ISSN 1753-2396 (Print)
ISSN 2753-328X (Online)

Journal of
Irish and Scottish Studies

Articles

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Volume 3, Issue 1
Pp: 213-228
2009
Published on: 1st Jan 2009

1495
ABERDEEN
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Free Movement of People? Responses to Emigration from Ireland, 1718–30

Patrick Walsh

> *No. 67 Whether a country inhabited by a people well fed, clothed and lodged would not become every day more populous? And whether a numerous stock of people in such circumstances would not constitute a flourishing nation? And how far the product of our own country may suffer for the compassing of this end?*
>
> George Berkeley, *The Querist* (1735)[1]

In December 1729 legislation to halt emigration from Ireland to North America was introduced in the Irish House of Commons. The heads of bill were welcomed by many sections of the Irish Protestant community who had become increasingly worried about the record levels of emigration to the American colonies during the previous three years, which had seen an annual average of 4,000 migrants cross the Atlantic. This dramatic increase provoked intense debates about the effects of emigration, as Ireland for the first time in over two hundred years experienced net out-migration.

These debates and their contexts are explored in this article. The study will begin by examining the background to the initiation of this legislation, looking at the reasons, both practical and ideological, which led to its introduction. This will include revisiting the historiographical debate over the motivations for the large-scale migration of Ulster Presbyterians in the 1720s. The traditional view that religious grievances played the decisive role has been challenged by more recent historians such as Graeme Kirkham and R.J. Dickson, who point out that just because 'most northern emigrants were dissenters does not necessarily prove that they departed because of religious reasons'.[2] Patrick

[1] George Berkeley, *The Querist,* edited by J.M. Hone (1735; Dublin, 1935), 30. I would like to thank Dr Kevin O'Sullivan and the two anonymous referees for their helpful comments on this article. I also wish to acknowledge the financial support provided by the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences.

[2] R.J. Dickson, *Ulster Emigration to Colonial America, 1718–1776* (Belfast, 1966), 25; Graeme Kirkham, 'Ulster Emigration to North America 1680–1720' in H.T. Blethen and C.W. Wood (eds), *Ulster and North America: Transatlantic Perspectives on the Scotch Irish* (Tuscaloosa, AL, 1997), 85.

Griffin has, however, highlighted the importance of the Ulster Presbyterians' position on the cultural margins of the greater British polity and argues that their 'religious difficulties illustrated just how far and to whom Britishness extended'.[3] He nevertheless acknowledges that religion was not the sole factor motivating their emigration. This article develops these arguments further, suggesting that religious issues played their part but that economic conditions provided the tipping point during the periods of exodus at either end of the decade.[4]

Having established the reasons that eighteenth-century contemporaries believed were driving this 'strange humour', this article will move on to examine their intentions in raising barriers to emigration, looking not just at high politics, but also at the role played by Arthur Dobbs. A vocal economic thinker and promoter of Ireland's part in the British Empire, Dobbs' contribution will be analysed in light of the economic patriotism current in Irish political thought and activity in the late 1720s and early 1730s. Official attitudes to Catholic Irish military migration to the continent will also be considered, showing that attempts to prevent the people leaving were not limited to preserving the 'Protestant interest', but instead crossed confessional and cultural boundaries.

The imposition of such barriers by government action was not a new idea. There were already restrictions on Irish Protestant participation in the British army, which had been introduced specifically to prevent the reduction of the Protestant population in Ireland. In Scotland, attempts were made to curtail emigration to Ireland during the demographic crises of the 1690s. The Alien Act passed by the English parliament in February 1705, 'which specified that unless a union treaty was in train or the Hanoverian succession accepted by Scots, except those already domiciled in England or her possessions, would be treated as aliens', can be seen as a similar attempt to close an existing frontier or border.[5] None of these measures were particularly effective but they reflected a willingness to close off borders in this period. The proposed legal barriers to emigration, both to North America

[3] Patrick Griffin, *The People With No Name: Ireland's Ulster Scots, America's Scots Irish, and the Creation of the British Atlantic World* (Princeton, 2001), 35.

[4] See S.J. Connolly, *Divided Kingdom: Ireland 1630–1800* (Oxford, 2008), 381. See also Patrick Walsh, 'The Differing Motivations for Preventing Transatlantic Emigration: A Case Study from West Ulster 1718–1729' in Shane Murphy et al. (eds), *Beyond the Anchoring Grounds: More Crosscurrents in Irish and Scottish Studies* (Belfast, 2005), 324–30.

[5] Douglas Watt, *The Price of Scotland: Darien, Union and the Wealth of Nations* (Edinburgh, 2007), 226.

and to Continental Europe, were a response to a wave of out-migration which was motivated not only by economic circumstances, but also by legal restrictions blocking full participation in the political and social life of the Irish polity.

I Migration Patterns

Substantial Irish migration to the North American colonies only began in the years 1717–20, following successive harvest failures and a severe economic depression partly caused by the effects of a Treasury-imposed quarantine on European trade and the ripple effects of the collapse of the Mississippi and South Sea schemes.[6] Ireland's experience of net immigration since the late sixteenth century had been unique in Western Europe, with up to 50,000 Scots alone arriving in the three decades after the Williamite revolution.[7] The settlement of the majority of these in Ulster in the 1690s had helped to stimulate the post-war boom in the province, itself a major contributor to Irish economic growth in the early years of the new century.[8] Net out-migration was therefore a novelty when it occurred in 1717–20. As such, it did not arouse much negative contemporary commentary, apart from occasional complaints from landlords about defaulting creditors. Many of those departing were Scots who had been attracted by the very favourable leases available on Ulster estates in the post-war environment. These leases mostly expired in the late 1710s, and sharp increases in rents encouraged many of these Scots Presbyterians who had few ties to Ireland to move onwards to North America where bargains were still plentiful. The transitory nature of so many of these migrants meant that little official effort was expended trying to keep them in Ireland. Indeed, the failure of attempts to repeal the sacramental test clause (imposed in 1704 as part of the infamous Act to Prevent the Further Growth

[6] Up to 7,500 emigrants departed for the American colonies during these years. See Kirkham, 'Ulster Emigration', 96. For the causes of emigration see Dickson, *Ulster Emigration to Colonial America,* chapter 2; Griffin, *The People With No Name*, 67–70; and Marianne Wokeck, *Trade in Strangers: The Beginning of Mass Migration to North America* (Pennsylvania, 1999), 171, who sees it as the first Irish instance of 'homeland disaster'-inspired migration.

[7] L.M. Cullen, 'The Irish Diaspora of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries' in Nicholas Canny (ed.), *Europeans on the Move: Studies on European Migration, 1500–1800* (Oxford, 1994), 116.

[8] L.M. Cullen, *An Economic History of Ireland Since 1660* (2nd edition, London, 1987), 29.

of Popery) in 1709 and 1719, despite the support of the British government, only added to the motivation for many Presbyterians to abandon Ireland.[9] The hostile opposition of the overwhelming majority of Irish Anglicans to their Presbyterian neighbours did little to encourage prospective migrants to stay, while it also meant that few of those who departed were missed, at least during this initial wave of migration.

By the end of the decade things had changed. The numbers emigrating had increased, with over 4,000 departing from Ulster alone in 1728.[10] The economic situation had deteriorated dramatically, leading most commentators to view events with a more negative attitude than in the opening years of the decade.[11] Growing pessimism about the Irish economy was reflected in the flurry of publications on Irish political economy produced in the closing years of the 1720s, a veritable 'golden age' for such writings.[12] This alarmist reaction informed official circles through the redoubtable figures of Speaker William Conolly, and the archbishop of Armagh, Hugh Boulter.[13] Both had strong Ulster connections and derived much of their respective incomes from the province, leading to an increased awareness of the gravity of the situation on the ground. The majority of the migrants were again Ulster Presbyterians, but this time not only were their numbers more significant but most came from longer-established communities with greater ties to Ireland. Softening political attitudes to dissenters meant they were more likely to be included within the Protestant nation even if most legal barriers remained intact (despite the imposition of a Toleration Act in 1719). All of these factors led to increased official interest in the emigration phenomenon in 1727–30.

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[9] The imposition of the test had restricted Presbyterian participation in public life by disqualifying dissenters from most state and local government employments. See Griffin, *The People With No Name,* 23–4, 60–4; and David Hayton, 'Exclusion, Conformity and Parliamentary Representation: The Impact of the Sacramental Test on Irish Dissenting Politics' in Kevin Herlihy (ed.), *The Politics of Irish Dissent* (Dublin, 1997), 52–73.

[10] Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (Oxford, 1985), 153.

[11] On the economic crisis which engulfed Ireland in these years, see James Kelly, 'Harvests and Hardship: Famine and Scarcity in Ireland in the late 1720s', *Studia Hibernica*, 26 (1992), 65–106.

[12] Patrick Kelly, 'The Politics of Political Economy in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Ireland' in S.J. Connolly (ed.), *Political Thought in Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin, 2000), 108.

[13] For biographical details of all figures mentioned in the text see the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.* On Conolly, see Patrick Walsh, *The Career of William Conolly, 1689–1729* (Ph.D. thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 2007), esp. chapters 1, 5, 8.

Reports submitted by various interested parties to the Dublin Castle administration sparked additional concern. In 1727 the Protestant dissenters of Dublin and the South of Ireland submitted an address to the king outlining their complaints, especially with regard to the sacramental test. The writers of this address observed that the grievances under which many dissenters laboured meant that 'they had in great numbers transported themselves [to] the American plantations for the sake of the liberty and ease they are denied in their native country', adding that 'we have too much reason to fear that many more will follow their example, if this occasion of their grievances should not be timely removed, greatly to the weakness of the Protestant interest in general and the prejudice of the linen manufacture, which is the principal support of this nation.'[14] While the purpose of the writers of this address was to obtain a relaxation of the penalties under which the dissenters suffered, the use of the prospect of emigration and the ensuing security and economic repercussions showed they were aware of the perception of emigration in official circles, especially regarding the diminution of the 'Protestant interest'.

Another government correspondent, this time a Belfast ship's captain, Thomas Whitney, informed the Dublin Castle administration in 1728 'that 40,000 people out of Ulster and the low part of Connaught had gone to the colonies these past eight years'.[15] Such exaggeration of emigration statistics was common, with one astute English official, Charles Delafaye, commenting that the numbers emigrating 'are perhaps not as many as has been represented, for on these occasions are magnified usually and no where so much as in Ireland'.[16] The magnification of the numbers does, however, indicate the contemporary perception of the issue. Whitney suggested that rising rents were the crux of the problem and that many landlords had a great rent roll 'and don't receive half the money.'[17] Higher rents encouraged emigration, while the disparity between the expected revenue and the actual rent paid further extended the impact of non-payment of rents by departing tenants by increasing indebtedness amongst landowners.

It was not just the Irish administration (and landlords) who were concerned about rising levels of emigration. In December 1728 the duke of Newcastle

[14] Address of the Protestant Dissenting Ministers of Dublin and the South of Ireland to the King, n.d. 1727, Public Record Office Northern Ireland (hereafter PRONI), *Transcripts of State Papers Ireland* (hereafter *TSPI*), T659, ff. 20–3.

[15] Thomas Whitney to Unknown, 27 July 1728, PRONI, *TSPI*, T659, ff. 52–3.

[16] Charles Delafaye to the duke of Newcastle, 23 October 1730, National Library of Ireland (hereafter NLI), *TSPI,* MS 9613, ff. 30–3.

[17] Thomas Whitney to Unknown, 27 July 1728, PRONI, *TSPI*, T659, ff. 52–3.

wrote to the archbishop of Armagh referring to the 'infatuation that has of late prevailed amongst the common people in the north of Ireland of removing from whence to the Plantations'.[18] Newcastle's attitude that it was nothing more than an 'infatuation' was echoed by Irish Lord Justice Thomas Wyndham who remarked in a letter to a member of the British cabinet that 'nothing remarkable has happened here since my last, except the spreading of a humour among the tenants of Ulster, of quitting their lands here and transporting themselves to America'. In the same letter he referred to the harvest failures in Ulster, but failed to connect them to the departures. Instead, he ascribed the rising emigration levels to rising rents.[19]

Wyndham and his fellow Irish Lord Justices, William Conolly and Archbishop Boulter, conducted their own investigation into the reasons for emigration in early 1729, at the request of the lord lieutenant, Lord Carteret.[20] In March of that year they wrote to Carteret describing their findings. Drawing on the testimony of dissenting ministers to support their conclusions, the Lord Justices stressed the Presbyterian character of the emigrants and warned that a failure to halt their departure would have fatal consequences for the 'Protestant interest' in Ireland.[21] Presbyterian ministers, they suggested, could admonish their congregations and attempt to persuade them not to leave for America: 'such admonitions would very much contribute to put a stop to it.'[22] Their belief that the Presbyterian clergy could help prevent emigration suggests that religious grievances were not the primary motivation for emigration. This is confirmed in a report drawn up for the Lord Justices by two Presbyterian ministers, Francis Iredell and Robert Craghead, which outlined the reasons why so many Ulster Protestants were departing for America. High rents, the inequities of the tithe system, and bad harvests were all cited, as well as the effects of the sacramental test. Economic factors, or what they termed the 'poverty to which that part of the country is reduced', were seen as the primary reasons for emigration.[23]

[18] Duke of Newcastle to Archbishop Hugh Boulter, 5 December 1728, PRONI, *TSPI*, T659, f. 59.

[19] Thomas Wyndham to a Lord, 11 January 1728/29, PRONI, *TSPI*, T659, ff. 64–6.

[20] Griffin, *The People With No Name,* 65.

[21] Lord Justices (Boulter, Conolly and Wyndham) to Lord Carteret, 8 March 1729, in W.T. Latimer, 'Ulster Emigration to North America', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 32 (1902), 388.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Memorial by Francis Iredell and Robert Craghead to their Excellencies, the Lord Justices and General Governors of Ireland, n.d. 1729, in Latimer, 'Ulster Emigration to North America', 389. See also Archbishop Boulter to the duke of Newcastle, 13

The conclusions reached by Iredell and Craghead were confirmed by two members of the Irish judiciary who reported back to Dublin Castle following their travels in the north of Ireland on the legal circuits in the spring of 1729. Their reports stressed economic grievances related to the bad harvests of the previous two years as well as rising rents. The religious grievances were also acknowledged, but they pointed out that 'in the counties they passed through they did not hear of any prosecutions against that [the Test Act] or any other penal laws'.[24] This reflects the difference between the letter of the law and the real practice of penal legislation in eighteenth-century Ireland. The two judges also stressed the attractions of the colonies and the influence of former emigrants and shipping agents on prospective migrants. It may be significant in this regard that Nathaniel Crouch's *The English Empire in America: Or a View of the Dominions of the Crown of England* was re-published in Dublin in 1729. It had first been published in 1685, with the sixth edition appearing in London in 1728, but this was the first Irish edition. Certainly, in April 1728, one prospective emigrant in County Westmeath cited the evidence of a 'history of America which gave me a very honest account of all your country' as a motivating factor for considering the voyage across the Atlantic.[25]

Dispatching the judges' reports to Carteret in June 1729 the Lord Justices expressed the view that if the 'approaching harvest proves good, it may contribute very much to abate this humour in the people', but if not 'we are humbly of the opinion that an adequate remedy cannot be had from the laws now in being to put a stop to this evil'.[26] The concerns of the Irish administration and in particular Conolly and his fellow Lord Justice Archbishop Boulter can be seen in their charitable contributions for the benefit of the Ulster poor. In January 1729 Boulter established a public subscription to purchase grain to feed the poor in the 'northern part of the country', to which both he and Conolly donated £500 each to encourage further donations. The purpose of this concentration on the northern province, as one astute Vatican

March 1729, in Hugh Boulter, *Letters to Several Ministers of State in England* (2 vols, Dublin, 1770), I, 321–6.

[24] See 'Report of Judges of the Northern Circuits' in Lord Carteret to the duke of Newcastle, 26 June 1729, PRONI, *TSPI*, T659, ff. 74–9. For the promotional activities of shipping agents, see Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 160–1.

[25] James Wansbrough to Ann Shepherd, 18 April 1728, in Kerby A. Miller, Arnold Schrier, Bruce D. Boling and David N. Doyle, *Irish Immigrants in the Land of Canaan: Letters and Memoirs from Colonial and Revolutionary America* (Oxford, 2003), 21.

[26] Lord Justices (Boulter, Conolly and Wyndham) to Lord Carteret, 8 March 1729, in Latimer, 'Ulster Emigration to North America', 388.

correspondent observed, 'pointed to the necessity of stopping the defection from the province of Ulster of so many Protestant families … to America.'[27] Conolly's generosity in this instance was motivated by more than just charitable instincts; instead, it reflected the 'alarmist response' to the significantly greater outflow of population during 1728 and 1729.[28]

Conolly, who had landed interests in three of the worst affected counties—Donegal, Fermanagh and Londonderry—was particularly sensitive to the effects of the crisis. Since 1727 his land agents had been supplying him with information on the depressed state of the economy and the hardship suffered by his tenants, many of whom had chosen to emigrate. In July 1728 Thomas Dickson (Conolly's brother in law) wrote from Ballyshannon, County Donegal:

> [T]here is a ship in Killybegs that is taking passengers for New England, several tradesmen and young men, some about this town is going with him but none of the tenants although there is several of them that intends going there the next time. I know there are many families already gone there this year out of Laggan.[29]

The departure of tradesmen and young men suggests a general economic recession affecting not just crops but also other aspects of the local economy dependent on profits and other outputs from the land. The situation in Ballyshannon had been deteriorating since 1727 when Dickson had written to Conolly warning him that it was 'likely to be a hard year for the poor' and that the price of 'bread grain is extravagant', suggesting a harvest failure.[30]

Conolly's Ballyshannon estate was not his only estate affected by harvest failure in these years. The Manor of Newporton in neighbouring County Fermanagh suffered even more than Ballyshannon. In 1728 the Newporton

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[27] 'News from Dublin', 26 January 1729, in Cathaldus Giblin, 'Catalogue of Material of Irish Interest in the Collection *Nuziatura di Fiandra*, Vatican Archives', *Collectanea Hibernica*, 9 (1966), 11–2.

[28] See Richard K. MacMaster, *Scotch-Irish Merchants in Colonial America* (Belfast, 2009), 6–8; Kelly, 'Harvests and Hardship', 83. See also Bishop Henry Downes to William Conolly, 26 November 1728, for another instance of a northern bishop's charitable intervention (Trinity College Dublin, Conolly Papers, MS 3984/12).

[29] Thomas Dickson to William Conolly, 16 July 1728, Irish Architectural Archive, Dublin (hereafter IAA), Castletown Papers, 97/84 C28/1. See also Walsh, 'The Differing Motivations', 326.

[30] Thomas Dickson to William Conolly, 12 March 1727, IAA, Castletown Papers, 97/84 C28/2.

tenants dispatched a petition to Conolly outlining their plight: 'the common calamity of Ulster has been grievously felt by your petitioners'.[31] They made reference to the 'excessive prices' they had been forced to pay for their leases, a common complaint across the province at this time. This, however, was not the principle cause of their trouble; that honour was reserved for a higher cause. 'God in his anger', wrote the petitioners, 'has for these three years past after the seasons blasted their labours and withheld the ground from issuing its usual increase'.[32] These religious undertones indicate the sense of despair that the petitioners felt, and were continued in their appeal to Conolly, in which they desired him to share in the 'misfortune that no human prayer can remedy'.[33] Reference was also made to those who had fled to the new world instead of seeking Conolly's 'compassion', implying that the petitioners still viewed emigration as an option of last resort.[34]

It is notable that in all these representations, whether made in public or by private channels, economic factors rather than religious grievances were seen as decisive. Large numbers of Presbyterians emigrated because large numbers of Presbyterians lived in the areas worst affected by economic disasters. These disasters included, as we have seen, three successive harvest failures in Ulster, which in turn led to a credit crisis as tenants struggled to pay their rents, which had been rising throughout the decade. The crisis in credit led to the stagnation of local markets, which even the embryonic linen industry, largely concentrated in Ulster, could not overcome.[35] The regional dimension of the crisis explains why Presbyterians were disproportionately affected, and why Irish Catholics did not emigrate to the American colonies in the same numbers at this juncture.[36]

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[31] Petition sent by James Crawford (agent) and tenants of Newporton, n.d. 1728, IAA, Castletown Papers, 97/84 C/20/1.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ian McBride, *Eighteenth Century Ireland: The Isle of Slaves* (Dublin, 2009), 106; E.R.R. Green, 'The "Strange Humours" That Drove the Scotch-Irish to America, 1729', *The William and Mary Quartely,* 3rd Series, 12 (1955), 113–6.

[36] C.J. Houston and W. J. Smyth, 'The Irish Diaspora: Emigration to the New World, 1720–1920' in B.J. Graham and L.J. Proudfoot, *An Historical Geography of Ireland* (London, 1993), 341; Cullen, 'The Irish Diaspora', 130. See also Liam Kennedy and L.A. Clarkson, 'Birth, Death and Exile: Irish Population History, 1700–1921' in Graham and Proudfoot, *An Historical Geography of Ireland*, 172–3, for a further articulation of the regional dimension.

II Legislative Intentions

In May 1729 Conolly's Londonderry agent Robert McCausland wrote to him, calling for legislation to be introduced in the Irish parliament to hinder the departure of emigrants.[37] In his reply to McCausland, Conolly wrote: 'as to what you mention about Government preventing passengers going to America two weeks before they go, this cannot be done without an act of parliament which I hope will be taken care of next session'.[38] Such a response did not, however, meet with universal approval. Wyndham's reaction was lukewarm. He believed that it was 'an affair of too private and particular [a] nature for the government to interpose in: at least no scheme of that sort has yet been offered, which had the appearance of a proper adequate remedy'.[39] Archbishop Boulter shared his concerns, writing to the duke of Newcastle that 'whatever can be done by law, I fear it may be dangerous to forcibly hinder a number of needy people from quitting us.'[40]

Despite these objections, heads of bill entitled *An Act to Prevent Persons from Clandestinely Transporting Themselves to America in Order to Defraud their Creditors* were introduced in the Irish House of Commons in December 1729, six weeks after Conolly's death.[41] The scope of the bill was broader than the title suggests, with one government official accurately describing it as a bill to 'prevent the people going to America'.[42] The heads of bill gave powers to local magistrates to grant or refuse licences for prospective migrants. Without such licences or certificates legal departure would be impossible. Giving such a role

[37] This was McCausland's second letter on this theme in six months. See Robert McCausland to William Conolly, 23 November 1728, Trinity College Dublin, Conolly Papers, MS 3984/9.

[38] William Conolly to Robert McCausland, 27 May 1729, IAA, Castletown Papers, 97/84 C/27/83.

[39] Thomas Wyndham to a Lord, 11 January 1728/29, PRONI, *TSPI*, T659, ff. 64–6.

[40] Hugh Boulter, archbishop of Armagh, to the duke of Newcastle, 23 November 1728, in Boulter, *Letters to Several Ministers of State*, I, 211.

[41] See Dickson, *Ulster Emigration to Colonial America*, 186. For similar legislation in Scotland, see I.C.C. Graham, *Colonists from Scotland: Emigration to North America 1707–1783* (London, 1956), 90. For earlier Scottish attempts to restrict emigration to Ireland in the 1690s, see Scottish Privy Council, *A Proclamation Discharging People to Travel to Ireland Without Passes* (Edinburgh, 1695), and Scottish Privy Council, *A Proclamation Discharging the Transportation of Persons to the Plantations of Foreigners in America* (Edinburgh, 1698). I am indebted to Kathleen Middleton for pointing me in the direction of these proclamations.

[42] Marmaduke Coghill to Edward Southwell, 3 January 1730, in D.W. Hayton, *Letters of Marmaduke Coghill, 1722–1738* (Dublin, 2005), 84.

to the county magistrates, in practice local landlords, would have imposed a 'legal stranglehold on emigration had it become law' because most landlords were opposed to the departure of their tenants.[43] Their concerns included fears that they could not replace the migrants, as well as the stated focus of the bill–the fear that departing tenants were defrauding their creditors, the majority of whom were these same landlords.[44]

The focus on the non-payment of creditors, however, also reflected concerns about the outflow of specie that accompanied emigration. The influx of Lowland Scots in the 1690s with badly needed specie had made an important contribution to the rapid economic growth of these years.[45] The possibility of an outflow of capital to the American colonies added to broader worries about the lack of money circulating in the Irish economy in the late 1720s, worries that were being articulated in the voluminous economic critiques of the period. These critiques included the works of writers on trade and money like David Bindon and John Browne, Thomas Prior's famous work on absenteeism, and Arthur Dobbs' influential *Essay on the Trade and Improvement of Ireland,* published in late 1729.[46] These works were famously satirised by Swift in his *Modest Proposal* (1729), which turned the popular conception that a nation's wealth lay in its people upon its head, a trope that Swift had himself subscribed to in his *Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture* nine years earlier.[47]

It was Arthur Dobbs, MP for Carrickfergus, who introduced the heads of bill to restrict emigration into the Irish House of Commons on 11 December 1729.[48] He also managed the heads of bill through the committee stage, reporting on the progress made to the whole house on 31 December.[49] It is unclear whether his actions were motivated by personal interest–as well as

[43] Dickson, *Ulster Emigration to Colonial America*, 187.

[44] Green, 'The "Strange Humours"', 117.

[45] Cullen, *An Economic History of Ireland Since 1660*, 29; David Dickson, *New Foundations: Ireland 1660–1800* (Dublin, 2000), 115.

[46] David Bindon, *An Essay on the Gold and Silver Coin Current in Ireland* … (Dublin, 1729); Sir John Browne, *Essay on Trade in General and on that of Ireland in Particular* (Dublin, 1728); Arthur Dobbs, *An Essay on the Trade and Improvement of Ireland* (Dublin, 1729); and Thomas Prior, *A List of the Absentees of Ireland*… (Dublin, 1729).

[47] For an important recent study of Jonathan Swift's *Modest Proposal,* see Sean Moore, 'Devouring Posterity: *A Modest Proposal,* Empire, and Ireland's "Debt of the Nation"', *PMLA*, 122 (2007), 679–95.

[48] For Dobbs' biographical details, see E.M. Johnston-Liik, *History of the Irish Parliament, 1692–1800: Commons, Constituencies and Statutes* (6 vols, Belfast, 2002), IV, 64–5.

[49] *The Journals of the House of Commons of the Kingdom of Ireland* (3rd edition, 20 vols, Dublin, 1796–1800), III, 616, 628, 630.

being a writer, he was an Ulster landowner–or by a particular political role, possibly linked to his membership of the committee of trade. He certainly used his membership of the trade committee to his advantage in the writing of his *Essay,* citing unpublished revenue statistics which had been laid before the committee.[50] In his *Essay,* an extraordinary piece of social and economic analysis, Dobbs discussed the effects of the falling balance in trade resulting from the late harvest failures, and argued that the lack of manufactures combined with the harvest failures were behind the departures of the Protestant poor to America and the 'papists' for the Irish regiments in France and Spain.[51] He also cited the short-term leasing practices of many landlords as the reason for the departure of the richer farmers.[52] For Dobbs, manufacturing was key as it would increase 'our numbers', a sentiment which suggests that he subscribed to the prevailing orthodoxy regarding the relation of population to the wealth of the country.[53] The logical next step to this argument was to encourage the population to remain in the country, and if this did not work to prevent them from leaving even for other parts of the Empire.

Ireland's position within the British Empire was beginning to emerge as an issue within political discourse, particularly in relation to her economic participation in the lucrative colonial trade, and Dobbs' *Essay* should be seen as making an important contribution to this debate. He argued persuasively for greater Irish participation in the trade with the American colonies, demonstrating both the advantages it would bring to Ireland's balance of trade, but also the important role that Ireland already played in the Empire. Here he was arguing for greater access to imperial trade, which had been restricted by the English navigation acts of 1661 and 1663. These acts, as well as later legislation enacted in the 1680s and 90s, limited Irish participation in trade with the American colonies by specifying which goods could be exported from Ireland. These included horses and 'all sorts of victuals of the growth or production of Ireland'. Under the aegis of this legislation indentured servants were also permitted to travel to the colonies. In 1705 linen was added to the commodities permitted to be exported.[54]

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[50] For his use of the Custom House records to prepare his pamphlet while a member of the Committee of Trade, see Dobbs, *An Essay on the Trade and Improvement of Ireland*, 4.

[51] Arthur Dobbs, *An Essay on the Trade and Improvement of Ireland,* Part II (Dublin, 1730), 13.

[52] Ibid., 80.

[53] Ibid., 14.

[54] Thomas Truxes, *Irish-American Trade, 1660–1783* (Cambridge, 1988), 9.

Ireland, for Dobbs, was 'no inconsiderable member' of the Empire. Irish men had made an important contribution to Britain's armies during various foreign wars, he argued, as well as 'peopling her colonies'.[55] This suggests that the proposed bill to 'prevent persons from clandestinely transporting themselves to America' was aimed at reducing emigration at this particular juncture, when the sheer volume of individuals joining the diaspora was causing such concern, rather than halting Ireland's peopling of the plantations entirely. In this regard it was not dissimilar to the attempts made by the Scottish Privy Council in the 1690s to reduce the flow of emigrants to Ulster and North America. These legislative initiatives, like the Irish proposal in 1729, reflected real concerns about the outflow of population to other parts of the Empire.

The heads of bill passed through the House of Commons with little trouble, before being transmitted to London by Lord Lieutenant Carteret for the British Privy Council to scrutinise and decide whether to send them back as a bill. These heads of bill never returned. There are two possible reasons for this. First, the crisis had begun to abate with the bumper harvest of autumn 1729. Secondly, there were serious qualms about the propriety of the proposed legislation. It has already been noted that neither Boulter, the dominant figure in the Irish administration now that Conolly was dead, nor Lord Chancellor Wyndham were particularly enamoured by the idea when it was first mooted. More importantly, they had the support of the best legal opinion in London. In a letter to the duke of Newcastle, the attorney general, Philip Yorke, questioned the legality of preventing travel 'to our own colonies', adding an imperial dimension to the problem.[56] Acting on Yorke's advice, the Privy Council rejected the heads of bill and thus ended the only legislative attempt to impose such restrictions on emigration from Ireland. Their failure also demonstrated the desire for free movement of peoples within the Empire.

The imperial dimension to Yorke's advice is clearer still when read in the context of the rest of his letter, which dealt with the recruitment of Irish Catholics by the French army, reminding us of the other great Irish eighteenth-century diaspora.[57] Recruitment for French service was formally forbidden in the 1720s, but about 1,000 men on average were leaving

[55] Dobbs, *An Essay on the Trade and Improvement of Ireland,* 138–40.

[56] Philip Yorke to the duke of Newcastle, 14 April 1729, PRONI, *TSPI*, f. 70.

[57] On Irish migration to Europe, see Cullen, 'The Irish Diaspora', 124–6, and Thomas O'Connor (ed.), *The Irish in Europe, 1580–1815* (Dublin, 2006).

each year during that decade driven both by Irish economic conditions and French needs for manpower.[58] In 1730, the London government gave permission to a Colonel Richard Hennessy to recruit 750 men from Ireland, but this was later revoked because of the negative reaction from the Dublin administration.[59] The primary reason for this response was the 'draining' effect it would have on the population, accentuating the 'desertion' of large numbers of Ulster Protestants to America. In contrast, the under-secretary of state and former Irish chief secretary Charles Delafaye saw the foreign recruitment of Catholic soldiers as balancing the Protestant emigration from the north:

> Those who have deserted … are for the most part, if not all, Protestants from the north of Ireland. It might have the appearance of right policy to diminish on that account the number of the popish inhabitants.[60]

But this seems to have been a minority view. Instead, the preferred government policy on both sides of the Irish Sea was to maximise the population of Ireland, regardless of creed. The legal barriers, in the form of the penal laws, which partly motivated the emigration of Catholics to Europe and Presbyterians to America, nevertheless remained in place. Attempts to repeal the sacramental test, a major bone of contention for Presbyterian migrants, failed in 1733. This failure did not lead to increased emigration, however, as the economic situation had improved, again suggesting the primacy of material factors.

This was confirmed when legislative attempts were made to resolve some of the structural problems affecting the Irish economy, which had contributed to the surge in emigration. These efforts led to a number of British restrictions on Irish trade with the American colonies being lifted in 1731.[61] Again, Arthur Dobbs played a key role in ushering the bill through parliament, while Carteret's recommendation for such a bill could have been taken straight out of Dobbs' *Essay*:

> For these and many other reasons they allege that it is evident that commerce between Ireland and the American plantations for goods

[58] Cullen, 'The Irish Diaspora', 120.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Charles Delafaye to the duke of Newcastle, 23 October 1730, NLI, *TSPI*, MS 9613, ff. 30–3.

[61] For a detailed discussion of these restrictions and their lifting, see Truxes, *Irish-American Trade*, 29–33.

> not enumerated will greatly contribute to the benefit of His Majesty's subjects of Ireland and the said plantations without detriment to the commerce of Great Britain.[62]

The bill to restrict emigration had been introduced not only to maintain the 'Protestant interest', but also to protect the Irish economy and prevent the departure of some of the most productive members of Irish society. The lifting of some of the restrictions on trade with the colonies was similarly designed to boost the economy, particularly in the light of the recent demographic and subsistence crises. In his *Essay*, Dobbs prescribed the lifting of such barriers as essential for future development, while he also outlined a utopian vision of a yeoman society in which the Ulster Presbyterian freeholders would play a substantial part, thereby negating the need for them to emigrate. His vision, like that of his contemporaries John Browne, Thomas Prior and George Berkeley, focused on an industrious society with full employment and the maximisation of the potential of the existing population. Any further reduction in population would be seen from their perspective as symptomatic of a wider failure.[63]

Irish economic conditions improved in the 1730s and the numbers emigrating fell substantially, at least until the severe winter of 1740–1, when famine once again gripped much of the country. Further legislative initiatives to prevent migration across the Atlantic frontier were not attempted. Instead, as William Smyth has argued, as the eighteenth-century progressed the frontier moved westward as Ireland changed from being a colony to being a coloniser. Emigration to the New World became a feature of Irish life, eventually coming to be seen as a 'safety valve', and 'America itself became Ireland's western frontier'.[64] Amongst those attracted across the Atlantic was Arthur Dobbs himself, who became governor of North Carolina in 1754, having already purchased a substantial estate there in 1745. In a further irony, he encouraged Presbyterian tenants from his County Antrim estates to emigrate to his American holdings, building up his own Ulster colony in the New World. Here on the frontier of the British world he hoped to create the yeoman society

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[62] Lord Carteret to the duke of Newcastle, 23 February 1730, NLI, *TSPI*, MS 9613, f. 7.

[63] Berkeley, *The Querist,* 30.

[64] William J. Smyth, *Map-Making, Landscape and Memory: A Geography of Colonial and Early Modern Ireland c.1530–1750* (Cork, 2006), 450. On the 'safety valve' concept in an Irish context, see Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland, A New Economic History, 1780–1939* (Oxford, 1995), 77–8.

he had earlier envisaged for Ireland.[65] In the long run, extending the frontier across America proved more sustainable than maintaining 'a numerous stock of people' in Ireland.

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[65] Desmond Clarke, *Arthur Dobbs, Esquire, 1689–1765* (London, 1958), 71–6.