



BOOK REVIEW

F. Barry, *Industry and Policy in Independent Ireland, 1922–1972*

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023). Pages xiv + 232 + 65 tables. £49.00 hardback.

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(Received 11 January 2024; accepted 11 January 2024)

Industry and Policy in Independent Ireland, 1922–1972 by Frank Barry is a fascinating book based on an analysis of Irish industry in the immediate post-independence period. Barry's work shows the development and changes present in various Irish industries, the role of the state, and the modernisation of the Irish economy from a principally agrarian focus to a globalised manufacturing focus that took Ireland into the modern world. Based on his longstanding interest in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Ireland, Barry indicates that the original rationale for the book lay in understanding early forms of FDI in Ireland and the extent of foreign ownership in Irish manufacturing concerns. This yielded an excellent book and an accompanying database that can be accessed via a web address provided in the preface. Whilst the book is mainly focused on manufacturing, there are nods to services as well as recognition that the work is not wholly comprehensive in terms of capturing all the manufacturing industries in Ireland, but rather the largest employers as per the Committee on Industrial Organisation's survey in the early 1960s.

By setting these parameters early in the work, Barry ensures that the focus remains clear throughout and prose crisp and sharp. We hear about myriad industries in this way at different levels (from local to international) and it is important to note that his analysis is as comfortable discussing the macro-economic outlook as it is the individual decision-making of factory managers and owners, set against the newly independent post-colonial country's attempts at finding its feet in highly tumultuous global conditions. Employment, skills, production, international engagement, and regional development all feature heavily in Barry's discussion offering wide ranging and deep insights into the Irish post-independence experience. In this sense Barry's book will be of interest to a wide variety of readers outwith Ireland, which is testament to the skill with which he has constructed the narrative holding the book together.

Astutely balancing his analysis between economic and business history, Barry has produced a high-quality piece of work that acts as both a survey and a more in-depth history of the development of Irish business and business-government

relations in the period after independence from the UK through to the eve of joining the EEC in 1973. What is striking about this monograph is how confidently poised it is – Barry’s prose is always in control, understated, and delivered cleanly. The reader is never left in doubt about what he is saying and why it is important with concision his preferred style of writing. Chronologically ordered, the book charts the early days of the newly independent Ireland and its businessmen and politicians, illustrating the initially dominant Protestant managerial and ownership classes’ influence over the industrial structure in the country as well as its engagement with policymakers. As it charts the development of the Irish economic and industrial structure towards a more outwardly oriented focus Barry also illustrates the decline of sectarian business practices and the emergence of the developing policy focus on modernisation, global integration, and in some cases sectoral rationalisation through mergers and acquisitions. Britain becomes left behind (in more ways than one) as Ireland becomes increasingly more integrated globally with a particular focus on the US and Europe and the internationalisation of the Irish industrial base. What this does of course is pay significant dividends in economic terms after the period of Barry’s analysis, but his work is important in understanding how these gains were able to be realised as a result of the changes made in the decades previously. By showing the development of the industrial structure and related policies, Barry provides a compelling account of the new nation’s attempts at distinguishing itself on the global stage whilst still trying to figure out how to structure its economy. Nation building obviously took prominence in the new country, but this was not at the expense of business and industry as Barry shows.

Barry’s database provides the foundations for much of the analysis and acts as a springboard for discussions of economic, industrial, and financial policy, business-government relations, and the various approaches to new nation building in Ireland during the fifty-year timeframe the book covers. The data equally allows Barry to discuss both business and economic history in ways that might otherwise get lost in a purely archivally based analysis. Triangulation of work drawn from the database, official reports, secondary literature, archives, and popular media form the basis of the analysis, with the database providing details on the largest employers according to industry, their locations, key events in their history, and the source references for each entry. If there is a criticism (and it is a very minor one and admittedly quite unfair), it is that the data only focuses on the larger industrial concerns and therefore misses entrepreneurship at the small business level, but it is not something that undermines the work present here. The effort put into constructing first the database then the narrative of Irish industry in this period is considerable – building the database from scratch is no small undertaking and it is testament to the quality of scholarship that the reader is rarely (if ever) left wondering if there are other stories to be told such is the richness of the work. By using the database in this way, it allows Barry to move seamlessly around different industries whilst sticking to the chronological cohesion such work requires in order for the reader to follow it.

There are not many monographs comprising relatively comprehensive analyses of Ireland’s business and economic history, but *Industry and Policy in Independent Ireland, 1922–1972* goes no little way in addressing the lacuna. This work is immensely helpful to anyone seeking to understand Irish business and economic

history in this period in part because it is the only database of its kind in existence, and it forms the basis for much of the detailed and insightful commentary that Barry provides. The database captures both the indigenous business base in the newly independent Ireland and the manifest multinational activities (both inward and outward) that Irish industry undertook during the new state's early years leading up to it joining Europe. It is in this respect a foundational piece of Irish business history that not only fills the lacuna, but also provides a springboard for other work to build on it. It is no small achievement to have written such an enjoyable and engaging prose.

doi:10.1017/S0268416024000043