

sure powerful obstacles are in the way. These obstacles are not, however, the hunger myths—overpopulation, too little land, laziness, religious taboos, inhospitable climate, lack of technology, unequal terms of trade, and so forth. In our research, we found that the most fundamental constraint to food self-reliance is that the majority of the people are not themselves in control of the production process and, therefore, more and more frequently they are not even participants.

How do we remove the obstacles preventing people from taking control of the production process and feeding themselves? What we have learned is that the path we are suggesting—the path of people taking control of food—is the *only* guarantee of long-term productivity and food security. It is the land monopolizers—both the traditional landed élites and corporate agribusiness—that have proven themselves to be the most inefficient, unreliable and destructive

users of agricultural resources.

Many, who have come to see that the problem of hunger is not simply a problem of production, conclude that instead it is a problem of distribution—getting the food to the hungry instead of the well-fed. We are saying something else. The issue of distribution is only a reflection of the more basic problem of control and participation in the production process itself.

Once we grasp these fundamentals, we will then begin to see that the “poor, hungry masses” whom we are repeatedly being told to fear are in reality our allies. Consciously or not, we are all joined in a common struggle for control of the most basic human need—food. “More food”, or even redistribution programmes like food aid and food stamps, will continue to mean more hunger until we first come to grips with the problem of who controls and who takes part in the production process.

## The Air is Dark . . . .

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“WHEN did the Irish problem start and when will it end?” Around 1920, one of the Irish leaders gave a sombre answer to those questions. “The Irish problem started when Strongbow came to Ireland. It will end when Cromwell gets out of Hell.” Between Strongbow and Cromwell fit the Elizabethan “plantations”.

The Anglo-Irish settlers had a sort of base in the “English Pale” round Dublin. Beyond that, the country was to a greater or less degree governed by Gaelic lords of one kind or another, who acknowledged that some kind of shadowy suzerainty was vested in the English Crown.

Why, we may ask, did anybody bother to interfere? The answer is quite important, not only for an understanding of British motives in Ireland, but for an understanding of the motives of many imperial powers in many places. Ireland had very few attractions for the English “Imperialists”. Most English folk, from the Queen down, would probably have preferred that the whole island should disappear beneath the waves. The trouble was that a hostile Ireland, or an Ireland in occupation of a foreign enemy, was a tremendous danger to England. For that

reason, Gaelic Ireland must be subdued.

The story of what followed is told by Nicholas Canny.\* His book is aimed at the scholar, rather than the layman. It is learned, erudite and fascinating.

Dr. Canny tells us a tale which strikes chords of memory. There is muddle at the start over political objectives. Assuming that the English wished to control Ireland, how should they set about it? Should they treat the Gaelic chieftains as enemies to be fought and

were cast for the role of model countrymen for the rest of Ireland to emulate; yet they found themselves profoundly unhappy in that role, and finished by leaning towards the Gaels.

Dr. Canny's book is a powerful refutation of the romantic stories of later times. The English myth that Ireland was colonised in order to civilise the Irish for their own good is demonstrable nonsense. Francis Drake (*The Francis Drake?* We are not told) and a colleague gathered a gang of ruffians who put the six hundred inhabitants of Rathlin Island—men, women and children—to the sword. Yet the Gaelic chieftains do not emerge as heroes or even patriots; they obviously had a keen eye for the main chance, and would freely submit to Elizabeth when it suited their purpose.

As for those at the bottom of the heap—the peasants—their story is again the usual one. Whether the local magnates were Anglo-Irish or Gaelic or incomers mattered little to them. They were rack-rented to the limit, whoever was around. In a few places within the Pale, the peasants might accumulate a surplus in a good year; but for most peasants life was at the edge of subsistence.

Yes, it is a grim, unedifying, story. There are no heroes, not many real villains, just a lot of sufferers. To that extent, the pattern of twentieth century Ireland was already set.

conquered, or as loyal if errant subjects whose allegiance should be reclaimed? Should Englishmen be settled in Ireland, or should Irishmen be turned into quiet and loyal subjects? Does religion fit into the story?

Now we see why the tale has a familiar ring. All the old story of conflicting motives which seems to beset every human situation is told in the sixteenth century Irish context. The colonists were sent out to colonise and settle; they wanted to make their pile and come home. The Anglo-Irish



\**The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland: A Pattern Established*, Harvester Press; £10.50.