

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code:	2007/111/1841
Creation Date(s):	1977
Extent and medium:	6 pages
Creator(s):	Department of Foreign Affairs
Access Conditions:	Open
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Northern Ireland and the United States

Introduction and Summary

1. The current disturbances in Northern Ireland have been the subject of a good deal of interest and controversy in the United States, particularly among Americans of Irish descent. The involvement of some Irish-Americans in support for the Provisional IRA has been a major concern. The last two Taoiseachs as well as Ministers in both Governments publicly urged Irish-Americans not to support Provisional IRA front organisations in the United States and this problem has figured prominently in visits of Irish Ministers to the United States as well as in contacts between the Irish and United States Governments and political leaders in the legislatures of both countries. This paper attempts to describe some of the principal factors in the present situation as well as some of the more important developments of recent years.

2. There is evidence that the understanding of Irish-Americans of the problem has generally improved in recent years and, equally, that American financial support for violence in Ireland has declined. At the same time, however, United States supporters of the Provisional IRA have embarked for the first time on an intensive campaign of lobbying of politicians and the media to win support for their viewpoint, or at least to achieve a position where they could claim in Ireland to have influential contacts in the American Government and Congress. We have, despite some initial successes on the part of these lobbyists, succeeded in containing the problem and the Provisionals' political campaign in the United States suffered a series of reverses earlier this year when four political leaders of Irish descent and of outstanding national importance in the United States, Kennedy, O'Neill, Moynihan and Carey, called for an end to violence in Ireland and, in the cases of Senator Kennedy and the Governor of the State of New York Carey, followed this initiative by major speeches on the problem on similar lines. The statement and the speeches were drafted in close consultation with the Irish Embassy in Washington.

3. In another important and still highly confidential development, these same political leaders have been working with the United States Government to have President Carter issue a statement which would envisage that the United States would provide aid in the event that the political leaders of the two communities in Northern Ireland could reach a settlement. This development was initiated by Mr. John Hume and it is probable that the United States Government will be in a position to issue such a statement by mid-August.

4. The United States media have in some cases created an impression that the incoming Irish administration would be less forthright on security matters and Northern Ireland policy than the outgoing Government.

The Irish-American Community

5. Americans of Irish descent number at least 13 millions. The ancestors of most of them came to the U.S. in the second half of

the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth. As an ethnic community, they have had outstanding success in improving their position economically and socially with the passing generations and, in the view of one distinguished sociologist, they are now the second most successful such group in the U.S. With their rising success their interest in Irish political problems and their self-identification as a separate Irish community in the U.S. has declined and it is important to note that the overwhelming majority of Irish-Americans have little or no interest in the problem of Northern Ireland or indeed in other Irish problems.

6. A small minority remains, however, which is seriously involved with the problem and many in this minority, taking a simplistic and emotional view of Northern Ireland, have supported the cause and the violence of the Provisional IRA in recent years. Those Irish-Americans who interest themselves in Irish affairs are those who actively participate in Irish organisations such as the GAA, AOH, Emerald Societies, county organisations. A majority of the members of these organisations are themselves of Irish birth and with the end to Irish emigration to the U.S. and the decline in serious Irish-American interest in Irish affairs, the membership of these groups has dwindled to a fraction of its strength at the turn of the century, while the average age of the members has continued to rise. The total number of persons involved with these organisations is approximately 100,000, of whom a small minority consistently support the cause of violence while others do so intermittently.

7. Officers at our Embassy in Washington and Consulates General at New York, Boston, Chicago and San Francisco, have found that those Irish-Americans who actively involve themselves with Irish ethnic organisations have something of a love-hate relationship with their country of origin. There is a sense of resentment at the fact that they or their parents were forced to emigrate from Ireland and a sense of pride in Irish patriotic exploits of the past which they project into the present. There is little or no sense of allegiance to the institutions of the Government of Ireland which in many cases they blame for having failed to provide employment for those who were forced to emigrate.

8. Experience indicates that blanket condemnations of Irish-Americans for supporting violence tend to be resented by the majority of Irish-Americans who do not do so and provocative to many of those who sometimes do (as opposed to the small number who do so consistently). For example, a speech in December 1975 by Prime Minister Wilson condemning Irish-Americans for "drowning the shamrock in blood" hindered more than helped the ending of support for violence on the part of Irish-Americans. Our approach in recent years has been to try to conciliate Irish-American feelings of resentment and sensitivity towards the Government of their land of origin, while at the same time making no concession on the principles of Government policy in relation to violence. This approach has had a certain measure of success in as much as a relationship based on mutual respect with most Irish-American groups has been established, although it could not be said that the misunderstandings and emotions about Northern Ireland have been overcome.

IRA gun-running and fund-raising

9. The Provisional IRA has looked to the U.S. as a major source of funds and weapons since the current campaign of violence commenced. Their principal fund-raising organisation is the Irish Northern Aid Committee (NORAID) based in New York, where it has most of its support, with some 80 other branches concentrated in cities with large populations of Irish descent such as Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago and San Francisco. NORAID was in 1972 obliged to register with the U.S. Department of Justice and to make public returns of its financial transactions twice yearly. It is difficult to determine to what extent the returns represent the real situation, but on the assumption that it is embarrassing to NORAID to have to publish figures which indicate a considerable fall-off in support, it would seem that figures for recent years which indicate such a trend may well be accurate at least as an indication of such a pattern. Financial support as indicated by returns has fallen from nearly half a million dollars in 1972 to less than a quarter of a million in 1975 and 1976. It seems probable, however, that larger individual donations have been received by the Provisionals directly from a small number of wealthy persons who would prefer to keep their involvement secret.

10. All of those convicted in U.S. courts on charges relating to gun-running have themselves been members of NORAID. The British contend that 75 per cent of weapons discovered in Northern Ireland are of U.S. origin while American officials believe that the flow of weapons to Ireland from the U.S. has dwindled to a trickle as a result of the actions of the courts and law officials and that many of the U.S. weapons found in Ireland are of foreign manufacture frequently purchased in third countries. They instance the Armalite semi-automatic rifle which they say is manufactured in Japan and frequently purchased by the Provisionals in markets in Europe or the Middle East. On the other hand, recent court cases in Baltimore and Philadelphia relating to gun-running in 1972 involved very considerable consignments of sophisticated weapons and attempted purchases of items such as rockets and rocket-launchers. There has been evidence of a considerable commitment of several law-enforcement agencies of the U.S. Government to prevent, contain and investigate gun-running, notably the U.S. Customs and the Bureau of Firearms and Tobacco, and these agencies have co-operated with the Irish and British police.

11. During the past year the U.S. Customs requested through the U.S. State Department on-going information from the Irish Embassy about persons in the Irish-American community who might be involved in gun-running. There was considerable reluctance to agree to this request as (1) our offices in the U.S. are not equipped to engage in police-type work; (2) channels of communication and co-operation already exist between the Garda Síochána and U.S. law-enforcement agencies and (3) the involvement of Irish diplomatic and consular officers in the U.S. in such activities might become public through court or congressional hearings and the degree of trust which our officials have established with the Irish-American community would suffer inevitably as a result. On the other hand, the co-operation of the U.S. Government in eliminating American-based support for violence in Ireland which was referred to publicly in a joint communique issued by President Ford and Taoiseach Cosgrave in 1976 is appreciated and it was felt

that our response should not be entirely negative. Accordingly, the U.S. authorities were informed verbally that, in instances where it seemed that a suspicious person might escape apprehension because of the delay involved in communicating intelligence to the U.S. law enforcement agencies through normal international police channels, Irish officials in the U.S. in possession of such intelligence would communicate it direct to the U.S. side through the State Department. There has been no such instance to date.

Provisional IRA political lobbying

12. Since 1975 leading supporters of the Provisional IRA in the U.S. have given a high priority to winning the support of well-known American political leaders for their cause. To this end an organisation known as the Irish National Caucus which purports to represent a large number of Irish-American organisations was established. With one important exception, the AOH, none of the legitimate groups it claimed to represent had authorised the Caucus to speak for it. Several "organisations" were listed which have no existence so far as is known. In the case of the AOH, its current national president, Jack Keane, is a committed supporter of the Provisionals and, by "staffing" the national board with like-minded persons, he succeeded in securing official AOH support for the Caucus although the majority of AOH members are quite unaware of what the Caucus represents or that it has been authorised to speak for them.

13. The Caucus has used its spurious claim to speak for the Irish-American community unscrupulously with a number of important American leaders and, while it had some temporary successes, notably when Governor Carter, on 27 October, received a delegation from the Caucus while electioneering in Pittsburgh, it has been possible to counter most of them. In the case of the Pittsburgh meeting, Carter, when he became aware of the way in which the meeting was being misused, sent the Minister for Foreign Affairs a telegram for publication in Ireland in which he denounced violence and called for a peacefully negotiated solution to the Northern Ireland problem.

14. The Caucus is now led by Fr. Seán McManus, a Redemptorist priest serving in a Boston parish and the brother of former M.P. Frank, and Dr. Fred Burns O'Brien, a maverick figure of Irish-American descent who formerly worked as a lawyer for the U.S. Government. Official Sinn Féin has accused O'Brien and an associate Seán Walsh (who has reportedly absconded with the funds of the Caucus) of being agents of the Central Intelligence Agency. Fr. McManus and O'Brien have made numerous visits to Washington and have attempted to secure the support of several congressmen and Government officials. Their success with congressmen has been largely confined to two New York representatives, Lester Wolff and Mario Biaggi who themselves have no Irish associations but who judge it to be politically advantageous in their constituencies to be seen to be supporting the Provisional IRA. They were both in fact associated with NORAIID for several years before the Caucus was established, so their support for the Caucus is neither surprising nor an achievement by the Caucus. The Caucus has been attempting since it was established to have hearings held on Northern Ireland in the U.S. Congress with the clear intention of confining the witnesses to supporters of the

Provisional IRA. The Minister for Foreign Affairs, in a letter of 10 October 1975 to Wolff, stated that it was the policy of the Government that, while the question of holding hearings was one for the U.S. Congress to decide, the witnesses heard should be confined to those whom the Irish people North and South had designated to speak for them, namely those people democratically elected as representatives North and South or those whom they might nominate to speak on their behalf. As it happened, the former chairman of the International Relations Committee of the House of Representatives Morgan, as well as its current Chairman Zablocki, have opposed hearings. The Speaker of the House, Congressman Tip O'Neill, an extremely powerful member of the Congress, also opposes hearings and it is therefore unlikely that they will take place.

15. In February of 1977, Fr. McManus and O'Brien managed to make contact with a number of senior officials of the new Carter administration who did not realise that they represented the Provisional IRA. They also were seen by a junior White House official Marlyn Haft, who was similarly ignorant of their background. President Carter assured the Minister for Foreign Affairs at their meeting of 16 March that such contact would not recur and it was stated in the course of a communique issued jointly by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Secretary of State Vance that the two leaders called on the Irish and American people not to be deceived by those who claimed to speak for human rights in Ireland but whose true purpose is to promote violence.

16. The Caucus was thereafter refused admission to agencies of the U.S. Government in Washington but recently they renewed contact with Allard Lowenstein, a U.S. representative at the United Nations and a dedicated supporter of human rights. Although unorthodox if not eccentric in his methods, Lowenstein had arranged meetings between the Caucus and McKeown of the Peace Movement in his office. We requested the White House and the State Department to terminate this contact as it lent credibility to the claim by the Caucus that it, and by extension the IRA, had powerful friends in the U.S. Government. The contact was suspended on instructions from the White House.

Statements of four leading Democrats

17. The position of the Caucus suffered its most serious setback when, on a joint initiative of the Embassy in Washington and Mr. John Hume, Speaker O'Neill (the most powerful member of the Congress), Senators Kennedy and Moynihan and Governor Hugh Carey issued a statement on St. Patrick's Day calling for an end to violence in Ireland and an end to support for violence in Ireland. No more influential or better-known group of Irish-American politicians than those four could have been put together and their combined weight ensured considerable publicity and authority for the stance they took. It also made it much more difficult for the Caucus to pretend either in Ireland or the U.S. that they wielded influence in powerful circles in the U.S. Governor Carey followed this statement with an impassioned plea for an end to violence while visiting Dublin, and Senator Kennedy developed this theme in a major speech in New York on 18 May. Both of these statements were widely publicised and attracted, particularly in Carey's case, a good deal of hate mail and street protests. The

net effect of these initiatives has been that the perception of the position of Irish-Americans on the Northern problem both in Ireland and in the U.S. has been transformed. Where formerly it was assumed that the position of prominent Irish-American leaders on violence in Ireland was at best ambiguous, it is now clear that they oppose it.

The House Initiative

18. The four leaders who took the St. Patrick's Day initiative, and Senator Kennedy in particular, have been anxious for some time both to find a useful role for the U.S. Government and to be in a position to support positive as well as negative ("end the violence"/"don't support the violence") positions. Discussions on possible initiatives are now taking place and the Embassy in Washington is closely involved in these. The State Department have informed us that in view of the result of the recent Irish election they would need to consult the incoming Irish Government before proceeding.

Reaction on recent Irish elections

19. The reaction of the U.S. media to the recent election results has in a number of cases given an impression that the new Government's position on Northern Ireland would be less clear on the IRA and less encouraging to unionist opinion than that of the previous Government. On the other hand, the four political leaders referred to above, on 20 June sent Mr. Lynch a congratulatory cable in the course of which they said:

"We are also very much encouraged by your strong support for an end to violence and killing in Northern Ireland. We welcome your leadership at this critical time and we look forward to the early achievement of a peaceful settlement and an end to the tragic conflict."
