

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



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File 28 1986

What is your reaction to the election of an IRA supporter as Grand Marshall of the New York St. Patrick's Day parade?

I regret that some elements have sought to turn what should be a happy celebration of the Irish achievement in America into a political divisive event. Worse than that, that there are those who have sought to transform the parade into an open show of support for violence in Northern Ireland. The Irish Government is not seeking to interfere in the organisation of an event in New York but we could not possibly associate through our representatives with those who promote violence and division in Ireland and delay the peaceful coming together of the Irish people.

I have said that we have not sought to interfere. Nevertheless, the reaction on the part of responsible Irish-American political leaders to the development to which you have referred is heartening. I think it is equally significant that the major media in New York and elsewhere have all condemned this abuse of what should be a joyful and unifying event and been supportive of my Government's stance.

File 28 p87

What steps will the Irish Government now take to convince Irish-Americans to support the Government's policies.

How do you propose to undermine Noraid's support and after ten years is it not clear you cannot do so?

Many Americans, and not just those of Irish extraction, are interested in Irish affairs and, particularly, share a concern about the situation in Northern Ireland. It is, of course, absolutely vital that this interest be expressed in a positive way so as to foster reconciliation in Ireland and indeed enhance relations between the Irish and American peoples. I think the most important task facing the Irish Government then, in the United States is to ensure that our approach to the Northern Ireland problem is well-understood here. ~~There~~ There are those, such as Noraid, who seek to misrepresent our position and in so doing to exploit the genuine interest of a small number of those who are perhaps most interested in Ireland.

The situation in Northern Ireland is a complex legacy of history. It does not, therefore lend itself to instant solutions. Those organisations, such as Noraid, who claim otherwise in order to promote a vicious campaign of violence, are misleading the American public.

Let me make it absolutely clear, as I did in a speech just before I left Ireland, that the Government of which I am a member is working actively to end the tragedy of Northern Ireland. We are working actively to peacefully end the direct involvement of Britain in Irish affairs and to end the division among the Irish people. I am convinced that if our position is fully explained to the American people, and I rely on your courtesy to do so, that the lies of organisations such as Noriad will be effectively countered.

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Has the Irish Government lost the battle to gain the support of Irish-Americans? Was it a fight worth joining?

I think it is important to remember the size and diversity of the Irish-American community. There are perhaps 44 million Americans who claim Irish ancestry including, of course your first citizen. Only a small number of these would have an active day-to-day involvement in Irish affairs. Nevertheless my Government is very much aware of the strong interest many Irish-Americans have in the affairs of their ancestral homeland and in particular, in the tragedy of Northern Ireland. This interest is, of course, one shared by many other Americans who are naturally concerned at the continuing violence in Northern Ireland. Indeed Americans cannot but be troubled by a problem which so deeply affects two of their closest friends, Ireland and Britain.

It is not, therefore, a question of the Irish Government seeking to create an interest on the part of Americans whether of Irish or other extraction. That interest is already there. What is important is that it should be as well-informed as possible on the reality of the situation in Northern Ireland today. We, the Irish Government, do of course welcome the support of Americans for our objectives. But what is equally vital is that Americans with a genuine interest in Ireland should not be left open to exploitation by extremist groups (such as those who have marred the St. Patrick's Day celebrations in New York). We are happy that through our contacts with Irish-American organisations and our explaining the Irish Government's approach to the media in the United States that many Americans now have a better understanding of the problem. Clearly we must continue our work in this field. I would not see our efforts as being in any way a "fight" unless it be against those who directly support violence in Ireland. Rather it is a question of explaining our position to those in America who have an interest in Ireland, which is surely an eminently worthwhile exercise.

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The Friends of Ireland have been criticised as a forum for Irish-American politicians who wish to avoid taking a high profile on the thorny question of Northern Ireland. What is your view of the FOI and how would you answer that criticism?

Well, I think that this criticism, perhaps propoganda would be a better word, usually comes from the same sources here in America who criticise the peaceful efforts of the Irish Government to reconcile all our traditions in Ireland. I think that this is certainly an unfair accusation against a wide body of American politicians from both sides of Congress who are united in their interest in Ireland. The fact that they take a serious and informed interest in the problem of Northern Ireland does not, of course, suit those who promote violence in Ireland or their associates who merely seek political capital from the suffering of the people of Northern Ireland.

Certainly, the Friends of Ireland have not adopted any simple one-line so-called solution, though they are at one with the Irish Government in working for Irish unity. Rather they have sought, through developing links with Irish legislators, to understand the problem more completely. I am very glad that the Irish parliament recently established a counterpart group to the Friends and am confident that close links between these two bodies will contribute to a better understanding of the Northern Ireland situation here in the United States.

In my view it is those few public representatives who come out with simple dramatic statements on Northern Ireland based on an ignorance of the true situation who are really avoiding the problem. Those members of Congress, who in the midst of their many other preoccupations, are working to foster close relations with their counterparts in Ireland are to be commended. Through them, I am convinced that Americans will come to better understand the problem we face. They are an influential body in Congress and I look forward to have valued my consultations with them during this visit.

- Q. What specific measures have Irish Governments taken to curb IRA activity?
- A. Successive Irish Governments have introduced extensive legislation to deal with serious crime including terrorist crimes. This legislation includes the Offences against the State Act which provides for the prohibition of membership of an unlawful organisation i.e. the IRA/ ^{and INLA.} It also established the Special Criminal Court to prosecute a number of scheduled offences such as murder, firearms and explosives offences, and membership of an unlawful organisation. The Criminal Law (Jurisdiction) Act provides the legal machinery for the bringing to trial in the State of persons accused of crimes committed in N.I. This Act is an alternative to extradition of people accused of political offences. Other legislation enacted to combat terrorism includes the Criminal Law Act which provides for harsher penalties for certain offences and creates new offences in respect of incitement to join unlawful organisations, of aiding escapes from lawful custody and of giving false information. In addition further legislation has been enacted to tighten the controls of the lawful possession of firearms and to ensure that all explosives in Ireland remain in the possession of those authorised to hold such explosives. These tight controls on commercial explosives forced terrorists to use other substances such as fertilizer and sodium chlorate and nitro benzene. These substances are now also under strict control.

The seriousness with which the Government approaches the security problem can be seen by the high percentage of the State's total expenditure that is spent on security. Of the estimated £506m. to be spent this year on security, about £134m. can be directly attributable to costs from the N.I. situation. This represents over 2% of total Government tax revenue and is about 3 times approx. per head of population more than the equivalent cost to Britain.

The IRA and other paramilitary organisations are a serious threat to the institutions of our state as well as to the lives of people in Ireland and Britain. In our common efforts to deal with that threat my Government cooperates fully with the

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British Government. This has been acknowledged on many occasions and most recently in the House of Commons in February of this year by the N.I. Secretary of State.

I would like to reiterate our total commitment to the suppression of terrorism in Ireland. We will do all in our power to thwart the men of violence and I would appeal to all concerned Americans to be on the alert that contributions they make with benevolent intent do not go for the purchase of arms which will cause yet more death and destruction in Ireland and carry us further and further away from a just solution.

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Q. Why have you refused to introduce extradition for terrorists in Ireland?

A. The stance of our Courts on extradition has been that Article 29(3) of the Constitution provides that Ireland accepts the generally recognised principles of international law as its rule of conduct in its relations with other States. Irish Courts have considered that one of these "generally recognised principles of international law" is the principle of non-extradition for political offences. The enactment of legislation to permit extradition for such offences would represent a departure from these principles and would consequently be repugnant to the Irish Constitution.

Extradition is only one method of dealing with fugitive criminals. An alternative method, as adopted in the Criminal Law (Jurisdiction) Act 1976, is to put the offender on trial in the jurisdiction in which he is apprehended. Under this legislation there have been a number of successful prosecutions.

Finally, I would like to dispel a common myth that there are walking the streets in Ireland many people who are wanted for serious crimes in Northern Ireland. It is acknowledged that there may be a small number of people who are at liberty in respect of whom evidence is available that they committed offences in Northern Ireland before the 1976 Act came into operation. It was not possible then, nor is possible now, to make the Criminal Law (Jurisdiction) Act retrospective. I must point out that the number of people who fall into this category is exceedingly small. In the vast majority of cases referred to by the media, sufficient evidence to justify an arrest and prosecution under the 1976 Act has not been passed to us by the Northern Ireland police authorities.

Q. How will the recent Supreme Court decision in the McGlinchey case affect Ireland's stance on extradition?

A. It is too early to assess the significance of this recent Supreme Court decision. The judgement indicated that a more strict view of what constitutes a political offence or an offence connected with a political offence is likely to be taken in the future in extradition cases that come before Irish courts. It would be premature to say on the basis of one case that in future extradition cases the definition of political offences will exclude terrorist type crimes.

Gunrunning to Northern Ireland from the US

- Q. What is the extent of gunrunning to Northern Ireland from the US?
- A. There is evidence available to the Irish Government that supplies of arms which have been used in terrorist activities in Northern Ireland came from the US. This can be borne out by a number of indictments in US Courts as a result of guns seized in N.I. and later traced by the US authorities to gun dealers and their customers in the US. It is difficult to quantify precisely the extent of gunrunning to N.I. but it can be stated that the USA still remains a major source of the supply of arms to the PIRA.
- Q. Are there any particular groupings in the US organising this gunrunning?
- A. I think it would be wrong to highlight any one particular organisation and thus provide free publicity which might have the opposite effect to that originally intended. At the same time it would also be wrong not to "steer" Irish Americans, who are genuinely interested in helping the attainment of national objectives, towards bona fide organisations. In that context I would urge all Americans not to give either moral or financial help to those organisations which support the campaign of violence in N.I. and give direct assistance in its pursuit. If Americans are uncertain about the credentials of particular organisations, the Irish Consulates and the Embassy would be pleased to answer specific enquiries.
- Q. Are you satisfied with the efforts by the US authorities to halt gunrunning to Northern Ireland?
- A. Yes - I am more than satisfied that the US authorities are doing all in their power to halt the flow of arms to N.I. They have conducted major investigations across the country resulting in numerous indictments. These indictments in many instances were

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secured with the close cooperation of the Irish police in the provision of vital evidence. I would like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation of the efforts of the US security authorities and to pledge our continued support and cooperation.

- Q. How vital are US arms to the terrorist campaign in Northern Ireland?
- A. As the US is a major source of arms for the Provisionals, it is clear that efforts by the US authorities to halt gunrunning activities have a bearing on the level of terrorist activity in Northern Ireland. Plugging the flow of arms from the US may not solve the problem of violence but it may lead to a substantial drop in the capabilities of the terrorists and help to bring the prospect of permanent peace and stability in Northern Ireland a step closer.

For 28 p 16

Q. Why is the Irish Government hounding Michael O'Rourke?

A. Mr O'Rourke is a fugitive from Irish justice. He was convicted by the Irish courts on charges relating to the possession of arms and explosives with intent to endanger life and was sentenced to six years imprisonment in 1975. After serving only one year of this sentence, Mr O'Rourke escaped and subsequently fled to the United States. My Government's wish is that he be returned to Ireland to complete his sentence. I might add that it is the US authorities that decided to arrest O'Rourke and it is they who are pursuing through the courts the question of his deportation because of his illegal entry into the US.

Q. O'Rourke has indicated that he is willing to renounce his ties with the IRA in return for some measure of clemency. Will the Irish Government consider such a proposal?

A. The Government is always willing to consider proposals but in this instance it is not the Government but the independent Irish Courts who would decide on such proposals and it would be wrong for me to preempt any decision they might wish to make regarding this case.

Q. Michael O'Rourke has been in US custody for over three years. Would the Irish authorities be willing, if O'Rourke agrees to return to Ireland, to set this period off against the six year sentence he received in 1975?

A. As I've said before, it would be improper for me or the Irish Government to comment on this proposal which is ultimately a matter for decision for the Irish Courts.

Q. How does the Irish Government feel about the acquittal of Michael Flannery and four others on gun running charges last November?

A. The Irish Government, while not wishing to comment on the operation of US justice, was very disappointed with the verdict handed down by the jury in this case.

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Q. Will the Irish Government be protesting to the US Government about the verdict?

A. I do not think this is necessary. The US Administration is aware of our feelings in this matter. In fact, Ambassador Binns of the State Department said last November in Dublin that the Washington Administration had also been disappointed that the trial did not result in the conviction of the men charged

and has assured us that the US Government will continue in its fight against those who attempt to smuggle arms to Ireland.

Q. Is the Irish Government concerned about allegations of CIA involvement in the importation of arms into Ireland?

A. We are happy with the reassurances we have received from the US Government that there is no evidence to support the allegations of CIA involvement in the shipment of arms to Ireland.

Q. Four men are currently on trial in New York on charges relating to the attempted purchase of weapons for the IRA. Two of these men have spent time in British concentration camps. Do you not think that they need help and medical treatment, not more persecution?

A. I would prefer not to comment on this case, as it is still before the US Courts and hence sub judice.

Q. William Quinn, who is wanted by the British authorities, is due to be deported to Britain. Can you not do anything to prevent this?

A. Once again, I would prefer not to comment on a case which is before a US Court, and which is therefore sub judice.