

## INSIDE THE BRANCH PLANT ECONOMY :

### A QUEST FOR TRUTH AND JUSTICE.

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There is a dichotomy in our discipline regarding the merits of the quantitative approach as opposed to the more literary and descriptive traditions. Many of the proponents of the latter approach fail to recognise the advantages of quantitative analysis. To illustrate the folly of this attitude let us take a particular case study. Let us suppose that a student doing a quasi-spatial, pseudo temporal study of Lingerie MNCs in South-West Ireland chooses to ignore Statistical techniques: Imagine that the fieldwork consists of a series of conversational interviews and that the subsequent thesis is written in a melodramatic, literary manner. In other words he has adopted what I refer to as the Mike Hammer narrative style. However it must be pointed out that unlike Hammer, the student in question and most of the geographers in the descriptive school have never defended democracy and freedom in Nam nor indeed in the Bronx.

This story is dedicated to the multinational executive who would like to buy more locally but can't afford to, who would like to provide jobs but is afraid to and who would like more autonomy but could not handle it. This is the story of one man, who for sixteen years defied the odds. It is the story of a man who infiltrated the branch plant economy. To do this, for sixteen years, he adopted the mannerisms, attitudes and desires of an aspiring MNC executive. This is the story of a man who had the facts and therefore had no need for statistics. This is my story.

The story begins and ends with the fieldwork. On July sixth 1972, I gunned my powerful engine towards 'Strapless Inc.' in Shannon. Driving through the night from Cork, the ancient capital of the south, my muscles tense and my mind alert, I was ready. As Fleetwood Mac played on the stereo the sun began to rise and I took in the beauty of the Golden Vale. The sun glistened on the tinted windscreen as I admired the lulling fields giving way to babbling brooks, state forests and imported mountains in the distance. I could see the farmers bringing the cows in for milking but as I moved into top gear and sped down the Mallow by-Pass my mind moved from the aesthetic virtues of this Celtic land which struggled against oppression for so long. I wondered aloud to Concepta who sat beside me, if this newly independant country was going to betray itself at the hands of the invading MNC. However, my thoughts strayed at Charleville because already in the distance I could see Shannon Towers, home of SFADCO, defender of the faith.

Seventeen minutes later I was on the Shannon Motorway. It had two lanes. In the inner lane, the employees of the branch plant economy headed for work in their second hand Fiestas. The outer lane was protected by the state security forces. It was reserved for MNC executives, cabinet ministers, the clergy and IDA personnel all driving BMWs and Harley Davidsons. I drove on the Kerb.

My first stop was 'Tighter Still' plc. I gunned my powerful engine up the treelined winding drive of the global conglomerate. As I walked boldly through the revolving glass

doors my heart was pounding. I turned it off as only brave men can. The walls were adorned with Van Goghs latest works and the carpets were six inches deep giving way to Galway marble (imported from Pittsburgh). I recognised Joe Capital the Managing Director instantly: He is a kindly man who dresses in Saville Row cutaways and modestly conceals his Cartier watch and gucci shoes with papersacks. His eyes have the benevolent twinkle of a man who has given employment to millions worldwide (they have a high staff turnover), and has helped countless countries to develop. In short he subscribes, like all good men do, to the 'Budweiser Theory of Modernisation'. We spoke at length. He told me nothing but I learnt a lot. He assured me that he bought "a helluva lot" locally and that everybody on the production line had a good job and was Irish. I sensed that this was a good Multinational. He agreed and suggested that as all other MNCs copied him it would be fruitless to waste time visiting them. I agreed, so we shook hands and I departed with the kindly assistance of four guards and two dobermans.

It was noon and I was thirsty so I headed for the airport, caught a flight to Boston and had a marvellous lunch. Concepta looked ill so she continued drinking brandy, but felt better when we got back to Shannon two days later. I gunned by powerful engine towards Shannon Towers, and as my muscles tensed I checked my revolver and felt the adrenalin rushing to my brain which I recently had relocated in my left foot for security purposes. Inside I was shown into a plush office with Swedish carpets and 'Buy Irish' slogans plastered all over the walls. A cow walked past the window. This made me suspicious as I was on the fourth floor. Suddenly John Grant Head of Promotional Locational Planning Kicked in the door. I said nothing, it was his office. We spoke about MNCs and he learnt a lot. In return he allowed me to listen in on a meeting with their latest catch, Thermal International. I dropped to the floor and hid behind a bottle of whiskey. I wanted to remain anonymous. The discussion lasted for hours. Finally both sides edged towards common ground.

The deal with Shannon Development and the MNC was complicated. Four hundred jobs in a new factory, three hundred and ninety on production, two in Research and Development, two in Management and six in the union. S.D. would pay sixty per cent of the wages and pay for the construction of the factory. In return the company would pay 1% tax on Irish sales until the year 3,000. They then dealt with the spatial details. The M.D. of the MNC wanted the Silvermine Mountains moved a little closer to Shannon, the river was to be redirected to Galway to avoid pollution and he wanted an authentic seventeenth century castle in the grounds. In return he would spend one thousand dollars per annum on raw materials in Europe. It was a good deal, and Michael Grant the S.D. boss gave a lengthy speech of gratitude to Thermal Inc. He said he looked forward to getting to know the company, if they stayed long enough, and hinted that they might even benefit from the National Legislation package. What was This? My curiosity was aroused!

I knew I had to find the answer so I gunned my powerful engine back towards Cork. The windows were down, the sunroof was open; the Stones 'blared on the quadrophonic and Concepta as always studied

the deep mysterious lines on my face. Nightfall was closing in as I sped through suburban Cork, home of Trinity College and birthplace of Daniel O'Connell. Two minutes later I was cruising in the midtown areas. Already, in February it was 90°F and throngs of young people headed for the casinos and clubs in Tivoli. Others were heading home from the beaches of West Cork but nobody I stopped knew anything about the N.L.P. I went back to my apartment, watched the news, showered and fed the goldfish.

Two a.m., and I was on top of the Sun Alliance building on the South Mall. The wind ruffled my hair but my cool blue eyes remained steady and calm. I slipped out of my dinner jacket, covered my face in polish, put on a jumpsuit and threw a rope across the street to the top of the IDA Building. As I soared through the air the theme to Miami Vice blared on the walkman and Concepta gazed at me with adoration. Four seconds later I crashed through the window.

I was badly bruised and cut so it took me a few seconds to regain my composure, find my camera and my torch. I searched for what seemed like hours through copies of Fortune, Business Week and Irish Geography for a clue. It was in Martin Grant's office I knew I was getting close, I knew this because my huntsman's instincts told me so. Suddenly I came upon a file marked National Legislation Package. I poured myself a Manhattan, lit a cigarette, inhaled deeply and began to read.

It was horrifying! The package proposed to allow MNCs to submit to the IDA any laws which they would like to see enacted. Within twenty-four hours the Dail would meet and it would become law. Oh no complete submission for this proud land of Kennedy, Gregory and de Gaulle!

I heard tyres screeching outside and began to move out. Too late, a man came crashing through the window. It was Martin Grant, Head of Long Range Domestic Small International Industry Planning. I pulled my gun, it was empty, I had no choice, so I let him live. We talked for a while and he offered me a way out so I took it. The story ends in another time and another place.

1986, Singapore, Macao, Scariff, Hong Kong, hotspots of the Orient. I looked at my pulsar, it was eight o' clock, the sun was rising and Bucks Fizz blared on the stereo as I gunned my engine through the Hung Flung tunnel. So much has happened since Joe Captital retired and I took his job. In the intervening years I have finished my thesis and submitted it to my ageing supervisor. Concepta left me some time ago. Life with me was too dangerous. She needed some space so I bought her Co. Clare, where she now lives with Martin Grant, I bought her him too. My powerful jet leaves in ten minutes and I'm going home. We're going to locate in Ireland and we'll all live happily ever after.