

Enabling Growth and Promoting Equity in a Global Financial Crisis

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' Combining growth with equity in an agrarian economy: development in England c.1600-1830'

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The Elizabethan or 'Old' Poor Law: created by two statutes 'For the Relief of the Poor' 1598 and 1601

- every one of England's approximately 10,000 or more parishes was mandated to create a parish fund, financed by a local tax on property, in order to support the local poor all year round if necessary, not just in times of dearth- orphans, widows, the old and disabled and the unemployed were all covered in principle.

Universalist but devolved system

- Strengths: high quality information
- Potential weaknesses:
 - local corruption
 - unlimited liability

Solutions to potential problems

- J.P.s (Justices of the Peace; 'Magistrates')
- The Settlement Laws (1662)

'The Poor Law' c.1660-1830

- Four interlocking institutions of local governance, mandated by central govt
- Poor Laws
- Settlement Laws
- Parish Registers
- Justices of the Peace

Evidence for Poor Law effectiveness

- Cambridge Group for the History of Population 4% sample (404 parishes) found no evidence of national famine crisis mortality after 1623/4, approximately 200 years before any other countries of Western Europe

Economic growth-enhancing properties of English Poor Laws

- enable productivity-raising innovations in agriculture
- capacity to promote labour mobility around the economy
- capacity also to facilitate mobility of capital (parish registers)

British population during the 'long' eighteenth century

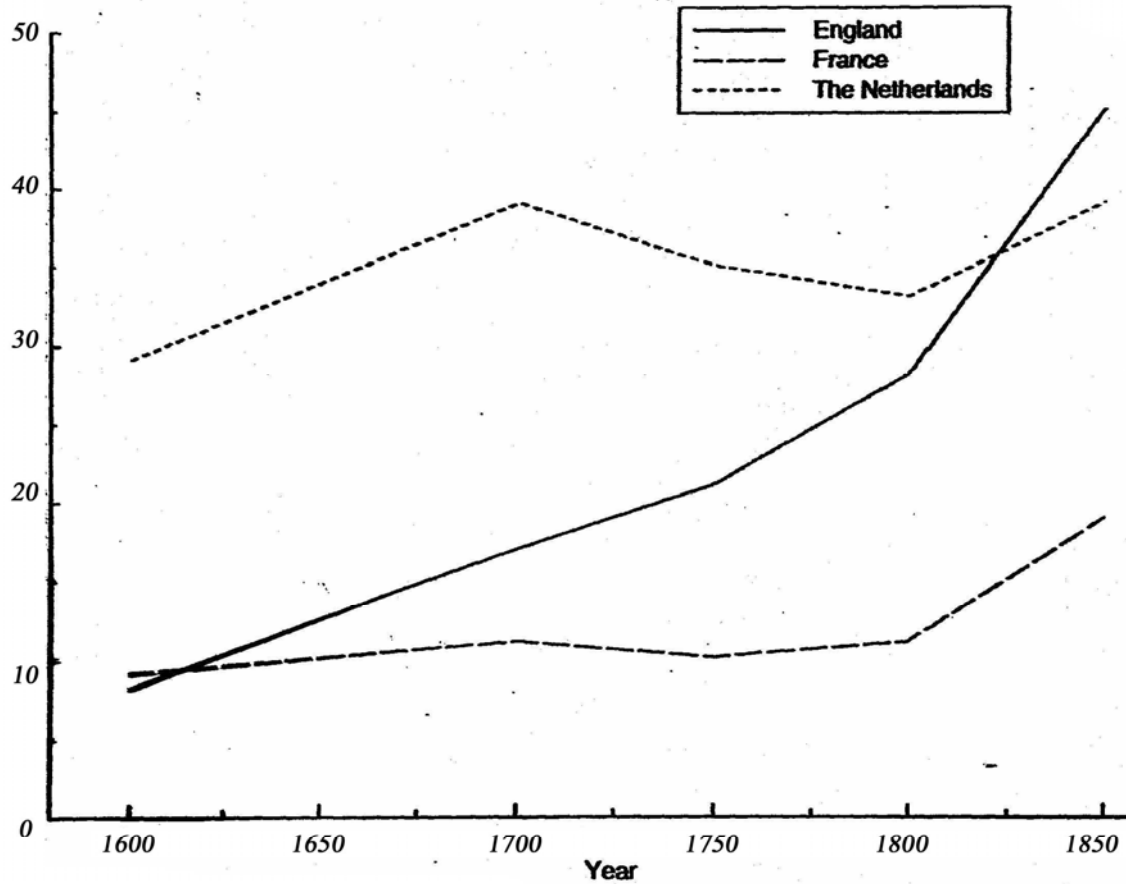


Figure 3.8 Urban growth in England, France and the Netherlands

Notes: The urban proportion was taken as the percentage of the total population living in towns with 5,000 or more inhabitants.

Source: E. A. Wrigley, ch.3 in R. Floud and P. Johnson, eds,
The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain 1700-1860 (CUP 2004)

The 1538 system of parish registers

- ‘...for the avoiding of sundry strifes and processes and contentions arising from age, lineal descent, title of inheritance, legitimation of bastardy, and for knowledge, whether any person is our subject or no.’
- (Thomas Cromwell, Henry VIII’s Vicar-general)

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