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The Irish dissenters and nineteenth-century political economy

by R. D. Collison Black

I

To be a dissenter, according to the dictionaries, is to refuse to accept established doctrine; which implies in turn the existence of an orthodoxy of some sort.

According to the view of the history of economic ideas which prevailed some forty years ago, such an orthodoxy had indeed existed in political economy throughout the first seventy years of the nineteenth century. Its sources and character were well known and could be briefly summed up. It derived initially from Adam Smith's *Wealth of nations*, had absorbed as one of its essentials the doctrine of Malthus's *Essay on population*, received its definitive theoretical statement in Ricardo's *Principles of political economy* and had been finally rounded out and re-stated by John Stuart Mill in his *Principles* in 1848 — a re-statement which remained unchallenged until the appearance of Jevons's *Theory of political economy* in 1871.

The core of the classical orthodoxy which had been built up in this way was a cost of production theory of value, in which labour was seen as the major element of real cost and as in some sense the 'best' measure of value. Only Ricardo had sought (vainly) to establish an invariable measure of value and to make labour the sole source of value.

This cost theory of value in turn formed the foundation for a theory of production and distribution dominated by the law of diminishing returns and the Malthusian theory of population. In this the 'Ricardian' theory of rent was the best known and best regarded feature; the wage fund theory and the complementary theory of profits as a return (falling through time) mainly on circulating capital tended to be treated as crude aberrations long superseded by the superior techniques of neo-classical price theory.[1]

That nineteenth century economic literature encompassed a far greater variety and richness than is conveyed in this stereotype began to be recognised after the publication of Seligman's famous articles 'On some neglected British economists'.[2] It was not until

some thirty years later that detailed research results began to be published on the work of the many authors to whom Seligman had first drawn attention; notable among these was Professor Marian Bowley's *Nassau Senior and classical economics* which put forward what was to become an influential view, that the economists of the first half of the nineteenth century could in fact be divided into four groups — 'the French school, particularly Say and his immediate followers; the Ricardians; the group which we may call the English dissenters, which includes economists as far apart in time as Lauderdale and Macleod, and the German theorists from Hufeland to von Mangoldt'.[3]

While naturally giving most attention to the work of Senior, Professor Bowley included among the [English!] Dissenters both Mountifort Longfield and Isaac Butt, the first and second holders of the Whately Professorship. Her suggestion that 'in Ireland . . . Longfield bid fair to set up a distinctive school of economists'[4] was one which I followed up in an article published in 1945,[5] contending that Longfield did really found such a local school, which included not only Butt but other early occupants of the Whately chair such as J. A. Lawson and W. Neilson Hancock. These then were the first group of Irish dissenters who in Schumpeter's 'Review of the Troops'[6] were ranked not with the Ricardians, but with 'The Men who wrote above their Time'.

Such was what one might call the topography of the relationship between the Irish Dissenters and mainstream English classical political economy as it had been mapped out when Schumpeter wrote. However Mark Blaug's well-known comment remains true — 'there is a mutual interaction between past and present economic thinking for, whether we set it down in so many words or not the history of economic thought is being rewritten every generation'.[7] The history of economic thought has indeed been re-written several times since Schumpeter, and in different versions the place of the early Whately professors, as dissenters or otherwise has been variously re-assessed. It is these re-assessments and their validity or otherwise that I wish mainly to discuss here.

II

The first major re-assessment of classical economic thought after that given in Schumpeter's *History of economic analysis* came with the appearance in 1951 of the first volume of Sraffa's superb edition of *The works and correspondence of David Ricardo*. It would be fair to say

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that the interpretation of Ricardo's system which Sraffa gave in his introduction to the first volume of the edition, the *Principles of political economy and taxation,* came to dominate thinking on that subject for the ensuing thirty years. Indeed it is in one of the most recent works on Ricardian theory that one of the most concise statements of the interpretation of that theory which Sraffa promoted is to be found:—

> Ricardo's thesis of the long-run tendency of the economy towards a stationary state situation is based on a set of crucial assumptions — diminishing returns in agriculture, reinvestment of profits and a theory of distribution in which the income of the capitalist class represents a residual. This set of assumptions implies a strict connection between the rate of profit and the rate of capital accumulation. It is thus necessary, for a theory which aims at proving the validity of that thesis, to solve the problem of the unambiguous determination of the profit rate and to show how diminishing returns affect its behaviour through time. These problems found a straightforward solution within Ricardo's primitive agricultural model of the *Essay on Profits.* [1815] It was in the attempt to escape the limitations of this model that Ricardo felt, in the *Principles* the need for a developed theory of value.[8]

Ricardo's convoluted thinking on labour as the measure and source of value was thus displayed in a new and much more sympathetic light by Sraffa's argument that it was crucial for the Ricardian analysis of distribution to 'find a measure of value which would be invariant to changes in the division of the product; for if a rise or fall of wages by itself brought about a change in the magnitude of the social product, it would be hard to determine accurately the effect on profits'.[9]

It was out of this Sraffa interpretation of Ricardo that there developed the view that 'there were, broadly speaking, two quite distinct and rival traditions in nineteenth-century economic thought as to the order and mode of determination of phenomena of exchange and income distribution'.[10]

> One of these deriving from Adam Smith treated the value of any commodity as being determined as the sum of the various expenses or costs involved in its production; these expenses depending upon the necessary payments for land, capital and labour and upon the various amounts of these needed to produce the commodity in question. Determination of these necessary payments was viewed in a general supply-and-demand framework . . .

This line of thought is seen as running from Smith through Malthus to 'the Senior-Longfield group' and so on to John Stuart Mill and ultimately Marshall.

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> The second main line of tradition also derived from Smith, even if in a quasi-Hegelian manner from certain doctrines or propositions of Smith inverted (and hence transmuted) by Ricardo. First, Smith's peculiar theory of value . . . was refashioned by Ricardo so as to make conditions of production, and in particular quantities of labour expended in production, the basic determinant alike in capitalist and pre-capitalist society. In doing so he rejected the Adding-up-components Theory, and by implication rejected the possibility of treating the sphere of exchange relations as an 'isolated system', and anchored the explanations of these exchange-relations firmly in conditions and circumstances of production. Secondly, whatever his reason may have been for regarding distribution as the central problem, his instinct in doing so was undoubtedly right, and his mode of treating distribution was crucial. He saw this had to be explained in terms peculiar to itself and not as an outcome of general supply-demand exchange-relations, as Smith had treated it.[11]

According to this view J. S. Mill was not, whatever he himself may have said, a developer of the Ricardian tradition. That development was the work of Marx; thereafter it lived on only in the underworld of heresies, not to re-emerge finally and fully until the publication in 1960 of Sraffa's *Production of commodities by commodities* and the subsequent growth of 'neo-Ricardian' theory.

This 'two traditions' view of the history of economic thought has never won general acceptance, even among those who were ready to agree with Sraffa's interpretation of the Ricardian 'corn model'. Most such commentators would nevertheless have drawn a very clear distinction between what Baumol once termed 'the magnificent dynamics' of the classical school and the equilibrium theories of the neo-classical writers.

Of recent years, however, we have seen the emergence of another interpretation of classical political economy which harks back to Marshall's view of the essential continuity of the earlier classical and the later neo-classical approaches to questions of value and distribution. According to this interpretation, whose main exponent is Professor Samuel Hollander of Toronto, 'the economics of Ricardo and J. S. Mill in fact comprises in its essentials an exchange system fully consistent with the marginalist elaborations. In particular, their cost-price analysis is pre-eminently an analysis of the allocation of scarce resources, proceeding in terms of general equilibrium with allowance for final demand, and the interdependence of factor and commodity markets. . . . The demand side, the functional relation between cost and output, and the supply and demand determination of wages and profits, far from being "radical departures" from

Ricardianism, are central to that doctrine without which neither the cost theory of price nor the inverse wage-profit relation can be understood'.[12]

I am not called upon here to discuss the merits of these two contrasting approaches to the assessment of Ricardo and to the writing of the subsequent history of classical and neo-classical economic thought,[13] but only to deal with the re-assessments of the place of the Irish dissenting economists in that history which result from them. In each case that re-assessment is substantial, and substantially different.

III

To begin with the Sraffa approach, under this the notion of dissent from Ricardian ideas is preserved, but for very different reasons from those given by Schumpeter. From being among 'the men who wrote above their time' writers like Longfield are demoted (along with Senior) to form part of 'the reaction against Ricardo' by Maurice Dobb who, having assisted Sraffa in editing Ricardo's *Works and correspondence,* may be taken as perhaps the most authoritative expositor of this approach.[14] According to Dobb, Longfield's 'concern if not preoccupation, with the emerging "Labour question" is clear' from the form of his analysis of wages and profits. Having given rather more prominence to some of the rather naively sanctimonious corollaries which Longfield (perhaps for the benefit of Archbishop Whately) drew from this than to the analysis itself, Dobb comments: 'The laws of production and distribution, apparently, are not merely made of iron but are of divine origin'.[15]

Looked at from this point of view, the dissenters become the orthodox — 'harmony theorists' defending the *status quo* or, in other words, the lackeys of the capitalists. As it had been put earlier by Ronald Meek, 'it was the *dangerous* character of Ricardo's doctrines, rather than what they believed to be their falsity, with which they were primarily concerned'.[16]

On the other hand, Dobb does credit Longfield with having developed 'a "marginal efficiency" notion of profit' and describes his treatment of intensities of demand as 'certainly a foretaste of a Jevonian Law of Diminishing Utility'. Indeed one of Dobb's comments on Longfield's *Lectures on political economy* is that 'it is evident that we have here quite a number of preliminary sketches for economic theory at the end of the century' — a comment which of course is not inconsistent with the criticisms quoted above.

The new interpretation of Ricardo given by Hollander leads to a treatment of the work of Longfield and his followers which comes near to being the simple inverse of that given by the followers of Sraffa. From being part of the reaction against Ricardo they now appear as dedicated Ricardians — but in the process inevitably their originality as theorists of value and distribution disappears. For Hollander says of Ricardo,

> While, of course, his main interests lay in long-run price determination, his economics required and, implicitly at least, hinged upon the operation of the competitive mechanism involving demand-supply analysis. His rejection of demand-supply theory did not apply to the particular version elaborated by Longfield, and Longfield himself appreciated Ricardo's objections to the 'indefinite' and 'vague' expression, 'proportion between the demand and supply' as unhelpful in the prediction of market price.[17]

Now Hollander does admit that 'there can be little doubt that Ricardo failed to appreciate the conception of marginal utility'.[18] If then, as Dobb said, Longfield gave his readers 'a foretaste of a Jevonian Law of Diminishing Utility' there would still seem to be an important difference between his treatment of price determination and that of Ricardo. However, as against this view Hollander can invoke the authority of Professor Laurence Moss who in his book on Longfield has categorized him as merely a supply-and-demand theorist, though one whose ideas of demand derived from Malthus rather than Ricardo.[19]

On the other hand Moss contends that 'Longfield's *Lectures on political economy* does contain something approximating a complete non-Ricardian theory of income distribution and not simply a series of modifications of the Ricardian analysis',[20] whereas Hollander takes the view that 'much of the discussion of the *Lectures* is unmistakably "Ricardian" . . . on the whole Longfield retained a Ricardian structure throughout'.[21]

IV

Now, the broad title given to this series of lectures is 'Economists and the Irish economy . . .' and it may be noted that these re-assessments in the history of classical economic thought raise questions with regard to both. The 'two traditions' approach, associated with the names of Sraffa and Dobb puts the Irish dissenters into the category, if not of 'hired prizefighters', certainly of harmony theorists and defenders of the *status quo*. But this must presumably refer to the status quo in Ireland and hence it raises the whole issue of the attitude of the early Whately professors to conditions in Ireland generally and to the distribution of income and wealth in particular.

As against this, the 'new interpretation' of Ricardo associated mainly with the name of Hollander does more to call into question the position of the early Whately professors *as economists* — in relation to their contemporaries and their place in the history of economic ideas. It suggests that the application of the term 'dissenter' to them may be misleading, for they were not so much dissenting from the Ricardian orthodoxy as following in it and perhaps developing it to some small extent. It may be convenient to deal with this latter contention first, since it follows on somewhat more directly from my discussion of the various assessments of classical economic theory earlier in this lecture.

The question we have to deal with is essentially whether writers like Longfield were or were not Ricardians. The fact that it is possible for able and scholarly commentators such as Professors Hollander and Moss, in addition to the late Mr Dobb, to return diametrically opposite answers to this question arises from the fact that they employ different criteria to determine what constitutes the essence of a Ricardian.

For Sraffa, Dobb and their followers, as we have already seen, the key feature of the Ricardian system is that in it distribution was explained in terms peculiar to itself and not as an outcome of general supply-and-demand exchange relations. On this criterion an economist like Longfield could definitely not be classed as a Ricardian, for his analysis of distribution is characterised by statements such as 'it is evident that the wages of labour, like the exchangeable value of every thing else, must depend upon the relation between the supply and the demand'.[22] Consequently followers of the 'dual development' approach to nineteenth century economic thought must inevitably see a sharp break between Ricardo and the dissenters, just as Professor Bowley originally did although not for quite the same reasons.

On the other hand, for Hollander the essential distinguishing feature of Ricardo's work is what he calls 'the fundamental theorem on distribution' — 'the entire Ricardian scheme is designed to relate the rate of return on capital to the "value" of per capita wages (Ricardian real wages) — which in effect amounts to the proportion of the work-day devoted to the production of wages — and variations in the rate of return to (inverse) variations in the real wage rate'.[23] He contends that this theorem displays an impressive resilience in

nineteenth century economic thought and states his 'primary conclusion that the Ricardian theorem on distribution — the inverse wage-profit relationship — left a firm and positive impression on the work of a number of authors normally regarded as "dissenters" *par excellence*' — including Longfield.[24]

In contrast to this Moss (as Hollander himself has noted) adopts a version of the Ricardian system 'running in terms of the agricultural model of distribution in a growth context' and treating the role of the measure of value as basis for the inverse wage-profit relationship as only a secondary feature of the structure.[25] Arising from this Moss finds that 'the major area of disagreement between Longfield and Ricardo has to do with the question of the determination of profit and wages';[26] not surprisingly he considers Longfield's marginal productivity theory of profits and productivity theory of wages to amount to a fundamentally non-Ricardian theory of distribution.

As between these two very different interpretations of the essence of Ricardo, it seems to me that one focuses primarily on the structure of Ricardian theory, the other on the content. There can be no doubt that Longfield had a very clear grasp of the structure of Ricardian theory — he recognised the reasons for Ricardo's search for an invariable measure of value and was able to present the idea of the inverse wage-profit theorem in a manner which led Torrens to withdraw his objections to it.[27]

Now if this particular feature of Ricardo's system is to be seen as the essential one, some of the traces of Ricardian ideas which, as I have always pointed out, are to be found all through Longfield's *Lectures on Political Economy* will assume enhanced significance. Longfield did devote one whole lecture (Lecture VIII) to examining what profits are, 'and how their amount is to be calculated'. By assuming all advances of capital to be made in the form of wages and for the same length of time 'it will follow, that the rate of profit depends upon the proportion in which the value of any commodity is divided between the labourer and the capitalist'.[28] This is indeed a Ricardian way of measuring profits, but when it comes to 'the investigation of the laws which determine their actual amount' Longfield's treatment of this question involves a polite but total refutation of Ricardo's ideas.

Admitting that 'some of the most distinguished writers have adopted the theory, first, I believe, proposed and explained by the late Sir Edward West, which considers profits to be almost entirely regulated by the fertility of the last and worst soil that is brought under cultivation', Longfield declared that 'the theory is an ingenious one, and I should feel much pleasure in assenting to it, and it is with corresponding regret that I have come to the very contrary conclusion, namely, that the decreasing fertility of the soil has scarcely any direct effect upon the rate of profits . . .'.[29]

In the Ricardian system rent is a surplus resulting from the 'indestructible powers of the soil'; of the remainder of the produce the share which goes to the labourer is determined by the cost of his subsistence, and the residue forms the profits of the capitalist. Hence it follows 'that in all countries, and all times, profits depend on the quantity of labour requisite to provide necessaries for the labourers on that land or with that capital which yields no rent'.[30]

In Longfield's system, on the other hand, rent is a surplus indeed, but one which could arise from land scarcity without differences in fertility; profits are determined by the marginal productivity of capital, and the residue is divided among the labourers in accordance with their specific productivity. 'Naturally, therefore, Longfield reaches very different conclusions from Ricardo on the question of how economic progress affects the division of the social product. Superficially his conclusions seem identical with those of the Ricardians, for like them he also predicts a rise in rents, a fall in profits and a rise in wages — but the fall in profits is to be the outcome of increased accumulations of capital, and the rise in wages, of increased productiveness of labour. Longfield enlarges on the favourable social consequences of a low rate of profits, and concludes that in the course of progress the circumstances affecting the state of the labourer will alter "in a manner favourable to his condition". Optimism is substituted for Ricardian pessimism.'[31]

Professor Hollander himself admits that Longfield 'fails to state precisely how his own theory [of profits] was related to the preceding defence of the Ricardian inverse profit-wage relationship' but nevertheless asserts with emphasis that *'it seems clear enough that he envisaged the latter as a valid framework for a satisfactory theory'*.[32] No evidence is adduced to support this assertion, but even if it is accepted at its face value the fact remains that Longfield clearly did not find the Ricardian theory of profits, and the resulting view of the relation between profits and wages in the course of economic growth, satisfactory.

If one accepts, as I am disposed to do, Dr Terry Peach's view of Ricardo's central object of analysis as having been 'specifically to isolate and "illustrate" what he believed to be the only serious basis for a permanent reduction in profitability in the course of capital

accumulation — worsening conditions of production on the land',[33] then it is not possible to regard Longfield as anything but non-Ricardian in his analysis of distribution. But what of his analysis of value? We have already seen that Longfield's treatment of the returns to factors of production as determined by the supply of and demand for them prevents him from being regarded as a follower of Ricardo by the members of what I have called the 'dual development' school. On the other hand if one accepts Professor Hollander's view that 'Ricardian economics . . . comprises in its essentials an exchange system fully consistent with the marginalist elaborations'[34] and sets it alongside Professor Moss's view that 'Longfield developed a supply and demand explanation of market price',[35] it would seem that his value analysis added little to what Malthus and Ricardo had already done.

Is it then to be seen as no more than a minor improvement in supply-and-demand analysis, already well understood and accepted by Ricardo, instead of the major departure from his '93% labour theory of value' which it was formerly thought to be?

This is really a combination of two questions; the first is, to what extent was Longfield's analysis of market price an improvement on whatever may have been done by Ricardo in this field. The second, perhaps more fundamental, is, was that analysis merely a supply and demand one, or did it also contain elements of utility theory?

On the first point, there has recently been more than one attempt to reinterpret Ricardo's supply and demand analysis and to show it to have been more complete and consistent, particularly on the question of price-quantity relationships, than has hitherto been recognised. These attempts have served to bring out what one of the reinterpreters has described as the 'formidable interpretative problems engendered by the absence of any systematic treatment of the theory of price in Ricardo's *Principles*'.[36] Consequently the view put forward by commentators such as Rankin and Hollander — that Ricardo held essentially the same ideas about the relations of price and quantity demanded as had been stated by Malthus — has to be inferred mainly from widely separated passages in his pamphlets, letters and speeches.[37]

On the other hand, as Professor Moss has rightly said, 'it was Longfield (and not Ricardo) who made the concept of a demand schedule an integral part of his theory of price'. Nothing in the recent writing on Ricardo's treatment of supply and demand seems to warrant any revision of Moss's judgement that 'Longfield must be credited with having developed one of the earliest and most complete supply-and-demand explanations of market price in British economic thought'.[38]

The second question is the more controversial one. Professor Moss is critical of the idea that Longfield can be regarded as a precursor of the marginal utility approach — an idea which I presented in my 1945 article and which others have also put forward. It seems to me that this is another instance where the answer depends on the criteria adopted — in this case the criteria which make a writer into a utility theorist. If that description is to be confined to those who have given an explicit statement of the principle of diminishing marginal utility it cannot be applied to Longfield, but if the description is extended to include those whose writings make clear their understanding of the principle then it would be my judgement that Longfield would properly come under it. I still would contend that important elements of utility analysis are to be found in Longfield's value theory, which is thus more than a mere supply-and-demand treatment of the problem.

Moss does concede that Longfield 'was quite willing to admit that utility does influence price, but only in the same way as cost of production, that is, *indirectly*. Cost influences market price by way of supply and utility by way of demand because, in Longfield's words, it is to utility that the "demand is to be entirely attributed". But in another place he was quick to warn that the effect utility has on actually determining the market price is "not so easily calculated", and on the basis of this remark we may be confident that Longfield did not intend to connect the "intensity of demand" with a measure of utility'.[39]

This does seem to me to make as little as possible out of what Longfield says about utility and consumer behaviour. Has *any* utility theorist ever tried to show that utility influences price other than 'by way of demand'? Apart from that I do not really see why Longfield's statement that the effect utility has in determining price is not easily calculated ensures confidence that he did not intend to connect intensity of demand with a measure of utility. To my mind the essential point about Longfield's treatment of intensity of demand is that he relates it not merely to market demand but to the demand of the individual consumer.[40]

It seems to me that Professor Bowley's reading of this passage is much more careful and therefore much closer to the truth than that of Professor Moss:

Longfield's exposition of diminishing degrees of intensity of demand provides an explanation of the downward slope of an individual's demand curve, as well as of the market demand curve. It has already been noticed that his degrees of intensity of demand coincide with Dupuit's 'maximum sacrifice' used by him as the measure of utility and the reflection of diminishing marginal utility. Longfield did not take the final step of showing the relation of the concept of intensity of demand to the concept of utility, although he had said that demand 'was to be entirely attributed' to utility. It seems to me then that Longfield introduced the degrees of intensity of demand as a way round the difficulty of discovering the effect of utility on price because although he, like so many others, observed the phenomenon of diminishing utility, he was unable to draw conclusions from it in a way which demonstrated the precise influence of utility on exchange value.[41]

If the matter is seen in this way, Longfield's failure to take the final step explicitly does not seem to me adequate ground for denying that he was a precursor of the marginal utility approach. And the grounds for claiming him as such seem to be strengthened by Moss's own statement that 'Longfield came closer than any of his contemporaries to stating what is now commonly referred to as the "first-order condition" in the theory of consumer choice—that a consumer will vary his purchases of several commodities in such a way that the proportions between their respective marginal utilities and prices will all be equal to one another'.[42] Taking all the evidence into consideration then, it seems to me that even if Longfield did not state the law of diminishing marginal utility explicitly and precisely, it is still reasonable to classify him as a 'utility' or 'subjective value' theorist, and that to treat his theory as no more than a supply and demand one is to give it an unduly narrow interpretation.

V

Finally, we come to consider the view that the Irish dissenters, in line with their English counterparts, were harmony theorists and defenders of the status quo whose opposition to Ricardian distribution theory was partly, if not mainly, founded in a desire to play down those conflicts between classes which it so starkly highlighted. Now one would scarcely expect the early occupants of the Whately Chair to have been radicals, appointed as they were by an Archbishop of the then established Church of Ireland to lecture on political economy in a college whose students were mainly drawn from the ascendancy class and whose revenues derived from extensive landholdings. Nor indeed were they, although Mr Antoin Murphy elsewhere in this volume (pp. 13-24)[43] has drawn together interesting evidence of the proceedings of the Board at the time of the first elections to the Chair which indicates that Longfield was looked at askance by some of the Senior Fellows because of his supposed radical opinions. On the other hand his successor Isaac Butt at the time of his election in 1836 was well known for his high Tory views, views far removed from those he was later to express as leader of the Irish Home Rule party.[44]

Viewed objectively against the background of these facts, the Irish dissenters appear neither as radicals nor as defenders of the status quo but rather as concerned reformers. On some aspects of social and economic policy, notably that of trades unions and combinations, their position was undoubtedly a conservative one.

'Let the labourer be taught to know', declared Longfield, 'and the proof is simple and easy to be understood by all, that the wages of his labour cannot be determined by the wishes of his employer, that they are even as independent of the decrees of the legislature as they are of his own will, and that they are ultimately entirely dependent upon the prudence or improvidence, the industry or idleness, of the labouring classes themselves.'[45]

Professor Hollander has recently suggested that these comments may have been intended as a reply to the radical socialism of Thomas Hodgskin; 'the tone of Longfield's remarks here and his general emphasis upon the rule of law and the limited potential of union activity suggest that he may have been familiar with Hodgskin's writings.'[46] That is possible, but it seems to me much more likely that Longfield's remarks were directed against the Dublin trades unions whose notoriously violent tendencies at that period had earned the condemnation of Daniel O'Connell among others.

It is also Professor Hollander's contention that Longfield provides an instance of one of the dissenters using Ricardian doctrine to counter radical arguments rather than rejecting them because of their radical implications—a neat reversal of the reading of the historical record given by such commentators as Sraffa and Dobb.[47] Again, the significance to be attached to this depends on one's view of the importance of the traces of Ricardian doctrine to be found in Longfield's writings. To my mind it was Longfield's departures from Ricardo's theory of distribution—his reversal of the place of profits and wages in the sharing of the total product and his productivity analysis of their determination—which enabled him to

take an optimistic view of the progress of capitalist society and the prospects for labour within it.

However the significant point in this context is not the degree of importance to be attached to the Ricardian elements in Longfield's economic theory. Rather it is the undoubted fact that Longfield gave clear and frequent indication that he was no uncritical defender of the existing order. As Professor Hollander has rightly noted, 'the matter of "undesirable" distribution was placed squarely within the domain of the economist' by Longfield.[48] The position which he took on this question is a specially interesting one. On the one hand in his *Four lectures on Poor Laws*[49] he supported the stern principle, developed by Nassau Senior, of giving aid to the able-bodied only on a basis of 'less eligibility'. On the other he asserted that '*every individual is entitled to the means of support from that society which is determined to compel him to obey its laws*'.[50]

The basis for this assertion was that 'society is nothing but a combination of individuals for the common good. Can they with justice (I speak not of compassion now) say, we have divided the land and property of the country among us in a manner that we have found by experience is well calculated to promote our interests, but you have got no share in this distribution, and we do not want your labour, therefore you must starve.' The able-bodied therefore might as of right demand and receive subsistence from the society which demanded their allegiance—but nothing more.

It was always Longfield's view that others less fortunate—'the blind, the insane, the crippled poor' and the aged—in whose case the granting of assistance could involve no risk of encouraging idleness and improvidence should be generously aided by the state. Even in 1834 he was prepared to advocate 'a small pension as a superannuation allowance, to every labourer of sixty years of age'[51] and when in 1872 he came to consider 'The limits of state interference with the distribution of wealth' he 'set out a programme of redistribution of wealth and social investment which anticipates most features of the modern welfare state'.[52]

In this remarkable paper there are interesting anticipations of Keynes in references to 'the average strength of the disposition to accumulate' which Longfield argued to be 'greater than is necessary, and can bear reduction without loss to the public'.[53] Similarly his 1834 discussion of the right to subsistence finds echoes today in current discussions of the 'right to food' which often make reference to Rawls's *Theory of justice*.[54] One criticism which can be made of Longfield, particularly in relation to his 1834 *Four lectures on the Poor*

Laws is that he did assume that the able-bodied would normally find no difficulty in obtaining employment through the workings of the labour market—an assumption which was scarcely borne out by the facts in Ireland at that time. It was left to the young Tory barrister who succeeded him, Isaac Butt, to point this out and draw attention to the limitations of an economic theory based on full employment assumptions.

'It appears to me,' he wrote in an unobtrusive footnote, 'that in all the arguments which attempt to prove, as a general proposition, the injury of protective duties, it is assumed that the industry of a country must always be fully employed'.[55] Recognising the restricted validity of this assumption, particularly in pre-famime Ireland, he was prepared to swim against the full tide of orthodox economic opinion and state the case for protection to home industry as a means of increasing employment. The argument by which Butt supported his case is still worth hearing almost a century and a half later:

> Enough for us now to state the general principle, that if there be in our own land a state of society in which men are willing to work, and cannot find the opportunity of exchanging their labour for bread, and if the community in which this occurs have resources enough at its command, by the best and most carefully contrived combination of all its skill and power to find bread for all its people, there ought to be an effort made to bring about that result. To this end, if it can be obtained, there is no taxation that might be necessary to accomplish it that ought not cheerfully to be borne—there is no sacrifice from those who own the revenue of the country, too great to demand. In the progress of society, the masses of the people ought surely to have their share... These principles and these reasonings may fall strange upon the ear of some present. Be assured, the time is coming when they shall not be so.[56]

Such are some of the writings of the Irish dissenters on the economic situation in their time. They are not, in my judgement, the words of Ricardians but assuredly they are equally not the words of harmony theorists, Pollyannas, or the running dogs of the capitalist class.

VI

The development of economic thought in the nineteenth century was a complex process with many facets—about which we have learned much as a result of the scholarly studies carried out during

the last forty years. Inevitably attempts must be made to elucidate the complexity by imposing patterns on it. One such is the 'dual development' thesis, promoted mostly by economists of the Cambridge school since Sraffa, another what may be called the 'general equilibrium' approach of which Hollander is the leading exponent.

According to the first the Irish economists who held the Whately Chair in its early days are to be seen as part of the reaction against Ricardo, forerunners of neoclassical or marginalist economics indeed but tarnished by all the unhappy features which the term 'neoclassical' implies in modern Cambridge thinking. According to the second they become not part of the reaction against Ricardo but of a resilient Ricardian tradition involved in 'the sharing of a common heritage or "central core", which amounts largely to allocation theory and the mechanisms of demand-supply analysis'.[57]

With what may well be regarded as typical Irish stubbornness I have chosen to dissent from both these interpretations; but I hope that I may be judged to have given adequate reasons for my continuing belief that the early Whately professors can be correctly seen as constituting something like a school of their own which had its own original thread to weave into the pattern of nineteenth century economic thought, as regards both theory and policy.

Notes

1. These views are perhaps to be found most clearly and forcefully stated in Edwin Cannan, *A history of theories of production and distribution in English political economy from 1776 to 1848* (London, 1893) and *A review of economic theory* (London, 1929). But cf. also F. H. Knight, 'The Ricardian theory of production and distribution' in *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, i, (1935), pp 3-25 and 171-96.
2. E.R.A. Seligman, 'On some neglected British economists, I and II' in *Economic Journal*, XIII (1903), pp 335-63 and 511-35.
3. Marian Bowley, *Nassau Senior and classical economics* (London, 1937), p. 67.
4. ibid., p. 109.
5. R.D. Collison Black, 'Trinity College, Dublin, and the theory of value, 1832-1863' in *Economica*, N.S., xii (August 1945), pp 140-8.
6. J.A. Schumpeter, *History of economic analysis* (London, 1954), Part III, ch.4.
7. Mark Blaug, *Economic theory in retrospect* (3rd ed., London, 1978), p. vii.
8. G.A. Caravale and D.A. Tosato, *Ricardo and the theory of value, distribution and growth* (London, 1980), p. 4.
9. Piero Sraffa, Introduction to Vol i of *Works and correspondence of David Ricardo* (10 vols, Cambridge, 1951-73), pp xiviii-ix.
10. M.H. Dobb, *Theories of value and distribution since Adam Smith* (Cambridge, 1973), p. 112.
11. ibid., p. 115.

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12. Samuel Hollander, 'On the substantive identity of the Ricardian and neo-classical conceptions of economic organization: the French connection in British classicism' in *Canadian Journal of Economics*, xv, no. 4 (November 1982), pp 586-612 (pp 590-91).
13. Nevertheless I may be allowed to comment that I do not find either wholly convincing. I would agree with the recently expressed view of Dr T. Peach—'Ricardo's words and intentions have all too often been strained and distorted so that he might be bracketed with "Neoclassical" economists, "Marxist" economists or "Sraffian" economists.'—Terry Peach, *A re-interpretation of David Ricardo's writings on value and distribution* (Unpublished thesis for the degree of D. Phil, University of Oxford, Trinity Term, 1982), p. 241.
14. Dobb, *Theories of value and distribution*, pp 107 et seq.
15. ibid., p. 108.
16. R.L. Meek, *Studies in the labour theory of value* (London, 1956), pp 124-5.
17. Samuel Hollander, *The economics of David Ricardo* (London, 1979), p. 671 (hereafter cited as *E.D.R.*).
18. ibid., p. 277.
19. L.S. Moss, *Mountifort Longfield, Ireland's first professor of political economy* (Ottawa, Illinois, 1976), pp 33 et seq.
20. ibid., p. 97.
21. Samuel Hollander, 'The reception of Richardian economics' in *Oxford Economic Papers*, xxix, no. 2 (July 1977), pp 222-57 (pp 232-3).
22. Mountifort Longfield, *Lectures on political economy, delivered in Trinity and Michaelmas Terms, 1833* (Dublin, 1834), p. 209 (hereafter cited as *L.P.E.*).
23. Hollander, *E.D.R.*, p.7.
24. Hollander, 'Reception of Ricardian economics' in *O.E.P.*, xxix (1977), p. 224.
25. Cf. Samuel Hollander, 'Review of Moss, *Mountifort Longfield*' in *Canadian Journal of Economics*, xi (1978), pp 378-80 (379). In a review of Hollander's *E.D.R.*, Moss has argued that the 'consensus view' of Ricardian theory is that which 'insists that the truly unique or novel element in Ricardo's theorizing was his "agricultural theory of profit" ' (L.S. Moss, 'Professor Hollander and Ricardian economics', *Eastern Economic Journal*, 5, (Dec. 1979) p. 503). Cf. also Hollander, 'Professor Hollander and Ricardian economics: a reply to Professor Moss', *Eastern Economic Journal*, 8 (July 1982), pp 237-41 and Moss, 'Reply to Hollander', *ibid*, pp 243-5.
26. Moss, *Mountifort Longfield*, p. 97.
27. Hollander, 'Reception of Ricardian economics' pp 234-5; Lionel Robbins, *Robert Torrens and the evolution of classical economics* (London, 1958), pp 55-7. Professor Hollander has rightly stressed the influence of Longfield on Torrens, which was not noted in my Introduction to the 1971 reprint of Longfield's economic writings (see below, note 31). On this point see also Moss, 'Professor Hollander and Ricardian economics', *Eastern Economic Journal* 5 (Dec. 1979), p. 505.
28. Longfield, *L.P.E.*, pp 171, 179.
29. ibid., p. 183.
30. Ricardo, *Works and correspondence* (ed. P. Sraffa), i, 126.
31. R.D. Collison Black (ed.) *The economic writings of Mountifort Longfield* (with introduction and bibliography, New York, 1971), p. 16.
32. Hollander, 'Reception of Ricardian economics', p. 235.
33. Peach, *A re-interpretation of David Ricardo's writings. . .*, p. 235.
34. Hollander, 'The French connection in British classicism' in *C.J.E.* xv no. 4 (November 1982), p. 590.
35. Moss, *Mountifort Longfield. . .*, p. 30.

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36. S.C. Rankin, 'Supply and demand in Ricardian price theory: a re-interpretation' in *Oxford Economic Papers*, xxxii, no. 2 (July 1980), pp 241-62 (p. 244).
37. Rankin, op. cit., pp 244-54 and Hollander, *E.D.R.*, pp 273-80. On this point cf. also G.J. Stigler's review of Hollander, *E.D.R.* in *Journal of Economic Literature*, xix (March 1981), p. 101.
38. Moss, op. cit., pp. 34, 38.
39. ibid., p. 40.
40. Longfield, *L.P.E.*, p. 115.
41. Marian Bowley, *Studies in the history of economic theory before 1870* (London 1973), pp 152-3.
42. Moss, *Mountifort Longfield*, p. 41.
43. Antoin Murphy, 'Mountifort Longfield's appointment to the chair of political economy in Trinity College, Dublin, 1832', in this volume, pp. 13-24.
44. Cf. Terence De Vere White, *The road of excess* (Dublin 1945).
45. Longfield, *L.P.E.*, p. 19.
46. Samuel Hollander, 'The post-Ricardian dissension: a case study in economics and ideology' in *Oxford Economic Papers*, xxxii, no. 3 (September 1980), pp 370-410 (p. 395).
47. ibid., p. 403.
48. ibid., p. 405.
49. Mountifort Longfield, *Four lectures on Poor Laws*, delivered in Trinity Term, 1834 (Dublin, 1834).
50. ibid., p. 19. Italics in original.
51. ibid., p. 33.
52. Black, *Economic writings of Mountifort Longfield*, p. 25.
53. Mountifort Longfield, 'The limits of state interference with the distribution of wealth, in applying taxation to the assistance of the public' in *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, part xiii (1872), pp 105-114. (Reprinted in Black, *Economic Writings of Mountifort Longfield*).
54. N.J. Faramelli, *World hunger, ethics and the right to eat* (Rome, 1982) pp 7, 8, 13. I am indebted to my son, Mr T.R.W. Black, for drawing my attention to this and other references on the *right to food*.
55. Isaac Butt, *Protection to home industry. Some cases of its advantages considered. The substance of two lectures delivered before the University of Dublin, in Michaelmas term, 1840* (Dublin, 1846), p. 133.
56. ibid., p. 63.
57. Hollander, *E.D.R.*, pp 683-4.