

# **The Ninth Countess Markievicz Memorial Lecture**

**Strategies of State Mobilization in  
Irish Industrial Relations**

**Michel Peillon, D.Soc.**

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The Countess Markievicz Memorial Lecture has been established by the Irish Association for Industrial Relations with the support of the Department of Labour. Countess Markievicz was appointed Minister for Labour in the Executive of the first Dáil Eireann in 1919. The object of the Memorial Lecture is to provide an occasion for a substantive contribution to discussion in the Industrial Relations area by a distinguished practitioner or academic.

The Ninth Lecture was given by Dr. Michel Peillon on November 5th, 1984, at the Royal College of Surgeons, Dublin. Dr. Peillon is of French origin and received a Doctorate in Sociology from the Sorbonne University, Paris. He came to Ireland in 1972 to take up a Lecturership in Sociology at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, a position he still holds. His book *"Contemporary Irish Society"* has been widely recognized as an original and stimulating contribution to sociology in Ireland. His field of special study is the interaction between the State and the society in which it operates. In the lecture he focuses on this interaction in the area of Industrial Relations.

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# Strategies of State Mobilization in Irish Industrial Relations

MICHEL PEILLON, D. SOC.

IT IS A GREAT HONOUR to be addressing you for the Ninth Countess Markievicz Memorial Lecture. The topic of my address tonight is mobilization and counter mobilization, a fitting subject, I think, to commemorate a leading and socially minded figure of the movement of independence. She indefatigably sought to attract and harness popular energies to the movement that she animated, to organize their participation in it. This is broadly what is meant by mobilization. Mobilization refers to organizing people for a special collective effort. The major goal of the Irish State is without doubt industrial development through private enterprise. Its main task becomes in that way to create in people a willingness to work and live in the conditions created by industry, to adopt even partly this goal of industrial development, to go along with the State policy. The mobilization of a group of people by the State indicates their active participation in a collective effort, but participation according to the State's requirements, according to the goals that it seeks to realize.

I address you tonight not as a specialist in industrial relations — which I am not — but as a sociologist. Sociology deals mainly with industrial societies and the relations between the major industrial groups are directly relevant to the sociologist. It is in that context of the relations between industrial groups that I will place my comments on Irish "industrial relations."

I would like first to reflect on the involvement of the State in Irish industrial relations. The whole system of industrial relations in the Republic of Ireland is conventionally defined as 'voluntarist.' By voluntarism seems to be meant the agreed character of the bargaining procedures. The level of pay, for instance, is negotiated between employers and employees, and no statutory income policy has ever been imposed. Industrial conflicts themselves are regulated by agreed procedures of conciliation and arbitration. The State provides a loose legal backing and it facilitates negotiations and arbitrations. But the negotiating groups bargain according to their agreed rules. They may or may not resort to official arbitration and in any case do not have to heed governmental wishes. Voluntarism signifies an absence of compulsion, an avoidance of statutory policy and a determination to keep the rules of law to a minimum.

The label of voluntarism does not imply, however, the absence of the State in the industrial scene. It indicates that the autonomy of action of the unions and of the employers is not suppressed by the presence of the State. The State participates fully in the bargaining process, as a negotiator itself more than as a mediator. Although most national agreements, during the long period during which they ran, were bi-partite agreements, the State was all the time looming very large in the background. It was not simply involved as a major employer, but as the dominant party. The particular weight of the State was explicitly recognized in the 1977 National Understanding. The agreement between unions and employers was then linked to a commitment of the government about levels of taxation, job-creation policy, social welfare benefits, health services, etc . . . There is no escaping the fact that the State participates directly in industrial relations, even if its presence is not manifested through tight legal regulations or a statutory policy. Only with this qualification can we agree with the assertion of the 'voluntary' character of industrial relations in the Republic of Ireland.

At the turn of the century, the German sociologist Georg Simmel put forward a simple but original idea: that a relationship involving two people is in nature different from a relationship involving three people. One can illustrate this idea with the case of a couple who, as such, are involved in a close and direct relationship. Then the couple have a baby, and the nature of their relationship is radically transformed by the presence of the newcomer, of a third party. This idea can be usefully applied to Irish industrial relations. I do not mean to say that the employers, the unions and the State form a happy family. No, I suggest that the very presence of the State deeply transforms the relationship between employers and employees.

In the first part of the lecture, I intend to clarify in what ways is the State present in society, how it is so to speak inserted into society. I will naturally concentrate my attention on those aspects which have direct implications for industrial relations. Then, in the second part, I develop the view that the activity of the State in the field of industrial relations is best understood as a strategy of mobilization. I contend that the State endeavours to mobilize the groups involved in industrial activity.

### **The State in Society: Its Implications for Industrial Relations**

Three aspects of the relations between State and society are most relevant for industrial relations. The first aspect refers to the question of what exactly is the State doing in society. It depends, of

course. All States fulfil basic functions (such as territorial defense and maintenance of public order). But they do more than that. Nowadays, the State has become in all societies a major force, it has become involved in many aspects of social life. The extension of State activity in advanced capitalist societies has been quite phenomenal and is widely acknowledged.

**(a) The Scope of State Intervention**

This extension has most obviously taken place in economic activity. The key role that the Irish State is playing in that respect is largely recognized, but the relevant figures do not fail to make impressive reading.

- First, the total amount of resources at the disposal of the State has steadily grown, and in 1981 (the latest figure I could obtain), the figure of State total expenditure was as high as 61% of the Gross National Product\*. Nearly two-thirds of the national wealth passes through the hands of the State. This gives an idea of the material basis from which the State operates, of the mass of resources that it manipulates.
- Secondly, the consuming power of the State constitutes nearly a quarter of the GNP. In other words, a great deal of the spending power in the Republic (of the demand for commodities) belongs to the State. And what it buys has naturally serious consequences for various sectors of the economy.
- Furthermore, the State also contributes to over a quarter (25.87% in 1981) of the total physical capital formation. It becomes in that way the largest investor in Ireland.
- Finally, the State employs with the civil servants, a whole range of public services and the semi-state bodies, about 20% of the labour force in the Republic.

All these figures point to the central and strategic position of the State in economic activity. There, it can play on all the major economic variables. It has become the major consumer, the major investor, the major employer. And no doubt, it can bring all these powers to bear on industrial relations. The State may well present itself as a negotiator like the others, as an 'industrial partner,' but it

\* National Economic and Social Council: *Economic and Social Policy*, Dublin Stationery Office, 1982, page 94.

Central Statistics Office: *National Income and Expenditure*, Dublin Stationery Office, 1983, page 89.

represents a very special kind of partner. It has access to resources unavailable to others, it can rely on a greater range of strategies. It possesses in that sense a greater capacity to determine the outcome of collective bargaining. For industrial relations take place within a context of economic policy, and they cannot be separated from it. Would anybody seriously contend, for instance, that the employment situation in Ireland has no direct implication for industrial conflict? Unions' demands, the very mood of the labour-force, the whole thrust of their collective action are largely determined by the economic climate. The State has, more than any other force, the capacity to make or unmake an economic climate, to shape the economic situation.

The economist Kenneth Galbraith has made a name for himself by showing the demise of the market in the American economy. This idea applies even more forcefully to Ireland: the economic strength of the State suggests that market mechanisms hardly contribute to explaining economic activity in Ireland. Not that the market has disappeared, not even that it has been pushed to the side. But it is thoroughly manipulated by the State. A manipulated market is hardly a market any more. The capacity of the State to manipulate the market is not without consequences for industrial relations. In exercising its influence, the State can rely on different strategies. It decides on the size of the aggregate demand, it can limit inflation or contribute to inflation; the investment decisions that it makes partly determine the overall level of economic activity.

Beyond its economic intervention, the State reaches deep into social life. The State has now, for instance, the task of alleviating the failures of the economic market. It has to cater for the very basic needs of the people. It must protect them from unemployment, accident, illness, old age: it must ensure minimum standards for **all**. And the social intervention of the State is costly:

- Public expenditure on social services in general (health, housing and education) and expenditure on welfare, on social security amount to not far from one third of the GNP (31.44% in 1980).\*
- The social welfare expenditures on their own cost around 12% of the GNP.

Obtaining all such State services has been a hard battle. Each service has been won by struggle, pressure and tough bargaining.

\* Central Statistics Office: *National Income and Expenditure*, Dublin Stationery Office, 1983.

The provision of public services is still very much part of a game of pressure and conflicts: the quality of health services, the extent of school provisions, the levels of welfare allowances, etc . . . represent the stake of a continuous battle. The demands associated with such services rate high in the preoccupations and in the requests of the unions, and such demands are also subjected to direct negotiations and trade offs. The extent to which they are satisfied increases or decreases discontent. Even if implicitly, the social involvement of the State represents a central element of Irish industrial relations.

**(b) The State as Consumer of Ideology**

The State is present in economic activity; it is also concerned about social consequences. But this is not all. The State has to justify its activity, to ensure compliance to its commands. It has to convince people, and a great number of them, of the lightness of its decisions, of the wisdom of its policies. It has to promote allegiance to its leadership. I have contended elsewhere that the Irish State is more a consumer than a producer of ideology. It has for a long time relied on two pillars of legitimacy, that of the Catholic Church and that of the Gaelic and nationalist movement. Nowadays, the major challenges faced by Ireland originate in the process of industrialization. Another system of justification is needed: and it would have to include the promise of continuous growth and the anticipation of greater affluence.

Today, the State does not obtain the ideological support that it requires. The "materialism" of capitalist Ireland is regularly denounced by the Catholic Church. There is even evidence of a withdrawal of legitimation to the State from elements of the lower clergy in large urban areas. The State has to look elsewhere for producing legitimation. It tends to have recourse to academic 'experts' (wise men or otherwise). The inflated voice which is given in the media to their pronouncements indicates a sustained attempt at producing and diffusing an 'ideology of economic development.'

There is more to industrial relations and collective bargaining than a show of force. Demands have ultimately to be justified, justice has to be invoked. At the core of industrial relations, one finds implicitly at work different views of what is equitable. Collective bargaining is also an ideological battle. The State is, directly or indirectly, the key to the distribution of wealth. The overall result has a lot to do with industrial muscle, with the bargaining power of occupational groups. But not only, for the exercise of power itself takes place within a culture and within a



system of norms. The justification, or the lack of it, for the sharing of the cake is being discussed all the time: who gets unfair advantages and who is being penalized. The discussion is of course distorted, but it aims nevertheless at justifying, at convincing, at presenting the case for particular demands. Any social group that would successfully propose norms of equity and a philosophy of development would control the ideological field and consolidate its position in collective bargaining. In the meantime, the State is not able to produce its own ideology of industrial development and none is really available. We will see that this lack of accepted norms of equity is of consequence for collective bargaining in Ireland.

### (c) **Management Style of the State**

A second aspect of the relations between State and society is the management style of the State. The State manages society: it organizes it, it copes with what is going on, it tries to overcome tensions and conflicts, it endeavours to ensure its adequate functioning. In an industrial society, the style of State management is manifested mainly in the way the State relates to employers and to the labour force. How does the Irish State handle the relations between employers and unions? What is its style of management?

The style of State management can be adequately described through two characteristics. The first refers to the role of the law in industrial relations, and we have seen that the legal regulation of industrial relations in Ireland is kept to a minimum. The second aspect points to the way the State relates to the major groups and organizes its relationships to them. The Irish State has to a large extent organized the participation of unions and employers in state agencies. Unions and employers are represented on many departmental commissions and are consulted on many decisions. The bargaining process more and more takes place not between the State **and** the major organized forces, but **within** the State itself.

I do not **think it is** appropriate to characterize the Irish scene as corporatist. The incorporation of representative interests has certainly taken place in Ireland. The co-operation, within the State itself, between government, trade-union leadership **and the representative voice of industrialists is usually deemed successful. However, this incorporation is voluntary. Corporatism, on the contrary, has historically constituted a way of curbing the autonomy of interest groups, particularly of unions. There is also in corporatism a definite hierarchy of participation which does not exist here. In Ireland, trade unions have agreed to the form of their participation — and their choice has been bargaining within the State institution.**

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Irish industrial relations are best defined as 'corporate bargaining,' in that collective bargaining takes place between quasi-corporate bodies. Such a label emphasizes the bargaining rather than the corporatist aspect. This way of managing the conflictual relationships between employers and organized labour offers the flexibility of a genuine bargaining process and the stability of an institutional framework.

Another aspect is relevant for analyzing the management style of the State. The overall strategy of the State consists in retaining a power of manipulation, while exercising little control or responsibility. It achieves that, apparently, by delegating its control to diverse agencies, while retaining strategic resources. Such a method is very much in evidence in its manipulation of the market. But it was also in the past relied upon for the formulation and the implementation of social policy. The educational function is also left to the schools (that is to say in great part to the Churches) while the State provides the finance; it can exercise an effectual influence without having to control the educational system. This idea may even be applied to industrial development as a whole. It could be contended, originally at least, that the Irish modern capitalist class has been to a large extent created by the State, as the instrument through which the State sought to realize its own goals. In all these cases, the State succeeds in retaining and in enhancing its manipulative power while avoiding developing a formalized control. This style of management adequately accounts for the role of the Irish State in industrial relations: an avoidance of formal control and a reliance on manipulation (all characteristics of what has been referred to as the voluntarist character of industrial relations).

#### **(d) The Social Basis of the State**

Another important aspect of the relations between State and society concerns the social basis of the State. The social basis signifies that the State is not without body, that it finds its place within society and rests on particular social forces. Without a basis, the State would hang in mid-air. However, the notion of social basis is complex and a few distinctions are in order.

First, the social basis may indicate the existence of a *pivot* in society, of a group or a coalition of groups on which the State relies. The State and this pivotal group are in a close association and they defend a similar orientation. I have tried to show, elsewhere, that the capitalist class constitutes the pivot of the Irish State. What I have called the project of the State and that of the bourgeoisie greatly overlap. It must be pointed out that such overlap does not

necessarily transform the State into an instrument of the pivotal social groups. The State has to take into consideration a broad range of demands and issues, and its frame of reference is necessarily broader than its pivot. A group becomes a pivot (such as the bourgeoisie in Ireland) mainly because of its strategic position. Its needs and requirements are taken into consideration and satisfied because they also contribute to the realization of whatever goals the State tries to achieve.

The reliance on a pivot would not be sufficient to secure the stability of the State. The State has also to get *support* for its policy from groups which do not enjoy a particularly close relationship to it or may not even profit from its policies. The social support of the State points to groups that rally around it and may even stand up for it: but they do not really have any leverage on it, they do not strongly determine State policy. A supportive group could get a particularly raw deal from the State and ceases to support it. For this reason, the support of the State is potentially unstable. In Ireland this support has proved in fact to be quite stable. The supportive groups in Ireland (farming, small business, professional and administrative classes) have not withdrawn their support, despite the occasional suppression of material interests that State policies may impose on them.

Finally, the State must be able to mobilize the large mass of the population. People show their willingness to work, they comply to the demands of the State, they accept living in particular conditions. They go along with the State and with its policies. The capacity of mobilization indicates not only that the State manages to stimulate the participation of such groups, but also that it ensures their participation on its own terms. In that sense, the mobilized groups become ingredients of State policy, resources that the State can use for its own purposes. The failure to mobilize those large groups would result in the State having to face passive or active resistance. Such a failure would of course make difficult the realization of its goals.

The implications of the social basis of the State for industrial relations in Ireland are of some consequence. For it is clear, if what I have just said possesses any validity, that the State does not relate to the business class and to the working classes in a similar way. The State enters' the arena of industrial relations with a different relationship to the major protagonists: one represents its pivot while the other one is to be mobilized.

## Strategies of Mobilization

The impact of the State on industrial relations can be looked at, as we have just seen, from different angles. However, the purpose of the State in industrial relations remains fairly unified. I would like now to develop the view that the State is engaged there in a strategy of mobilization.

It is of course all too easy to exaggerate the unity and the coherence of the State. The State is after all composed of different institutions which are not necessarily well coordinated and may act at cross purposes. At the same time, its activity is not so incoherent that it becomes impossible to recognize an overall direction. The structure of authority in the State creates some basic unity. Although there is no agreement on this aspect, I would contend that the State possesses a fairly clear idea of its goals, that its activity rests on a few principles. Whatever incoherences exist are more likely to emerge in relation to tactics and strategies used by different State agencies. If, as I suggest, the State possesses its own particular goals, it also needs to mobilize all the resources necessary to achieve such goals. And a great deal of what the State is doing can be explained as part of a strategy of mobilization. I will be concerned here with the mobilization of the labour-force, on the long term more problematic than the mobilization of capital.

A central difference between traditional and modern societies concerns the position of the labouring classes, their form of participation in society. The feudal society, for instance, did not require the participation, active or otherwise, of the mass of peasants. All that was required from them was the delivery to the lord of part of the economic surplus. Non-involvement and passivity in relation to public affairs were the normal occurrence. The industrial society, in its capitalist but also in its communist forms, cannot do without the active participation of the labour force. They have to be mobilized, economically, ideologically and politically. They have to vote, pay taxes, cooperate with the authorities. They have to improve the productivity of their labour, they may have to retrain from time to time. The economic participation of the labour-force requires a high level of activity. We need to put our civilization in perspective in order to realize that our work orientation is not natural. Only in industrial societies has work become so central to the life of individuals, has work become so extensive, so concentrated and so demanding. The industrial society has enormously increased the amount of time spent at work.

All this means that industrial development requires the willingness of the people to work — and to work hard at that — in the not too congenial conditions that are often created by industry. This goodwill is normally not forthcoming: it must be in some way produced, promoted and encouraged. Diverse processes must be set to work in order to attach the mass of the population to the State in its effort to realize its goals: and these processes aim at ensuring the active but subordinate participation of the mass of the population. The Irish State is engaged in definite strategies to that effect and I would like to comment on the major one. It is of course no coincidence that such State strategies are enacted primarily in the field of industrial relations. It is perhaps this mobilizing role of the State in industrial relations that Professor Fogarty had in mind when he declared, in the first Memorial Lecture, that . . . "industrial relations procedures are expected much more than was the case a few years ago to pass the test of contributing to productivity . . ."

(a) **Balancing Values and Rewards**

The first strategy has to do with balancing values and rewards. The social philosopher Jurgen Habermas has contended that people accept a particular state of affairs either because it corresponds to their own beliefs, or else because it provides them with rewards. The State would be engaged in a balancing act: its failure to be accepted on the basis of ideas and values is compensated for by the distribution of rewards.

In the Irish context, the process of industrialization has been initiated and promoted without any strong ideological back up. If anything, the State has had to work against ideological orientations (such as nationalism, church-based traditionalism, glorification of the rural way of life, etc . . . ) which did not encourage an industrial transformation of Irish society, or squarely opposed it. The State has had from the start to rely very heavily upon material rewards. The reliance on material rewards has lasted well into the 1970s, and long after the economy and the State were in any realistic position to deliver the goods. At the same time, this social mobilization by rewards has helped, over nearly twenty years, to overcome ideological resistance. It has provided a basis for promoting another ideological discourse: a discourse in which capitalist industrialization is seen as the only realistic road to development, in which the State is presented as the animator of industrialization and the bearer of progress.

However, the success of such an 'ideology' still depends directly on performance, on providing rewards. One hears today that even

an increase of industrial production will not contribute to a decrease in unemployment. One is daily told that an end of the recession will not lead to a general increase in standards of living. Industrial development may mean no rewards at all, and the realization of this fact is already undermining the ideology of progress. The balancing act between value and reward has never been a realistic strategy in Ireland. In the past, the tension between a traditionally oriented ideology and industrial development has meant that a reliance on values and beliefs was not available. Today, a justification of industrialization derives from the rewards it ensures. The fact that rewards are not available anymore could lead to a demobilization of the labour-force and to a loss by the State of some of its support: it may render the State unable to attract good will and to harness energies to its project of capitalist development.

### **(b) Controlling the Distribution of Rewards**

The second strategy of mobilization consists in controlling the distribution of rewards. A huge proportion of the national wealth, as we have seen, passes through the hands of the State: and the latter to a large extent controls the distribution of this wealth. This control exercised by the State over the distribution of resources is effectuated through a twin process: the State takes from different groups of people (mainly through taxation) and it gives away benefits and services. A recent study has attempted to give an idea of the arithmetics of direct transactions between the State and social groups.\* It has shown how some groups depend on the State for their survival, but also how the property classes (farmers, small business and to some extent larger business) do not lose from their relation to the State. The State, in the way it effectuates the distribution of national wealth, strengthens the already strong position of the property classes. In fact, the non-property middle-class mainly and even the higher levels of the working-class are paying for the welfare-state.

These findings, at the time of their publication, have been received with surprise, and this gives an indication of the extent to which the ideology of the welfare state has been accepted uncritically. Such an ideology can be summarized in two statements, namely

— that society, through the State, looks after those who, for many reasons, cannot look after themselves;

\* D. B. Rottman, D. H. Hannan, N. Hardiman, M. M. Wiley: *The distribution of income in the Republic of Ireland, a study in social class and family-cycle inequalities*, Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute, 1982.

— that such support is paid for by everybody, on a progressive basis (the wealthier, the higher the rate of contribution).

The progressive character of taxation is in fact operating within a fairly small and not particularly wealthy group of people. Redistribution occurs mainly within the wage-earning and salaried classes.

The Irish reality does not correspond to the idea of the welfare state; it represents only an approximation of it. But that seems sufficient to attach the labour force to the present organization and functioning of Irish society. It provides a sense of security (indeed, it provides some security); it makes a capitalist society more bearable and consequently that more acceptable. But even an inadequate welfare state is costly, and the State is presently trying to provide the least level of service while obtaining a maximum level of resources through taxation. The mobilizing power of such a strategy of control is rather limited. It remains an open question how far can the State scale down its provision of benefits and services, (how far it can cut health services, the building of houses, food subsidies, etc . . . ) without seriously threatening an acceptance of the established order. Popular tolerance to that kind of policy seems to be, quite naturally, pretty low.

### **(c) Strategy of Mediation**

The function of mediation that the State often undertakes may also become a strategy of mobilization. The very presence of the State reduces the possibility of head-on confrontations between unions and employers, simply because the State constitutes a third party. This remains true even if the State is not neutral and represents the most powerful agent in the relationship. In fact, nothing stops the State from using this function of mediation as a way of mobilizing support for itself and for the realization of its own goals. The mediating power of the State does not necessarily indicate that the State becomes an arbiter in such conflicts or that it stands above them. It does not suggest that the State is interested in achieving balanced compromises: it simply means that the relationship between industrial groups ceases to be direct and immediate. Something comes between them, transforms the nature of their relationship and alters its outcome.

The State in the Republic provides an institutional back up to industrial relations. The emphasis has been all along to encourage and facilitate conciliation. In that sense, the State is seen to be involved and associated with the reaching of compromise. It also provides a way of passing independent judgements on the rights or the wrongs of particular claims. The State comes to share the aura



of mediator, of conciliator, of arbiter. In the context of particular conflicts or in relation to national agreements, the State has also urged the different groups to listen to reason, it has pressed them to adopt greater flexibility and more compromising attitudes. On all such occasions, the State adopts a posture of being the neutral and reasonable voice, as well as the watchdog of the general interest. However, the State is rarely interested in compromise for the sake of compromise. The kind of compromise that it favours, the kind of mediation that it effectuates belong to the strategy, already mentioned, of distribution of resources. 'How much to give in' represents in that sense a political as much as an economic decision. Compromises of this kind have to take into consideration their potential political impact. But the possibility for the State of monitoring industrial relations in a conciliatory way is limited by many constraints. It is difficult for it to appear as the mediator when, for instance, it makes repeated pronouncements about the necessity of keeping wages down or when it seeks a freeze on pay rises.

It seems that in the recent past, the Irish State has not been able to rely on mediation as a mechanism of mobilization, as a way of attaching the labour force to its policy of industrialization. It has been more concerned with hindering unions and employers from reaching agreements that it considers damaging. It has ceased to be seen as a mediator, it has acquired the image of the harder party in collective bargaining. This reflects a narrowing of its strategic options.

#### **(d) Strategy of Market Manipulation**

Another strategy of mobilization is based on the manipulation of the market. The State possesses the capacity to manipulate the market and to play on the major economic variables — although the extent to which it can do so for mobilizing purposes will vary from one period to another. But the possibility remains. I have already suggested that the market mechanism may not represent the organizing principle of the economy in Ireland. I would now suggest that market mechanisms have become agents of mobilization on behalf of the State.

The capacity of the State to use market mechanisms or simply to manipulate the market (by managing the economy and by playing on the major economic variables) in order to mobilize the labour-force is nowadays limited. Many options are closed. Some would contend that the present inability of the State to use this strategy of market manipulation for mobilizing purposes derives directly from an over-reliance on it during the seventies. Market

manipulation had then become a way of upholding the flagging attachment of the working class to the policy of industrialization. It is interesting to note that the inability of the State to play on a strategy of market manipulation for mobilizing purposes is associated with its withdrawal from centralized collective bargaining.

All the strategies that I have mentioned (and they are not exclusive) are directly relevant to collective bargaining. They are part of industrial relations in a broad sense, they are used and enacted primarily in this context. The alternative reliance on rewards and values gives the general mood of the relations between industrial groups. It will make industrial relations appear as a narrow battle of interests or else will give priority to an appeal to norms and principles. The capacity of the State to appear as a mediator and even as an arbiter of industrial conflicts determines the available procedures and the spirit in which they are being used. The distribution of the national wealth and the management of the economy (e.g. the manipulation of the market) constitutes the very matter of collective bargaining, what is really at stake in the negotiations. It is quite clear that industrial relations are shaped by such strategies of mobilization. If this is true, mobilization must be seen as a major interest of the State in industrial relations, as one of its essential purposes in that field. But it is also the ground on which this kind of mobilization is resisted.

### **Failures of Mobilization**

I have attempted to show that mobilization is an essential purpose of the State presence in the field of industrial relations. I have illustrated this view in relation to the working class, but the proposition holds true in relation to the employers (although the relationship and the strategies would differ considerably). The contention is that the State engages in strategies of mobilization, not that it necessarily succeeds in mobilizing the relevant groups. At the end of the day, mobilization appears as a rather fleeting phenomenon and it depends on circumstances. Mobilization is never ensured and is always to be started anew. Furthermore, mobilization is also a matter of degree, it can be more or less successful.

How do we know that the State is successful in its efforts? How do we measure the degree of mobilization? Mobilization tends to be measured negatively, according to the degree of its failure. One may observe, for instance, an active resistance to the State orientation, that is to say a counter-mobilization. Active resistance

may be associated with a high level of strikes — although the significant index is not the frequency but the character of strikes. When the bargaining is centered on clear-cut and material demands, then strikes do not express a counter-mobilization. But when the claims are rather diffuse, not well focused, when the dispute possesses many overtones (political or otherwise), then the strike is used as a form of general protest. Counter-mobilization also takes the form of social movements or, on a smaller scale, of local campaigns of protest, civil disobedience, community action, etc ...

More simply, the labour force may cease to feel involved in what the State wants to achieve. It no longer believes in its promises. This I refer to as de-mobilization. Passive resistance is the mark of de-mobilization. Absenteeism in the workplace, but also a general lack of goodwill and cooperation with management are obvious symptoms of such phenomena. All kinds of restrictive practices are intensified; productivity improvements become difficult to introduce. Rigidities prevail in the work place. Passive resistance to the State project may also take the form of large-scale tax avoidance, of participation in all kinds of parallel economies. In all such occurrences of mobilization failures, the tendency is to leave the institutional scene of industrial relations and to enter an uncharted battleground. This, by itself, reinforces the view that explicit institutionalized bargaining has a lot to do with mobilization, and that perhaps the whole set-up was in a way created for that purpose. Hugh McNeill has last year, in the Eighth Memorial Lecture, emphasized the fact that the present recession has led to a comparative inactivity in industrial relations. I would like to add that activity has left the arena of collective bargaining and has taken another form. When de-mobilization occurs, one leaves what is conventionally referred to as the field of industrial relations.

Do all these considerations help us analyze and make sense of the Irish situation, do they throw some light on the characteristics of industrial relations in Ireland? It could be contended that the mobilization of the labour force behind the project of capitalist industrialization has been rather successful. Industrial development actually took place, standards of living rose significantly, with the promise of greater affluence to come. Labour force mobilization was high, despite harshly fought industrial conflicts. From the mid-seventies, however, the situation has changed quite radically.

Collective bargaining in Ireland often appears as a naked battle of interests over the distribution of wealth, as if views of equity were of no relevance. The apparently amoral character of Irish industrial

relations, the fact that the naked battle over rewards is so prominent reflects the weakness of an ideological framework appropriate to industrial issues. This also means that when rewards are not available anymore, the State cannot enter into balancing strategies and cannot turn towards values. Calls for self-restraint and sacrifice enjoy very little appeal in the Irish context. In a period of stringency, the State is also looking for the minimum acceptable threshold in the provision of State services and in the welfare support that it offers. Its capacity to use the distribution of resources as a mobilizing strategy is drastically limited. Its concern is more about finding the minimum acceptable level of State services, below which counter-mobilization would take place. The determination of this level represents a delicate political exercise. For similar reasons, the State possesses a low capacity for manipulating the market with a purpose of mobilization. Other concerns have taken precedence. Finally, the State appears less and less as a mediator and more and more as the tougher party in collective bargaining, impeding further its mobilizing functions.

The conclusion is quite clear. The range of possible strategies of mobilization available to the State is considerably narrowing down, at a time when it would need them most. And this narrowing of available strategies produces a mobilization failure, or at least threatens to do so. The last few years have led to a massive disenchantment about industrial development, a loss of hope and faith in the dominant path of economic development. There seems to be a great amount of demobilization, although figures about such phenomena are hard to obtain. Unwillingness to cooperate with management, over-all suspicion, work place rigidities seem to be on the increase. Ireland is also experiencing a thriving black economy, and tax avoidance has become a way of life. There are also signs of growing counter-mobilization. Part of the working-class vote, traditionally moderate in Ireland, is beginning to shift to the far Left. Industrial conflicts are more likely to take unusual forms, such as factory sit-ins (as in the Rank Mills conflict). Ireland has experienced a short-lived but large protest movement on the tax issue. Campaigns of near civil disobedience are taking place, and the local authorities find it hard to raise water charges in working-class districts. Tough community protests (about drug pushing and about itinerants) also reveal an underlying theme of protest at neglect by the authorities. They all express a growing disaffiliation.

All these happenings do not make good news for the State, although the latter has not exhausted its range of possible

strategies. For instance, little use has been made yet in Ireland of the "workers' participation" option. In many different forms, workers participation has become a major strategy of workforce mobilization in continental Europe. But the prospect of mobilization failure augurs also badly for the trade-unions. Whether they like it or not, they are a party to State mobilization, in the sense that their bargaining power is strengthened by successful State mobilization. Loss of mobilization by the State undermines the trade-union movement in two ways. First, demobilization and alternative forms of mobilization, more often than not, bypass trade-union organization. Second, the institutionalized arena of industrial relations in which the trade-unions can hope to exercise most influence, become to a large extent irrelevant with mobilization failure: the game simply ceases to be played there. When the State ceases to use industrial relations as a strategy of mobilization, the institutional set-up falls apart.

To conclude this paper, I would like to widen our horizon and put the question of labour-force mobilization into a broader perspective. One can assess a particular type of society or civilization from two different angles. One looks first at what it has achieved, if it is any better than whatever it has replaced. In that sense, industrialization has considerably transformed Irish society and few would welcome a return to the fifties. But one can also evaluate a particular society in the light of what it could have achieved, but did not succeed in achieving. For instance, do capitalist societies realize fully the potential of industrialism? I personally consider that the second question is far more significant.

Industrial society holds the promise of quasi-infinite development, it carries the hope of affluence. But it has not succeeded in creating wealth to the extent that it anticipated, and it shows no sign of doing so. For this shortcoming, one can always blame the quality of management itself; or perhaps defects in industrial organization hold back a faster and more efficient development. Although real, I do not consider such factors to be crucial. In fact, industrial societies (in the two existing forms of capitalism and communism) operate with a permanent and chronic under-mobilization of the labour-force. In other words, they cannot attach the labour-force to their project of development. They have not fully mobilized it.

Why? Industry, like many organizations, models itself on the army, with a strict and rigid division between the functions of direction and the functions of execution, with the introduction of a fairly clear hierarchy of command from management to the

work-force. The failure of mobilization derives directly from the relegation of the work-force to the role of complying to commands. It would be difficult to exaggerate how widespread are restrictive practices, to exaggerate the extent to which workers labour well below their capacities. The talent, the creative powers, the suggestions for innovations from those who are actually doing the job, all that cannot be tapped, even when forthcoming. For it is realistic to suspect that such creative talents are also used to resist management.

The existing industrial world is made of rules and commands, it leaves little room for individualities on the shopfloor. Yet the more sophisticated the industrial technology, the more complex the organization, and the greater becomes the need for relying on the initiative of individual workers. Industry would come to a halt if people actually worked according to rules and regulations. Not only can the rules not anticipate every possibility, but most problems are overcome by informal communication. Too much formalism in the workplace leads in fact to industrial paralysis and chaos. The dream of a totally organized work plant would rapidly become a nightmare. So much so that 'working to rule' has actually become a new and effective form of strike.

The type of industrial society that would overcome the strict separation between a 'managing group' and an 'executant group' is still to be invented. Many doubt if it is at all possible. But if industrial democracy in that sense was impossible, the promise of continuous development and affluence would simply become a deception, a delusion. For industrial society would then have to live, and permanently so, with a chronic under-mobilization of the labour force that it can hardly afford.