

Social Partnership and the Irish Crisis

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This paper argues that the institutional structures of accumulation in Irish society can be broadly characterised as a variant of, or local manifestation of, global neo-liberalism. This situation has been partially obscured by those areas where Ireland differs from the overall global pattern, in particular in the area of social partnership. This was manifest most clearly in the practice of negotiating extensive partnership agreements that dovetailed wage restraint, welfare levels and lowered taxation. The 'partnership' model has been held in contrast with the anti-union postures of the paradigmatic neo-liberal governments in the US and UK. While Irish social partnership contributed to the Celtic Tiger success it was itself heavily dependent for its longevity on the resources generated by the rapid expansion of the Celtic Tiger period. Ultimately, it lacked many of the institutional underpinnings of regulated arrangements in other European/Nordic countries. Paradoxically, socio-economic cooperation in Ireland rested on the foundations of permissive voluntarism. In this area, it did not depart so radically from global neo-liberal patterns. In the face of economic crisis, social partnership, successful in part in distributing the spoils of growth, proved unable to negotiate retrenchment. It is an irony that the first consequence of the crisis has been the rapid disintegration of precisely that element of the Irish social structure which served to distinguish Ireland from the overall pattern of global neo-liberalism. In the face of the crisis, the institutions of Irish industrial relations have been forcibly realigned with the market fundamentalism of the global neo-liberal era.

It would be OK to consider the paper for a theme.

I don't think refereeing the paper will be necessary unless it is competing for limited space.