

How the British Crown Reduced Ireland's 'Carrying Capacity' to 6 Million Souls

by Paul Gallagher

It is, unfortunately, a well-known fact that today's population of Ireland, about six million including both the Republic and Ulster, is less, by two million, than its population of two centuries ago. While Europe's population as a whole became 4.5 times greater over those two centuries, that one small part of Europe under near-continuous British Crown financial and political domination all that time, has lost a quarter of its population.

This is what the British royal family wishes, by the public statements of its members today, for the whole world. Queen Elizabeth, Prince Philip, Prince Charles, and their scholarly retinue claim that the "carrying capacity" of old Mother Earth is—and therefore the world population should be, in the future—some 1-2 billion people, not 7.2 billion as it is today.

How did the British Crown impose its wish upon Ireland?

Beginning 170 years ago this Fall, British Crown policy caused the genocide of two million out of eight million Irish subjects in four years. In contrast to the Nazis, the British perpetrators of this 1845-1849 genocide were not punished for their policies, nor did they change them in any way afterwards.

In their quoted statements on that episode

of genocide, presented below, you will recognize precisely the view of Prince Philip "Deadly Virus" Windsor today, regarding reducing the population—pollution, in his view—of "common" people in the world.

Not Potatoes, But Debt Slavery

Any historian who has studied the subject knows that potatoes (or the lack thereof) did not cause the Irish famine and genocide 170 years ago. The potato blight which struck the harvest in Autumn 1845, had begun in



Prime responsibility for starving the Irish people lay with Queen Victoria (r. 1837-1901), shown here in 1887, and her Prime Minister Lord John Russell, who was in office from 1846 to 1852.



North Carolina, and spread to destroy potato crops throughout the Northern Hemisphere for several years; but it did not cause famine or mass death anywhere except in Ireland.

Nor were potatoes the only major produce of Irish agriculture at the time; they were just the only produce which the Irish—75% of whom had become tenants of British landlords—were allowed to eat or to feed to their livestock. The historian Arthur Young had written in 1841 that in the course of two generations to that point, Irish tenant farmers had become slaves in effect:

A landlord in Ireland can scarcely invent an order which a laborer, servant, or cottier [tenant farmer] dares to refuse He may punish with his cane or his horsewhip with the most perfect security. A poor man would have his bones broken if he offered to lift a hand in his own defense.

British traders exported or sold all the corn, wheat, barley, and oats Irish farmers grew, in order that they should pay their rents. All crops became cash crops—and there was nothing left for the farmer and his family to eat. While a million Irish starved to death, the British Crown heavily deployed troops to protect the export ships. All farmers who stopped paying their rents were instantly evicted, and the large landlords, led by then-British Foreign Minister Lord Palmerston, evicted their tenants more rapidly than before as they were starving in the 1840s, even evicting many who were still paying rent. Free trade decreed that no money would be spent for employment on infrastructure projects such as drainage, harbors, fisheries, etc., though a committee of prominent Irish subjects led by Thomas Drummond had quickly surveyed what was most needed. Ireland at that time had 164 miles of railways; England had 6,621 miles.



Clothing being distributed during the Irish Potato Famine.

No government surplus food was available to the starving. The destitute were put on the road works or in the workhouses by the hundreds of thousands, received almost no net wages after their debts and rents were collected, and died in large numbers “on the works” and in the Poor Law houses.

The Irish population was 8.2-8.4 million in 1845. Some 1.5 million human beings died of starvation and disease in Ireland in four years, while more than one million attempted to emigrate; of these, about 500,000 died—usually of typhus—in the Atlantic passage or in quarantine camps in Canada and New England. The Montreal Board of Health stated of those in the camps in 1847, “It may well be supposed that few of the survivors could reach any other than an early grave.” In that period, among the Irish emigrant population of Massachusetts, average life expectancy was estimated by Lemuel Shattuck at 13.4 years, with 60% dying by the age of 5: a level characteristic of Stone Age human societies.

When it was “over,” the British officials directly in charge of “Irish famine relief,” particularly acting Treasury Minister Sir Charles Trevelyan, congratulated themselves and were decorated when Queen Victoria made her gala 1848 visit to and “progress” through Ireland. As 1847 ended, Trevelyan wrote:

It is my opinion that too much has been done for the people. Under such treatment the people have grown worse instead of better, and we must now try what independent exertion, and the operation of natural causes, can do.... I shall rest after two years of such continuous hard work in public service, as I have never had in my life.

Then, having vacationed in France, he added:

[The] problem of Irish overpopulation being altogether beyond the power of man, the cure had been supplied by the direct stroke of an all-wise Providence.

Ireland's population continued to fall after 1850, though more slowly, reaching a low of just over four million by the early Twentieth Century.

The British historian Charles Kingsley, who accompanied the Queen on her gracious and glorious visit, wrote:

I am daunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that 100 miles of horrible country. I don't believe they are our fault. I believe that there are not only many more of them than of old, but that they are happier, better and more comfortably fed and lodged under our rule than they ever were. But to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black, one would not feel it so much.

However, Lord Clarendon, the British viceroy in Ireland during the famine, saw the situation more clearly. He wrote to Prime Minister Lord John Russell:

I don't think there is another legislature in Europe [other than the British] that would coldly persist in this policy of extermination.

How It Was Done

British Crown policy had been working to create this disaster for a long time previously. The crucial period was the 1785-1845 policies of William Petty, the second Lord Shelburne, and Prime Minister William Pitt, who took over the British governments after the American Revolution, and for whom Adam Smith

wrote his *Wealth of Nations* and other "free trade" tracts.

The great Irish writer and leader Jonathan Swift had written already in 1730:

One-half of all Irish rents is spent in England ... with other incidents, (it) will amount to full half of the income of the whole kingdom, all clear profit to England.... The rise of our rents is squeezed out of the very blood, and vitals, and clothes, and dwellings of the tenants, who live worse than English beggars.

However, during that Eighteenth Century the condition of the Irish had improved for the first time since the Cromwellian invasion in 1653 (which also explicitly intended genocide, though failing to achieve it). This improvement was due in large part to the organizing efforts of Swift and his Leibnizian networks.

In particular, the Irish merchant marine had been revived, her ports improved, effective taxes lowered, and the clothing, linen, and glass industries developed, and agriculture had been improved. The Penal Laws of the 1690s had been intended to insure that Irish Catholics would be reduced to potato culture on land rented from British landlords. But effective organizing of the large number of Scottish Protestant immigrant landlords, had allowed economic development; in fact, it led to a united Catholic-Protestant movement for independence. This United Irish movement and Irish Volunteers militia gained the Constitution of 1782, during the American War of Independence.

The Irish population had begun to grow rapidly in the last quarter of the Eighteenth Century.

Prime Minister William Pitt's policy was described by Sinn Fein's founder and Ireland's first President, Arthur Griffith.

On the 12th of May, 1785, Pitt's new proposals were introduced in the English Parliament. They provided, among other things, that Ireland should not trade with any country where its trading might clash with the interests of England's mightiest corporation—the East India Company ... and that the navigation laws which the British Parliament adopted should be accepted by Ireland.



Starving Irish peasants at the gates of a workhouse.

To enforce this, Pitt eventually provoked his own Irish armed revolt. His military repression of the Irish Uprising of 1798 disarmed the Irish Volunteers and introduced large numbers of British troops, to force the 1801 Act of Union which annulled the Irish Constitution. (During the same period, the same policy of the same Pitt and Shelburne also reduced and impoverished Scotland, which had begun to industrialize at the time of the American Revolution.)

In his political pamphlets, Arthur Griffith described in detail how Pitt, after 1801, destroyed Ireland's new manufactures, particularly linens, by dumping British goods there, and rapidly eliminated independent Irish shipping. Even worse, was the collapse in land use under Pitt's and Shelburne's policy. By the 1820s, 80% of all Ireland's land was owned by British and Scottish landlords, and 25% of all land was *completely unused* except for real estate speculation. Some 75% of what was used, was in grain or horse/cattle pasture, most of this for export by merchants under London's domination.

On the remainder, the Irish who worked for the British landlords were allowed to grow potatoes for themselves; on perhaps two acres of rented land for each large family.

All Nineteenth-Century accounts of those who saw both the Irish tenant farmers and African slaves in

America and the Caribbean, agree that the Irish now were far worse off. In 1845, a British government commission headed by the economist Nassau Senior, confirmed that woolen, linen, poplin, furniture, and glass manufacture had disappeared; fishing had nearly disappeared for lack of capital for boats, storage, etc. Even water-powered grain mills had disappeared, in the country which had introduced them to Europe in 600 A.D. There were only 39 hospitals serving 8 million people.

The famous Duke of Wellington wrote in 1829 that "there never was a country in which poverty existed to the extent it exists in Ireland."

In 1824, a member of a previous British Commission had been asked in Parliament:

"Looking ahead to 15 years or more, what must this increase in population in Ireland, without any employment, end in?" Sounding like Sir David Attenborough today, he answered, "I don't know. I think it is terrible to reflect upon."

Once the famine was underway, the above-mentioned Nassau Senior wrote that he feared it would not kill more than a million people, which, he thought, would scarcely be enough to eliminate Irish unemployment.

But in 1842, 6 million pounds Sterling in rents were remitted out of Ireland to England, and a very large amount of real estate lending speculation in the City of London was based upon those rents.

Free Trade Without Money

Thus, when blight destroyed three-quarters of the potato crop of 1845, a sizeable majority of the Irish population owned no land, earned no wages, and paid as rent most or all of the proceeds of the sale of their grain crops. They had little or no money, or means of raising it; nearly two million did not even sell their

own produce, but turned it all over as rent in exchange for being allowed to grow potatoes on small strips of land.

Sir Robert Peel was British Prime Minister for the first half of 1846 after the destruction of the first potato crop. Immediately, a committee of Irish citizens (rather, subjects) headed by Henry Drummond made urgent proposals:

1. stop the export of corn and the distilling of grain into spirits;
2. remove duties on food imports;
3. public works concentrating on rail and harbor (fishing) infrastructure and drainage projects;
4. relief committees funded in part by a 10% tax on landlords (20-50% on absentees); and
5. in part by a 1.5 million pound, 10-year British loan on the security of Irish hardwood forests.

Prime Minister Peel responded by pushing for repeal of the British Corn Laws, to make import of Irish corn into Britain much easier.

Otherwise Peel's government bought, against a crop loss of 3.5 million pounds Sterling, a total of 100,000 pounds worth of American Indian corn, purchased through Baring Brothers' Bank. The reason for the tiny amount, was that it was to be locked up in military storehouses in Ireland, under control of Relief Commissioner Col. Henry Routh, and used "only as a leverage stock for purposes of preventing, through occasional sales from these stocks, an overfast rise in the market of foodstuffs."

Thirdly, Peel allowed formation of relief committees which could propose public works, but with no British government funds and solely voluntary (charitable) contributions from landlords in Ireland.

Treasury Head Sir Charles Trevelyan became effective dictator of the "relief" of Ireland, and already in June 1846 he was writing to Colonel Routh:

The only way to prevent people from becoming habitually dependent on government, is to bring [relief] operations to a close. The uncertainty about the new crop [there were already signs of a second year of potato blight] only makes it more necessary.... These things should be stopped now, or you run the risk of paralyzing all private enterprise and having this country on you for an indefinite number of years.

Almost nothing of the tiny government "reserve

stock" remained by then anyway. Baring's had one more ship on the way, but Trevelyan ordered that "the cargo of the *Sorciere* is not wanted; her owners must dispose of it as they think proper."

In September, when the Irish had begun to die of starvation, and there was plenty of evidence of the 100% failure of the 1846 second, annual potato crop, the *Times* of London added:

Such are the thanks that a government gets for attempting to palliate great afflictions and satisfy corresponding demands by an inevitable but ruinous beneficence.... It is the old thing, the old malady, the national character, the national thoughtlessness, the national indolence.

Meanwhile, Peel's Tory government had been voted out for trying to repeal the Corn Laws—Great Britain's high tariffs on imported grain. Lord John Russell's Whig government replaced it and did get them repealed. During 1846, Ireland exported enough wheat, barley, oats, oatmeal, pigs, eggs, and butter to feed its entire population.

Many modern historians have raged at this export, which was heavily guarded by British troops against starving crowds. But few note that under British free trade policies, even more wheat was imported into Ireland that year than exported; however, at least half the entire Irish population was without any means to buy food; there was no government food support, and the rate of evictions was growing with the destitution.

Irish members of the British Parliament in London proposed the government buy stocks of grain otherwise to be exported, and sell it in the worst famine areas, especially in Connaught where starvation deaths were growing. The answer from Lord Russell directly was no: "Purchase by government of any food in ordinary use is forbidden in order to avoid competition with private traders."

Trevelyan and Colonel Routh agreed that

there must be a distinction clearly kept between the ordinary distress of the people [!], and that resulting from the losses of the potato crop, which alone it may be our object to relieve.

Lord Russell's government added a Public Works program which was widespread but unfunded; local

committees had to propose the works and sign a contract holding their members personally responsible to repay the British government 100% of the cost within two years, plus interest of 3% per annum! At first, the government sometimes added partial matching grants for local money raised, but these were very difficult to qualify for, and were completely discontinued in 1847. During all of 1846, with three million Irish unemployed and selling everything down to their family beds for food, a total of 5,000 pounds-Sterling was expended for piers, harbors, drainage, navigation and water power projects combined: In other words, none were carried out.

Russell and Trevelyan made a Public Works rule, which was later found as well in the Constitution of Jefferson Davis's Confederacy:

Any public works done shall not be of a nature to benefit any individuals in any greater degree than all of the rest of the community.

To the despair of the better-off Irish farmers who were trying to save their countrymen, this rule eliminated all projects for drainage of bogs—the only way to rapidly increase food production—on the grounds that this would preferentially benefit those living nearest the bog being drained.

This was the common argument against government infrastructure-building which was used against Abraham Lincoln's Illinois networks in the same years. As a result of this "rule," the Public Works during the Irish famine built only roads, which was the one kind of infrastructure which the country already had plenty of. The wages were supposedly set at subsistence levels, but as desperate people deluged the "Works," the wages were often paid weeks late, and many thousands starved to death. Meanwhile, in the Workhouses (called Poor Houses the next year after passage of the Irish Poor Law), several hundred thousand elderly, infirm, and young children crowded, dying more slowly of malnutrition and disease.

The Tavistock Grin

Lord John Russell evaluated the reports of the second consecutive complete failure of the potato crop as no reason to change policy. Lord Russell, the 6th Duke of Bedford, was known for his small stature and icy smile. By the winter of 1846-47, the Irish

people had begun to die of starvation in large numbers.

Lord Russell's Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Charles Wood, announced that there would be no more government importation of Indian corn or any other food—private enterprise would provide it. Public Works were to be limited to one year, and ended by Aug. 15, 1847, and their expense was "to fall entirely on persons possessed of property in the distressed district."

In Autumn 1846 crops failed in many European countries. French and German governments and bidders bought large amounts of grain from America and elsewhere, while the British government "sat it out." Food dealers in Ireland were now charging enormous prices, which Trevelyan welcomed in a letter to Colonel Routh:

The high prices will have a regulating influence, as nothing is more calculated to attract supplies, and especially from America. . . . Do not encourage the idea of prohibiting exports (from Ireland): perfect Free Trade is the right course. Nothing ought to be done for the West of Ireland which might send prices, already high, still higher for people who, unlike the inhabitants of the West Coast of Ireland, have to depend on their own exertions.

In December 1846 Whitehall ordered all Commissariat officers in Ireland to cease all food sales. Colonel Routh added in a memo:

Even if it were practicable at the moment to open our depots [he knew they were actually empty], it would be prejudicial to owners of grain, inasmuch as at present extraordinary prices can be realized.

If this seems an egregious government endorsement of price gouging, Trevelyan repeated it himself:

If dealers were to confine themselves to what in ordinary circumstances might be considered fair profits, the scarcity would be aggravated fearfully. . . .

Trevelyan added that the government would also do



One of many mass evictions carried out by the British during the deepening Irish famine.

nothing about the new problem—the disastrous fact that all seed potatoes had been eaten and there was nothing to plant in 1847: “The moment it came to be understood that the government would supply seed, the painful exertions of private initiative to preserve a stock of seed would be relaxed.”

No seed would be provided, and, as it turned out, the 1847 potato harvest was to be blight-free, but only 20% of normal anyway for lack of seed and the death, exhaustion, or illness of farm families. The chance was not to be repeated: The 1848 crop again was destroyed by blight.

In January 1847, the British government smashed Circular #38, which the Irish Board of Public Works had issued, which would have allowed “family task work” under a sensible emergency proposal of some large farmers. It would have paid farm families wages to work their own land, and more wages for also working on drainage projects. “It is quite impossible,” wrote Trevelyan, “for my lords to give their sanction to parties being paid by public funds for the cultivation of their own land.” The government also defeated a proposal of Lord George Bentinck in Parliament, for a railroad building act in Ireland funded by the British Treasury.

That same month, Colonel Routh reported on Ireland’s poorest county, Skibereen, that 50,000 pounds rent had been paid in 1846; there were only twelve landowners, all British lords and knights.

When Sir Charles Trevelyan, in February 1847, ordered the ending of all government “relief” spending, he added, “It is hard upon the poor people to be deprived of knowing that they are suffering from an affliction of God’s Providence.”

Only Lord Clarendon, the Viceroy for Ireland, remained the protesting voice: “What is to be done with these hordes? Improve them off the face of the earth, you will say, let them die. But there is a certain responsibility attaching to it.”

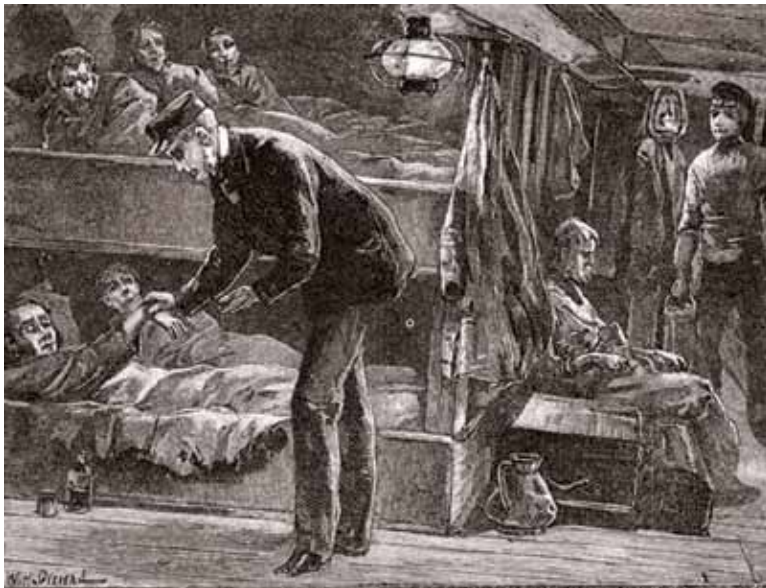
‘They Have Gone, Or Are Dead’

Typhus began to spread in March 1847. Trevelyan had his secretary notify all Poor Law Unions in July 1847:

The Commissioners cannot but complain of finding the demands for rations from many districts continuously increasing, and sometimes largely, without even a word of explanation to account for it.

The entire cost of relief of the destitute and starving lay on the local “rates” paid by landlords. But, this threatened the London speculative bubble which Irish rents were sustaining. Lord Montcashel presented the following figures to the House of Lords: Of the annual rent collection in Ireland of 13 million pounds (a huge amount), the landlord class paid annually 10.5 million pounds-Sterling on “mortgages and borrowed money” to the City of London bankers and speculators in real estate. Montcashel was making clear that an increase in rates, now planned by the British government, would siphon money off from mortgage payments. Sure enough, in late summer 1847, the financial markets of London crashed, as the speculation in rents, wheat, corn, and foreign railway shares collapsed.

Landlords in Ireland now tried to evict all the tenants they could in order to reduce the number of local destitute, and therefore their rates (poor relief taxes). They began to get, not just evictions, but criminal judgments for non-payment of rent, throwing the fa-



A scene from a ship carrying some of the millions of Irish who fled to North America during the depths of the famine.

thers of families into jail. This—as the landlords intended—finally set off the migration across the Atlantic which became a flood of starving, dying typhus-carriers into Canada and then New England in 1848-9.

Incredibly, large exports of foodstuffs from Ireland continued right through 1848 and 1849, which were the years in which the Irish population fell rapidly from 8.2 million to six million through death and emigration (and 40% of the emigrants died in crossing the Atlantic alone). In November 1848, exports of food from the County of Cork in a single day, were 147 bales of bacon, 255 barrels of pork, 5 casks of hams, 3,000 sacks and barrels of oats, 300 bags of flour, 300 head of cattle, 239 sheep, 542 boxes of eggs, 9,300 firkins [about one-fourth of a barrel] of butter, and 150 casks of miscellaneous foodstuffs.

But an inspector of the Public Works in Cork in the same month wrote about the public “workfare” rolls: “The lists are useless. No one answers their name. They have gone, or are dead.”

1848 was the year in which “revolutions” and insurrections took place against those European governments targetted by the British, particularly France. Foreign Minister Lord Palmerston personally manipulated and directed the “Young Europe” agents who fomented these insurrections. A very small and pathetic such “uprising” was apparently attempted that year by the “Young Ireland” movement; but in fact, Lord Rus-

sell had written to Palmerston three months earlier, acknowledging that this “Young Ireland” was controlled by Palmerston. “I am not yet ready to adopt, like Mr. Pitt, ‘ripening measures’ to force on a rebellion,” wrote Russell in December 1847. Thus he was admitting, at the same time, that the Irish Uprising of 1798 had been sponsored and controlled by then-Prime Minister William Pitt, in order to force upon Ireland the ruinous Act of Union in place of the Irish Constitution of 1782.

Palmerston still found time to evict nine shiploads full of his Irish tenants to Canada, 2,000 persons in all. As the ships arrived in New Brunswick, they raised storms of protest—on board children, elderly, and destitute were starving, many of them completely naked: “They had to be clothed by charity before they could, with decency,

leave the ship.” The “Common Council of the City of St. John deeply regret that one of Her Majesty’s ministers, the Rt. Hon. Lord Palmerston . . . should have exposed such a numerous and distressed portion of his tenantry to the severity and privations of a New Brunswick winter . . . unprovided with the common means of support, with broken-down constitutions and almost in a state of nudity.”

Ireland has never recovered from Britain’s Nineteenth-Century episode in “reducing carrying capacity.” In Lyndon LaRouche’s terms, from 1800-1850 British colonial policy succeeded in reducing the “potential population density” of Ireland—which is relative to its use of energy, agricultural, and industrial technology—to far below the *actual* Irish population of eight million in 1800. And so 2.5 million of them disappeared: two million dead of starvation and disease; 500,000 barely alive in America.

Ireland’s scant industrial and agricultural progress in the Twentieth Century is due entirely to the national institutions built by the Sinn Fein movement of 1902-1924, which explicitly opposed British free-trade dogma. But once again in the financial crash of 2007-08, Ireland was initially thrown backwards farther and faster than any other European country, because of the debt bubbles which London-centered banks had blown on Irish soil. Ireland’s potential relative population density was again thrust down—now below five million in the Republic—by British policy.