

# **The Localisation of the fast food industry in Ireland**

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## **Abstract**

For many years food as an academic discipline was ignored by academics in favour of more 'serious' topics such as poverty, unemployment and gender issues within the workplace. We as people now live in a consumer society where choice and variety is the norm. Our supermarkets are now filled with dozens of varieties of fruits, vegetables and meats which now mirror that of supermarkets in America the consumer capital of the world. However consumers have now become skeptical of the food industry and are worried how healthy food is on offer in supermarkets in light of food scares such as foot and mouth disease, BSE, and Salmonella. Since the beginning of this new century, a global obesity epidemic has come to dominate academic and medical interests. This was reflected in the popularity of Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation* (2000), Greg Critser's *Fat Land* (2003) and Felicity Lawrence's *Not on the Label* (2004).

The fast food industry and especially McDonald's have come under severe criticism due to the high content of fat, sodium, and sugar in its products and the marketing strategies directed especially at children. McDonald's and its golden arches have come to symbolise the rising levels of obesity in Irish society. This paper will not only discuss how McDonald's has come to symbolise rising obesity levels, it will also discuss how a multinational like McDonald's has come to symbolise broader sociological trends in society like the homogenization and dehumanization of the Irish landscape. The lack of non-union affiliation within the private service sector and how the globalisation of food is eroding our cultural identity and local democracy in what we eat. The research for this paper entailed interviews with different political activists groups like the Globalised Resistance Movement, the trade union SIPTU, members of the general public as well as the more traditional methods of research through medical journals and textbooks.

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## **Declaration of authorship**

**Date 22/10/2004**

This thesis represents research carried out by Declan Flanagan and does not, except where appropriately acknowledged, include the work of any other party.

**Signed:**

**Declan Flanagan**

*Declan Flanagan*

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# 1.Introduction



## **Introduction**

[It will take years, not months, to turn round a company (McDonald's), which despite all its problems still serves 46 million people a day in 30,000 restaurants in 121 countries. But one thing is certain. If the burger 'n' fries chain has a future. It won't be burgers 'n' fries].

(Aldridge, 2003:34).

In April 2003 an *Observer Food Monthly* from where the above quote was sourced detailed how McDonald's was buying into leaner cuisine in a big way with the introduction of fresh fruit, salads and low fat meals on the menus. The reason for this new direction by McDonald's was in response to a number of problems the corporation is having to deal with, like the rising obesity levels in America and across the world, to which McDonald's has been identified as a major contributor. Consumers in America have placed the sole responsibility for their ill health at the door of McDonald's and the fast food industry. This has led to a bombardment of lawsuits against the fast food industry in America since late 2002. Other American fast food companies like Burger King, Wendy's and Taco Bell have equaled or bettered McDonald's on price, quality and production. This has led to the saturation of a very competitive American fast food market. The American Sandwich Franchise Subway now has more outlets in America than McDonald's reflecting the demands of consumers who want healthier fare. At the end of 2002, McDonald's made its first ever loss of \$343m, and the media were quick to proclaim that it was the beginning of the end for one of the greatest business success stories in history. (Aldridge, 2000:30).

Many people have asked, why do a research thesis on a company like McDonald's? The main reason is that McDonald's has become a magnet for debate and discussion, an object of fascination, evoking strong feelings and emotions around the world. McDonald's concretises a plethora of larger social, cultural, economic, political and



educational concepts. This was first highlighted by the media attention in Britain surrounding the Mclibel trial (1997), where two environmentalists raised public consciousness of the company's social, cultural, political, economic and environmental role in society. More recently a group of farmers led by Jose Bove dismantled a McDonald's restaurant in Millau, France to protest against U.S imperialism, trade policies and the promotion of '*Malbouffe*', junk food. McDonald's has captured the public imagination, playing many roles in a contemporary globalised society: the corporation is the all-American success story; creator of the happy meal fandom; is a symbol of western economic development, a symbol of modernity, corporate bully, post-modern sign value, object of disdain; and patron or cultural dislocator of the McWorker.

McDonald's has the power to elicit dreams and fantasies from people around the world, which illustrates its compelling impact on the collective psyche. When I was a child growing up in the 1980s, McDonald's restaurants were only found in the major cities of Ireland. Going to Dublin on school trips or on family excursions always meant a visit to McDonald's was in store. Dublin and McDonald's represented the modern and the new. It was not just the food that was the attraction of a McDonald's restaurant, it was the whole experience of walking into the restaurant to be met by a warm blast of air from the busy kitchens, the colourful interiors and seating that resembled amusement rides at fun fairs.

I can remember standing in line waiting to be served and looking up at the variety of burgers to choose from the menu board. I marveled at all the high-tech machinery with flashing buttons, automatic chip fryers and drink dispensers, all operating at a touch of a button. Young teenagers and students were dressed in identical uniforms speaking a certain way just like in American TV and films. The global expansion of American popular culture in the form of MTV, Hollywood, Disneyland, the popularity of Michael Jackson, Madonna and especially McDonald's, all projected America as a magical place to live or visit, and eating at McDonald's briefly made me feel that I was in America and an American.

There have been many popular and influential books written about McDonald's and its affects on America and on the world at large, these include George Ritzer's book *The McDonaldisation of Society* (1993, 2000 2004), James L. Watson's *Golden Arches East* (1997) J.Vidal *McLibel: Burger Culture on Trial* (1997) and more recently Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation* (2001). The aim of this thesis however, is to explore the sociological impact of a foreign multinational like McDonald's on Irish society. There are four sections of Irish society that I will comment on: landscape, health, employment and food.

Chapter two, entitled *McLocal*, discusses McDonald's as a symbol of cultural imperialism. It asks if the presence of McDonald's restaurants across Ireland results in a landscape or space that has become standardised, dehumanised and homogenised? And if it does, are there any forms of resistance to these forces? Using two unique McDonald's restaurants in Bray, Co. Wicklow and in Navan Co. Meath as examples, I discuss whether or not the presence of the ubiquitous restaurants can function as a positive liberating discourse, and therefore can be interpreted as resistance to these alleged dehumanising and homogenising processes.

Chapter three, entitled *McDonald's and Obesity*, is divided into five sections. The first section discusses why McDonald's more than any other fast food company has come under such criticism from nutritionists and others about obesity. A key factor is its television advertising and marketing strategies directed at children. The second section discusses the ways in which McDonald's uses its marketing and advertising strategies through Ronald McDonald, Happy Meals and promotional tie-ins with Disney, health organisations and sports leagues. The third section concentrates on McDonald's products, discussing why they have their products come under such scrutiny. The fourth section discusses how McDonald's has responded to such criticism and the attempts made by the company to react through a healthier range of products. The last section discusses the border effects of obesity on children.

Chapter four is entitled *The Battle for Unionisation*. This chapter discusses how McDonald's has been successful in remaining a non-union corporation. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section discusses the work undertaken by employees within a typical restaurant and the opinions held by academics and society at large about what is termed 'McWork' and those who are employed in McDonald's restaurants. The second sections details the attempts made by employees to unionise in two McDonald's restaurants in Dublin in the late 1970s and the techniques used by McDonald's to maintain a non-union corporation. The third section discusses broader questions of why unions are not as strong and influential as they once were, and how the attitudes of certain unions towards work within the private service sector that has aided corporations like McDonald's to remain union-free.

Chapter five is entitled *Globalisation Good or Bad?* In this chapter I will discuss McDonald's as a negative symbol of globalisation. I will start by discussing the motives behind the dismantling of a McDonald's restaurant in Millau, France by a group of farmers led by Jose Bove and the argument that McDonald's reflects a global food industry that is eroding local democracy and cultural diversity. I will then discuss how the anti globalisation movement across the world reinvented itself in light of the so-called 9/11 attacks and the strategies used by the movement to get their message across. One school of thought prefers the more aggressive form of symbolic gestures against corporations to grab the media's attention. While the other school of thought prefers an educational approach with educational conferences about globalisation to discuss what defines the movement and what are they demanding from world financial organisations. These two schools of thought has led to division within the movement,

Chapter six is entitled *McTrouble*. This chapter discusses the reasons behind McDonald's first ever financial loss in 2002. First, it charts the problems McDonald's were facing in the fast food market in America and the reasons for their global expansion. Second I chart and examine the cracks that have appeared in the golden arches and the attempts made by the company since the 1990s to address them. I also examine the social, political, economic and legal obstacles that the company had to deal with during the last fourteen

years to assess whether or not, it really the end for one of the greatest business success stories in history. The concluding chapter discusses what the future holds for McDonald's in Ireland. Eric Schlosser (2001) has predicted that McDonald's will become a relic of the twentieth century. This opinion comes from an American viewpoint where McDonald's has been operating in America since the 1950s and who are now under pressure from other fast food chains in a very competitive and saturated American market. McDonald's has only been operating in Ireland since the late 1970s and are by far the most successful fast food company in Ireland. This could indicate that McDonald's have a future in Ireland despite their recent global financial downturn.

## 2. McLocal: Localisation

Make your journey  
a little more special.



McDonald's opened its first restaurant in Ireland 25 years ago on Grafton Street, Dublin and now has sixty-eight restaurants across Ireland. [Retrieved on the 25<sup>th</sup> January 2004 from [www.mcdonalds.ie/facts/index.htm](http://www.mcdonalds.ie/facts/index.htm)]. (Figure 1.0) The arrival of an American corporation like McDonald's into a country usually leads to cries of cultural imperialism which is seen as a culturally corrosive force. Sardar and Davis (2002:104) interpret this force as one that personifies the way in which America is taking over the lives of ordinary people in the rest of the world and shrinking their cultural space. 'America projects itself on the rest of the world as though it were itself a hamburger: a commodity, a brand, out to capture all cultural space for itself'. One perceived outcome of the spread of the American hamburger throughout the globe, and the philosophy associated with it is that it has spread homogenisation, standardisation, and dehumanisation throughout the world. This is discussed in great detail in George Ritzers's (2000) *McDonaldisation of Society*.

In this chapter, I will discuss McDonald's as a form of cultural imperialism. By this I mean, does the presence of McDonald's restaurants across Ireland result in a landscape that has become standardised, dehumanised and homogenised? If it does, is there any form of resistance to these forces? Using two 'unique' restaurants in Bray and Navan as examples, I will discuss whether or not the presence of the ubiquitous restaurant can function as a positive liberating discourse, and therefore can be interpreted as 'resistance' to these dehumanising and homogenising processes. I will show how a corporation like McDonald's 'localises' into cities and towns across Ireland, thus at least partially detaching itself from its American origins. Part of the localisation process into different countries across the world is through the diversification of menus and the incorporation of 'local' specialities, interestingly there has been no diversification with McDonald's menus throughout Ireland; this raises the question, has Ireland got a 'local' food culture of its own?

How has America, perhaps more than any other country, come to dominate and influenced the contemporary world? Gertrude Stein once said, 'The twentieth century has become the American century' (McKay, 1997:16). This quote testifies to Stein's



Figure 1.0 McDonald's Grafton Street (2003).

conviction that America encompassed and embodied the modern and the new. Technology and the cultural imagery of technology have come to dominate our iconography of American modernity. The modern world owes much to American scientific accomplishments, but it is applied science and technology that is America's true genius as evidenced by the many epoch-making inventions that originated in the United States such as the reaper, steel plough, telegraph and aeroplane. It also produced Frederick Taylor whose revolutionary approach to manufacturing, associated with the assembly line perfected by Henry Ford, influenced the development of fast food restaurants in years to come. As the 20<sup>th</sup> century continued, American business funded more and more scientific research and was rewarded with breakthroughs that created whole new industries, radio, television, movies, plastics, antibiotics and an array of other medical developments. (Hertsgaard, 2002:117).

Today, computers, the Internet and other high-tech gadgets have revolutionised daily life in many parts of the world. These either originated in the US or found their fastest development there. This is also true of food; Bagels, Spaghetti, Pizzas, French Fries, Burritos, Hot Dogs and hamburgers all originated outside America, but companies founded by ethnic entrepreneurs such as Di Giorgio and Heinz were successful in mass producing and marketing popular food products that come to have no identifiable ethnic markers and which achieved global acceptance. (Gabaccio, 2001:158).

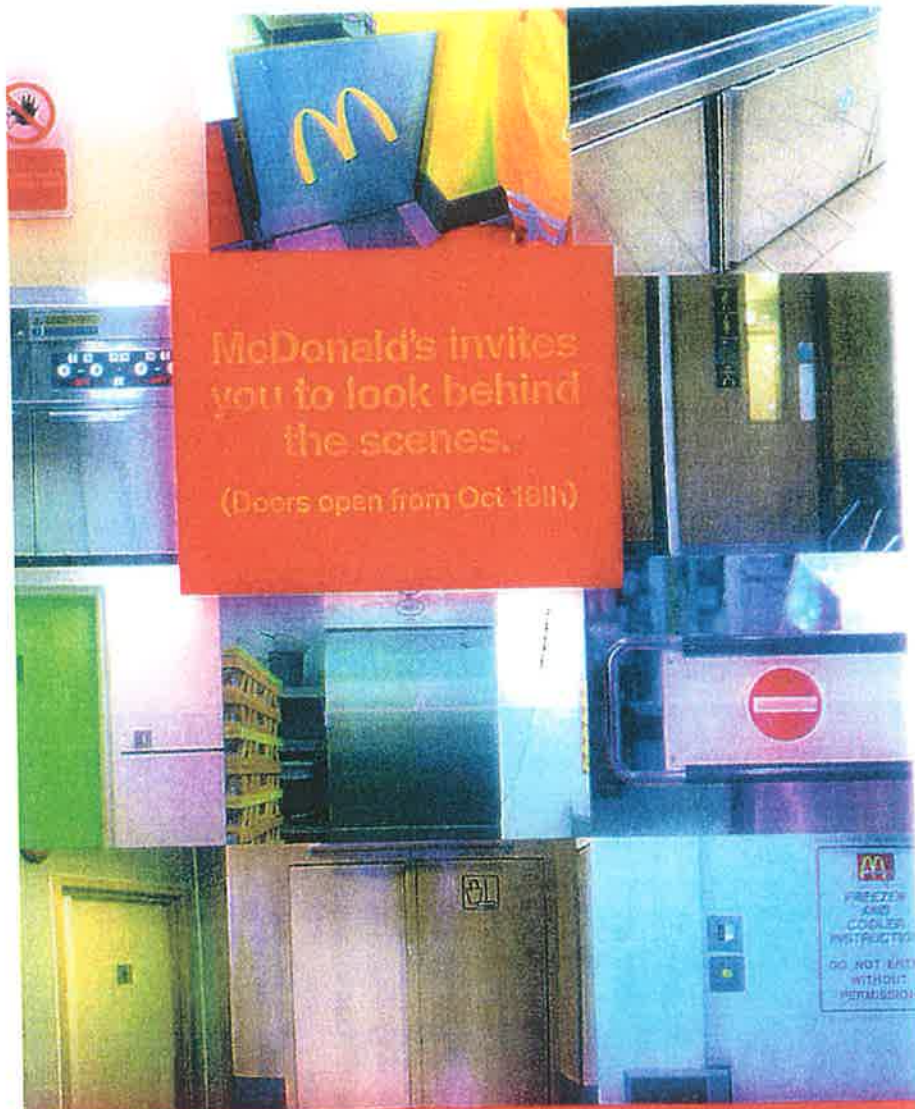
The new concerns are American youth culture, which originated in the 1950s, MTV, Rap music, Hollywood, and the presence of fast food restaurants and shopping malls in town and cities. The plethora of shiny surfaces, the bright lights, the pervasive use of glass and mirrors all serve to make both the commodities and the city centre itself appear brand new as though minted yesterday. The new could also include the contemporary concern about obesity. It seems that this health-related discourse has replaced that of cultural imperialism or may be a new way of expressing fears over cultural imperialism, as embodied in the term 'fat Americans'.



In McDonald's restaurants, 'everything is squeaky clean, never a smear or finger mark on the acres of plate glass, never a dull patch on the shiny walls or ceilings. It all adds up to an overwhelming image of newness, a space with no place for the old, the shabby, the worn, no place for the past, only an invitation for the future'. (Fiske, 1989:39). Newness and change can sometimes be met with suspicion especially in smaller localities and that's why McDonald's interiors and kitchens are open-planned for all to see. When one enters a restaurant, one can see all preparations and cooking of food and dispel any suspicion about newness of the company, restaurants or its food. In Britain, McDonald's has invited its customers to step behind the counter to observe how a McDonald's kitchen operates, its preparation, cooking and safety checks, as part of their new 'open doors policy'. (Figure 1.1).

If McDonald's represents the future, then according to Barber (2003 :128-129) 'the future is a world where foreign countries are no longer foreign'. He uses the term 'McWorld' to describe how corporations today play a greater role in global affairs than governments. Corporations like McDonald's adjure the very idea of nations or any other parochialism that limits them to time or space: their customers are not citizens of a particular nation or members of a parochial clan: they belong to the universal tribe of consumers defined by needs and wants that are ubiquitous, if not by nature then by the cunning of advertising(Barber, 2003:128-129).


Barber (2003) sees McDonald's as a theme park. Its commercial tie-ins with Disney, and its pervasive claim on American lifestyle, make McDonald's far more than just a restaurant. 'McDonald's is selling an experience, one that becomes the defining attribute of a food marketplace that is also a theatre of consumption and a theme park of lifestyles' (Barber, 2003:128-129). For Barber (2003) the experience that McDonald's sells is more than a quick lunch. He states that 'Fast food is life in the computer world's fast lane, the bites and the bytes propelling our bodies and minds through the day at breakneck speed. Customers eat fast and serve the business world's god of efficiency' (Barber, 2003:128-129). 'customers serve and clean up after themselves, therefore reducing the numbers of



**McDonald's invites you to look behind the scenes.**  
(Doors open from Oct 18th)

Chance to view a side of our restaurants that customers have rarely had the chance to see before. From 10am to 30th, you can step behind the counter to watch our busy kitchen staff in action. Our new "Open Doors" programme. You'll be able, among other things, to take a closer look at the use of our equipment to store and prepare your food and also witness some of the 100 safety checks that we carry out every day in every McDonald's restaurant across the UK. For more information, call McDonald's Customer Services on 0870 5244622 or go to [www.mcdonalds.co.uk](http://www.mcdonalds.co.uk) to book your visit. We look forward to welcoming you at the doors.

Andrew Taylor, Chief Executive, McDonald's Restaurants Ltd.



I'm lovin' it

Figure 1.1 McDonald's Advertising (Open Doors Policy) (Source: The Observer Magazine, 5/12/3 :35).

jobs available. Customers stand and eat or take it with them, transforming the act of eating into a solitary activity' (Barber, 2003:128-129).

Mass cultural analysis would argue that because of American global development in capital and technology that cultural imperialism is at work. This view of popular culture is one that sees it as so contained by mechanization and commodification that it cannot be seen as a genuine expression of anything other than corporations that standardise and homogenise everything for their own ends (McKay, 1997:19). On the other hand, some popular cultural analysts like McKay (1997) and John Fiske (1989) believe that the consumption of American popular culture such as fast food or Rap music might function as a positive liberating discourse. American popular culture would include Hollywood films, advertising, and images on packaging, fast food, clothes and music. These offer a rich iconography, a set of symbols, objects and artefacts, which, according to McKay (1997:31), 'can be assembled and reassembled by different groups in society in a literally limitless number of combination. Jeans, records and fast food restaurants etc are taken out of their original historical and cultural context and juxtaposed against other signs from other sources.'

Fiske (1990:2) 'regards popular culture as being made from within and below, not imposed from without or above, as mass cultural theories would have it'. To Fiske (1990:2) 'there is always an element of popular culture that lays outside social control and that escapes or opposes hegemonic forces'. Fiske (1990:2) suggests that popular culture is always a 'culture of conflict, it always involves the struggle to make social meanings that are in the interests of the subordinate and that are not those preferred by the dominant ideology'. Fiske (1990) uses the example of the shopping mall suggesting that they present two quite different texts for women and unemployed youths. Women interpret malls as legitimate, unthreatening public spaces, 'that are opposed to both the street and the home; for unemployed youths, they are the place to trick "the system," to consume the images, warmth, and places of consumerism, without buying into any of its commodities' (Fiske,1990:3).

John Watson's book on the experience of McDonald's in east Asia - *Golden Arches East* (1997) takes the popular culture stance that there can be aspects of resistance to the certainty of standardisation and homogenisation of food, even though McDonald's is largely responsible for the standardization and automation of food we now take for granted in the fast food industry. Watson questions whether American fast food corporations like McDonald's undermine local cuisines, many of which have been celebrated for centuries. He analyses consumer reaction to McDonald's in five east Asian cities; Hong Kong, Beijing, Taipei, Seoul, and Tokyo, and comes to the conclusion that McDonalds has been divorced from its American roots and has become a local institution.

The term localisation refers to how the corporation has had to adapt in order to flourish in new settings. The word "multinational" itself offends many multinationals – they prefer to use the term "multilocal"; McDonald's goes to great lengths appear to be linked into the community, preferring to be considered an 'Irish' rather than an American corporation. In the McDonald's official biography, Love (1995:443) repeatedly suggests that the key to success for McDonald's international markets was the same as it was in the USA: 'Local control by local operators'. For example, in struggles with trade unions in Ireland, the company emphasised the fact that its franchisees were Irish and that the original McDonald's brothers were descendants of Irish immigrants, in the hope that this would dilute the connection with the American head office in the eyes of the public.

They came up with the slogan 'our name maybe Irish but we're all Irish' (Love, 1995:443). In order to achieve a local identity, it is imperative to McDonald's that they find local suppliers and local partners whenever new branches are opened. The company supports local programmes, which operate at the grass roots level, usually focusing on family, charity and local environmental related issues. (Figure 1.2) (See Chapter 2) When McDonald's opened its first restaurant in Ireland, it represented the modern and the new, but the corporation could not keep selling this motif as the years went by. The tactic of localisation was the way forward for McDonald's. It must be said that McDonald's did not make the transition from foreign import to local institution until the first generation



Irish consumers began to have children of their own. This coincided with the boom in the fast food industry in Ireland during the late 1990s and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. According to Royle (2000:94) there were twenty-five stores in 1999, this has since increased to 68 stores according to the McDonald's website.

The "Big Mac" is probably the best known sign throughout the world represents "cultural imperialism". It can be interpreted in many ways for example as referring to the rising levels of obesity; around the world, the import of US hormone treated beef in to the EU; or how Eastern countries are switching their main source of nutritional food from rice or vegetables to meat and increase fat but conversely, according to Watson (1997), McDonald's modification of standardised menus and submission to local sensitivities could be interpreted as resistance to the notion of a dominant culture or of cultural imperialism.

Here are examples from around the world of modified menus that reflect local sensitivities and tastes:

- Chilled yoghurt drinks in Turkey.
- Espresso and pasta in Italy.
- Teriyaki burgers in the Netherlands.
- McSpagetti in the Philippines.
- Calks – grilled Salmon Sandwich in Norway.
- Frankfurters and Beer in Germany.
- Mchueuo- (poached egg) burger in Uruguay.
- "Oriental" Chicken Salad.
- Fried Chicken.
- Durian Milkshakes- made from fruit that tastes like a sweet onion.
- Kiwi burgers doused in beetroot sauce.
- French fries with chilli sauce.
- Veggie Burger in India.
- Grilled chicken Burger with Tandoori yoghurt and mint sauce in Australia.
- Rice porridge with chives and toasted garlic in the Philippines.

- Mango Ice Cream Sundae in China. (Kincheole, 2001:84) (Watson. 1997:84) (Springen, 2003:84).

In Ireland we have the McFresh burger and the McShamrock, shake two products that are sold for a limited time up to and after St. Patrick's Day. [Retrieved on the 20/01/2004 from [www.mcdonald.ie/facts/index.htm](http://www.mcdonald.ie/facts/index.htm)]. The former in consists of an extra large beef patty with extra large servings of salad on it, which is basically an extra large ordinary burger. Which begs the question; do we in Ireland have a food culture of our own? Do we as a country not have anything from our own cuisine to offer McDonald's as they modify their way into our towns and cities, compared to other countries that have some sort of local presence in their McDonald's Menus?

### **Irish Food Culture**

The word 'boring' in relation to food is a re-occurring motif among foreign students I have interviewed especially Mediterranean students who are living in Ireland. They are under the impression that Irish people lack creativity and are predictable in the kitchen. When asked what they didn't like about Ireland, the majority I interviewed said first and foremost 'the food', not because of the absence of culinary skills in their host family kitchens, but due to the fact that they got potatoes, chips, white or red meat nearly every night as part of their main meal. It was their opinion that there was nothing unique or exotic about our diet that constituted Irish food. (Interview 1, M 7 F 20-25 Dublin).

According to Inglis cited in Tovey and Share (2003, 364-366) Irish people are becoming more rational, circumspect and educated about the pleasures of food and drink, reflecting the modernization of Irish society. Irish people, like those in many other societies want to explore different tastes, products and services, and to eat and drink in new places. However the fact remains, regardless of the massive changes that have taken place over the last fourteen centuries, the Irish diet is still to a significant extent based on milk, grain, legumes and meat – with potatoes, tomatoes, sugar, tea and coffee amongst the most contemporary additions. (Tovey and Share, 2003:366) Ireland like any other country does have food culture, for if it did not 'it would be an Ireland without the great

famine, the potato, poteen, the craic around the fire, and the Irish Diaspora, an Ireland without the laments of the dispossessed, the emigrant history, all of which are the basic importance of food and drink to our social history'. (Clarkson & Crawford, 2001:279). So Irish food culture is perhaps more located in the narratives and meanings connected to food rather than in specific foodstuffs themselves.

If we interpret McDonald's as a cultural corrosive force, this means that the presence of a McDonalds restaurant in a town or city in Ireland, may result in a process of homogenisation where local places lose their distinctiveness. However McDonald's has had to submit to local sensitivities in two towns, Bray and Navan, due to issues of historic importance and heritage. McDonald's Bray occupies the old town hall that was commissioned by Lord Reginald Brabazon, 11<sup>th</sup> Earl of Meath. The building provided a dual purpose, as a covered market place and as a meeting place for the town commissioners. [Retrieved on the 26<sup>th</sup> of January from [www.mcdonalds.com/Ireland.html](http://www.mcdonalds.com/Ireland.html)]. The Navan restaurant occupies the old post office which dates back to 1908. (Interview 2 F 60 Navan). (Figure 1.3). (Figure 1.4)

Bray and Navan are two unusual examples of McDonald's restaurants in Ireland Each has a Golden Arches sign outside its premises but, unlike the majority of restaurants in towns and cities across Ireland they don't have the ubiquitous standard exterior and interior due to their listed heritage status. But no matter how unusual the restaurant may be, we can still ask: Does the presence of McDonald's restaurants in cities and towns across Ireland help to render the Irish urban environment homogenous and dehumanising? Or are there ways in which the people can resist a dominant symbol like McDonald's?

According to Ritzer (2000:1) 'McDonaldisation is the process by which the principles of the fast food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world'. McDonalds has succeeded because it offers consumers, workers, and managers efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control. These four elements constitute the McDonaldisation process.





Figure 1.3 McDonald's Restaurant Bray (2003).



Figure 1.4 McDonald's Restaurant Navan (2003).

- **Efficiency.** The first dimension of the McDonaldising process involves the search for the optimum means to a given end. This fast food restaurant has spearheaded the search of optimum efficiency by other elements of our McDonaldising society. (Ritzer, 2000:69).
- **Calculability.** The second dimension of McDonaldisation involves the emphasis on quantification. This emphasis shows up in various ways, but especially in the focus on the quantity rather than the quality of products, the widespread efforts to create the illusion of quantity, and the tendency to reduce production and service processes to numbers. (Ritzer, 2000:82).
- **Predictability.** The third dimension of McDonaldisation involves an emphasis on discipline, systematisation, and routine so that things are the same from one time or place to another. (Ritzer, 2000:102).
- **Control.** The fourth dimension of McDonaldisation is control (similar to Taylorism in many respects), primarily through the replacement of human with nonhuman technology. The most important aspect here is the control over uncertainties created by people, especially employees and consumers. (Ritzer, 2000:121),

### **Homogenisation.**

Ritzer (2000:135) discusses the negative impact of McDonaldisation and argues that this process is increasing homogenisation. This means that people around the world are likely to be offered the same products and services in the same way. The mere existence of standard American chains in other countries is not the only indicator of the spread of McDonaldisation; it is rather the existence of indigenous clones of the McDonaldised enterprises. Supermacs, Abrakebabra, the Four Lanterns and, most recently, O'Brien's sandwich chain are the main indigenous clones in Ireland. The expansion of these franchising establishments around Ireland mean that people find less diversity and more familiarity between regions and cities.

### **Dehumanization.**

Ritzer (2000, 136-137). believes that people who either work in or patronise McDonaldised restaurants are being dehumanised. The fast food industry offers its employees what Ritzer (2000) has termed McJobs. 'A McJob requires a worker to use only a small portion of their skills and abilities; it is a job that offers little satisfaction or stability and as a result leads to the dehumanisation of work'.(Ritzer, 2000:136-137). McDonald's dehumanises its customers by placing eating on a kind of assembly line, where restaurant customers are reduced to automatons rushing through a meal with little gratification derived from the dining experience or from the food itself. 'Customers are also dehumanised by the scripted interactions and other efforts to make interactions uniform'. Ritzer (2000) interprets uniformity as incompatible when human interactions are involved. 'Human interactions that are mass-produced may strike consumers as dehumanising if the routinization is obvious or manipulative. Dehumanisation occurs when the prefabricated interactions take the place of authentic human relationships'. (Ritzer, 2000:136-138)

From ethnographic study of the two McDonald's restaurants in Bray and Navan, I have observed that people are not just consuming food and are not being dehumanised nor does the presence of a McDonald's restaurant lead to a homogenised society. According to Smart (1999: 63) in the restaurant, 'one is not consuming food; one is consuming social positions and experiences. One can variously pretend to be rich, urban, powerful, radically chic and even anti-social'. He suggests that 'the restaurant is a site, so rich in social possibilities that it encourages practices, which transcend its own formal structures' (Smart, 1999:63). So what kind of practices do the people of Bray and Navan, for example do to transcend the formal structures of McDonald's in such a way that they can challenge tendencies towards dehumanisation or homogenisation?

### **McDonalds Birthday Parties.**

Watson (1997) has stated that the McDonald's children's birthday party is a key part of the corporation's localisation process. It could be interpreted as a culturally corrosive force in the way that it shifts the cultural space from the traditional place of celebration of

the family home to the restaurant. McDonald's, with its climate controlled environment and soft music, has become a place to hold family celebrations. It is a symbol of leisure which puts an emphasis on relaxing, a function that contradicts its American purpose. Most McDonald's restaurants have play areas where children can play and be entertained while parents can relax. McDonald's has not tried to educate consumers to accept the notion of dehumanising consumption that one must eat fast and leave quickly. What is now happening is that the 'fast' has been taken out of the 'fast food'.

### **Youth Centre.**

Through ethnographic observation of the Bray and Navan restaurants, it was seen that children and students of all ages use McDonalds as a form of informal youth centre, a recreational extension of school where students come to unwind after a day of study. Students congregate outside to meet friends from other schools or take up a percentage of the tables inside the restaurant buying a Coke and fries, which is shared in groups. They talk about the current trends in music and fashion and gossip or flirt with other students within the restaurant and are not hurried by any employees. These restaurants are also used as a rendezvous point for teenagers to meet on Saturday afternoons.

### **Social Meeting Point**

The ability of consumers to transcend formal structures does not just apply to McDonalds, it can happen to all fast food outlets and amenities that are open to the public. If you were to go into the Supermacs family restaurant in Eyre Square, Galway on a Saturday night, you would not find customers simply eating and leaving the restaurant. It has become a traditional meeting point for friends after a night out. People frequent it not just to eat but also to socialise, not prepared to go home just yet. 'yelping and the hollering punters crowding through the doors and the annexing the tables and counters and shouting the odds at the top of their voices about where they had been to whether it be to the local pub or nightclub'. (Carroll, 2002:15).

The reason why this has not happened to McDonalds in Galway is due mainly to two factors. First McDonalds closes relatively early on a Saturday night, second and most

importantly, although Supermacs is a nationwide chain, it is very much embraced as a local institution in Galway due to its origins in Ballinasloe back in 1978. Retrieved on the 20/1/2004 from [www.Supermacs.ie/corporate.htm](http://www.Supermacs.ie/corporate.htm)]. Customers in Galway prefer Supermacs because of its origin and also due to the fact that McDonalds is still seen as a foreign restaurant chain whose localisation process has not succeeded well with the older generation, compared with the younger generation. (Interview 2 M/F 25-30 Galway) (Figure 1.5).

Kincheole (2000:166) disagrees with Watson's (1997) localisation theory. Watson (1997) argues that it is no longer possible to distinguish what is local and what is not, the transnational corporation is now the local, no longer foreign because the principles of McDonaldisation have become detached from their American roots and become an important part of local institutions and local life. According to Kincheole (2000:166) 'Watson seems unable to grasp the inseparability of globalisation and localisation. McDonalds has globalised its production and marketing operations while providing an opening for local readings and idiosyncratic cultural appeal' (Kincheole, 2001:166). He further suggests 'is producing a global culture but not a homogenized one where the McWorld is mediated through local conditions and local perceptions' (Kincheole, 2001:166).

Barber echoes this in his argument that globalisation is threatening cultural identity and that multinational companies are complicit in generating this process. Driven by the promise of profit maximisation associated with operating on a global scale, 'multinational corporations such as McDonald's often do not seek to create a homogenised cultural identity, they prefer to centralise, as it is easier and more effective'. [Retrieved on the 27/08/01 from [www.snnflinders.edu.au/global/glob1002/2000book/jk/main.htm](http://www.snnflinders.edu.au/global/glob1002/2000book/jk/main.htm)].

Featherstone identifies this process as "glocalism, 'which refers to a global strategy which does not seek to impose a standard product or image, but instead is tailored to the demands of the local market'. He argues 'transnational corporations, who prefer to think globally about how to make more money, whatever the cost, do generally not consider



Figure 1.5 Supermac's Eyre Square Galway (2001).

individual or traditional cultures'. [Retrieved on the 27/0801 from [www.snn.flinders.edu.au/Global/glob1002/2000book/JK/main.htm](http://www.snn.flinders.edu.au/Global/glob1002/2000book/JK/main.htm)].

This localisation within globalisation is promoted by marketing strategies that use the personalisation motif that I term "McLocal". When McDonald's customers produce idiosyncratic meanings from the Big Mac, and when their customers customize the meanings of their consumption, then McDonald's marketing strategies have succeeded. As stated earlier, the goal of McDonald's is to be connected to local cuisine or in the case of Bray, Navan and the rest of the country, to be involved and connected to the community and heritage through the sponsorship of local events and environmental issues. McDonald's is eager to implant this perception of localisation/personalisation in the public mind that it tries to make the company feel small despite the reality of globalisation. It is multilocal rather multinational.

Watson's concern with cultural homogenisation blinds him to the subtler effects of McDonald's power and the ways in which it can win consent in different cultural settings. 'What Watson may see as an absence of cultural hegemony might be read as the success of McDonald's hegemonic activities in foreign venues'.(Kincheole, 2000:170). McDonald's achieves this by precisely not attempting to turn Irish people into Americans instead it works to gain consent by employing cultural beliefs important to them, like family values, community involvement in charity and environmental work. 'McDonald's hegemonic activities have been so successful that they have been able to divert attention away from the corporation's social sins that have been publicised on the McSpotlight and McLibel websites' (Kincheole, 2002:170).



## Conclusion

According to McKay (1997:13). 'America (meaning American popular culture) exported does not equal America at home'; America is more a mental image than a real place, (Heretsgaard, 2002:1). O' Toole (1989:32) gives the example of country and western music being imported into this country. He states that it is itself 'not so much an aspect of modernity but of nostalgia, which is part of the dynamics of memory and displacement, of exile and yearning' (O Toole, 1998:32) He further suggests that 'when Irish people yearn for America, they may not yearn for an America of the present but an America of the past, a remembered America, a myth of America created by their own ancestors' (O' Toole, 1989:32).

The presence of McDonald's restaurants across Ireland does not result in Ireland becoming a homogenous or Americanised landscape. People create openings for local readings and idiosyncratic cultural appeal in different ways and in different countries, that take the McDonald's restaurant out of its original context. It is then reassembled into a number of space combinations and meanings. In Bray and Navan the restaurant is used as a youth centre where children come to be entertained at birthday parties, teenagers meet up after school to socialise, share food and relax, or in the case of Supermacs, people see the restaurant as an extension of the pub or nightclub where they come not just to eat but continue to socialise well into the night. This cultural response according to Fiske (1989:16) 'challenges, offends and resists dominant culture. Resistance in this case refers to the making fast food slow'.

Although it may not be homogenizing our landscape, McDonald's is helping to create a global rather than a homogenized society, McDonalds has globalised its production and marketing operations which ironically allow for local readings and cultural appeal. It is producing a global culture but not a homogenized one, where the McWorld is mediated through local conditions and local perceptions. When people do produce idiosyncratic meanings from their consumption, then McDonald's has succeeded. A global wave of anti-American sentiment has escalated in recent years due to the military invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq and American economic dominance of world trade. The American

government in response has tried to rebrand itself by selling the United States and its 'war on terrorism' to an increasingly hostile world. The problem is not the fact that America has not been successful in branding itself as a place of democracy, liberty and equality. The fact is, America has been too successful in doing so and people expect the US to live up to its promises. These promises have not been kept and millions feel betrayed by American policy.

Despite President Bush's insistence that America's enemies resent its liberties, most critics of the US don't actually object to America and what it stands for. Instead they point to the US unilateralism in the face of international laws, widening wealth, disparities, the crackdown on immigrants and human rights violations-most recently in the prison camps at Guantanamo Bay and the Patriots Act. 'The anger not only comes from the facts of each case but also from the clear perception of false advertising. In other words, Americas problem is not with its brand-which could hardly be stronger- but with its product'. (Klein, 2002:185-186).

In the corporate world, once a brand identity is settled on, it is enforced with military precision across the world. 'The brand identity may be tailored to accommodate local language and cultural preferences (like McDonald's offering hot sauce in Mexico), but its core features – aesthetic, message, logo-remain unchanged'. (Klein, 2002:186).

McDonald's like, US policy, has let people down, through false advertising of its products, labour operations and environmental commitments, to such an extent that the corporation's global cultural dominance could be under threat. This was reflected in the last financial quarter 2002 when McDonald's recorded its first ever loss of \$343m [Retrieved on the 1/4/04 from [www.McSpotlight.org](http://www.McSpotlight.org)].

The core values of McDonald's, its ubiquity and the predictability of their food are no longer a powerful attraction. The corporation was faced with the ultimate decision to reinvent or die. There are signs of recovery, in 2003 McDonald's reported a double-digit gain in US. Same store sales from their 30,000 plus stores jumped 14.9% from a year earlier [Retrieved on the 1/4/04 from [www.idsnews.com/story.php?id=20296](http://www.idsnews.com/story.php?id=20296)]. Today

children's tastes are more sophisticated and Ronald McDonald is now seen as being old fashioned, clichéd and even-to-some , sinister and paedophilic. The first generation of Irish consumers do not continue to go to McDonalds because it is seen as a place of consumption for children, or else they associate the prefix 'Mc' with dietary dangers, environmental degradation, the evils of capitalism, minimum wage work, faltering unionisation and the threat of Americanisation and the negative aspects of globalisation. The plethora of shiny surfaces and bright lights no longer shine brightly as young professionals prefer to order take out sandwiches from establishments like O' Brien's, Subway, or Nude with its health and environmentally conscious set of values.

McDonald's, in response has started to reinvent itself by opening up three McCafé coffee shops on Grafton Street (Figure 1.6), Kylemore Road and in Artane offering paninis, sandwiches and different types of coffee drinks to try and attract back working professionals. They have started selling a new range of healthier foods like salads, fruit and more upmarket type sandwiches and burgers like the Chicken McGrill sandwich represents an attempt to combat the growing criticisms about their aggressive marketing and advertising campaigns directed at children. (Figure1.7)

The two McDonald's restaurants in Bray and Navan are unusual to Ireland. In conjunction with McCafes, they can be interpreted as signs of reinvention in an attempt to regain profits. There is a move away from the aggressive oversized arches and noticeable exteriors that first arrived in Ireland in 1978. The golden arches were and are often interpreted as an aggressive and arrogant symbol of global American dominance and insistence on homogenisation. The large signs that once illuminated city centre shopping areas and the main streets of large towns have decreased in size but are still visible as in the case of the restaurant on Mary Street in Dublin. (Figure 1.8-1.9:2003). According to Fiske (1989:11) such gains in the specificities of everyday life are progressive rather than radical. 'They enlarge the space of action for the subordinate; they affect shifts, however minute, in the social power relations between the subordinate and dominant cultures.' Whether these changes can be interpreted as signs of wavering of McDonald's dominance remains to be seen. McDonald's is still expanding across Ireland.



Figure 1.6 McCafe Grafton Street Dublin (2003).

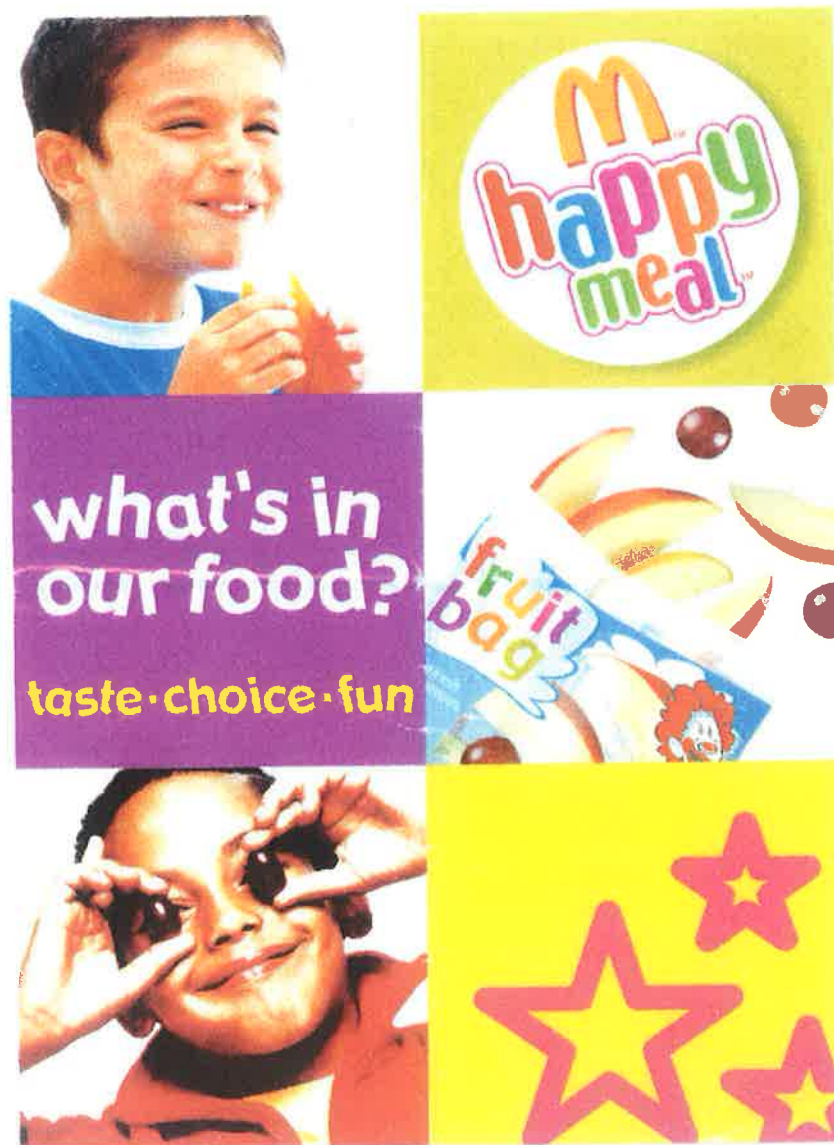


Figure 1.7 McDonald's New Advertising Campaign 2004.



Figure 1.8 McDonald's Mary Street (2003)

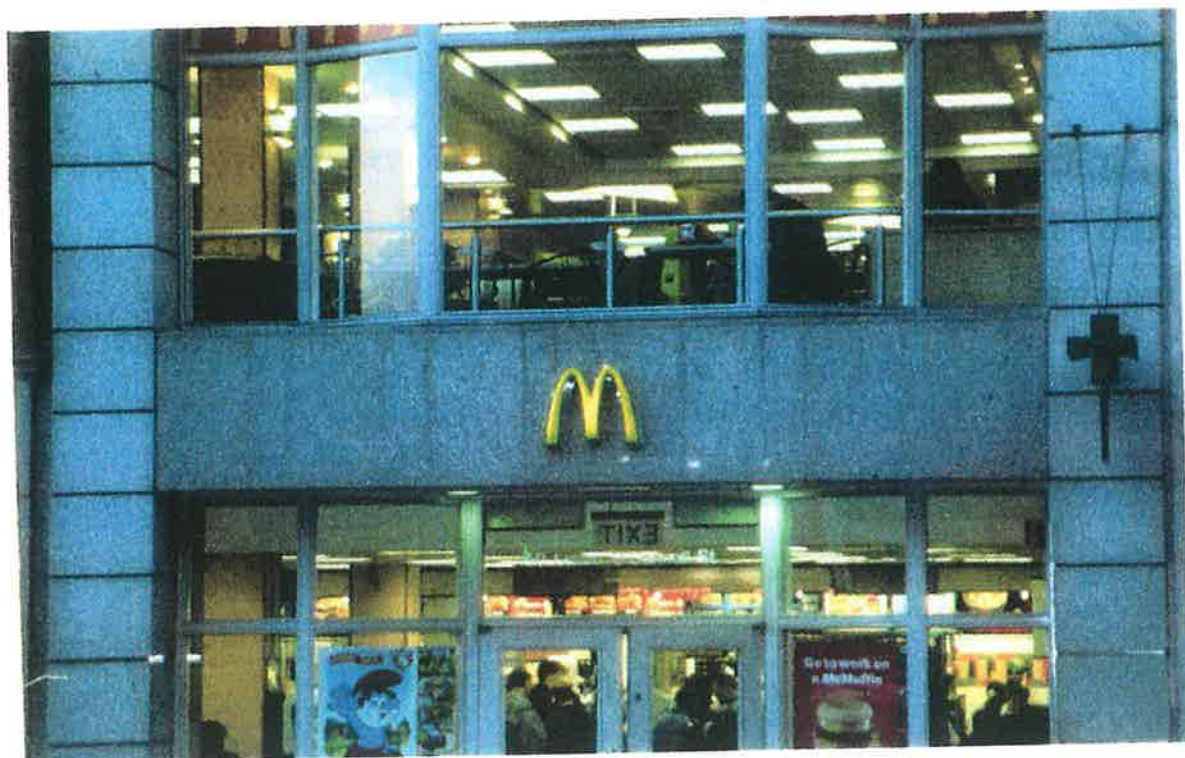


Figure 1.9 Golden Arches (2002).

Two new branches are being built at the moment, one in Ashbourne and one in Middleton, more outlets for Ennis, Dungarvan and Citywest are planned for this year [2004] and the company plans to open an outlet in Dundrum shopping centre in 2005. (The Irish Times,18/3/2004:3). McDonald's expansion across Ireland does not seem to be slowing down. There have been protests towards the presence of McDonald's in Ireland. In February 2004, a section of the Mid-Western Health Board formally objected to a new McDonald's outlet planned for Ennis, citing concerns about the possible effects on children's health in light of rising levels of obesity and other related illnesses such as two diabetes in Ireland. (The Irish Times,18/3/2004: 1). Sections of the medical profession and consumer groups have criticised McDonald's due to its marketing and advertising strategies directed at children and the high levels of fat, sodium and salt in its products. Whether McDonald's is the main contributing factor to the so-called for this now termed 'global obesity epidemic', this will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.



### 3. McDonald's and Obesity



People in the western world believe that life itself should be completely controllable, that babies should be born perfect and that nobody should suffer from diseases caused by genetic dysfunction. This arrogance stems from the advances in science and medicine over the last forty years and medical predictions that research using the cells of embryos will be used to combat disabilities and intractable diseases such as Parkinson's disease and Alzheimer's. We as a people have an impatient attitude towards nature and an arrogant belief that all physical and mental illness can be conquered. We can dream of perfect control over our health and marvel at the experiments that have resulted in the cloning of animals. We wait for the breakthrough that might one day make paraplegics walk again, and fantasise that humans will become the perfect race taken through a life that is absolutely predictable.

However, for all our talk of a super-human race, what most people want is the exact opposite. People want to eat what they want and do what they want and that is why the reality of our dreams falls so short of the dreams of science and science fiction. 'Neither takes into account the messy irrationality of human desires – desires that seem to get more irrational as our theoretical ability to control our lives increases' (Walters, 28/2/2002:p5). An extraordinary conundrum has occurred, we loathe fat and yet simultaneously we are getting fatter, as though we are somehow out of control. It is a fine example of how millions of people as a consequence of their actions become the thing they least want to be. We have escaped scurvy, pellagra and rickets only to suffer higher – tech forms of malnutrition, such as obesity.

Within the last decade, rates of obesity have shot up by nearly 50% around the world, rising to 300 million people up from 200 million in 1985. (*The Economist*, 27/9/3: p67). In Ireland The National Health and Lifestyle Survey (Slan 2000) reported that obesity rates have risen by 3% points in men from 11% in 1998 to 14% in 2002 and in women from 9% in 1998 to 12% in 2002. ([www.healthpromotion.ie](http://www.healthpromotion.ie)). Research is sketchy due to issues of definition and measurement but paediatricians estimate that 15 to 20% of children are clinically overweight and 13% of children aged 10-17 are on weight-reducing diets. (*The Irish Independent*, 6/3/2002: p14).

Obesity is a 'multifactoral' condition meaning many factors are involved like genetics, industrialisation of food, dietary changes in modern society and sedentary lifestyles. However consumer groups, nutritionists and the media have repeatedly pointed the finger at McDonalds and other fast food restaurants as being the one of the main causes of obesity, especially in children.

This chapter will discuss why McDonald's has come under such criticism from nutritionists and others in relation to the rise in obesity throughout Ireland. The first part of this chapter discusses why McDonald's rather than other multinational and national fast food chains like Burger King, Pizza Hut, Supermacs and Abrakebabra has come to symbolise fast food. The second part of this chapter concentrates on McDonald's, advertising and marketing strategies directed at children, through television, Ronald McDonald, Happy Meals, movie promotional tie-ins with Disney and through sponsorship deals with health organisations and sports leagues.

The third part will concentrate on McDonald's products, discussing why these have come under such scrutiny now, when it has been generally acknowledged that fast food is not healthy. The fourth part discusses how McDonald's has responded to such accusations and the attempts made by the company, through introducing a healthier range of products, to alter the association of the symbolic prefix 'Mc' with all that is bad about food. The final part of this chapter discusses the effects of obesity on children in the long term and which social demographic group is most at risk.

### **The Fast Food Industry: McDonalds.**

Why is it that when the media and nutritionists discuss obesity and fast food they point to McDonald's rather than any other company? Quite simply, McDonald's is by far the biggest and most popular brand of fast food in the world. In the introduction to *Fast Food Nation* (2000) Schlosser lists some interesting facts that would answer the above question. He states:

‘The McDonald’s Corporation has become a powerful symbol of American’s if not the world’s service economy, which is responsible for 90 per cent of America’s new jobs. In 1968, McDonald’s operated about one thousand restaurants. Today it has more than thirty thousand restaurants worldwide and opens almost two thousand new ones each year. McDonald’s has at some point employed an estimated one out of every eight workers in the United States. The company annually hires about one million people, more than any other American organization public or private. The McDonald’s corporation is the largest owner of retail property in the world and earns the majority of its profits not from selling food but from collecting rent. McDonald’s spends more money on advertising and marketing than any other brand. As a result it has replaced Coca-Cola as the world’s most famous brand. Every day McDonald’s serves food and drink to an amazing 40 million customers. A survey of American school children found that 96 per cent could identify Ronald McDonald; the only fictional character with a higher degree of recognition was Santa Claus. The impact of McDonald’s on the way we live today is hard to overstate. The Golden Arches are now more widely recognized than the Christian cross’(Schlosser, 2000: 4). [Retrieved on the /23/4/200 from [www.media.mcdonald’s.com](http://www.media.mcdonald’s.com)]

In Ireland, McDonald’s has 68 restaurants, more than any other multinational or national fast food chain in the country and by far the most successful. According to Bearing Point – Irish Times poll of the 1000 top companies in Ireland, McDonald’s ranked 205<sup>th</sup> compared to Burger King which ranked 551<sup>st</sup> and Supermacs 807<sup>th</sup>.(The Irish Times 2003: 23). McDonald’s serves approximately 150,000 people a day in Ireland and McDonald’s Irish customers consume the following on average every year:

- 1,450 tonnes of beef patties
- 870 tonnes of chicken products
- 3,800 tonnes of French fries
- 230 tonnes of cheese
- 800,000 litres of shake

- 300,000 litres of sundae mix
- 3.2 million sachets of sugar

[Retrieved on the 20/4/4 from [www.mcdonalds.ie/facts/index.htm](http://www.mcdonalds.ie/facts/index.htm)]

Many Companies use aggressive marketing and advertising techniques directed at children, but McDonald's has by far been the most successful in capturing and has captured and dominated the children's market since the 1980s. In 1962 Ronald McDonald was created as the mascot for McDonald's and quickly rivaled Mickey Mouse in popularity. Ronald McDonald, Mr. Cheese and the fantasy world of McDonald land were influenced greatly by Walt Disney's Magic Kingdom and as a result made McDonald's seem like more than just another place to eat. McDonald's now looms large in the imagination of toddlers, the intended audience. The restaurant chain has continually evoked a series of pleasing images in a youngster's mind because young children long for submission into worlds they will never inhabit, a world like a McDonald's restaurant with bright colours, a playground, a toy, a clown, a drink with a straw, and little pieces of food wrapped up like a present. (Schlosser, 2001: p42). (Figure 2.0). However how does all this relate to the accusations that McDonald's and the fast food industry are responsible for the widening waistlines in Irish adults and children and the rising rates of obesity for both?

### **Advertising and Marketing Strategies**

For many parents the 'battle of the box' no longer revolves around the television programmes that their children are watching, it is the advertisements that are causing the most concern. What angers consumer groups and parents about McDonald's is that their advertising and marketing campaigns, through event sponsorship, charity commitments and especially through television, continue to present a grossly imbalanced nutritional message to children, effectively promoting a diet that is high in sugar, sodium and fat. According to a study by researchers from The Children's Hospital, Boston, the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, and the Harvard School of Public Health, on a typical day when children eat fast food, they consume 187 more calories with poorer nutritional quality, than on a



Figure 2.0 Ronald McDonald and Friends.

day when they do not eat fast food. These additional calories could account for an extra six pounds of weight gain per year.

[Retrieved on the 24/4/4 from <http://www.medwire.ca/index.phtml?>]

On a global level, McDonald's has teamed up with UNICEF for the now rebranded annual McDonald's World Children's Day held on the 20<sup>th</sup> of November every year. The money raised from this event benefits hundreds of children's organisations including:

- 22 orphanages and children's homes in Russia, Eastern Europe, and across the world.
- 14 cancer centres and treatment facilities worldwide.
- A south African home for HIV/AIDS, infected children, [Retrieved on the 1<sup>st</sup> May from [www.media.mcdonalds.com](http://www.media.mcdonalds.com)]

The term 'Big Mac Alliance' was coined by NGOs working on child health and nutrition and citizens who had petitioned to stop UNICEF from lending its name and endorsement to McDonald's. This alliance with McDonald's is seen as a U-turn by UNICEF as in 1999 its Executive Director, Carol Bellamy, warned 'it is dangerous to assume that the goals of the private sector are somehow synonymous with those of the United Nations, because most emphatically they are not' [Retrieved on the 26/4/4 from <http://www.cpa.org.au/garchve5/1121unicef.html>]

In Ireland, McDonald's is involved in a number of charities and state medical institutions. The following are just a few examples of how the Ronald McDonald children's charities have got involved with communities on a national and local level around Ireland:

- Our Lady's Hospital for Sick Children, Crumlin.
- Down Syndrome Association of Ireland.
- Cork University Hospital – Paediatric Unit.
- Irish Society For The Prevention of Cruelty to Children.
- Marino Clinic, Bray.

- Beaumont Hospital Cardiology Unit.
- Ronald McDonald children's charities are funding to build the first Ronald McDonald house in Ireland situated on the grounds of Our Lady's Hospital for Sick Children which will provide a comfortable, convenient home away from home for the parents and families of children who are seriously ill in hospital [Retrieved on the 26<sup>th</sup> February 2004 from [www.RRMC.mcdonalds.com](http://www.RRMC.mcdonalds.com)]. (Figure 2.1 McDonald's Health Promotion leaflet 2003) (Figure 2.2 McDonald's Health Promotional Leaflet 2003).

In 2003-2004, McDonald's teamed up with the Gaelic Athletic Association to sponsor the first ever-underage training programme in Gaelic Games. The sponsorship aims to enhance and advance Gaelic football and hurling skills in young people at primary school level. [Retrieved on the 14/4/4 from [www.mcdonalds.ie/envir/sponsor1.htm](http://www.mcdonalds.ie/envir/sponsor1.htm)]. More recently, McDonald's have branched out into Mcbranded clothing, toys, books and DVDs. McKids clothing has just gone on sale in China and distribution will extend to Taiwan and Korea before reaching Western Europe in 2005. Amy Moynihan, the director of global brand marketing at McDonald's, is adamant that that this is not a cynical marketing ploy, stressing that McDonald's has long lent its name to a variety of third-party-produced merchandise, arguing that this is simply a way of formalising this activity and enabling McDonald's to have greater control over the way the brand is used. (*The Independent Review* 20/4/ 2004: p5). Dr. David Haslam, chair of the UK lobby group, the National Obesity Forum dismisses the plans as a mere attempt to sell more burgers and fries. He stated, "One can only be cynical of the motive behind this. It's a way of side stepping the hoo-ha about advertising to children. (*The Independent Review*, 20/4 2004: p5). (Figure 2.3 McKids Clothing,) (Source: The Independent 20/4/4: 5).

The caloric intake of McDonald's has increased since the 1960s; a serving of French fries had ballooned from 200 calories in the 1960s to 320 calories in the 1970s to 450 calories in the late 1990s to the present 610 calories. (Critser, 2002: 28). Recently, McDonald's introduced supersize portions on their fries and drinks adding up to 100 calories more to each product. To compare, in a portion of large fries, customers can expect 412 calories



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**Hop, Skip, Walk or Run...**  
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**Sunday 15th September 2002**  
Sponsored Run (On Grass) Followed By  
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Figure 2.1 McDonald's Health Promotional Leaflet (2003).

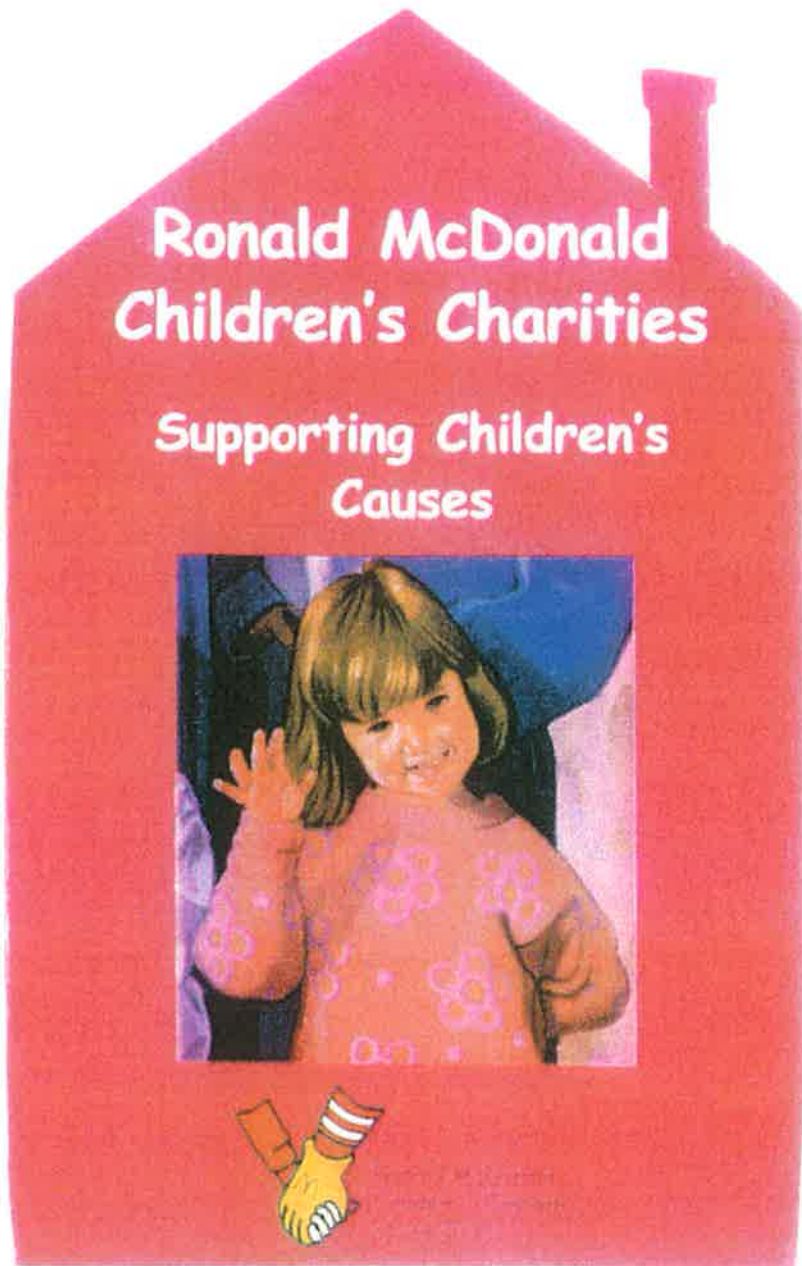


Figure 2.2 McDonald's Health Promotional Leaflet (2003).



Figure 2.3 McKids Clothing (Source: *The Independent*, 20/4/4).

and 18g of fat, which increases to 486 calories and 21.2g of fat in a supersize portion. A large coca-cola at McDonald's contains 226 calories, a supersize coca-cola comes in at 323 calories – 97 calories more. [Retrieved on the 23/3/4 from [www.news.bbc.co.uk](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk)].

The daily recommended intake of energy of an adult man is about 2300 calories, for a women 1,900 and a Child is 1,150 of which no more than 30% should come for fat and 11% from added sugars.[Retrieved on the 21/4/4 from [www.fda.gov/fdac/graphics/foodlabel/special/pg44.pd4](http://www.fda.gov/fdac/graphics/foodlabel/special/pg44.pd4)] A super size portion of fries, Coke and a Big Mac contains 1,302 calories and 44.1g of fat, which is more than the total recommended intake of energy for a child and half the recommended for an adult in one sitting. [Retrieved on the 12/4/4 from [www.news.bbc.co.uk](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk)].

The Green Party has recently called for an EU-wide ban on Junk food advertisements aimed at children. The Party insists that such a ban is necessary, as some stations broadcast in more than one country, as is the case with British channels broadcasting into Ireland. A recent poll conducted by [irishealth.com](http://irishealth.com) supports the Green Party's proposal. A total number of 38,000 people were asked should junk food advertisements be banned, of those who voted, 63% said that they would fully agree with such a ban. [Retrieved on the 30/4/4 from [www.irishealth.com/indexht](http://www.irishealth.com/indexht)]. Consumer groups, politicians and nutritionists now believe that there is a strong link between obesity and TV advertising directed at children and there is scientific evidence that stretches as far back as the 1980s to back up this claim [Retrieved on the 24/4/4 from [www.sustainweb.org/index.asp](http://www.sustainweb.org/index.asp)].

The first major evidence that children's media consumption may be related to their body weight came in a 1985 article by William Dietz and Stephen Gortmaker in the American journal *Paediatrics*. An analysis of the data from a large national study of more than 13,000 children, the National Health Examination Survey (NHES), found significant associations between the amount of time children spent watching television and the prevalence of obesity. The authors concluded that among 12-17 year olds, the prevalence of obesity increased by 2% for each additional hour of television viewed, even after controlling for other variables such as prior obesity, race and socio-economic status. In a

commentary published in 1993, the authors went on to note that another interpretation of their findings is that 29% of the cases of obesity could be prevented by reducing television viewing to 0 to 1 hours a week. [Retrieved on the 21/4/4 from [www.kff.org](http://www.kff.org)]. According to The Irish Times-tns mrbi youth poll (2003) young people spend an average of three hours a day watching television, with 27% spending four or more hours doing so. The 15-17 year olds average at three hours and a quarter, 18-19 year olds averaged two and three quarter hours and the 20-24 year olds three hours. (The Irish Times, 20/9/2003: p6).

McDonald's has two billion dollars available for global advertising. Reportedly the Golden Arches is now more recognised than the Christian cross. (The Irish Independent, 8/2/2003: p18). Children's advertising has been driven by efforts to increase not just present consumption but also future consumption, hoping that nostalgia of a brand will lead to a lifetime of purchases. This is why companies like McDonald's are planning 'cradle to grave' advertising strategies.

The New York Times has noted that 'the courtship of children is no surprise, since increasingly that is where the money is', and added that marketing executives anticipate that children under 12 will spend \$35 billion of their money and influence \$200 billion in American household spending in 2004'. [Retrieved on the 20/3/4 from [www.kff.org](http://www.kff.org)]. 'Marketers now use different terms to explain the intended response to their ads such as leverage, the nudge factor, and pester power, The aim of most children's advertising is straightforward, get children to nag their parents and nag them well' (Schlosser, 2001: p42). James U. McNeal, professor of marketing at Texas University, is a leading authority on selling to children and has made a career elaborating on the truism that 'while parents may have the keys to the family car, children have the keys to the family food budget' (Shell, 2002:192). Parents will often give into their children's demands because they feel guilty that they do not spend as much time as they would like due to the fact that one or both work long hours, as one parent stated:

‘When you have kids, they actually demand things  
Of you, if they don’t eat anything you prepare for them  
And if you take them to McDonald’s, they will eat it’.

(Interview/F/35/Dublin).

### **McDonalds Happy Meals**

According to Schlosser (2000: 47-48). ‘Fast food chains annually spend about \$3 billion on television and marketing efforts directed at children, but it is their marketing efforts that have proven far more effective than conventional ads.’ The fast food industry and the toy manufacturers have forged promotional links giving away simple toys with children’s meals now known as happy meals. ‘A successful promotion easily doubles or triples the weekly sales volume of children’s meals’. (Schlosser, 2000:48).

The chains often distribute numerous versions of a toy, thereby encouraging repeat visits by small children and adult collectors who hope to complete sets. The Teenie Beanie giveaway promotion at McDonald’s was one of the most successful promotions in the history of American marketing. At the time McDonald’s sold over 10 million Happy Meals in a typical week. (Schlosser, 2000: 49). The competition for young customers has led to fast food chains forming alliances with not just with toy companies but also with sports leagues like the GAA and Hollywood studios like Disney. ‘What has become clear is that there is little difference now between selling films, toys and hamburgers. America’s fast food culture has become indistinguishable from the popular culture of its children’. (Schlosser, 2000: 48).

In May 1996, the Walt Disney Company signed a ten-year global marketing agreement with the McDonald’s Corporation. The agreement between the two companies gave McDonald’s exclusive rights to that studio’s output of films and videos. (Schlosser, 2000: 49). In 2003, McDonalds teamed up with SEGA marking the first time a quick-service retailer offered advanced technology to customers. The deal comprises six different interactive handheld games available with Happy Meals. According to the Vice President

of Marketing Sega of America “This relationship with McDonald’s allows Sega to bring our most popular video game characters to a new generation of kids with the first time ever premium.”[Retrieved on the 27/4/3 from [www.planetgamecube.com/](http://www.planetgamecube.com/)}]

In the 1990s McDonald’s became a lightning rod for debate and discussion, evoking strong feelings and emotions across the world. According to Kicheole (2002: 7) McDonald’s serves as a widely recognised symbol that concretises a plethora of larger social, cultural, economic and educational concepts. Every decade is represented by a social dilemma of that time. In Ireland, in the 1970s it was mass industrial action and unemployment. In the 1980s, environmental issues like the Amazon rain forest, the Ozone layer, CFC gases and nuclear power caused most concern. The 1990s and up to the present day are represented by globalisation, GM foods, mad cow disease and the rise of obesity across the world. McDonald’s has come under great scrutiny from the media and consumer groups during the 1990s on issues such workers’ rights, the environment, and especially its food. This was highlighted by four factors, the McLibel Trial (1997), Eric Schlosser’s *Fast Food Nation* (2000), obesity lawsuits against the fast food industry in America (see chapter 6) and most recently by claims that fast food is addictive.

The idea that junk food is addictive was featured in a number of newspapers with headlines such as “Fast food can be addictive as hard drugs, claims new research”. The stories appear to have been triggered by a small segment of a BBC2 television programme, “Big Mac Under Attack” arguing that there is mounting evidence that fast food is addictive. Various researchers have studied animals and to some extent, humans, and the results are that there is some evidence that suggests it is possible humans could become addicted to sugar and fat. Dr. Sarah Leibowitz, a neurobiologist at Rockefeller University, New York, showed that exposure to fatty foods might configure the hormonal system to want more fat. [Retrieved on the 29/4/2004 from [www.bupa.co.uk/health\\_information/html/health\\_news/190703addict.html](http://www.bupa.co.uk/health_information/html/health_news/190703addict.html)]

Her studies have shown that rats fed on a high-fat diet of became more resistant to leptin – the hormone that stops eating. At the same time, levels of galanin – a brain peptide that

stimulates eating and slows down energy expenditure – increases. Leibowitz thinks that early exposure to fatty food could predispose children to always needing fatty products. However reactions are mixed. Experts are currently debating whether or not the term ‘addiction’ can be applied to people eating large amounts of fat and sugar. [Retrieved on 29/4/4 from [www.bupa.co.uk/health\\_information/html/health\\_news/190703addic.html](http://www.bupa.co.uk/health_information/html/health_news/190703addic.html)]

### **New Taste Menus**

The above scrutinsing and debate into McDonald’s food did have an impact on consumers and have been a factor in McDonald’s introducing a new range of healthier products, ‘New Taste Menus’. (See Chapter 6). However the main reason why McDonald’s introduced this new range of products was due to the change in dietary habits. As stated earlier, in the 1990s, food had become a political issue and consumers were becoming more aware of what they were eating, where it came from, and the growing rate and causes of obesity around the world. This was reflected when McDonald’s recorded its first ever loss (of \$343 million) followed by its share price falling to an eight year low (The Observer *Food Monthly*, 2003:32). McDonald’s are now offering more upmarket sandwiches and pasta salads using low fat and free-range ingredients in their products. Children’s menus now include:

- Fresh Fruit in an 80g happy meal fruit bag.
- Low fat apple pie.
- Fruit in Yoghurt parfaits made with low fat yoghurt and Dasili mineral water instead of a usual Coke.

(See Chapter 6) (The Observer *Food Monthly*, 2003: 32-33). (Figure 2.4 McDonald’s Happy Meal Fruit Bag) (McDonald’s Salads Plus (Figure.2.5))

More recently McDonald’s has introduced a new range of ‘Happy Meals’ giving Children the option of an apple and grapefruit bag and drink options such as milk, orange juice, mineral water and Ribena Toothkind instead of the standard Hamburger, Chicken McNuggets, cheeseburger and soft drinks. (Figure 1.4) McDonald’s announced it would put a stop to all supersizing products by December 2004. McDonald’s says it is phasing



WHY KIDS WANT TO GO  
TO McDONALD'S WITH MUMS



Figure 2.4 McDonald's New Happy Meals (2003-04).

**salads plus**

taste • choice • vitality

# Great news! McDonald's Salads Plus has arrived. It's fresh, it's new, and it's permanent.

What's more, it's light, tasty and every choice with the menu is prepared with a mix of tasty ingredients including at least 50% fresh vegetables. It's a salad to help you feel great. It's just what you need when you're taking life.



grilled chicken  
bacon ranch salad



crispy chicken  
bacon ranch salad

Choose warm grilled or crispy chicken fillet with edam and cheddar cheese.

Our salad\* counts as 2 portions towards your 5 a day target for fruit and vegetables. Choose balsamic dressing for lower calories.



grilled chicken  
caesar salad



crispy chicken  
caesar salad

Choose warm grilled or crispy chicken fillet with Italian cheese flakes and garlic and herb croutons.

Our salad\* counts as 2 portions towards your 5 a day target for fruit and vegetables. Choose balsamic dressing for lower calories.



grilled chicken  
caprese

Choose our grilled chicken fillet with a slice of cherry tomato, fresh mozzarella, fresh basil and balsamic dressing. It's a healthy meal with a side salad to boot.



side salad

Delicious crunchy side salad\* with carrot and cherry tomatoes served with a balsamic dressing.

Our side salad helps towards 1 of your 5 a day target for fruit and vegetables.



fruit bag

Fresh apple slices and grapes, washed and ready to eat.

One fruit bag counts as one portion towards your 5 a day target for fruit and vegetables.



fruit & yogurt

Cool Danone yogurt layered with strawberries and topped with delicious blueberries.

## want a meal under 270kcal?

choose balsamic dressing with your grilled chicken caesar salad.

10g fat, 263kcal per serving with one 30ml balsamic dressing sachet (without the croutons!)

Figure 2.5 McDonald's Salads Plus (2004).

out supersizing because it only represents a tiny portion of its business –0.1% of total sales and because its menu is being reviewed to meet customer expectations. [Retrieved on the 30/3/4 from [www.news.bbc.co.uk](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk)] Supersizing has received bad publicity following ‘Super size me’ a film by American Morgan Spurlock. He set out to discover the effect of living on nothing but McDonald’s food for a month upgrading to super size portions when offered. The film follows his 25lb weight gain and the health effects on his body, including on his liver and cholesterol level

**Obesity: How and Who it will affect:**

Children’s eating habits and tastes are developed early in life and become difficult to change as they move into their teens. When Children start the weaning stage, they are experimenting with flavour and texture. By the time they are able to feed themselves and are more mobile, they tend to become more restrictive, preferring foods with familiar flavours and similar textures that are high in energy density. (Capaldi, 1996: 126-137). McDonald’s are well aware of this is highlighted by their billboard advertisements (Figure 2.6)

Sinead McCarthy, a research nutritionist at Trinity College Dublin, says that the increase in obesity has implications for young people. Children who are obese have a risk of becoming obese adults meaning they will have a much higher risk of contracting a broad range of diseases. These include heart disease, hypertension, bone joint disorders, certain types of cancers, infertility and, most worrying of all, type 2 diabetes which can result in complications like nerve and eye damage. Up until recently, type 2 diabetes was exclusively found in overweight people over 40, but in February 2002, the British media revealed that researchers for the first time discovered type 2 diabetes in four Caucasian adolescents. Type 2 diabetes was first discovered amongst children in Ireland in 1997 (The Irish Independent, 6/3/2002: p14).

Adequate nutrition and environmental factors are as important in maintaining good health as availability of medical facilities. As a result, those on low incomes are more likely to experience ill health and children are exposed to greater health risks. According to Daly



Figure 2.6 McDonald's Billboard Advertising (2001).

and Leonard (2002) reporting on their survey their survey of some of the lowest income households in Ireland, parents expressed concern about the content and nutritional balance of their children's diets. One lone mother discussed the financial difficulties associated with providing children with a healthy balanced diet.

'You're paying a fortune for basic food. The vegetables are crap...like I got this book from the Health Board, a recipe book, and there's great things in it but to make a meal from the book costs a fortune'.

Daly and Leonard (2002: 94).

What is not often the focus is the clear link between obesity and low income. As Critser (2002: 6) found through his research in the U.S, 'poverty, class, and income over and over, these emerged as the key determinants of obesity and weight related disease...the largest concentrations of the obese, regardless of race, ethnicity, and gender, reside in the poorest sections of the nation'. In the United Kingdom, the evidence is the same: The National Audit Office's report confirmed that obesity is more prevalent in the lower socio – economic and lower income groups. The Department of Health also notes that a woman in an unskilled manual occupation is twice as likely to be obese as a woman in a professional occupation. [Retrieved on the 21/4/4 from [www.sustainweb.org](http://www.sustainweb.org)].

Using data from the continuing Survey of Food Intakes by individuals (CSFFII), Marilyn Townsend of the University of California, found that the prevalence of obesity increased among women as food insecurity increased (women on benefits having difficulties providing food each month) by 52% compared to women having enough to eat 34% [Retrieved on the 21/4/4/ from [www.nutrisci.wisc.edu/nutrinet/](http://www.nutrisci.wisc.edu/nutrinet/)]. According to Townsend's group, one possible explanation for the high prevalence of overweight among food stamp recipients involves food acquisition. Abundant food supplies may be available in the first 3 weeks of the month, followed by a week without food stamps or

money when food is limited. When money and food stamps are available again at the first of the month, food insecure families may overeat calorically – dense foods. Many studies indicate that binge eating can result in weight gain. Overeating by food insecure families when food is plentiful (i.e. when food stamps or money for food is available, followed by overeating) may be a pattern that results in gradual weight gain over time. [Retrieved on the 21/4/4 from [www.nutrisic.wisc.edu/nutrinet/](http://www.nutrisic.wisc.edu/nutrinet/)].

A study of over 20,000 children in Plymouth provided more evidence of an association between deprivation and childhood obesity. Another study in the Tayside confirmed the relationship between poverty and prevalence of type 2 diabetes, stating that there were more obese, diabetic patients in deprived areas. [Retrieved on the 21/3/4 from [www.sustainweb.org](http://www.sustainweb.org)]. A new study by Adam Drewnowski and S.E Spector, published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, reveals that high fat, energy dense diets are more affordable than those diets based on lean meats, fish, fresh fruit and vegetables. The study also found that low-income families are made to suffer from poor diets not because of individual food preferences, education or lower awareness of health issues, but because healthier foods cost more and are beyond the reach of many low income families. [Retrieved on the 21/4/4 from [www.nustrici.wisc.edu/nutrinet/](http://www.nustrici.wisc.edu/nutrinet/)]

Fast food chains are constantly competing to slash the price of their products. Here are a few examples from the McDonald's menu;

- Double Quarter Ponder with cheese €3.95
  - Bacon and Egg McMuffin Meal € 2
  - Double Cheese Burger with medium Fries € 3
  - Hamburger, Cheese Burger and Chicken McKnight Happy Meals €3
- (McDonald's prices 2004)

The hidden danger is that, while a burger and fries might seem a reasonably modest meal, research conducted by the Medical Research Council has found that most fast food is very calorie dense, meaning that people unwittingly eat far more calories than they would estimate are contained in the portion size. [Retrieved on he 13/4/4 from

[www.ivillage.co.uk](http://www.ivillage.co.uk)] So while fast food is cheap, fresh foods can be costly and organic ranges are pricier still. Another consideration is the decline of the local mini stores and independent greengrocers and butchers. With many small businesses disappearing and being replaced by out-of-town supermarkets, it is harder to get hold of healthier foods. Ironically, although the best bargains and multi-buy deals are to be found in the supermarkets, some householders – particularly those without cars – simply cannot afford to travel there and back. It is no wonder, then, that some families will rely on a high-fat, high-carbohydrate meal to fill them up.

### **Conclusion**

McDonald's is by far the most successful fast food corporation on a global scale, so successful that when we talk about or use the term 'fast food' we think of McDonald's more than any other fast food company. The Golden Arches has become a global symbol for fast food. Although that can be interpreted as a victory for McDonalds over other fast food companies in a very competitive market, there is also a downside. Over the last couple of years, the issue of obesity, its connection with fast food and scientific findings have dominated newspapers, magazines and medical journals. More recently, scientists have discovered that fast food could be addictive. Such articles do not state what kind of fast food was tested and from which companies they came from, but because of the huge success of McDonald's, the public are more likely to associated the term 'fast food' with McDonald's before other transnational or national fast food companies

The rise in overweight and obesity rates in Ireland can be described as multi-factorial and cannot be reduced to just one cause. Our genes, the food industry and our sedentary lifestyles all play an influential role with this health problem. Our genes do provide a strong genetic component to our weight but they do not make us fat, they merely set up a susceptibility to gaining weight under certain conditions. These conditions are now ubiquitous not only with fast food restaurants but also with supermarkets. Irish people do not eat every meal at McDonald's and buy most of their food at their local supermarket. These may contain the same high levels of fat, sodium and sugar as in ready

to cook meals (e.g. Tikka Masala in Tesco's). In both cases, they have the same large amounts of fat, salt, sodium and sugar in their foods.

McDonald's now symbolises the problem of obesity. The reason McDonald's has been picked out for closer scrutiny is that McDonald's has dominated the children's fast food market since the 1980s. Their marketing and advertising campaigns have been aggressively directed at children compared to other companies, promoting cradle to grave food consumption of their products. In light of the sex abuse scandals in industrial schools over the last forty years, the issue of protecting children and children's rights has become a very charged issue. Only when children reach teenage years can they make informed choices about their food consumption and this is why consumer groups and parents criticise the fast food industry for targeting the young, some going as far to compare the food industries' advertising and marketing activities to a form of paedophilia. McDonalds; through their campaigns, continue to present a grossly imbalanced nutritional message to children effectively promoting their food as 'healthy' through promotional campaigns such as the G.A.A Catch and Kick campaigns and through UNICEF ironically an organisation devoted to saving the lives of children around the world.

There has been a growing demand for an outright ban on fast food advertising and a tax on certain dairy products, fast foods and sweets by consumer groups and politicians in both Britain and Ireland. [[www.sustainweb.org](http://www.sustainweb.org)] The proposed tax on certain foods has been interpreted as being patronising to low-income families. Martin Peterson, of the Food and Drink Federation, said a tax would hit lower income families who already spend a higher proportion of their income on food and drink. He said: 'Consumers will rightly feel patronised by "top down" messages based on the idea that they can't think from themselves and need into taxed in to weight loss.' The idea that a particular food is bad for you is out of date and simplistic. A balanced diet can include snacks and treats – moderation is the key". [Retrieved on the 23/4/4/ from [www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/3502053.stm](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/3502053.stm)]. This is the key message of the food




industry- there is no such thing as 'good' or 'bad' food, only good or bad diets. This is very similar to the cigarette industry's statements about people who 'choose to smoke'.




In light of the McLibel trial, Schlosser's *Fast food Nation* (2000) and Felicity Lawrence's new book '*Not On The Label*' (2004), the obesity lawsuits in America and research into the possible addictiveness of fast food, there is more scepticism about the food industry in general. Consumers now take more interest in what they eat and where it comes from, proving that they do have power to demand better quality of food from food corporations. According to Schlosser, (2000: 269). 'The executives who run the fast food industry are not bad men. They are businessmen. They will sell free-range, organic, grass fed hamburgers if you demand it. They will sell whatever sells a profit.' The usefulness of the market, its effectiveness as a tool, can cut both ways. He continues to say that 'the heads of Burger King, KFC, and McDonald's should feel daunted; they are outnumbered. There are three of them and 300 million of you (meaning Americans). A good boycott, a refusal to buy, can speak much louder than words. Sometimes the most irresistible force is the mundane.' (Schlosser, 2000:269). Lawrence (2004) gives a detail account of her travels around farms, factories and packhouses around the world. She discovers why beef waste ends up in chicken, why bread is full of water and shows how obesity has affected different sections of society throughout Europe.

The new healthier range of products is a step in the right direction for McDonald's, in an attempt to ward off further lawsuits in America and the rest of the world. The obesity issue has made the food industry sit up and take notice of what their consumers want, which is increasingly quality rather than quantity in their products.

## 4. The Battle for Unionisation



where a  
**great job**  
means more...



‘Ray Kroc, the man responsible for McDonald’s global success, believed in the bounty of America, free enterprise opportunities and the pervasive mood that was spelled out in a speech by president Calvin Coolidge (1923-1929) and termed by the press as ‘Coolidge Confidence’ it read,

‘Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence,  
Talent will not, nothing is more common than unsuccessful  
Men with talent, Genius will not; unrewarded genius is  
Almost a proverb; Education will not; the word persistence  
And determination alone is omnipotent’ (cited in Boas & Chain, 1976:70.

Kroc’s hiring policies were based on his own beliefs and standards and applied the “Coolidge Confidence” motto to what sort of individual should work at McDonald’s .He had no interest in individuals with qualifications, high IQ’s or from academic backgrounds, mainly associating such individuals with political affiliations. A reporter once asked Kroc if he would hire a graduate from Harvard, he replied, ‘I couldn’t hire a guy from Harvard because the son of a bitch wouldn’t get down and wash the toilets’. (Boas & Chain, 1976:240). Kroc wanted young cheap labour in his restaurant to work and he justified the low pay of his workers because he was a staunch promoter of the teenage work ethic, and saw a youngster’s working stint at McDonald’s as a stepping-stone or a building block in the free enterprise market. But this criterion was framed in the 1950s, when militancy of after-school workers was unheard of and, as the years passed, serious issues such as disgruntlement over pay, excessive management practices and working conditions became paramount especially in Europe where trade unions were stronger and more active (Boas & Chain,1976:24).

The term ‘McJob’ was coined by the Canadian novelist Douglas Coupland in his 1991 novel *Generation X* which describes work done by those who are employed within the service sector like McDonald’s or in the retail sector. It describes a job that is low pay,

low prestige, low dignity, and low benefits with hardly any future prospects within an industry, a job that is frequently considered a satisfying career choice by people who have never had one. McDonald's expressed its outrage over how the latest Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, describes job prospects at the US fast food giant. In its latest edition, the dictionary defines the term McJob as "low paying, dead-end work". McDonald's then CEO Jim Cantalupo dismissed the term as 'an inaccurate description of restaurant employment' and called it 'a slap in the face to the 12 million industry's staff'. In an open letter to Merriam-Webster's, Mr. Cantalupo said that "more than a 1,000 of the men and women who own and operate McDonald's restaurants today got their start by serving customers behind the counter" [ Retrieved on the 23/4/2004 from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/3255883.stm>]

### **McWork**

On a global scale, jobs within the restaurant are fragmented into different stations e.g. working on the till, cleaning tables and emptying bins, garnishing burgers and monitoring fries, bread machines or the grill. Love (1995:188) states that the McDonald brothers refined their techniques, and as a result, members of the crew (meaning staff) became specialists. There were three grill men who did nothing but grill hamburgers; two shake men, who did nothing more than make milk shakes; two fry men who did specialised in making French fries.... three counter men who did nothing but fill orders. As a result of this fragmentation of work, worker's skills are eliminated and the work is labour intensive with the machinery making the cooking decisions. Lights and buzzers tell the workers when to turn the burgers or take the fries out of the fat. Computerised cash registers do most of the thinking for the till and window workers, separating the hand and brain in classic scientific management style (Royle, 2000:59).

Ritzer (2000: 32) believes that this is dehumanising and turns humans into mere robots: human beings equipped with an array of skills and abilities are asked to perform a limited number of highly simplified tasks over and over again. Instead of expressing their human abilities on the job, people are forced to deny their humanity and act like robots. Although the personal skills of the individual are eliminated, public perception is that

anyone can learn this job, that it is idiot-proof and is not challenging; only speed and exactitude are needed.

Royle (2000: 59) disagrees and gives the example that when the assembly line output of burgers slackens because the restaurant is quiet, it does not mean that the workers are allowed to take a break. Ray Kroc was obsessed with cleanliness; he insisted that his staff should be constantly cleaning areas that no one else would think about, with the cleaning cloth becoming an essential tool for every crewmember. As Kroc frequently reminded his staff, 'If you have time to lean you have time to clean'. (Love, 1995:143). Nowadays resting on the job is referred to as "Time Theft", which means doing anything other than working during company time, anything at all (Ehrenreich, 2001:146). Although the work can be easily learnt, it would be a mistake to think that it is easy, as one U.K manager emphasised

'Many people are not prepared to do the work that it entails, you've got to be a very strong-minded person to be able to handle it. A lot of people who think that 'Oh this will be so easy,' totally underestimate it, it is often students who can't hack it; they don't want to work that hard for the money'. (Royle, 2000:59).

In all European countries, hourly paid employers are supposed to get rest breaks In some countries where collective agreements apply, these breaks may be longer or more frequent than laid down in the law. According to Royle (2000: 60) despite more stringent European regulation, workers from several countries reported that when the restaurant is busy, breaks are cut short. Workers have to get permission to leave the floor and managers are often reluctant to let employees go when their contracted hours are finished. In these situations workers would sometimes aid management by controlling themselves, staying on longer so as to not let their colleagues down. According to the European Foundation's *Options* survey most full timers in the service industry would prefer to work shorter hours than they currently do, and most part-timers would prefer to work

longer hours. [Retrieved on the 20/4/4 at <http://www.tcd.ie/erc>]. The majority of employees in the service industry work on a part-time basis, so there is no opportunity to earn extra income through overtime.

A range of flexible hours arrangements have become more popular in some industries, with hours fluctuating on a daily, weekly, monthly, annual or seasonal basis, depending on business requirements. Flexitime arrangements tend to be concentrated in large-scale corporations, generally in the service sector and amongst non-manual workers. 'The crux of such schemes is that they provide the means for longer hours to be worked during peak periods of demand without the need for overtime, while shorter hours may be worked during quieter periods' (Foynes, 1996:83-84). Foynes suggests that 'the current trend therefore, seems to be one of eroding the parameters of what has traditionally been considered as overtime work'. By this Foynes (1996) means 'the flexibility for the reduction in standard hours formula that has typified the most recent rounds of hours reductions provides for a much wider classification of what was previously considered standard hours and, consequently, a narrower definition of overtime hours' (Foynes, 1996:83-84). Similarly, continued growth in shift and part-time work provides management with the opportunity to avoid incurring expensive overtime costs.

### The Battle for Unionisation

Most 'McJobs' whether in retail or in the service industry, are related by uniformity, pay and lack of union representation. McDonalds has been renowned for its zealousness at fighting attempts by its employees to unionise, not just in Ireland but also across the world. The apparatus it employs to resist its members on wages and unionisation usually handles labour with a 'kid glove' approach rather than the more overt use of force, having learned that manipulation is more effective than coercion. However this was not always the case: according to Schlosser (2001:76) during the 1970s and 1980s, there was a huge wave of union activity to try and unionise McDonald's. In 1973 amid a bitter strike in a San Francisco restaurant, managers forced staff to take lie detector tests and interrogated them about union activities and threatened them with dismissal if they refused to answer. Vidal (1997:231) quotes a memorandum from a US labour relations chief to top



... he said, explaining that though \$5p is the starting wage, MacDonald's promotional review stem allowed a worker who had worked in the company for 12 months to earn as much as 1.1p more per hour after the first three months, and another 1p more per hour after another six months.

The promotional review system is part of the MacDonald's employment code, and as at MacDonald's workers throughout the world, in the city's more than 4,000 outlets, there are 1,000 employees. There are 1,000

MacDonald's, clearly anxious to keep its corporate image clean and wholesome, has apparently decided to drop that tactic as too underhanded. But they're still obviously reluctant about negotiating with a union, constitutional right or not, and their dilemma is one that other American firms operating in Ireland sometimes share.

Just up the road from the MacDonald's pickup on Creation Street, for instance, you will find the pickup on the Schell Foot

per month—the blades chiropractors use when treating patients—and suggested that if the girls got to work on time and utilised the time allowed by booked appointments, they could keep the extra blades honed to sufficient sharpness.

### Atmosphere not comfortable

The money was the reason

Figure 3.0 Irish Times Newspaper Clippings, March-April (1979).

McDonald's executives that stated: 'I think [the union] was effective in terms of reaching the public with the information that we do use polygraph tests in a Gestapo-type manner'.

### The Dublin Strike

A mass drive to unionise across America coincided with a move to unionise in two particular restaurants in Dublin. In May 1977, McDonald's opened its first restaurant on Grafton St. Shortly after its opening, the ITGWU Dublin No. 4 branch were organising a meeting among the McDonald's staff with a view to recruit. The ITGWU recruited eight members and subsequently served a claimed for improvement in wages and conditions, but the company didn't respond.

- By February 1979, there were only six members due to continuous high turnover of staff. As soon as management discovered that someone amongst the staff was in the union, they subsequently pressurised them to leave and refused to deal with the ITGWU.
- In March 1979 the ITGWU balloted its six members for sanction to serve strike notice on the company, to expire on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March. The day before the strike action was due to take place, the company slipped a note into the workers pay packets telling them that an increase was due shortly, but the strike went ahead. Mass pickets were mounted on the Grafton street and O' Connell branches (Figure 3.0) which had since opened and the remaining non-union staff issued a petition saying they did not want the ITGWU to represent them and thanked customers for passing the picket lines.
- In June 1979, Justice Hamilton in the High Court heard McDonald's case for an injunction because of various incidents and skirmishes outside both restaurants and decided that a roster be submitted to the court, showing who was allowed to picket and who was not and no pickets to be allowed after 10pm.



- The Labour court began its investigation into the claim for union recognition, a wage increase, improvement in working conditions and a comprehensive working agreement and in September 1979 issued its recommendations which found in favour of union recognition. Resumption of work was planned for the 17/9/79.
- The company said that on return, that workers must have their hair cut short before they could take up reemployment and were not allowed to wear union badges or to put up notices about joining the ITGWU.
- In November 1979, the ITGWU accused the company of continually reprimanding any ITGWU member which led to those members being made redundant, e.g. one member was dismissed for not shaving. (he was a janitor).
- Throughout 1980 and 1981, the company systematically got rid of all union members. [Retrieved on the 16/12/2002 from [Hotels@Siptu.ie](mailto:Hotels@Siptu.ie)].

According to Tom O' Dwyer from the trade union SIPTU, [Retrieved on the 16/12/2002 from [Hotels@Siptu.ie](mailto:Hotels@Siptu.ie)]. there have been only two other attempts to unionise since 1978, which were both at the Nutgrove shopping centre in 1985 and failed. The service industry and especially the fast food industry has been renowned for exploiting staff mainly due to their age. 15% of Leaving Certificate students in Dublin work twenty hours a week (part time) and according to Dr.Don Thornhill chairman of the Higher Education Authority, employers 'pay scant regard to their educational needs'(The Irish Times: 18/3/2003). This was highlighted by Super Macs being fined €4,400 in February 2003 for breaches of the Protection of Young Persons Employment Act, 1996, for failing to keep appropriate records and allowing two teenagers to work after ten o'clock at night (The Irish Times, 27/2/2003:4).

How has McDonald's successfully prevented non-union activity in their restaurants since 1978? How does the McDonald's Corporation contrive to attain the consent and control of the workforce in practice?

### **Techniques used to prevent Unionisation.**

According to Boas and Chain (1976:99) there is nothing more effective as a means of combating unionisation than a combination of “bull session psychodrama” and interrogation known within the company as “The Rap” or RAP sessions - an acronym for ‘real approach to problems’. In theory, employees register their complaints or grievances with management over issues such as treatment by management or pay, but in reality the rap session serves a different purpose. The employees are encouraged to let off steam in what appears to be a very informal setting, when in fact it is a very highly controlled one. The employees are allowed the honour of rapping with the executives and this substitutes talk for action and serves to monitor young workers. This would usually happen before rumblings of unionisation would turn to boiling point: ‘it is nothing more than a sophisticated interrogation technique, they would soothe tempers and attempts by recognition of the employee as a unique and important person’ (Boas and Chain, 1976: 100).

This deliberate form of praise has been termed “stroking” it can make the employee feel that their contribution is sincerely valued. It is a technique that McDonald’s has provided to its managers for years (Schlosser, 2001:74). However, at restaurant level management are less enthusiastic; at best, they seem to be perceived as an early ‘warning sign system’ for potential problems and a means to clamp down on any employee unrest. In most countries, according to Royle (2000:122), the ‘Rap Sessions’ have simply operated as a ‘suggestion form’. Restaurant employees state that it is rarely if ever used, partly because of lack of interest among crew and partly because of the concerns about anonymity.

### **New McWorker**

Applying for a Job in McDonald’s is usually the same process across the world. The applicant fills out an application form and, if successful, will be invited for an interview. As stated above in the 1970s the corporation used extreme measures in some restaurants to determine whether or not applicants had any sympathy for trade unions during the interview stage. It appears having the ‘right attitude’ is the most important attitude to obtain employment at McDonald’s. According to Love (1995:426). Fred Turner (an ex

CEO of the corporation) was extremely impressed with the way that Japanese employees worked. However, he complained about the difficulty of achieving control over his American employees:

‘With your yankee mentality (US) grill men don’t give a damn about the system But in Japan, you tell a grill man once how to lay the patties, and he put them there every time. I’d been looking for that one hundred percent compliance very time’.

Although all “McJobs” are related by uniformity, pay and lack of union representation, some jobs differ within the “McJob” sector. There is hierarchy and it is considered by teenagers that I have interviewed that McDonald’s is the lowest of the heap of low skilled labour. For teenagers the pay is often less important than its social status. For the same rate of as those who work in McDonald’s teenagers and students would rather work in a trendy clothes shop or an exclusive members club. (Interview/M&F/30-35/Dublin). If you walked into a McDonald’s restaurant in Ireland especially in the bigger towns and cities, you would see that the majority of their staff comprised of Chinese workers and managers. Why are so many Chinese working in these types of jobs? According to the Union of Students in Ireland’s campus survey there is now considerable anecdotal evidence that in Dublin such young people are ‘bumping’ into less attractive employment (or even unemployment) those young people who are looking for full - time employment. This occurs because employers in smarter shops and restaurants believe that (middle class) students are more acceptable to customers than working class youths and this applies to Chinese workers also. [Retrieved on the 20/4/2004 from <http://www.tcd.ie/erc>].

There are between 30,000 Chinese now living in Ireland and 12,500 have obtained visas to study in the state since the Chinese regime began to relax and issue passports to its citizens in 1998. Four out of five students in some language institutions are of Chinese nationality. (The Irish Times, 2/2/2002: 1). [Retrieved on the 1/5/2004 from [www.EU2004.ie](http://www.EU2004.ie)]. They come to Ireland to learn English for between six months to a year by attending language schools so they can gain employment or attend third level

institutions and then return to China with good qualifications. According to one Chinese student, many students have paid to up €1000 to other Chinese students who were leaving for their restaurant Job. All they had to do is tell the manager that a friend was interested in taking over his/her job, the manager arranges a quick interview and once again the high turnover problem is sorted. (Interview 2, M25 Dublin 2002). Part of Chinese culture is for parents to invest large sums of money in their offspring's future, and these students are under a lot of pressure to do well at college so that they can look after their parents when they get older. Irish teenagers are not breadwinners so what is threatened is not their livelihood, only their pocket money. Chinese students cannot afford to jeopardise their financial well being in a foreign country over a transnational job and would rather work and earn money than get involved in unionisation, an attitude obviously favoured by the private service sector.

### **Psychological Concepts**

Reiter (1996) suggests that service industry management pursue an approach that focuses on isolated individuals and concentrates on their needs and wants. This suggests that job satisfaction can be attained not through good pay and working conditions but through psychological concepts such as the 'Employee of the month award', day trips and cash bonuses, and encouraging staff members towards promotion. Identification with the restaurant is another psychological concept fostered through the creation of a new form of collective. If 'us and them' is still recognised, it is interpreted to mean 'us' the management and crew and 'them' as the customer. Workers are encouraged to think of themselves as part of a team and managers are encouraged to equate restaurant management with coaching a team. A typical feature of management style was the repeated use of certain kinds of language with paternalistic expressions such as 'the McDonald's family' (Royle, 2000:65).

### **Bribing**

When attempts to unionise within a particular restaurant are in progress, notes have been put into wage packets indicating an increase in pay soon if unionisation does not take place. This was a tactic used by management during the 1977 dispute over unionisation at

the Grafton street branch in Dublin. [Retrieved on the 16/12/2002 from [Hotels@SIPTU.ie](mailto:Hotels@SIPTU.ie)].

### **Demeaning Activities**

Those found to be actively organising a union have been subjected to demeaning work, work that is not part of their job description, all of which is done to break their morale and determination. It also serves to make an example of those who try to recruit which inevitably leads to those involved leaving. This happened to one crewmember who tried to organise a union at the Nutgrove shopping centre in 1985. Once management had found out who was trying to organise members, it set about giving him tasks to do that were not part of his job description, like picking weeds outside the restaurant in the rain for five hours. He was eventually fired but won his unfair dismissal claim at the Equality Commission. [Retrieved on the 16/12/2002 from [Hotels@SIPTU.ie](mailto:Hotels@SIPTU.ie)].

### **The Impact of Trade Unions in Ireland.**

Despite the relatively strong position of most European unions compared with those in the USA, it is clear that the 1990s have not been good, particularly in the private sector, while unions have benefited from expansion in the public sector in Ireland. According to Roche, the combination of a number of interrelated factors would appear to account for the decrease.

### **Decline of Traditional Unionised Industries**

A study by Bill Roche, Professor of Industrial Relations and Human Resources at the Micheal Smurfit School of Business, University College Dublin entitled *Accounting for the trend in trade union recognition in Ireland* published in mid-2001 found that the significant rise in the number of newly-established workplaces without a recognised trade union in Ireland since the mid - 1980s is largely due to the positions adopted by US-based companies in the services sector industries with Irish subsidiaries. According to a survey carried out by the independent weekly journal, *Industrial Relations News* there was a major change between the 1994-5 and 2001-3 period is the growth of the service sector, which now accounts for over half of the new jobs coming from overseas. While

three quarters of the new companies in the mid-1990s survey were in the manufacturing sector, this had declined to 17 out of 39 – about 43%- in 2001-03. [Retrieved on the 20/4/4 from <http://www.eiro.eurofound.eu.int/2004/03/inbrief/ie0403201n.html>].

Roche's research indicates that the rise in the level of non- recognition of unions among Irish - owned and foreign - owned workplaces, other than subsidiaries of US companies, can be largely attributed to pre-existing low rates of union recognition in the sectors in which these firms have located since the mid-1980s. Only in the case of subsidiaries of US-owed multinationals is there evidence that the rising incidence of non-union workplaces marks a more generalised shift in the posture of employers towards unions in the new competitive conditions now prevailing in the globalised Irish economy. The number of US based firms prepared to recognise unions in Ireland has fallen from almost 70% to just under 15% since the mid- 1980s. [Retrieved on the 19/4/4 from <http://www.eiro.eurofound.eu.int/2001/07/inbrief/ie0107240n.html>].

### **Atypical Forms of Employment**

Increasing numbers of women are entering the workplace on a part-time basis in Ireland. In 1983 only 14% worked part time but by 1997 this had risen to 23% [Retrieved on the 20/4/4 from <http://www.tcd.ie/erc>] concentrated in the private sector. Although the unionisation rate among women according to Royle (2000: 90) is increasing in most European countries, it is not having a large impact in the unionisation in the private services sector. European unions are still, by and large, failing to focus enough resources on this new and growing sector. Part of the problem may be a 'conservative bias' among the richest trade unions, which are frequently found in declining sectors. The fact that unions tend to describe part - time and temporary work, so frequently found in many jobs today, as 'atypical', is itself ideologically loaded. In other words, many unions are still focused on the predominantly male standard employment contract as the norm. Nor have peak associations been able to change this perspective significantly or influence recruitment drives, and even where they have prevailed, they have usually failed. (Pankert,1993: 3-11).

### **Changes in State Policy**

There have been changes in state policy towards trade unions, in the sense that it is no longer a fundamental tenet of state policy to encourage incoming multinationals or new indigenous companies to recognise, and bargain with unions. As a result the Irish institutional context has become amenable to the diffusion of different 'models' of employment relations-including non-union models. [Retrieved on the 20/4/4 from [Http://eiro.eurofound.eu.int/2001/02/feature/ie0102164f.html](http://eiro.eurofound.eu.int/2001/02/feature/ie0102164f.html)]. The decline in collective bargaining coverage and trade union organisation in Ireland, and the growth of individual employment rights, has led to a significant increase in individual employees pursuing legal claims- which is placing substantial pressure on existing dispute resolution mechanisms. According to Teague, the result of this transition from a bargaining-based employment relations system to a 'rights-based' system is that very few areas of the employment relationships are now untouched by regulation. [Retrieved on the 20/4/4 from <http://www.euro.eurofound.eu.int/2004/02/feature/ie0402203f.html>].

These various factors would also appear to have coincided with the general hardening of employer attitudes towards trade unions. Union officials now state that McDonald's will meet unions in joint labour/ management catering committees, but not on their own. SIPTU (Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union) officials state that McDonalds is not seen as the worst employer in the fast food sector. Royle (2000: 97). According to Toynbee (2003:138). small companies can be the worst employers, their Chambers of Commerce and their Institute of Directors are the most mean-minded and selfish sector of employers. However much the anti-globalisers may rail against the iniquities of global companies, at least they have a brand name to uphold and minimum standards to maintain. When the minimum wage was first introduced in April 2000, it was employment associations like The Irish Small and Medium Enterprise Association (ISME) that expressed concern that the introduction of the minimum wage would lead to the threatening of jobs and competitiveness. (The Sunday Times, 19/1/2003:5)

### **Minimum wage**

The minimum wage, which now stands at €7 per hour, was introduced in 2000 to protect vulnerable people against individual exploitation, family poverty and the black market economy, but has it helped those it is meant to help? According to Sean Healy, director of the Conference of Religious in Ireland's (CORI) justice commission, the minimum wage is not a living wage for a family, couple or single person and is not an incentive for the unemployed to seek active employment. A single person working a forty hour week on the national minimum wage of €7 earns €280 a week. From this amount, they must pay tax, rent, food, transportation costs, electricity and heating. Any unexpected costs, such as buying clothes or repairing a broken appliance can throw the person into debt for months. Either way, he or she is not poor at least according to the state. Individuals must make less than €223 a week to remain outside the tax net. Only those who earn less than €170 a week are considered to fall below the government's poverty line. (The Sunday Times, 19/1/2003:5). As employment rose through the early 1990s unemployment remained relatively high, new jobs were going to new entrants to the labour market rather than those in the labour market. Unemployment Assistance and extensive secondary welfare benefits linked to unemployed (medical card providing free medical care, rent subsidies, etc) provided strong disincentives for the unemployed to take on low paid work.

### **Conclusion**

Today, McDonald's still uses Kroc's criteria for employment by advertising for staff using the theme 'a stepping stone in the free market enterprise'. They offer a job that, according to McDonald's, will provide an enriching and invaluable experience which will help those to achieve their ambition to become professors or business tycoons in the future. The McJob has been recognised by the government who awarded the company a FAS 'Excellence through people award' in 2002 for encouraging development of staff to full potential through training, development, communication and involvement. The Tanaiste said, in relation to McDonald's, that 'The excellence through people standard is in recognition of the quality training... the employers who train their people are more effective in maintaining the motivation and commitment for their employees'. (Hotel & Catering 2002:8). Doug Kellner disagrees, describing McDonald's as 'an extremely



blatant and degrading form of low pay and alienated labour as a career dead end' (cited in Kincheole, 2002:69).

This is a job that has been completely deskilled and has removed the skills involved in traditional restaurant work. How can this company be awarded such an award when the job is so routinised that employees rarely have to make decisions for themselves? These restaurants are 'labour proof', soft drink dispensers, cash tills, and chip fryers are all controlled by robots; all the food is cut, dried, moulded and fused by automatic technologies. According to Kincheole (2002:70) "McDonald's is working to replace more and more of these deskilled jobs with Robots". What these awards really represent is the acceptance of workers' own unemployment and dehumanisation.

Tom O'Dwyer at SIPTU provided information about the strike in 1977 and about other attempts to unionise. I did ask if he had more recent cases involving McDonalds but this was to no avail. This suggests that McDonalds seems to be winning the battle over unionisation. It is considered the lowest skilled work, and because this generation has actively become consumers instead of being actively involved in social and political issues, most people make a protest by just quitting. Resistance to McDonald's labour practices seems to be dormant and will remain so with the influx of migrant workers and Asian students willing to work for the minimum wage.

When Supermacs was fined for illegal labour practices, they gave the excuse that they couldn't find migrant staff to fill vacant positions. If that is the case, government departments like the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment must maintain monitoring of these types of industries more than ever, to protect migrants and foreign students who are in a very vulnerable position. Irish people need to be more welcoming of such people. We need to make them part of the community and to let them know that if they are in trouble or having difficulties with corporations that there are organisations here to help them. Until then, the Chinese especially, will remain a very exclusive group, resolving issues within their own community, not willing to ask for help that is available to them from others. As a result, we will not hear of cases of exploitative labour

practices, and companies like McDonald's will maintain their veneer, creating 'enriching and invaluable' jobs.

Mary Harney will be remembered for implementing the minimum wage and subsequently raising it to €7, with the intention of luring more people of benefits and into the workplace. But the minimum wage is not the incentive that she hoped it would be. What is needed is a living wage that would not throw people out of work, where workers would not be priced out of jobs if consumers decided to cut back on spending or if foreign companies moved abroad in search of lower wages. What people like Fr. Sean Healy are campaigning for is a wage, once it had reached a safety ceiling, that will allow people to live on it, not just get by and have enough to eat and pay bills, but to feel secure, have a drink, afford pleasures for themselves and their children and belong to a consumer universe shared by other people. (The Irish Times, 18/3/3:5).

Such a move has commenced in the US. In Baltimore in 1994, a group of community organisations and churches called BUILD persuaded the city council to pass a bylaw requiring all companies that have contracts with the city or receive subsidies and tax breaks to pay their workers a living wage. The minimum wage at present in the US is \$5.15, but the living wage is fixed at \$8 an hour, \$18,000 a year is enough to lift a family of four above the federal poverty line. (Toynbee, 2002: 215-219). Countries like Sweden, Norway, and Finland have taken many years to develop a living wage, this could happen in Ireland with national determination to keep moving the wage upwards towards an agreed goal for every worker. Economists cannot predict where the minimum wage might bite seriously into the economy, but according to Toynbee (2002) there is not a good reason not to keep increasing it until it begins to do harm, 'to suck it and see' as suggested by one L.S.E economist.

Most of these minimum wage jobs are in the service industry, so they cannot move abroad and cannot be done anywhere else but here. This is why McDonald's has fought unionisation with such zest, they are painfully aware of their companies exposed flank, so why have trade unions not taken advantage? Setting up union recognition in workplaces that have had no union experience is a long, hard and expensive process according to

Tom O'Dwyer ([Hotels@Siptu.ie](mailto:Hotels@Siptu.ie)). The unions alone are not likely to be the force than can make a real difference to most of the working poor, though the more numbers involved in union activities the stronger the political voice will be a living wage. The unavoidable fact is that the story on union representation of the low paid has been a failure over the years the unions have never succeeded in getting their members' including those that work in McDonald's and other parts of the service sector, work revalued and repositioned in the general scale of rewards.

## 5. McDonald's and Globalisation



mayday graffiti Galway 2001

‘Globalization is on everybody’s lips;(…) a passkey meant to unlock the gates all present and future mysteries. For some, globalisation is what we must do if we wish to be happy; for others globalisation is the cause of our unhappiness’.

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It would not be an exaggeration to say that globalisation was one of the most discussed topics of the 1990s and looks to remain at the top of the list for some time to come. At the beginning of the’ nineties, globalisation was primarily associated with economics and finance. According to Van Steenbergen ‘it was widely held to be an unstoppable process that would subordinate all economic life to the sway of global markets’. [Retrieved on the 1/6/2004 from [B.vanSteenbergen@fss.uu.nl](mailto:B.vanSteenbergen@fss.uu.nl)]. It was commonly believed that governance of such markets and the transnational corporations that operate in them was impossible. Noreena Hertz (2001) and George Monbiot (2001) have both stated that governments were ceasing to be effective bodies of economic management and were losing autonomy over social affairs as they were forced to respond to pressures from low wage and low public expenditure countries. According to VanSteenbergen

‘In short, globalisation would mean the triumph of liberal capitalism, the end of other types of economic systems and also of the welfare state. It seems that today the heart of the discussion has moved somewhat from economic to cultural globalisation. This is due to the fact that the pessimistic negative consequences of economic globalisation have not come to fruition, at least not in the western world. Countries’ welfare systems have not been dissolved and unemployment has not gone up in a lot of western countries. From an Irish point of view, Ireland has experienced an economic boom during the’ nineties, which has created an optimistic view of the future, at least in economic terms’.

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The present worries about the globalisation process have more to do with the problems of identity and symbolic representation in short, with the realm of culture. Globalisation is

seen by many as a process shattering differences and levelling particularisms, imposing a uniformity that could be qualified as what Ritzer (1996) refers to as the 'McDonaldisation of Society'. He defines this process by which the principles of fast food: efficiency, calculability, predictability and control have come to dominate more and more sectors of American society and the rest of the world. In the words of Ritzer 'McDonaldisation affects not only the restaurant business but also education, work, travel and food'. (Ritzer, 1996:1). In short, the forecast of a socio-economic crisis as the outcome of globalisation protests seems to have been replaced 'by the vision of a cultural nightmare of which Americanisation is often used as the main and encompassing concept, at least in Europe'. [Retrieved on the 1/7/2004 from [B.vanSteenbergen@fss.uu.nl](mailto:B.vanSteenbergen@fss.uu.nl)].

The fear of Americanisation – globalisation has been most strongly developed and felt in France. According to Roger Cohen 'there is a certain allergy in Europe to the extent of how American power accumulated since the cold war's end, and the most virulent expression of that allergy today seems to be food'. [Retrieved on the 1/8/2004 from [www.academic.brooklyn.Cuny.edu](http://www.academic.brooklyn.Cuny.edu)]. This was highlighted by the dismantling of a McDonald's restaurant in the French town of Millau by a group of French farmers led by Jose Bove in 1999. In this chapter I will discuss why this action took place and its symbolic significance. I will then discuss why the golden arches has come to symbolise in some cases the negative aspects of the globalisation. I will then discuss how the anti-globalisation movement on a crest of a wave with successful demonstrations in Seattle and Prague, dealt with a new world of ideological extremes, 'you are with us or without us', in light of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks.

The last two decades have seen the emergence of global food scares and worries such as foot and mouth disease, mad cow disease, dioxin-polluted chicken and genetically modified foods. These food scares have ignited debates about the centralisation, medicalisation and genetic manipulation of food. Farmers, agricultural organizations and consumer groups like the Slow Food Movement believe that treating food like another industrial commodity is putting consumers' health at risk on a global scale. They are beginning to question and debate about who gets to make decisions about the quality and

integrity of the food we eat: ‘we’ the citizens or the powerful agri-business, trade institutions and multinationals. So what has McDonald’s and the destruction of one of their restaurants in a small town in France got to do with this? The destruction of the McDonald’s restaurant was a symbolic protest against globalisation, the industrialisation of food and the role of multinationals like McDonald’s in eroding cultural diversity.

In retaliation for an EU import ban on all US hormone - treated meat, the US placed a 100% tariff on some of France’s most popular exports like Roquefort cheese, a product that is produced in the region where Bove and other farmers lived. By linking McDonald’s to the issue of hormone treated meat, Bove and others were battling for the right for local democracy and cultural diversity in a world that was increasingly governed by the principles that govern McDonald’s where food has become increasingly standardised throughout the world. The American press interpreted the act as another symbolic anti American protest. *The Wall Street Journal* described Bove as ‘the Bakunin – quoting former hippie who only became a farmer in 1975 as a political act’ [Retrieved on the 1/6/2004 [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk)].

However the Millau protest was not about US foreign policy or the bombardment of American popular culture. It was about the fact that multinationals showed little respect for French differences and identity: ‘We don’t want hormones in our food. They are a risk to public health and go against farming ethics, imposing hormones on us means that our freedom of choice in the food and culture we want is seriously restricted’. (Bove, & Defour, 2001:20 ). The example of BST *Bovine Samoatotrophine* is relevant here. Monsanto, the world pharmaceutical giant invested considerable sums of money to develop a hormone that could increase a cow’s milk yield by up to 25% ‘however the reality was that it added nothing to the quality of the taste and there was a risk of nutrient deficiencies’(Bove and Dufour, 2001:79-80).

According to Bove and Dufour (2002), the strategy of the food industry and corporations like McDonald’s is to create same tastes everywhere. The meat used in beef patties is made up of many cattle and from the cheapest parts of the cow. ‘All the burgers have the

same make - up. The proportion of fat to lean meat is identical in every branch ensuring that they can be cooked in the same way and have the same texture' (Bove & Dufour, 2001:55). This example of the production of beef burgers represents a trend that food and its origins are rapidly disappearing. The standardisation of food has meant that people have completely distanced themselves from their relationship with food and their culture.

### **Intensive Farming.**

One major aspect of the industrialisation of agriculture is the specialisation that accompanies it. Farmers are now considered as mere suppliers of raw materials to meet the needs of the food industry and manufacturers rather than those of the consumer. The standardisation of mass production, the division and splitting up of work, are consequence of shifts and changes which are linked to the type of modernisation imposed on agriculture after the second world war.

### **Meat Packing Industry**

Eric Schlosser's (2001) *Fast Food Nation* details how the American independent cattlemen are becoming an endangered species. American ranchers currently face a host of problems like increased shipments of live cattle from Canada and Mexico, development pressures and health scares about beef. However the biggest problem that now faces independent ranchers is that the growth of the fast food chains has encouraged consolidation in the meat packing industry. McDonald's is the largest purchaser of beef in America. In 1968 McDonald's bought beef from 175 local suppliers, however in an attempt to attempt greater uniformity, the corporation reduced the number of suppliers to just five (Schlosser, 2001:136). The meat packaging industry has been transformed by mergers and acquisitions over the last twenty years. Four corporations: Conagra, IBP, Excel and National Beef, have gained a stranglehold on the market – slaughtering 84% of American cattle. (Schlosser, 2001:136).

This concentration of the meatpacking industry has helped reduce the prices that independent ranchers can obtain for their meat. (Schlosser, 2001:137). The four major meatpackaging companies now control about 20% of live cattle in the United States



through what is known as 'captive supplies', which are cattle that are maintained in company-owned feedlots or are purchased in advance through forward contracts (Schlosser, 2001:137). When cattle prices start to rise, these four corporations flood the market with their own supplies in order to decrease prices. According to Schlosser (2001: 138) 'not only do they have the ability to drive down prices but they also obtain cattle through confidential agreements with wealthy ranchers never revealing the true price being paid'. These large meatpacking firms have no interest in buying cattle ranches, instead these companies finance a handful of large feedlot owners who lease ranches and run cattle for them. Independent ranchers are opposed to these 'captive supplies'. They are used primarily to control the market. Nor do they trust the meat packaging giants who discuss with competitors, set prices and divide up the world wide market for commodities. According to McMichael (2000) 'the growth of the global fast food industry has led to the imposing of feed grain and monocultures on local agro-ecologies' (McMichael, 2000:2). From the 1960s, the fast food industry has depended on grass-fed cattle, and its proliferation has produced the so called 'World Steer, as a global archetype of modernising food relations, distributed across first and third world regions, most notably in central America, where cattle populations rose from 4.2 to 9.6 million for the 1950' (McMichael, 2000:2).

The 'World Steer' was sponsored by the World Bank and governments were encouraged to develop new agriexports and hastened depeasantisation. Development policies favouring foreign cattle breeds over South American native cattle breeds like the Criollo have undermined traditional cattle raising and local self-provisioning. Peasants forfeit their original meat and milk supplies and side products such as tallow for cooking oil and leather for clothing and footwear. In short, the world steer now caters to affluent global consumers at the same time that it undermines local agro-ecologies. (McMichael, 2000:2)

### **Genetically Modified Crops**

The United States has consistently advocated the benefits of genetically modified [GM] food but has come up against protest, scepticism and outright rejection from other many other countries. This dispute has particularly strained US – European relations. On the 13

May 2003 the US filed a complaint against a EU moratorium on genetically modified food which has kept such food off European supermarket shelves. This was followed by President Bush charging the EU with contributing to hunger in Africa by blocking imports from the US of “high –yield bio crops”. [Retrieved on the 1/7/2004 from [www.yaleglobal.yale.edu](http://www.yaleglobal.yale.edu)]. The US representative, Robert Zoellick has called the EU policies “Luddite” “immoral”, and unfair trade practices harmful to the United States. [Retrieved on the 1/8/2004 from [www.yaleglobal.yale.edu](http://www.yaleglobal.yale.edu)]. What this battle over GM food reflects is an intensifying struggle between government- backed US agri-business and farmers worldwide.

This ongoing debate about about GM food is not simply about science, what is also at stake are the issues of environmental risk and economic and cultural sovereignty . Countries and farmers in a now growing globalised economy are losing the right to choose what they eat, what they produce and what kind of agriculture systems they employ. According to the socialists-future website the European patent office in Munich will grant a patent (the permission to grow plant varieties, proteins and gene sequences from plants) on the notorious “terminator” seed. This signifies that biotechnology corporations are moving closer to controlling the global food chain through a procedure known as ‘biopiracy’. The patent application of Plant Genetic Systems (part of agrochemical company Hoechst/Aventis) includes plants, seeds and fruits. The ‘terminator’ technology renders farm – saved seed sterile, forcing farmers to buy seed from genetic engineering corporations. [Retrieved on the 1/8/2004 from [www.socialistfuture.org.uk](http://www.socialistfuture.org.uk)]

This technology threatens to eradicate farming expertise in selecting seed and developing locally- adapted strains. Farmers in developing countries have little resources and depend on farm- saved seed and seed exchange from neighbouring farms. According to Greenpeace, ‘If companies like Plant Genetic Systems can push through their patenting plans, a worldwide monopolisation of the seed market is imminent’. [Retrieved on the 1/8/2004 from [www.greenpeace.ie](http://www.greenpeace.ie)]. There is growing corporate pressure to establish the patenting of life, genes, food crops, livestock and human cells. Corporations want these

patenting rights in order to increase their profits from food drug and technology sales which will give them new markets and legal control over the basic technologies and resources of the global food supply and health care systems. Moreover what this means for society at large is the biological underpinning of life passing into the hands of the multinationals.

“Biopiracy” is another word for privatisation of living organisms, which involves the process of taking indigenous plant varieties from developing countries and using these species in the extraction of genes or in genetically modified existing plants. These living organisms and indigenous plant life are the source of 90% of the world’s biological wealth – India has 81,000 species of fauna, 47,000 species of flora including 15,000 plant varieties unique to the country and yet industrial countries hold 97% of all patents worldwide [Retrieved on the 1/8/2004 from [www.socialistfuture.org.ie](http://www.socialistfuture.org.ie)].

Ten corporations control 32% of the commercial – seed market, valued at \$23 billion, and 100% of the market for genetically engineered, or transgenic seeds [Retrieved on the 1/8/2004 from [www.cjd.org](http://www.cjd.org)]. Corporations like Monsanto and Cargill also control the global trade in grain, and the agrochemical and pesticide market. The patent system is weighted heavily against developing countries. It can cost up to \$1 million to secure a patent on a plant or gene. This prevents poor countries from protecting their genetic resources through patents and to challenging a patent is costly. In 1999 the US based company Rice Tec secured a patent on Basmati-rice. Pakistani rice growers were denied a legal challenge whe US lawyers demanded a downpayment of £300,000[Retrieved on the 1/8/2004 from [www.socialistfuture.org.ie](http://www.socialistfuture.org.ie)].

How have multinational corporations come to dominate the food chain? It started with the completion of the Uruguay round of the General Agreement on Tarrifs and Trade (GATT) in 1994 and the establishment of the World Trade Organisation (W.T.O). This agreement and organisation have institutionalised corporate growth based on harvests stolen from nature and people. The WTO’s Trade Related Rights Agreement criminalizes seed-saving and seed-sharing. The agreement on agriculture legalises the dumping of

genetically engineered foods on countries and criminalises actions to protect the biological and cultural diversity on which diverse food systems are based. [Retrieved on the 1/8/2004 from [www.cjd.org](http://www.cjd.org)].

The US administration believes that EU policies toward GM crops are 'immoral' it argues that that GM crops have been proven to be free of significant health or environmental hazards. It also presumes that GM crops would reduce African hunger as GM crops yield more than conventional varieties. However according to McAfee (2003), average yields of currently available GM food crops seeds are slightly lower than yields of comparable non GM varieties. [Retrieved on th 1/8/2004 from [www.yaleglobal.yale.edu](http://www.yaleglobal.yale.edu)]. This is not surprising, because GM crops have been designed mainly to deal with pest problems, not to produce more food. Monsanto, for example is not a food company but a company that specialises in pesticides and fertilizers. It has recently renamed its chemicals as 'agricultural' products to disguise the content.

Vandana Shiva rejects the mantra by the global agribusiness that 'there will not be enough food for the world if industrial agriculture is not the method' [Retrieved on the 1/8/2004 from [www.cjd.org](http://www.cjd.org)]. She also rejects that food from biotechnology and patented varieties is cheaper than that grown in traditional methods, showing that higher cost of seeds, technology fees and the increased use of chemicals involved in the cultivation of genetically engineered seeds leads farmers into serious financial troubles. One of the examples is Monsanto's interest in killing weeds which is one of the essential parts of the supply in South Asia and Africa. 'In Indian agriculture, women use up to 150 different species of plants (which Biotech would call weeds) as medicine, food or fodder'. [Retrieved on the 1/8/2004 from [www.cjd.org](http://www.cjd.org)]. For the poorest, the biodiversity is the most important resource for survival. In West Bengal, 124 'weed' species collected from the rice fields have economic importance for local farmers. 'Herbicides such as Roundup (sold by Monsanto) and the transgenic crops engineered to withstand them therefore destroy the economies of the poorest, especially women. What is a weed to Monsanto is a medical plant or food for rural people' [Retrieved on the 1/8/2004 from [www.cjd.org](http://www.cjd.org)].

In addition, the environmental-risk question is proving more vexing than pro-GM advocates first thought. According to McAfee (2003) genetic constructs from corn, can travel much further from their fields of origin than the US regulatory officials had assumed. Synthetic gene constructs from GM can become incorporated into the genomes of other corn varieties with effects that are poorly understood. [Retrieved on the 1/8/2004 from [www.yaleglobal.yale.edu](http://www.yaleglobal.yale.edu)]. Some scientists worry that the synthetic genes and their products may contribute to the loss of vital maize genetic diversity, damage soil microbes and other organisms that keep agro-ecosystems productive. It has also become evident that weeds and insects can evolve in a few years to become resistant to the pesticides associated with GM crops. (Most currently-available GM crops either produce insecticides in their tissues or depend for their efficacy upon spraying with herbicides.) For the one crop – cotton – for which GM varieties have required less toxic spraying, this environmental gain may only be temporary. Until these ecological problems have been solved, countries may reasonably prefer not to accept GM seeds [Retrieved on the 1/8/2004 from [www.yaleglobal.yale.com](http://www.yaleglobal.yale.com)]

### **The Slow Food Movement**

The Slow Food Movement is an international educational organisation that was founded in 1989 by Carlo Petrini and has now got 77,000 members in 48 countries [Retrieved on the 1/8/2004 from [www.globalenvision.org](http://www.globalenvision.org)]. The organisation's manifesto in part states that 'we have become enslaved by speed and have all succumbed to the same insidious virus: fast life, which disturbs habits, pervades the piracy of our homes and forces us to eat fast foods' [Retrieved on the 1/8/2004 from [www.globalenvision.org](http://www.globalenvision.org)]. The people involved in this movement refer to themselves as 'environmentalists to the gourmets'[Retrieved on the 1/8/2004 from [www.enn.com](http://www.enn.com)]. The idea of saving regionally specific, locally grown and prepared foods from obliteration by the globalised food market is what lies behind the the Slow Food Movement [Retrieved on the 1/8/2004 from [www.globalenvision.org](http://www.globalenvision.org)]. In its drive against globalised food, one might assume the Slow Food Movement to be anti – globalisation. However this movement does not see itself in that context. Rather that globalisation has served the movement by enabling them to foster cultural exchange across borders. Although The Slow Food Movement might

oppose some corporate agribusiness practices and the plethora of chain restaurants, its overall agenda is not anti- globalisation, but the enjoyment of wholesome food.

### **The Globalised Resistance Movement**

The Millau incident was the spark that ignited a new debate. Due to the failure of political leadership, Bove and others were concentrating on the issues of food – ‘everyone holds their freedom of choice in this matter dear, and expects effective food safety controls - but public concern also extends to health, education and culture. The protests at the W.T.O Seattle conference brought a lot of these concerns together’ (Bove & Dufour, 2001:30). Throughout the summer of 2001, anti-globalisation activists in New York and across America were preparing for a march on Wall Street. Using the now well-honed tactics of human blockades, banners and street theatre, they were preparing for a day of action aimed at the bastions of capitalism to coincide with the World Trade Organisation meeting in Doha, Qatar, on November 9th. It was hoped that these demonstrations would be larger, more ambitious and widespread than anything anti-globalisation activists had tried before, It was seen as a dress rehearsal for what they hoped to achieve, which was the worlds’ first general strike. Politically, there was a huge shift to the left, Ralph Nader had received 3 million votes in the previous election and unions across American had become much more militant (Interview/M/35/Dublin). But less than a fortnight later, their aims and objectives seemed to be from another innocent age. On the morning the Al Qaeda hijackers launched their attacks on New York and the Pentagon, anti-globalisation activism was riding high with successful demonstrations across America and Europe.

In America, demonstrations were planned for the last weekend in September where organisers were expecting crowds of up to fifty thousand to disrupt if not derail the annual meeting of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in Washington. (Financial Times, 10/10/2001:8) After the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, this new protest movement went quiet; it suddenly dropped the language of confrontation, and replaced it with condemnation and condolences. Grand plans for the march on Wall Street and further afield were abandoned. Robert Weissman, a political disciple of Ralph Nader who

had been co-coordinating the protests over the summer months saw things come to a sudden halt. Summing UP the mood at the time he said, ‘ we are all a footnote right now’. (Financial Times, 10/10/2001:8).

The movement across America and the world came to a stop, In public, activists projected an opinion that it was just a respectful pause, but privately many campaigners were debating whether or not the anti-globalisation movement itself had become a victim of the attacks on America. An organisation that once was so fond of using the rhetoric of revolution and confrontation was now quiet, journalists who were so fascinated by the movement had come to the conclusion that the wind had indeed dropped from the sails of the movement, due the fact that everyone had been asked to view the world from ideological extremes, ‘You are either with us or with the terrorists’. The US trade representative Robert Zoellick used this kind of language to cast the World Trade Organization as the an epitome of civilisation, asking the U.S and the world to counter terrorism with trade, using trade as a model of efficiency, to promote the values at the heart of this protracted struggle. (The Independent, 9/11/2001:4).

In America the anti globalisation movement became stagnant under these ideological extremes. This was not the case across Europe, where the movement focused their energies into the Anti War movement organising further demonstrations. There has been little appetite for the disruptive activities that once characterised the movement, and in this present climate with the recent bombing attacks in Madrid characterised as Europe’s 11<sup>th</sup> September, who really wants to see a city brought to a standstill, police taunted, cars set alight and windows smashed even if the cause is well founded? This was the question that was asked in response to the “Reclaim the Streets” protest in May 2002 and again in May 2004 when Ireland held the European presidency. The demonstration in May 2002 began peacefully on O’ Connell Street but was soon interrupted when participants pulled a car from a laneway, smashed the window and threw in a smoke bomb as a symbolic anti-car demonstration to reclaim the streets for cyclists and pedestrians. Protesters were ordered by the Gardai to disperse and when they did not comply, Gardai moved in, some with truncheons. What followed were ten minutes of bedlam, traffic was stopped and

protesters ran in all directions. The Gardai injured a number of people due to what was reported by bystanders as acts of totalitarianism.

No Multinational or organisation welcomes the idea of having its internal activities made public or scrutinised, but what video footage taken by protesters showed was a police force stamping on people's basic democratic freedom to protest in what was in most cases a peaceful demonstration. The police did without doubt overreact and showed a lack of proper training and an attitude of totalitarianism, but it comes as no surprise that violence is a recurring motif of Anti Capitalist demonstrations on a global scale mainly due to the fact that anarchists and militants infiltrate the demonstration throwing the media spotlight on them and away from the predominately peaceful protesters. This reoccurring motif of violence even prompted some on the American political right to question whether or not this movement was involved in the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. "If the protesters had been treated as criminals before the Twin Towers outrages, they were now seen as terror suspects". (The Irish Times, 11/11/2001:10).

In hindsight one couldn't help but feel cynical about all that had happened. Some members within the Anti-Globalisation movement, whether socialists or environmentalists, will be delighted that they now have their own "Seattle" or "Genoa" type demonstration to call their own, and the anti-globalisation movement in Ireland can now compare war wounds when they meet their international comrades at the next international party. Natasha Walter, a writer for the English Independent was reporting on the reclaim the streets protests in London on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September 2001, when news broke that an aeroplane had flown into the World Trade Centre, The crowd around her cheered, unable at the time to conclude that no-one would do more to favour the cause of "trade liberalisation" than Osama bin Laden (Interview/m/35/Dublin). Their initial response exposes clearly the limitations of some elements of the Anti-Capitalist Movement, with their constant appetite for destruction and purely symbolic actions displayed in that sudden flare of excitement over the twin towers toppling. (The Independent, 9/11/2001:4).



This was echoed by Naomi Klein (2002) when she stated that there would need to be a dramatic change in activists strategy, one based more on substance than on symbols. The largely symbolic activism outside summits and individual corporations has already been challenged within movement circles as there is much that is unsatisfying about fighting a war of symbols, 'the glass shatters in the McDonald's window, the meetings are driven to ever more remote locations-but so what! It still is only symbols, facades and representations' (Klein, 2002:202). This is not to say that some symbolic acts didn't draw attention to the anti-globalisation movement and help gather support for the movement on a global scale, most notably, the dismantling of a McDonald's restaurant by a group of French farmers led by Jose Bove.

This action put globalisation on trial [see next chapter]the McLibel trial put the fast food industry in the full glare of the media spotlight. What Klein means by substance is to move away from symbolic gestures in a discourse around the vague notion of globalisation and to make it a specific debate about democracy. Klein (2002) has suggested that this movement concentrates on 'measuring the euphoric promises of globalisation- that it would bring general prosperity, greater development and more democracy- against the reality of these policies especially in Africa and South America.' 'The movement needs to prove that this version of has been built on the back of local human and ecological welfare'. (Klein, 2002:243).

### **Conclusion**

The negative aspects of economic globalisation have become an African and South American 'problem' compared to the western world. The pessimistic predictions and negative consequences of globalisation in the western world have not materialised. Nation states have not ceased to be effective loci of economic management, have not lost their autonomy over social affairs as they are forced to respond to competitive pressures from low wage and low public expenditure countries, unemployment has not increased and welfare systems have not been dissolved. Ireland for example has experienced an economic boom during the 1990s that has created an optimistic view of the future, at least in economic terms. The main worries associated with globalisation are to do with

problems of identity, homogenisation, symbolic representation in short, the realm of culture.

The dismantling of the McDonald's restaurant in Millau by Jose Bove and others highlighted these worries. The Millau incident put globalisation on trial; just as the McLibel trial had put the fast food industry in the media spotlight. However the Millau incident was not about economic concerns, it was more to do with environmental and cultural concerns, especially about food. The golden arches have come to symbolise the homogenisation of food, a hegemonic culture and the erosion of cultural identity in favour of profits by the global agri-business. So are we living in a global society where the food we eat is now dictated by American multinationals like Monsanto and McDonald's; have we moved towards a global culture that has become a nightmare instead of a dream?

The typical modernist theory as expressed in Ritzer's *McDonaldisation of Society thesis* (1996) or Samuel Barber's 'Mc World' can be refuted by the increase of ethnic restaurants and food organisations like the Slow Food Movement. To both Ritzer and Barber, cultural imperialism is impenetrable, where there is no room for divagation or resistance, 'a situation in which the increase, improvement or growth of one cultural element goes necessarily hand in hand with the decrease or even deterioration of another' [Retrieved on the 1/6/2004 from [www.Vansteenberg@fss.uu.nl](mailto:www.Vansteenberg@fss.uu.nl)]. The growth of fast food restaurants in the western world would imply fewer types of other restaurants, however this has not happened. However Irish cities and towns have experienced an increase all sorts of fast food, but also ethnic restaurants, bistros and Michelin-star red restaurants. What we are experiencing is not an American erosion of our own culture but a pluralism, an increase in variety and choice. Furthermore, Ritzer and Barber's theories have again been challenged by the fact that Monsanto, the company that pioneered GM crops, is withdrawing from many of its European operations and laying off up to two thirds of its British work force [Retrieved on the 1/6/2004 from [www.Independent.co.uk](http://www.Independent.co.uk)] due mainly to suspicion and worry over the health concerns by the general public.

Although the Anti-Globalisation Movement may have moved away from street battles and symbolic protests that have characterised the movement since the late nineties, there are still elements within the movement like the Wombles in Britain who believe that clashes and symbolic protests are an effective method of grabbing the media's attention to their cause. From an Irish point of view, these protestors are seen as little more than Luddites and perceived as 'anti prosperity', which does not help their cause or the movement. Some may have criticised or were cynical about the outcome of the demonstrations in 2002 and 2004 but we should not ignore the determination of this loose network of organisations that are genuine in their determination for a better world. To many, they will be seen at best as naïve or starry eyed idealists and at worst a dangerous waste of police resources. Certainly it would be absurd to believe that any kind of political movement could work merely through organised annual outbursts of costumed confrontation, but this movement is not just about an odd day of ineffective chaos. People within the movement go clogging along in other ways in campaigns against privatising public services and third world debt.

People in Ireland have recently seen the dangers of the collapse of the centre of politics. We constantly hear updates from so many tribunals that are investigating the underhand activities of past and present politicians and their dealings with various businessmen. Many have lost interest and have become apathetic towards politics, while others feel deeply uneasy about the idea that people should voice their opinion in any other way than the ballot box. When people in the Anti Globalisation movement talk about the disenfranchisement and degradation of the losers in a capitalist society, they are talking about real problems and when they talk about the need to deal with this inequality, not just about the redistribution of wealth but by the redistribution of power, they are voicing a potentially forceful analysis. What drives these protesters is the fact that so many people feel so little power over what happens in their own neighbourhoods or workplaces let alone in central governments. If politicians really want to respond to the growth of apathy and alienation they would need to engage with this sense of powerlessness. (The Independent, 1/5/2002:16). A lack of control over the food we eat is but one manifestation of this.

The Anti – Globalisation movement has long been associated with rioting and public disturbances. High profile activists like Susan George and Naomi Klein have expressed their view of moving away from symbolic gestures of defiance and street battles with riot police while demonstrating against the W.T.O and other global financial organisations. What these two activists are in favour of, is the coming together of all different activists, political movements and organisations coming together under the umbrella of the of the Anti –Globalisation movement. This happened in 2003 with the Annual World Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil. This convention represented a beginning and an opportunity for this emerging movement to stop shouting and using ineffective symbolic actions of aggression of what is against to start articulating what it represents. ‘If Seattle was for many people the coming out party of the resistance movement, then according to Soren Ambrose, Porto Alegre was the coming out party for the existence of serious think of alternatives’ (Klein, 20002:194). However the symbolic dismantling of the McDonald’s restaurant by Jose Bove and others was not just another symbolic act. What Bove was expressing in a time when the economic aspects of globalisation are generally seen in a positive light especially in the western world was ‘fear’. Fear of cultural/symbolic dominance by American multinationals which stroke a cord with the broader public made evident by the large numbers of demonstrators that attended further Anti – Globalisation demonstrations. Globalisation has become a cultural more than a economic issue in the western world. It has become a fight for local diversity and democracy in what we want to eat.

## 6. McTrouble



On the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 1998, McDonald's shares were said to be the best-performing consumer stock on Wall Street. In 1965, when McDonald's went public 100 shares cost \$2,250, some 33 years later, those same shares adjusted for stock splits were worth more than \$2.8bn (Royle, 2000: 16). In 1990, the corporation apparently had replaced General Motors as the bellweather of how America fares (Heskett *et al.*, 1990) and in 1996, it was rated as the world's top brand by the inter-brand consultancy, knocking Coca-Cola off its perch (The Economist, 1997: 107-08). Ronald McDonald came second after Santa Claus as the most famous person that American children could think of, ahead of the president of the United States of America (Schlosser, 2001; Love, 1995). The Big Mac has allegedly become the 'communion wafer' of the consumer society (Vidal, 1997: 37). and the corporation is described as being about the globalising of culture and belief systems and as the most important institution of our time. Appleyard (1994: 17). writes:

' Ronald McDonald is a revolutionary beside whom Lenin and Robespierre pale into insignificance. He has utterly changed eating, the Most element of commercialised activities. ...His formula works Everywhere, the style and imagery slipping without the slightest Modifications into local streets and alien lives'.

It is hard to believe that a corporation with such financial success and achievements could ever be at risk of coming to an end. However in 2002, McDonald's recorded its first ever loss of \$343m in the last quarter of the financial year and its position continued to worsen in the first quarter of 2003 with sales plunging by 3.8% in Europe. (Aldridge, 2003: 32). The corporation's shares fell to a seven-year low and profit margins around the world fell from 16.9% in 2000 to 14% in 2002. (The Observer, 20/10/2002: 20). In 2003, financial analysts said that McDonald's share of the fast food industry had fallen by 3% this may not seem like much but it marked a dramatic reversal of fortune for a company that has generated double digit growth figures almost every year since its foundation in 1955, and until then, had returned annual profits in the billions. (Aldridge, 2003: 32).

In the space of one year, the corporation went from being the darling of the American stock exchange to one of the lowest-rated companies on the Dow Jones index. The media were quick to declare that this was the final nail in the coffin for McDonald's, following the tarnishing of McDonald's image by Eric Schlosser's (2001) *Fast Food Nation* and the continuous bombardment of lawsuits against McDonald's and the American fast food industry over claims that their products have caused obesity and other illnesses in consumers.

In order to explain how McDonald's has arrived at this situation, coined by the media as 'McTrouble', I will start by examining the problems the corporation faced in the American market and the reasons for their global expansion during the 1990s. I will chart and examine the fissures that have occurred in the Golden Arches and the attempts made by the company to address them. I will also examine the social, political, economic and legal obstacles they have had to deal since 1990s to assess whether or not it really is the beginning of the end for one of the greatest business success stories in history.

At the beginning of the 1990s, McDonald's was battling an array of forces and trends that the company founder Ray Kroc never would have predicted or dreamed of. By 1990, burger consumption in America dropped to 17% of all restaurant orders from 19% in 1982. This was mainly due to the increased competition with saturation of the American fast food market. Emerging chains like Taco Bell, Wendy's, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and Rally's all battled with McDonald's for supremacy on price and speed. (Business Week, 21/10/1991:44).

In the same year, McDonald's opened 427 overseas restaurants compared to 188 in America and profits overseas had risen by 28% compared to 7% in the US market. (New York Times, 18-19/4/ 1992). Desperate to keep impressing shareholders with upbeat news the chain concentrated on foreign markets and mushroomed frenetically abroad (30,000 plus restaurants worldwide in 2004) while sales in existing restaurants-the key test of any food outlet's real - strength seemed to be reaching a plateau. In 2000, for the first time ever, the US fast food industry gained in net terms no new customers at all.

(Burkenham , 22/11/02: 2). According to Schlosser, 'They (McDonald's) got too big too fast and, like the British Empire, their huge increase in size cloaked fundamental weaknesses.' Burkenham (2002) pointed to two key problems. 'If you put a little flag on a map for every branch in the world, it so looks impressive, but expansion is much more expensive in Kuala Lumpur than in San Diego. You're not just opening a restaurant. You're creating a whole new infrastructure'. (Burkenham, 22/11/02: 2).

McDonald's expansion overseas in the early 1990s had resulted in 30,000-plus restaurants worldwide, since opening its first restaurant in Dublin in 1978 McDonald's now has 68 restaurants in Ireland [Retrieved on the from [www.mcdonalds.ie/facts/](http://www.mcdonalds.ie/facts/) - 27 – k]. This expansion also symbolised the beginning of globalisation. According to Eric Hobsbawm, it was a time when the world had reached a critical stage. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, an era of world history ended and a new one began. The Soviet Union collapsed and much of its wealth was absorbed by Western business. Information Technology was continuing its headlong development, linking the world together electronically in global networks of computers and communication devices, making international trade and speculation faster and easier to carry out. (Fox ,2001:18).

McDonald's had completely dominated the children's market through the creation of Ronald McDonald, but by the 1990s other companies had learned the ability to colonise children's consciousness and had equalled or bettered McDonald's production systems. For so long, other fast food giants had envied McDonald's ample seating and prime locations, but this had now become a burden because the consumption patterns of fast food was rapidly changing. 62% of fast food was now consumed off the premises (take away) against 23% in 1982. (Business Week, 21/10/1991:46). This was due mainly to the re-entry of women with children into the American labour force.

In 1985, the labour force participation of American women with children under 18yrs was 60.8% and 53.4% for married women with children under 6yrs. [Retrieved on the 7/5/4 from [www.bc.edu/org/aup/fnetwork/timelines/2002/eighties.html-61k](http://www.bc.edu/org/aup/fnetwork/timelines/2002/eighties.html-61k)]. It was much more convenient for a working mother to feed a family by ordering fast food off the



premises or by phoning for fast food than bringing a family out to a restaurant. At the same time more and more families were eating away from home and wanted a greater variety of foods and were prepared to pay for it.

### **Jack Greenberg to Jack L. Cantalipo 1997 – 2004.**

A cartoon by Fred Schrier of the *Washington Post* summed up McDonald's position in the fast food market as the end of the nineties was drawing to a close. The illustration showed Ronald McDonald cornered in an alleyway being beaten senseless by Colonel Sanders of KFC, Wendy and the crown of Burger King. (Kincheole, 2002: 190). These worrying trends in the 1990s forced McDonald's to act by firing their CEO Michael Quinlan and replacing him with Jack Greenberg. This change in CEO was significant due to the fact that it shifted away from Kroc's traditional hiring policies concerning CEOs. Greenberg came from a legal background, while Kroc had always favoured applicants who started out in the lower ranks of the firm and had worked their way up the promotional ladder. (Boas & Chain, 1976: 22-34). The two former CEOs Fred Turner and Michael Quinlan were such examples. Both men had years of experience within the company but lacked the macro - economic, political and social knowledge needed to take McDonald's in to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In Kincheole's (200) opinion, the intellectual baiting that Kroc was renowned for was seen as taking its toll on the company. (Kincheole, 2002: 191).

This change in corporate employment within the food industry is not unusual, According to Gabaccia (2000:212) by the 1970s new and younger winemakers- few of them with family ties or ethnic traditions linking them to winemaking-began to raise standards and prices for California wines. These new "boutique vintners," following the example of European vintners, focused on developing fine wines for Americans with cultivated palates, familiarity with imported wines, and money to spare. The focus was in the dynamics of the market, not with family tradition.

Greenberg's direction for the company differed somewhat from Ray Kroc's in that Kroc had always believed that persistence and determination are central to success. (Boas & Chain, 1976: 8). Greenberg believed that innovation should be added to this formula, for

it was innovation that led to the creation of the Big Mac, Egg McMuffin, Extra Value Meals, and the Euro Saver Meals. While Kroc applied the motto “Keep it simple stupid” (Boas & Chain (1976: 56). Greenberg was pushing innovation to the point of complexity. In America he promoted an extra large burger the Mc Extra, fried slices of chicken, breakfast bagels, the McFlurry, the lobster sandwich and a Mexican sandwich. (Kincheole, 2002: 217). Greenberg was pushing a recovery plan to spend \$800 million over the next two years on remodelling half of its 13,000 restaurants across America. (Eisenberg, 30/9/2002:33). The utilitarian chairs, tables and plastic fixtures that characterised the premises were dropped and replaced by interiors that closely resemble Starbuck’s coffee shop chain with its hardwood floors, exposed brick and armchairs.

In 1998 McDonald’s moved into the upmarket world of coffee opening up McCafes (figure 5.0) in America (Teather,4/8/2001: 26). and opened one in Dublin in 2002. It also bought a chain of coffee stores in Britain called Aroma and had a 38% stake in Prêt a Manger, an upmarket sandwich franchise, with an option to buy it out completely in 2005. (Teather , 4/8/2001:26). New restaurants were built within listed buildings like the two restaurants in Bray and Navan (Figure 5.1) and the ubiquitous Golden Arches have been reduced in size to blend in with the surroundings. The most striking change under Greenberg’s control was a new direction in advertising. McDonald’s advertising executives were considering plans under which Ronald McDonald would have a far lower profile in the chains. One executive said ‘I think they have serious concerns about Ronald, he is 30 years old; he is a clown from another era. He reminds me of Mickey Mouse, iconic but dated. The kids have moved on’. (Rushe, 8/92002: 1).

As far back as 2001, marketers warned McDonald’s that the company whose trade was burgers should stick to burgers, warning that all could backfire horribly, risking all through diversification. [Retrieved on the 20/3/2001 from [www.gaurdian.co.uk](http://www.gaurdian.co.uk)]. In February 2002, McDonald’s called time on its disastrous foray into coffee bars by selling most of the Aroma chain to café Hero then, in April 2003, McDonald’s confirmed plans to divest a controlling stake in some but not all of its partner brands including the Prêt A Manger sandwich chain in order to restore the fortunes of the ailing fast food business.



Figure 5.0 McCafe Grafton Street (2003).



Figure 5.1 McDonald's Restaurants Bray and Navan (2002).

While the five brands that McDonald's owns have added 1 billion sales, they have also been criticised for being a management distraction and a drag on capital spending [Retrieved on the 8/4/2003 from [www.gaurdian.co.uk](http://www.gaurdian.co.uk)].

By the end of 2002 sales were continuing to fall in the US by 1.3% per annum and in Europe by 1.6%. This signalled to the shareholders that Greenberg was not able to arrest the situation – which in turn led to his resignation. This forced a former president by the name of James L. Cantalupo out of retirement. McDonald's was now putting emphasis on its products rather than its systems. The corporation introduced healthier and more upmarket type of products quite simply because they had no choice.

The US is in the midst of an obesity epidemic and the rest of the world is rapidly catching up in the rates of obesity, type 2 diabetes and heart disease. Obesity rates have increased from 19.8% of American adults to 20.9% between 2000-01. More than 44 million are considered obese by body mass index, reflecting an increase of 74% since 1995 [Retrieved on the 23/4/04 from [www.nutrition.about.com](http://www.nutrition.about.com)].

In Europe, the prevalence of obesity has increased by 10% to 40% over the last ten years [Retrieved on the 23/4/04 from [www.obesity.org/](http://www.obesity.org/)]. Consumers have become more health-conscious and this has been reflected in the growing popularity of the sandwich. Initially the burger replaced the sandwich as part of a convenient meal in America after rationing ended in 1945. Through McDonald's and other American restaurants global expansion made it popular, but now the humble sandwich has overtaken the burger again in the popularity stakes.

Up until 2002, McDonald's menu consisted mainly of greasy, fried foods. The Subway sandwich chain, with its healthier line of offerings and with global sales of \$5.7bn, has now challenged McDonald's. It is the number one sandwich chain in the US and with 21,052 restaurants located in 74 countries. Subway intends to open another two thousand stores across the UK and Ireland by the end of 2010. In 2004, the number of Subways in

Northern Ireland increased to 27 (40<sup>th</sup> store across Ireland) overtaking McDonalds's in the province. [Retrieved on the 3/5/2004 from [www.Subway.co.uk](http://www.Subway.co.uk)] (Figure 5.2)

Another example of the growing popularity of the sandwich is the O'Brien's Irish Sandwich bars. Since its beginning in 1988, O'Brien's have become the fastest growing sandwich, coffee and outside catering franchise in the UK and Ireland with an expected turnover for 2004 in excess of €100 million. With 125 outlets throughout Britain and Ireland and 1000 throughout the world, O'Brien's intends to build another 500 outlets in the UK. [Retrieved on the 3/5/2004 from [www.obriens.ie/pressrelease/2003.asp-32k](http://www.obriens.ie/pressrelease/2003.asp-32k)] (Figure 5.3)

In January 2003, McDonald's sales growth plunged 3.8% to 12.38% globally from a peak of more than 40% growth sales the year before. It closed 517 restaurants, pulling out of three countries altogether. (Aldridge, 4/2003:32). Quite simply the supersize chain had a supersize problem, they were faced with a stark ultimatum "change or die". Analysts predicted that if McDonald's has a future it would not be with Burger 'n' fries. Aldridge (4/2003:34). Computer giant IBM had been in a similar position. Profits were down; margins and every section of IBM's business were clearly floundering. Revenues were down 12% for the first quarter of 2002, net income was down 32%; gross profit was down 15%. The individual divisions were even bleaker. Hardware was down 25%, global services, previously IBM's most prized cow, were down 3%. [Retrieved on the 4/5/04 from [www.it-director.com/article.php?articleid=9139](http://www.it-director.com/article.php?articleid=9139)].

The problem with companies like McDonald's and IBM is that they attempt to grow revenues and earnings at an unnaturally high rate. Few investors are willing to consider single digit growth as a probability for their stocks. If you look at published Wall street research reports on the individual companies, it is rare to find an estimated future growth rate less than 10%, Many, especially technology companies, have growth estimates in excess of 20% [Retrieved on the 2/5/04 from [www.cloverclap.com](http://www.cloverclap.com)]. It is not likely that investors will be happy with single digit growth figures. Through option grants and other compensation programs, managements are heavily incentivised to attempt to grow



**Figure 5.2 Subway outlet in Galway (2002).**



**Figure 5.3 O'Brien's Sandwich Outlet: Dublin (2004).**



Earnings Per Share at a faster rate than even the inflated expectations to boost their stock prices. They are also badgered by Wall Street to create a “big story” scenario for growth. This entails embarking on risky strategies, such as acquisitions and big capital spending programs, which often results in serious problems [Retrieved on the 2/5/04 from [www.cloverclap.com](http://www.cloverclap.com)]

### **New Taste Menus**

McDonald’s commercials up until two years ago were about the euro saver menus, the Ronald McDonald experience for kids or the egalitarianism of the food but now, due to public obsession with health and consistent lawsuits against the corporation, McDonald’s has shifted the focus on the product rather than the system. It promotes its products with healthy active children as in their latest advertising promotion “I’m Loving it”. The following are a selection of items from the ‘new taste menus’ from America and may not yet be available in Restaurants in Ireland.

- Low fat Chicken salsa, flat bread made from premium chicken fillets served with a warm sun dried tomato and herb bread.
- Penne salad with lean chicken, tomato, spinach and basil in a light red pesto dressing with crisp bread, which just has just 266 calories.
- Fresh fruit in a 80g happy meal bag
- Low fat apple pie
- Lattes from 100% fresh ground Arabica beans.
- Egg McMuffin with a free-range egg. (The Observer Food Monthly, 3/4/2003: p32) (See Chapter 2).

In America, McDonald’s recently outlined plans to introduce “Go Active” diet conscious option meals for grown ups at all its 13,500 stores. It will also distribute brochures telling customers how to modify their McDonald’s orders for lower fat calories and carbohydrates. [Retrieved on the 6/5/04 from [www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com)]. (Figure 5.4) In Ireland, McDonald’s will soon introduce Salads plus, a range of salads, which include:



Figure 5.4 'Go Active' Brochure, McDonald's (2004).

- Grilled Chicken ranch salad/Crispy Chicken with edam/cheddar and bacon.
- Grilled Chicken Caprese (Chicken breast topped with basil sauce, mozzarella cheese, rocket, tomato and onion all in a tasty tomato and olive bun)
- Crispy Chicken Caesar (grilled or crispy chicken with Italian cheese flakes with garlic and herb croutons)
- Quorn Premiere (a succulent Quorn fillet topped with sweet chilli sauce, Hellmann's light mayonnaise, tomato and lettuce all in a foccacia bun)
- Garden Side Salad (mixed salad with carrot and cherry tomatoes served with balsamic dressing)
- Evian Mineral Water.
- Apples/ Danone Fruit Yoghurt [Retrieved on the 4/5/04 from [www.mcdonald's.co.uk/pages/eatsmart/saladsplus.html](http://www.mcdonald's.co.uk/pages/eatsmart/saladsplus.html) -9k] (See Chapter 2)

### **The beginning of the end for McDonald's?**

McDonald's is continually picked out for further scrutiny by nutritionists and the media because it is seen as symbolic of broader issues in society like obesity, industrialisation of food, corporate censorship, and globalisation. When McDonald's financial problems first came to light, the media were too hasty in printing that this was indeed the end for McDonald's before the corporation had attempted to rectify the situation. The downturn in shares and profits at the end of 2002 and the beginning of 2003 did bring to McDonald's to a crossroads in the corporation's history. It indeed was a matter of 'change or die'. Under Jack Greenberg's control, the company concentrated on improving the system with numerous unhealthy limited edition products and changing the exterior and interiors of restaurants, rather than concentrating on what most people want which was healthier quality products and better service.

Under Cantulpo's control, McDonald's put emphasis on improving products. The introduction of healthier options like 'New Taste Menus' and the Salad Plus range is a step in the right direction for McDonald's. This has been reflected in its sales by the end of 2003. In December 2003, McDonald's once again reported a double-digit gain in US same stores and a modest improvement in Europe, its second- biggest market. System-

wide stores sales from their 30,000 plus stores jumped 14.9% from a year earlier as the chain continued to benefit from new products, new marketing, a strengthened economy and the US dollar's weakness overseas. Most notably comparable sales climbed 10.2% at US stores, which was the eighth consecutive increase overall and the third month in a row of double-digit growth. There was also a 1.9% growth in sales across Europe where sales had been sluggish. [Retrieved on the 13/5/04 from [www.idsnews.com/story.php?id=20296](http://www.idsnews.com/story.php?id=20296)]

In February 2004, McDonald's sales in America jumped 22.6% over last year's numbers, extending a recovery that sent its stock to a year high. Core restaurant stores were up 13.9%, comparable sales up 20% and sales in Europe were up 7.7%. Jim Cantalupo stated, 'Our actions to improve the customer experience with better tasty food, improved service, relevant marketing and enhanced menu variety are clearly working'. [Retrieved on the 12/5/04 from [www.detnews.com/2004/Business/0403/06/Business - 83634.htm](http://www.detnews.com/2004/Business/0403/06/Business - 83634.htm) - 24k].

In spite of these recovering growth figures, most Wall Street analysts are still reluctant to express the opinion that McDonald's have achieved the mammoth task of amending the precarious position they were in at the end of 2002. According to Richard Gibson "While we expect McDonald's to maintain same-store sales momentum near term, we think that it will be tough to sustain (that) growth and thus margin expansion without a substantial improvement in operations"[Retrieved on the 13/5/04 from [www.licenseenews.com/news/news231.html](http://www.licenseenews.com/news/news231.html)]. While Goldman Sachs & Co. restaurant analyst Caroline Witter believes that while McDonald's are on the right path, "implementing changes in its 30,000-plus restaurants is slow progress that will take time. Moreover it is unlikely that McDonald's will have the same number of new-product hits as in 2003 to offset still weak operations in 2004. [Retrieved on the 31/5/04 from [www.licenseenews.com/news/news231.html](http://www.licenseenews.com/news/news231.html)].

### **McWoes 1993-2004.**

The changes in lifestyle and culture in America and around the world, the saturation of the American market and a downturn in profits were not the only problems McDonald's have faced during the last decade. In the 'nineties, this company became a lightning rod for debates and discussion, evoking strong feelings and emotions on a global scale. According to Kincheole, McDonald's serves as a widely recognised example that concretises a plethora of larger social, cultural, economic and educational concepts. (Kincheole, 2002: 7). The popularity of George Ritzer's *The McDonaldization of Society* (1993, rev. ed. 1996), initially within academic circles, has encouraged further analysis on these levels. Once the media and consumer groups started to scratch beneath the surface of these concepts, more debates, discussions and questions were asked about McDonald's, leading to a decade of McWoes.

### **The McLibel Trial.**

The court case between McDonald's and the two British environmentalists Helen Steel and Dave Morris became the longest – ever English trial, lasting seven years. McDonald's were suing Steel and Morris for libel over the distribution of a fact sheet called "What's wrong with McDonald's, everything you want to know") [Retrieved on the 23/11/03 from [www.McSpotlight.ie](http://www.McSpotlight.ie) (Figure 5.5). Instead of the two environmentalists being placed in the full glare of the media, the tables turned as the ubiquitous food franchise was put on trial, forced to lay bare their labour, marketing, environmental, nutrition, food safety and animal welfare policies for public examination. Naomi Klein termed the trial, the corporate equivalent of a colonoscopy. Klein (2001: 330). McDonald's had an army of lawyers and had revenues at the time of about \$18bn while Morris and Steel received £25,000stg from an ad-hoc campaign. Initially they could not afford a lawyer and were refused legal aid. Schlosser, (2001: 246). The British press seized upon the David and Goliath aspects of the story and made it front page news.

When the verdict arrived, it was a PR disaster for McDonald's. Judge Bell ruled that Morris and Steel had proven certain aspects of the fact sheet. McDonald's were found to have exploited children using misleading advertising; were responsible for cruelty to

# What's Wrong With McDonald's?



McDonald's spend over \$2 billion every year worldwide on advertising and promotions, trying to cultivate an image of being a 'caring' and 'green' company that is also a fun place to eat. Children are lured in - dragging their parents behind them - with the promise of toys and other gimmicks. But behind the smiling face of Ronald McDonald lies the reality: McDonald's only interest is money, making profits from whoever and whatever they can, just like all multinationals. The company's sales are now \$40 billion a year. The continual worldwide expansion of fast food chains means more uniformity, less choice and the undermining of local communities.

## PROMOTING UNHEALTHY FOOD

McDonald's promote their food as 'nutritious', but the reality is that it is processed junk food - high in fat, sugar and salt, and low in fibre and vitamins. A diet of this type is linked with a greater risk of heart disease, cancer, diabetes and other diseases. Their food also contains many chemical additives, some of which may cause ill-health, and hyperactivity in children. Modern intensive farming and production methods are geared to maximising profits. As a result, the widespread use of unnatural practices and chemicals has also affected people's health (e.g. BSE and food poisoning).

## EXPLOITING WORKERS

Workers in the fast food industry are paid low wages. McDonald's do not pay overtime rates even when employees work very long hours. Pressure to keep profits high and wage costs low results in understaffing, so staff have to work harder and faster. As a consequence, accidents (particularly burns) are common. The majority of employees are people who have few job options and so have no alternative to being bossed around and

## DAMAGING THE ENVIRONMENT

Forests throughout the world - vital for all life - are being destroyed at an appalling rate by multinational companies. McDonald's have at last been forced to admit to using beef reared on ex-rainforest land, preventing its regeneration. Also, the use of farmland by multinationals and their suppliers forces local people to move on to other areas and cut down further trees.

McDonald's are the world's largest user of beef. Methane emitted by cattle reared for the beef industry is a major contributor to the 'global warming' crisis. The heavy use of chemicals in modern agriculture destroys wildlife, plants and the soil. Every year McDonald's use over a million tons of

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

Food is central to our everyday lives, yet we have virtually no control over its production and distribution. The way we eat, and even the way we think about food is being manipulated by these powerful institutions and their sophisticated marketing campaigns. But despite strenuous marketing efforts, McDonald's is widely despised, and its 'reputation' - along with that of the food industry in general - continues to sink ever further.

Every year on 16th October there is an annual World Day of Action against McDonald's and all they stand for - with pickets and demonstrations all over the world. Together we can fight back against the institutions which currently control our lives and our planet, and we can create a better society without exploitation or oppression. Workers can and do organise together to fight for their rights and dignity. People are increasingly aware of the need to think seriously about the food we eat and our children eat. Environmental and animal rights protests and campaigns are growing everywhere. People in poor countries are organising themselves to stand up to multinationals and banks which dominate the world's economy. Why not join in the struggle for a better world? Talk to friends and family, neighbours and workmates about these issues. Please copy and circulate this leaflet as widely as you can.

For more information, visit: [www.mcsportlight.org](http://www.mcsportlight.org)

Please copy and distribute. If unable to copy, contact:  
Anti-McDonald's Campaign, c/o 245 Gladstone St, Nottingham NG7 6HX

Your local contact (if applicable) is:

unnecessary plastic and paper packaging, the production of which requires environmentally-damaging chemicals and degradation of forests. Most of the packaging ends up littering our streets or polluting the land buried in landfill sites.

## CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

The menus of the burger chains are based on the torture and murder of millions of animals. Most are intensively farmed, with no access to fresh air and sunshine, and no freedom of movement. Their short lives are cruel and their deaths are barbaric - 'humane slaughter' is a myth. We have the choice to eat meat or not, but the billions of animals slaughtered for food each year have no choice at all.

animals; were antipathetic to unionisation and provided low pay to their workers. McDonald's had made a huge error in stating that everything on the fact sheet was libellous. Unfortunately Morris and Steel had not sufficiently proved every point on the fact sheet, like the involvement of McDonald's in the destruction of the rainforest from its packaging and heart related illnesses from their food. McDonald's were awarded £60,000stg but later dropped the claim for costs and their intention to prevent Morris and Steel from distributing the fact sheet. It was a shallow victory for McDonald's, but Morris and Steel decided to battle their decision.

On March 31 1990, the appeal court justice overruled parts of the original verdict, supporting the claim that McDonald's food could lead to heart disease and so reduced their damages to £40,000stg. Morris and Steel appealed their decision to the House of Lords but it was refused and they have now appealed the decision to the European Court of Human Rights, challenging to the validity not only of the verdict but also of the British libel laws. Schlosser, (2001: 249). Five years on, the European Court of Human Rights had declared admissible Steel and Morris's claim that the McLibel trial breached their right to a fair trial and freedom of expression. The case will be heard in full at the European Court from the 7<sup>th</sup> September 2004. [Retrieved on the 23/4/4 from [www.karmabanque.com](http://www.karmabanque.com)]

### **McSpotlight**

The McSpotlight website ([www.McSpotlight.org](http://www.McSpotlight.org)) was born out of the McLibel trial and is now seen as a corporate monitor for grassroots global action movements in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the first three years of existence alone, it was visited 65 million times. Klein (2001:325). It represents an effective weapon against neo-liberal and neo-conservative corporate politics. Its website allows access to the twenty thousand page transcript of the McLibel trial, campaigns against McDonald's, daily press articles from around the world and a debating room where people who have worked for or have a strong opinion about the company can discuss and share experiences.

### *Fast Food Nation*

Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation* (2001) uncovered the "The dark side of the American meal". It has made those who have read his book think twice about what kind of food is being served at these restaurants. It has had major fallout of the fast food industry on the social and political landscape not just in America but all over the world. The book examines the marketing strategies that are targeted at children and how American fast food chains have infiltrated schools through lunchroom franchises and special advertising packages that aid public schools' funds. The second part of the book examines the domino effect of the fast food industries' entrenchment in American life, detailing their control of American agriculture, the homogenisation of the landscape, the rise in obesity levels and the growth of the flavour industry detailing the extraordinary extent to which food we smell and taste today originated in a test tube. Schlosser uses his journalistic knowledge to peel away the veneer of the fast food industry and shows how its hegemony was achieved and how it is sustained today at the expense of a nation's health, economy, environment and culture.

### *McDonaldisation of Society*

Academic interest in McDonald's and the fast food industry as a whole was highlighted by sociologist George Ritzer's book *McDonaldisation of Society* (1993). Ritzer sees the thousands of McDonald's restaurants that dot the American landscape, if not the world, as having much greater significance than the convenience of fast hamburgers and milk shakes. He coined the term 'the McDonaldisation of Society' to refer to four key factors that enable the successful running of McDonalds restaurants, efficiency, calculability, predictability and control. He sees these tendencies as increasing the rationalisation of the routine tasks of our everyday lives. He gives examples such as shopping malls, as controlled environments of approved design, logo, colours and opening and closing times. Travel agencies transport middle class Americans to ten European capitals in fourteen days, each visitor experiencing exactly the same hotels, restaurants and other predictable. *USA Today* produces the same bland instant news – in short unanalytic pieces of news that can be read between the gulps of a milkshake or a burger. [Retrieved on the 11/3/04 from [www.stedwards.edu/bss/farrall/mcdonize.htm](http://www.stedwards.edu/bss/farrall/mcdonize.htm)].



## Obesity Lawsuits

While the war against tobacco companies may not be over in Europe, the next major litigation offensive to cross the Atlantic will be against the fast food industry. In 2002, the US lawyer John Banzhaf, who was the first to sue the tobacco companies in the mid – 1960s took the American fast food industry to court accusing them of making Americans obese. (*The Independent Review*, 4/2002: 4-5). A 123 kg man named Caesar Barber issued a law- suit in 2001 against the American fast food industry. He claimed not to know that McDonald's, Wendy's Kentucky Fried Chicken and Burger King's food could make him unhealthy due to lack of nutritional information about their products. He was unsuccessful in his claim.

However, this has not stopped others from claiming that consumption of fast food has resulted in their obesity. Ten parents filed a lawsuit against McDonald's in November 2002 in New York for not providing the necessary information on the health risks associated with its food, which has led to their children's obese state - again their cases were thrown out of court. (Vulliany, 24/11/2002: 23). In January 2003, Robert Sweet, a distinguished district court judge dismissed a class action suit against McDonald's (Phelman V McDonald's) and the corporation loudly proclaimed it was a victory for common sense. However legal scholars interpreted Sweet's verdict as the opening volley in a battle against fast food that could turn into a full-fledged war by the top legal minds in the country.

Among Sweet's observations was that 'Chicken McNuggets... are a Frankenstein creation of various elements not utilised by the home cook' and that 'it is hardly common knowledge that 'McDonald's French fries are composed, in addition to potatoes' of a myriad of ingredients. (*The Observer Food Monthly*, October 2003). The judge's opinions spelled out at least two winnable legal theories under which lawsuits could be brought and, since they were not included in the lawsuit, they remain for use in subsequent legal actions. These include arguments that McDonald's failed to advise customers of the risks which were common knowledge – such as the dangers of eating

**Lost cause** José Bové loses appeal against sentence for McDonald's protest



Figure 5.6 Jose Bove at Millau Courthouse (Source: *The Gaurdian* 7/2/2002:18).

Chicken McNugget, and a failure to warn that eating fattening foods can cause addictive like effects similar to nicotine. (The Observer Food Monthly, October 2003:43)

Although all the lawsuits taken against the fast food industry have failed so far, the food industry is taking them seriously. In 2003, food multinational Kraft formed a global advisory panel of nutritionists and other outsiders to change the way Kraft makes, packages and promotes its food. A cap, to be determined, will be placed on the portion size of all single serve products. Many products will have calories and fat reduced. Kraft will eliminate all in-school marketing and drop some products from school vending machines. Kraft's highly profitable Lunchables meal kits, which typically contain crackers, processed meat and cheese, fruit punch and sweets, have long been criticised by nutritionists. In response, Kraft recently added the Lunchables Fun Fuel line that the company claims has more nutritious products – including yoghurt (replacing a candy bar) and 100% fruit juice (replacing fruit punch). The new lunch kit replaces the ham, cheese and crackers with such items as chicken and cheese wrapped in pita bread. [Retrieved on the 28/4/4 from [www.usatoday.com/money/](http://www.usatoday.com/money/)]

### **Jose Bove and the Anti Globalisation Movement.**

Jose Bove [see previous chapter] first came to global attention in August 1999 in the small French town of Millau. Bove a leader of the regional sheep's milk and Roquefort cheese region and nine other protesters dismantled a half built McDonald's restaurant with screwdrivers and other tools. The action was wrongly interpreted as protectionist or anti – American. The symbolic protest was a campaign against the W.T.O's decision to place an import tax on Roquefort cheese because of the European Unions refusal to import US - injected hormone beef. By linking McDonald's to the issue of hormone-injected beef, the dismantling of the restaurant became loaded with symbolic significance. It symbolised an American economic imperialism and the trend towards imposition of uniformity of the world by US agro – industrial groups.

Hormone - injected beef represented a standardised industrialised product against Roquefort cheese, which represented tradition, quality and expertise in producing food. According to Bove and Dufour, (2000:). theirs isn't a nationalist battle; their message has resonance everywhere. Battles are fought for the right to local democracy and cultural diversity in a world governed increasingly by the principles that govern McDonald's. Bove and his supporters were charged with vandalism, which catapulted Bove a new life as into an articulate crusader against globalisation. He was a leader of the Seattle demonstrations in November 1999. (Figure 5.6)

### **Conclusion**

The problems McDonald's have faced from the mid-1990s to the beginning of this century were multifactorial, including a competitive fast food market, changing lifestyles, obesity, closer scrutiny of multinational business practices by the media and academics. A lack of foresight and institutional arrogance by McDonald's have also been a factor, mainly due to the corporation's thinking that a standardised menu developed in the 1950s with additions and variations throughout the decades could sustain popularity right into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It showed a multinational that was out of touch with changing lifestyle patterns and a company that was not listening to its customers. Over the last 15 years, McDonald's has threatened libel suits to everyone from food companies to national and student newspapers. Many corporations do rely on libel and defamation law suits to keep their practices from being debated in the public realm, especially in Britain.

If a corporation succeeds in building an impregnable wall around its image and its business practices through the use of the courts, then there is a complete inability to criticize these culturally and politically powerful corporations, which must bring into question the very essence of free speech and a democratic society. Although Morris and Steel did make McDonald's lay bare their complete business practices, the McLibel trial was not so much about the merits of a fast food company as the need to protect freedom of speech in a climate of escalating control. After intimidating British critics for years, the McDonald's Corporation picked on the wrong two people. (Klein, 2000: 388).

The political backdrop to this significant court case and the dismantling of the McDonald's restaurant by Jose Bove was due to the rise of many different citizens movements who have tried to reverse neo-conservative trends over the last decade. Initially voters elected labour or social democrat socialists movements to stop these trends but now believe that these too cater to the whims of global corporations. Naomi Klein disregards an open and accountable parliament or a congress if the opaque corporations were setting so much of the global political agenda in the back rooms. This view was echoed in two books, George Monibot's book *Captive State* (2001) and Noreena Hertz's *The Silent Takeover* (2000). Each argues that multinational corporations are threatening democracy for their own financial ends.

The break with uniformity in the opening of the Bray and Navan restaurants, the reduced size of the Golden Arches above restaurant doors and most recently the opening of three McCafes in Ireland represented Jack Greenberg's attempt to bring innovation and diversification to the corporation, but inevitably it failed. The new range of healthier products introduced under Cantalipo's control was in reply to growing criticism of McDonald's products and the possibility that lawsuits against the fast food industry could result in tens of million of dollars in compensation to consumers reflecting what happened to the tobacco industry.

While these new healthier products have brought better fortunes for the company, however the question most financial analysts are asking is for how long McDonald's can maintain robust domestic and foreign sales. The problem with McDonald's is that they have to continually bring out products that are going to a hit with the customers. The new healthier products are very popular at the moment, but for how long? Already there has been criticism over the new salad range. According to the interactive nutrition counter on the McDonald's website, a Caesar salad and dressing with a Chicken Premier contains 18.4 grams of fat compared with 11.5 grams of fat in a standard in a cheese burger. [Retrieved on the 14/5/04 from [www.reuters.com/newsArticle82&section=news](http://www.reuters.com/newsArticle82&section=news)]

The corporation's good fortune continued in May 2004 when the American Congress approved the 'cheeseburger bill' (yet to be approved in the Senate) to shield restaurant franchises and food firms the accusation of from making customers 'dangerously fat' .A White House person stated 'food manufacturing and sellers should not be made liable for injury because of a persons consumption of legal unadulterated food and weight gain or obesity'. [Retrieved on the 15/5/04 from [www.reuters.com/newsArticle82&section=news](http://www.reuters.com/newsArticle82&section=news)] Consumer rights groups say more is at stake, with the cheeseburger bill than a wake up call for Americans to take control of poor eating habits and sedentary lifestyles. Jennifer Keller, a nutritionist on the Physician's Committee for Responsible Medicine, said "that the unfortunate thing is that without the threat of litigation and lawsuits, the food industry is not going to take steps to improve healthy options." [Retrieved on the 15/5/04 from [www.reuters.com/newsArticle82&section=news](http://www.reuters.com/newsArticle82&section=news)].

This comment gives the impression that the only way to beat or to challenge dubious multinational practices is through the courts as with the McLibel trial. However the troubles McDonald's faces are due mainly changes in lifesyles and consumers not spending money in their restaurants. Inevitably this has forced one the biggest corporations in the world to implement changes in all of its 30,000 plus restaurants worldwide. To believe that we as consumers have little or no power to resist is a myth and one that has been promulgated ceaselessly in the press.

According to Kevin Myers, we have enormous power as consumers. The history of business shows us that commerce is littered with companies that once were about to take over the world. Twenty-five years ago we had not heard of Microsoft, Dell, Hyundai or Seat, computer companies were called Olivetti, Ferranti, and Rank, Austin, Morris, NSU and DAF made cars, and airlines were called BOAC and TWA. What these former companies tell us about history is that nothing lasts forever. (The Irish Times, 28/5/2003: p15). Schlosser believes that McDonald's will represent a relic of the twentieth century, a set of attitudes, systems and beliefs that emerged from the post - war era in Southern California that embodied a limitless faith in technology that quickly spread across the

globe, flourished briefly and then receded once its true cost became clearer and thinking became obsolete. (The Guardian 2, 22/11/2002: 2). Time will only tell if this is true.

## Conclusion



**Ronald McDonald**

**(we love him really)**





## Conclusion

In light of the facts, opinions and arguments expressed throughout each chapter, McDonald's has now come to symbolise or reflect larger sociological patterns and problems throughout the world. The presence of McDonald's restaurants, according to Ritzer's *McDonaldisation of Society (2000)* has come to symbolise the homogenisation and standardisation of our landscape. Kincheole (2002) goes further by stating that McDonald's is responsible for creating a globalised fast food culture. The medical profession, nutritionists and consumer groups consider the fast food industry and especially McDonald's to be a contributing factor in the rising obesity levels in Ireland and across the world. Irish trade unions refer to McDonald's as having a notorious reputation for dubious labour practices and non-union affiliation. It has remained a non-union corporation since the early 1980s, which reflects the growing private service sector in this country.

More recently, McDonald's and its golden arches have come to symbolise the negative effects of globalisation of food with food scares like BSE, Foot and Mouth disease and GM crops. Moreover it has come to symbolise a threat to local democracy in what we can eat and not eat, dictated by a global agri-business that prefers to put profits before the health of consumers. Over the last ten years this corporation has had to deal with PR disasters such as the McLibel trial and the publication of Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation (2000)*. As a result, McDonald's has become the corporate whipping boy for politicians, nutritionists, consumer groups and campaigners across the world. So what does the future hold for McDonald's in Ireland? Does it have a future? or will McDonald's become a relic of the twentieth century as Eric Schlosser predicted at the end of his expose on the fast food industry in America.

There are factors that suggest that McDonald's are far from finished in Ireland, in fact their 68 restaurants nationwide could only be the start. Ray Kroc was looking for cheap land in the 1960s and was planning a revolution for suburban America even before suburban America existed. Kroc, the mastermind behind McDonald's, first used helicopters to survey land during the 1970s and, by the 1980s, the company was one of

the largest purchasers of commercial satellite photography, using it to predict suburban sprawl outer space. The story of the spread of American suburbs makes disturbing reading, particularly in light of a report published by the Department of the Environment in 2001. This report forecasted that the population for the greater Dublin region would grow to 2.4 million by 2020. [Retrieved on the 1/6/2004 from [www.environ.ie](http://www.environ.ie)]. Such anxiety is made yet more acute by the fact that the vast majority of new building is going up in commuter towns and all roads are leading to Dublin. The prospect of a rural Ireland characterised by soulless concrete housing estates is now a reality. These enclaves will be serviced not by the local town or village, but by clusters of shopping centres and fast food restaurants that will be located on the proposed motorway sections. According to David McWilliams “this is the west coast American model and despite all our government’s rhetoric, the ‘facts on the ground’ suggest it is the blueprint for suburban development in Ireland”. [Retrieved on the 1/6/2004 from [www.DavidMcWilliams.ie](http://www.DavidMcWilliams.ie)].

Apart from the obvious implication for traffic, the suburbanisation of rural Ireland is likely to presage a fast food revolution because suburban sprawl, traffic, and fast food are very much connected. In the US today, the establishment of fast food outlets often serve as advance warning of suburban sprawl. Thriving on traffic, restaurants tend to be located on intersections where traffic is likely to clog up. A pattern has emerged whereby typically McDonald’s is the earliest settler, followed by the rest of them: Burger King, Pizza Hut and Wendy’s. “A cluster of fast food joints sprouts as if out of nowhere, announcing the arrival of yet another faceless concrete enclave that serves as little more than a ‘shuteye dormitory for tired commuters’”. [Retrieved on the 1/6/2004 from [www.DavidMcWilliams.ie](http://www.DavidMcWilliams.ie)]. It would not be an exaggeration to predict that a smiling imbelic clown called Ronald, offering your children a happy meal, could dominate the main Dublin-Mullingar road. Moreover the next time you are out for a stroll in Westmeath, Kilkenny, Louth or Monaghan and you hear the drone of light aircraft, look out because a McDonald’s Inc plane may be watching you, scanning for future concrete jungles, prospective motorway intersections and the next Golden Arches.

The rise of overweight and obesity rates in Ireland can be described as ‘multifactorial’ and cannot be reduced to just one food or cause. Genetics, the food industry and our sedentary lifestyles all play an influential role with this health problem. McDonald’s symbolises one of the causes of obesity, because the corporation has dominated the children’s fast food market since the 1970s. They have done this through their advertising and marketing campaigns aggressively directed at children promoting ‘cradle to grave’ consumption of their products. So much so, there are growing demands by politicians, consumer groups and parents for an outright ban on fast food advertising directed at children, as in Sweden and Norway. There have been calls for a ‘fat tax’ on certain fast foods and for a health warning to be put on fast food products indicating the health consequences of over-consumption. One thing is certain, our courts will not be bombarded with obesity lawsuits from consumers claiming that various fast food restaurants like McDonald’s have made them obese or critically ill.

This is due in part to the fact that Ireland does not possess the same kind of litigation culture as in America. The culture of litigation in America typifies one of the most overlooked cultural deficiencies in the United States, which is the refusal to acknowledge any form of personal responsibility for an individual’s behaviour. Moreover it can be interpreted as the ultimate in self-ascribed victim-hood and serves to highlight the intellectual deficit of some individuals who unquestionably accept the allegedly non-biased words of the multinational’s PR machine.

Marginalised overweight people do not unaided, get into litigation against global corporations, so clever and greedy lawyers have had to be behind these lawsuits. If lawyers were beginning to be successful against tobacco companies for hooking their customers on a killer product, logically, the next target had to be peddlers of burgers and fries. Until lawyers stop taking this type of cases – hoping for a big pay out and Judges stop awarding unbelievably high damages, people are going to be tempted to try to sue over the slightest of things. However the American culture of litigation concerning obesity could be at an end. ‘The Cheeseburger Bill’ has recently been passed in the American Senate (but as yet to be passed by Congress). This could possibly prohibit any

consumer from suing the fast food industry on the grounds of making them obese or at fault for other health related illnesses.

McDonald's can be seen as a 're-offending' criminal concerning their business practices and their products. With overwhelming scientific proof from doctors and nutritionists about the content of their products and its relation with obesity, McDonald's in response introduced healthier products like salads and fruit bags for children. However McDonald's seems to keep 're-offending'. McDonald's and Coca Cola have now got their intentions firmly set on Irish school playgrounds, as the next space to colonise. According to Sean Cortrell, director of the Irish Principals Network (IPPN), "The commercialism of school children here has already begun. Big business has entered and the integrity of education is ripe for compromise". (Naughton, 2004: 15).

A recent survey by the IPPN found that more than 92% of principal teachers disapprove of Coca Cola and McDonald's promoting their products through primary schools. (Naughton, 2004:15). Moreover this survey found that 41% said that they were forced to support initiatives sponsored by commercial interests due to being seriously under-funded for the most basic educational equipment. (Naughton, 2004:15). It is now commonplace for sports programmes, equipment and summer camps to be sponsored by companies such as McDonald's, Coca Cola, Pepsi, Nestle and PlayStation. This possibility of our primary schools becoming another colonised space by big business mirrors the American model that is seen as one of the main reasons why 30.3% of American children aged 6-11 are overweight and 15.3% are obese. [Retrieved on 1/6/2004 from [www.obesity.org](http://www.obesity.org)]

It maybe absurd to think, but in the future we could be reading articles in newspapers about children being suspended from school for wearing a Pepsi T-shirt or drinking a rival product on 'Coke in Education Day'. According to Sean Cortrell, "we're growing into an acceptance that we need handouts because schools are under-funded". (Naughton, 2004:15). However education is a right, not a privilege or charity. Schools should be a safe place for children's personal development, emotional enrichment and physical

safety. There are moral and ethical questions that need to be asked about marketing products to children because it is ultimately about converting children to consumers.

One thing is for certain, we have not heard the last about obesity, McDonald's and its products. This present government may introduce a 'fat tax' on certain fattening foods; make fast food companies put health warnings on their products or ban fast food advertising on television completely. However this will not stop children teenagers and adults from buying fast food products. Take smoking as a case in point. In Ireland, smoking advertisements have been banned from billboards, newspapers and magazines. Smoking is now banned in work places and more recently in pubs and restaurants. Although this smoking ban may curtail a smoker's habit, it has not made the smoking population of Ireland quit. Adults know that smoking endangers their health, along with the consumption of large amounts of fast food, but children do not. It is essentially up to parents to ensure that children eat a balanced nutritional diet. Children should be protected from the 'cradle to grave' marketing strategies that the fast food industry has perfected, until they have the ability to make that choice for themselves.

The battle for unionisation seems to be all but lost against McDonald's. This is due mainly to four factors, attitudes towards McWork-McJob, the decline of traditional unionised industries, union attitudes towards atypical forms of employment and changes in state policy. Falling wages, reduced benefits and raising job insecurity seem to be increasingly entrenched features of the job scene across most of Western Europe, the United States and other parts of the developed world. The number of insecure freelance positions is rising (as are working hours) while stable jobs with good benefits are being cut. The new labour market is shaped by growing global competition, spurred by the rise of cheap manufactures in China, India and Eastern Europe, and the price chopping effect of both the Internet and giant retailer chains led by Wal-Mart.

The global labour market has not changed this dramatically since the height of the industrial revolution. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century many of the same factors, including technological change, improved communications, transport and falling prices, threw

millions out of jobs. By the 1920s, restrictions on immigration and trade were making the world poorer and less safe. It took two world wars to bring the global economy back to where it started. And now, there is the new fear that the new competitive threats are inspiring another protectionist backlash. What's crucially new this time- around is what is being globalised – that is, the service sector, which accounts for the bulk of employment in the developed world. The fact that seemingly any job can be exported abroad is creating an unprecedented level of anxiety across all social classes.

However Irish trade unions do not seem to realise the possibility for union organisation within certain sections of the private service sector. Other industries e.g. the clothing industry (e.g. Nike) have the ability to move their entire manufacturing and production sections to Asian countries, due to the attraction of no minimum wages legislation and little or no trace of union organisation. McDonald's and other private sector jobs on the other hand cannot do so. According to McDonald's Ireland, employee turnover was at 300% in 2000; this has since been reduced to 80% in 2004 (interview 1/F/32/Dublin 2004). One of the main reasons for the lack of union activity has been the high turnover of staff, but this is not the case anymore. Not since the 1970s has there been an opportunity for trade unions to organise members in the private service sector like in McDonald's.

It is up to trade unions and the general public to the change their attitudes towards the 'McJob' or atypical work as "a stepping stone in the market free enterprise". The 'McJob' is still viewed as a dehumanising and degrading job done by teenagers, university students and more recently by a huge influx of foreign students working within the private service sector. The McWorker is no longer an Irish part time secondary or university student, they are mostly full time foreign workers or part-time students. McDonald's Ireland was unable to provide a total number of workers working throughout their restaurants in Ireland, but there is a definite foreign work force throughout Ireland. Nearly 50,000 work permits were issued for all of 2003, up 10,000 from a year earlier.

Three quarters of all such work permits have been for low skilled jobs with almost a quarter working in catering. [Retrieved on the 1/6/2004 from [www.movetoireland.com](http://www.movetoireland.com)]. Foreign workers like the Chinese are very exclusive, preferring to solve problematic situations within their own communities rather than ask for help from government institutions and organisations. The Irish government and trade unions need to be more supportive and protective of minority groups in Ireland. Even though minority groups such the Chinese are more interested in earning money than getting involved in union affiliation, it does not mean that they should not be protected from multinational organisations like McDonald's. Immigrant workers have the right to be protected just like native Irish workers for if we do not, it will result in stories of labour abuse practices not only from corporations McDonald's but also throughout the private service sector.

McDonald's may well have survived the bombardment of obesity lawsuits in America, attacks on their foreign restaurants by anti - American protestors and Eric Schlosser's expose on the American fast food industry, *Fast Food Nation (2001)*. However one case continues to haunt the McDonald's corporation and that is the McLibel trial. The McLibel trial did expose McDonald's dubious environmental, labour and animal welfare practices but this case was much more than just dubious business practices, it was fundamentally about the freedom of speech. This was echoed by Naomi Klein (2000:388) when she said, "If Brent Spar was about the loss of space, and Nike was about the loss of Jobs, McLibel was about the loss of voice – it was about corporate censorship". This is the issue at the heart of what will be inevitably be dubbed Euro-McLibel. Helen Steel and Steve Morris intend to take their case against McDonald's to the European Court of Human Rights in September 2004.

They will also argue that if a corporation has the right to sue a members of the general public, then there should be a defence of "reasonable belief", available to the public. The court will also consider whether a trial that pitted two individuals with a combined annual income of £7,500 against a McDonald's legal team costing £2,000 a day could be fair. If the European Court agrees that the current law of defamation is having a chilling effect on the free speech rights of critics of powerful corporations and the experience of Steel

and Morris has to be a prime example. We could see a shift in the balance towards freedom of expression. There was a ruling by the House of Lords; during the course of the McLibel trial, which held that government bodies could sue only if there is malice. The Law Lords argued that this was fair on the grounds that people should be able to criticise government bodies. If the public sector cannot sue why not limit the same right for those companies that arguably exert greater power and are generally less accountability than elected bodies. Robins (27/7/04:16).

Campaigners and ordinary people should have the right to go out and express criticisms about the way society is being run and how these corporations operate without having to fear they will be dragged through the courts. “Why should anyone have to go through 313 days in court over seven years just to defend that right to criticise a multinational”. Robins (27/7/04:16). It is easy to regard Steel and Morris as pioneering heroes who delivered a devastating blow to a huge corporation. The British legal system is totally geared towards representing the rich and powerful and clearly that is the case in defamation, where the law is there to protect the reputations of the corporations.

There is the great belief expressed in newspapers and by ultra left organisations that big business is taking over the world, taking over Ireland. However this is simply not the case, big business like McDonald’s relies on us the consumer. We as consumers do have the power to a certain extent dictate what we want and do not want from big business. McDonald’s first ever global financial loss at the end of 2002 is an example of this. Consumers around the world had become tired of the same unhealthy fair opting for the healthier option of the sandwich which is reflected by the popularity of the Subway Franchise chain in America and by O’Brien’s sandwich chain in Ireland. However multinationals like McDonald’s do have an effect on society such as the homogenising effect of our cities and towns, the damage McDonald’s and other fast foods are doing to our health and how the ‘McJob’ has influenced employment patterns in the private service sector. It will be interesting to see in years to come whether there will demonstrations against McDonald’s establishing a restaurant in new commuter towns just like with demonstrations against Wal-Mart establishing out of town complexes in



American towns. It has already started in Ireland with objections to a new McDonald's restaurant opening in Ennis Co. Clare. It will also be interesting to see if fast food will carry a fat tax and public warnings on their products just like with cigarettes and how the fast food industry will deal with this. McDonald's are at a corporate crossroads that could determine their future. McDonald's are now in a position where they will have to continue to create healthier fare that is going to attract new customers for if they do not it could be disastrous. Will there come a day when McDonald's will sell only salads and fruit bags in Ireland? I doubt it, for McDonald's provides the types of food Irish people have been eating for hundreds of years which is mainly potatoes and meat. However, it is inconceivable to think that McDonald's could be a relic of the twentieth century? Well, there was a time when it was inconceivable to think when the British Empire would be no more and it happened. Time will only tell if this will happen to McDonald's.

One area of McDonald's I did not concentrate on was its franchising operation. It would be interesting to do further research on this area due to the fact at the moment McDonald's expansion in Ireland has only begun. Another area of research that would be interesting is the attempts by the fast food industry to market and advertise their products through education and school playgrounds a model that has already proved successful in America and Britain.

## 8. Appendix : Doing the research

## **Appendix**

### **Doing the Research**

The Research began in May 2001 as I set out to examine the activities of McDonald's in Ireland, concentrating primarily on how a multinational company like McDonald's 'localises' into a community. This initial study was then extended 2 years later to also examine McDonald's as a factor in the rising obesity epidemic in Ireland, how McDonald's have been successful in resisting unionisation within the service industry and why the golden arches have become a symbol of all that is negative about globalisation and a target for anti- globalisation protestors. A variety of research methods were used in this thesis, including questionnaires and a period of observation of customers within two particular restaurants in Bray and Navan. However the bulk of my material has come from text books, medical and sociological journals on the Internet and from interviews. The interviews have included members of the SIPTU trade union, managers and staff of McDonald's restaurants across Dublin, Human Resource Management from McDonald's Ireland, politicians from the Socialist's Workers Party, anti - globalisation activists, and the general public.

### **Why undertake a study of McDonald's?**

There seems to be little doubt that that the increasing globalisation of business and the growth of multinational corporations and the growing importance of regional trade blocs such as the European Union require a better and more precise understanding of foreign institutions, cultures and business. My interest in McDonald's and the affects it had on society first surfaced during my primary degree, which was in American literature, history and popular culture. This study was not on the whole a comparative study comparing McDonald's USA to McDonald's Ireland. I wanted to show the sociological impact of a multinational corporation like McDonald's on Irish society. The impact of McDonald's on the landscape, Irish Diet, Trade Unions, and the opinions held by

political parties and activists who were using McDonald's as a symbol of all that is wrong about globalisation.

The Study of food within academic circles has until recently been ignored, due to the fact that consumption patterns of food were considered a mundane subject to research (unless it was connected to the famine era). More 'interesting' topics like crime, unemployment, and poverty have been preferred in an attempt to regard sociology serious social science. However with high rates of obesity, heart disease, high blood pressure and cancers in Ireland, along the outbreak of BSE and foot and mouth disease during the 1980s and 1990s, has led to food becoming a political issue. Moreover as the availability of fast food and convenience foods proliferates, there is alarming evidence that the skills, knowledge and culture surrounding food are being lost.

### **Gaining Access**

Of course, obtaining access to undertake research is often problematic in many organisations and particularly where the subject matter may lead to some criticisms of the way in which organisations function. This means that in many cases of research especially into employment relations (discussed in chapter 3) or the marketing practices directed at children, (discussed in chapter 2) researchers will often want to ask awkward and unwelcome questions. It is unsurprising that there are many organisations are unwilling to allow access to researchers in these and other areas and many more deeply suspicious. According to Royle (2000), there is a classic paradox: "if as managers and as society, we want to learn about solving problems and about the pros and cons of institutional arrangements in different countries then we need to examine the reality of practices and not merely a doctored version of processes.

"Organisations are in many cases the gatekeeper to this world; if they are unwilling to allow us access then will never uncover the reality of practices and outcomes"(Royle, 2000:216).

Management in certain organisations are more suspicious than others. McDonald's is well known for its tendency for secrecy. Reiter (1996) suggests that fast food chains in particular are often wary about outsiders. This is not only because they are concerned about giving away secrets to competitors but also because they are constantly worried about the 'danger' of trade union infiltration. On finishing my research about the McDonald's in Ireland, I thought it only right that I go and interview senior management at McDonald's headquarters in Dublin to compare and verify research I had accumulated over the last three years. Prior to the interview, I had asked in advance for certain statistics, percentages and data about the company for example, how many restaurants were built between 1990 and 2004? And what percentage of their entire staff across the country was Chinese? All data I requested was agreed upon prior to the interview.

On arrival at the interview, I was instructed not to record or quote anything that was said during the interview. Moreover, McDonald's did not provide the information I requested about employment percentages of their Chinese workers in McDonald's Ireland. The outcome of the interview was not surprising, and did feel that I had not learned nothing that I had already known about the company. However I did feel that it was imperative to at least interview a member of senior management from McDonald's Ireland before submitting my work.

### **Establishing and Developing other Research Contacts**

While resources, accessibility to information and interviews were much easier for some chapters like the obesity chapter or the Mctrouble chapter, I did initially have problems finding information on the attempted unionisation of McDonald's restaurants in the late 1970s. Important links were made with members of SIPTU. The union proved to be an exceptional source of information about the attempted unionisation in the late 1970s and also provided legal transcripts detailing the unfair dismissal of two staff members in the 1980s and the eventual outcome from unfair dismissal tribunal in 1985. Unfortunately SIPTU were unable to provide further interview contacts particularly with other

McDonald's workers and works councillors. However the union was able to provide up-to-date material on the state of union involvement within the private service sector and the factors behind why such unions have been unsuccessful.

As an EFL (English as a foreign language) teacher, I am in contact on a daily basis with a lot of students from different nationalities especially Chinese students. Many of these students work in the private service sector working in various fast food restaurants, takeaways and convenience stores. While SIPTU were unable to provide information about workers, I was able to interview 15 students who all either worked in McDonald's and Burger King. The majority of these interviews were group interviews conducted within my work place.

These interviews were conducted because it was time - saving and it made the students involved feel comfortable about talking about the positive and negative aspects of their jobs. The majority of Chinese students I interviewed were happy about working for McDonald's and stated that their managers showed an interest in their work and how they were progressing within their job.

Other important links came from the Globalise Resistance Movement and the Socialist Workers party. These organisations proved to be an exceptional source for further interview contacts particularly, those who specialised in different areas of the movement, whether it be on racism in Ireland or the use of the Shannon Airport by American troops. The Globalise Resistance Movement were keen to provide information about what kind of activities they were involved in, for example guest speakers they had planned to invite to speak at meetings and conferences and any further demonstrations they had planned.

The main weakness with my research methods was my initial reliance on newspaper articles about McDonald's and obesity. Although newspaper articles can be a legitimate source of information, a lot of these articles had a sensational slant in their style of writing. As a result I had to research more scientific articles and websites in order for the paper to be less journalistic and sensational which was time consuming. Another

weakness with my research methods was my interviewing techniques. By this I mean, I should have chosen a specific demographic instead of asking people of different age groups at random. What I should have done is prepare two questionnaires for children aged 5-12 and 13-17 distributed within a certain area of Dublin city to record attitudes of these two age groups about fast food and McDonald's since it is this issue about McDonald's and its marketing and advertising strategies specifically directed at children that has come under such criticism.

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