

The Promised Land

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about this which has to do with the nature of such policy.

As a response to the economic stagnation of the 1950s and the relative failure of mainstream industry to redress the balance in the 1960s, the Irish State has relentlessly pursued a policy of encouraging foreign-owned multinationals to establish high-skilled, labour-intensive high value-added, strong growth-potential industries — which in the main turned out to be in the chemical and electronics sectors.

The bait was in the fact that relatively high Irish labour costs would be offset by other factors — the availability of a well-developed infrastructure, an expanding technologically-literate workforce and the "assimilative capacity" of the Irish environment.

This latter point was of no small significance. Economic theorists hold that the quality of the environment and its "assimilative capacity" can be viewed as a "natural factor endowment" in the process of international resource allocation. This is to say that the capacity of the landscape to absorb industrial waste should be a critical factor in deciding where to locate.

By this logic, the IDA had a whole hand of aces — the virginal fields of the Irish countryside — with which to lure foreign multinationals. Included in that are factors such as high social tolerance to pollution, a relative lack of pollution-control regulations, natural "self-cleansing" systems and the unused absorption capacity of the landscape. For US-owned pharmaceutical corporations in particular, on the run from tightening environmental legislation at home in the 1970s, Ireland was literally a promised land.

The trend of such industries relocating in underdeveloped countries during this period has in retrospect all the appearance of a carefully-devised strategy — with the aim at the time, perhaps, of rolling back the tide of legislation in the US by operating openly and freely in less re-

In Ireland, although the regulations were tighter than in many Third World countries, US chemical factories were allowed to be located here under considerably less stringent conditions than obtained in either the US or mainland Europe. Industries arriving in the Cork region, for example, received permission to dump untreated organic waste into Cork harbour. The policy has been described — by H. Jeffrey Leonard in his book, "Pollution and the Struggle for the World Product" — as "a dustbin strategy for development".

An Taisce's chairman at the time, Philip Mullaly, wrote that it was "worth noting that permission to pollute may well be more valuable in economic terms than any IDA grant". Because of the growing unemployment problem (already five per cent in the early seventies), such concessions were not otherwise controversial at that time.

THE policy represented more than one type of sell-out, critics argue. The Irish economy, as Telesis pointed out, had become excessively dependent on this form of industry. By 1985, over 850 subsidiaries of foreign multinationals were operating in Ireland, accounting for more than one-third of the entire manufacturing workforce. More than half of such industry was in the chemical and electronics sec-

'The IDA had the virginal fields of the Irish countryside to lure foreign multinationals'

tors, accounting for over 50 per cent of (non-food) manufactured exports of the Irish economy.

Because of repatriation of their profits, however, these companies were not making a contribution to economic growth commensurate with their slice of economic activity. US firms were able to achieve profit levels in Ireland three times their

this by repatriating profits in vast amounts: £1,346 million in 1986, and an estimated £4 billion by 1995. Even the most conservative of estimates indicates that over two decades, this haemorrhaging has cost the Irish economy an amount in excess of the current national debt. This accounts, in large measure, for both the Government's inability to influence unemployment levels and the Taoiseach's puzzlement over escalating protests about new developments.

It is arguable that not only has control of employment been given out of the hands of the Irish government, but so too has control of the overall growth potential of the Irish economy. Both have been surrendered to multinational corporations.

Meanwhile, a combination

of factors has served to steer the foreign-owned model for industrial development into a cul de sac. In the first place, as Telesis outlined, such industry was failing to deliver on its job targets by a long chalk. By 1981, the report calculated, only 30 per cent of the aggregate number of jobs promised by the IDA for the foreign-owned sector had materialised.

escalating community objections to new developments were the last thing the Government needed. The environmental aspects, combined with the obvious lack of benefit to the Irish economy, were gradually eroding the climate of acquiescence which greeted the advent of such industry two decades ago. The balance to be weighed between the benefits of immediate employment and the danger to the environment began to weigh more and more in one direction.

This trend now threatens to throttle Government policy altogether if a way is not found soon to deal with toxic waste on a national basis. About 15,000 tonnes of waste are currently produced annually in the entire island of Ireland, of which one-third is produced by the Du Pont factory. This waste is exported for disposal at incinerators abroad, but Du Pont fears that stricter EC regulations will shortly restrict the transport of toxic waste and compel member States to burn their own.

At the moment, the Du Pont proposal is for a small incinerator to cater for the company's own waste; but the franchise for a national incinerator, to cope with toxic waste from all over the island, would be a commercial proposition as well. It would also provide a lifeline for the Irish Government, freeing it to woo further industry while reassuring local interests that their immediate environments would not be despoiled.

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the conventional sense, is asserting itself through grassroots community action. This new political action transcends nationalism, religions, and conventional ideology.

Over time, he believes, it will create a parallel political structure, based as much on alternative community initiatives as on objections to mainstream political actions, which will one day confront the mainstream, and perhaps sooner than we might imagine.

Activists in the Du Pont controversy do not challenge this thesis, either in description or attitude. Many of them are indeed of that generation born in the Fifties. Many, on both sides of the Border, are becoming involved in a political issue for the very first time. Many are teachers, social workers, or other professionals; some are unemployed. They are not, they are anxious to stress, "Greenies".

Most of them come from ordinary, lower middle-class backgrounds. "Overnight," says one, "Du Pont made a revolutionary out of me. They forced me to look at what they were doing and ask myself if something that was responsible for that amount of ugliness could be all right."

The strength of their campaign, says Peter Mackenzie, a Derry bookshop manager, has surprised even

Local and vocal

people. People are beginning to say, 'environmental things are important; we have to start somewhere'."

"At the moment for me," says Derry teacher Danny Holmes, "this is the centre of the universe. I used to feel that all these fights took place elsewhere, that there was expertise elsewhere. We waited on England, we waited on America, we waited on other people that we credited with a technology beyond our own. But I don't think we can wait any longer."

"They've done us a favour really. They've left me for the first time in my life where I feel integrated. I was possibly allergic to the 20th century. I couldn't live in it and couldn't face it. The result was that I couldn't face myself. My way of life was actually disintegrating before me, because I was asked to live it in a certain way. Du Pont focused my attention very, very particularly on an area in which I grew up."

"I hunted locally when it was permissible to shoot, and I fished locally. But I couldn't look in the rivers in the same way now; I couldn't look in the air in the same way. I couldn't look up without knowing that there was some dreadful, imminent contamination — perhaps, perhaps — about to come."

to address my own secret fears about myself. They took me out of myself and they planted my feet on the ground and they made me responsible for the trees that were in my garden and the grass that was on my lawn and the flowers in the garden centre. I felt, all of a sudden, responsible for them all. For years, somebody else was defending them, not me."

THERE are innumerable strands of opinion in the anti-incinerator movement, ranging from those who oppose merely the setting up of a national incinerator to those who believe that the entire Du Pont operation should now be re-examined; from those who maintain that the company must be fought on the basis of its own technological arguments to those who believe that the only argument against something as frighteningly nebulous as toxic waste is the common-sense one which tells people that if they feel threatened, they are threatened.

Peter Mackenzie says it all comes down to personal responsibility. "The problem of toxic waste is that nobody has taken responsibility. If somebody told you they had destroyed 99,999 per cent of a poison, you assumed from that it was totally destroyed. The fact is that the kind of

part of a general process of ignoring the facts and continuing to leave a problem unresolved."

There are varying degrees of optimism within the different strands of the campaign. Some, like Danny Holmes, Peter Mackenzie and Rosemary Vaughan, are optimistic that they will win. Others, like Enda Craig of the Moville and Greencastle Environmental Group, are not so sure.

"We feel that we are going to be crucified," he says. "There is growing anger among the people here on the Inishowen peninsula, and if the politicians don't listen to our arguments they're pushing themselves out onto the edge."

For all its undoubted strengths, he says, the campaign is caught in a Catch 22 in that unless it can place the debate on a national platform, it will function as a kind of controlled explosion, which will eventually dissipate (there is even a theory that this is the very strategy being pursued by Du Pont). "At the moment, the more noise we make, the more pressure we put on, the more Du Pont can use us to screw both governments."

"We feel that the incinerator will go ahead, come what may, and if it does there'll be civil discord here and perhaps even worse, if reasoned argument has no effect on these people. If that happens the campaign

