient explanation provided to enable them to grasp the main purposes of these techniques and the significance of the results to which they lead, while students of the social sciences should by now be prepared to acquire an understanding of such techniques as essential tools of their trade.

At the same time, we may add that one feature is common to the papers here collected to a greater degree than we had initially dared hope: that is, the presentation and discussion of Irish data in a comparative context, as the result of authors' awareness of, or indeed participation in, major cross-national research enterprises. Thus, for example, the CASMIN (Comparative Analysis of Social Mobility in Industrial Nations) Project, the Luxembourg Income Study, the DUES (Development of Unions in European Societies) Project, the European Value Systems Study and the European Parliament Election Study are all drawn on to good effect. Such interest and involvement in comparative research provides, in our view, the best means of ensuring both that the study of Irish society continues to be conducted to a high standard and that it attracts the attention that it merits within the international community of social scientists.

Finally as regards the scope of the papers, we should make it clear that it was from the start understood that attention was to focus on the Republic of Ireland, since the experience of the Republic and of the North, in their industrial development as in other respects, appeared too divergent to make a joint treatment feasible within a single volume. It would of course still be unrealistic to leave the North entirely out of account, and authors have not attempted to do so. However, where the name 'Ireland' appears in the text, it is to be taken as applying to the Republic, other than where it is indicated, or the context makes abundantly clear, that the reference is to the island as a whole.

It remains here for us to acknowledge the extensive support and assistance that we have received in preparing this collection. First of all, we must, on our own behalf and that of all contributors, thank the British Academy and the Royal Irish Academy for allowing the conference at Nuffield to be held under their auspices and for their financial backing. Valuable additional support, financial and in kind, was provided by both Nuffield and ESRI. In organising the conference, we were greatly reliant

on the energy and efficiency of Maireád Reidy, and Brendan Halpin and Niamh Hardiman also gave timely help.

The success of the conference was of crucial importance in motivating the authors of papers to produce the new versions here presented; and, in this connection, we should emphasise the significant input made by other participants, especially those who acted as 'prepared discussants': John Geary, Brian Girvin, Anthony Heath, Joseph Lee, Dorren McMahon, Tony McCashin, Lars Mjøset, Michael O'Higgins and Maireád Reidy.

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