

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## IRELAND



<b>Reference Code:</b>	2013/27/1606
<b>Creation Date(s):</b>	March 1983
<b>Extent and medium:</b>	3 pages
<b>Creator(s):</b>	Department of Foreign Affairs
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## St. Patrick's Day in the United States

St. Patrick's Day is an unofficial American holiday on which the descendants of the Irish in the United States celebrate their success in realising the American dream. The large number of parades on the day, their size, their popularity, all testify to the impact of the Irish in America.

The parades and all of the associated celebrations present a sentimental expression of the Irish-American experience. As such the picture of Ireland they present is more legendary than real. It is a picture frozen in time at the point of emigrant's departure and tempered only by his formative experiences in the New World.

Because these parades are a sentimental expression of Irish-America and because the sentiment which promotes them is part of the Irish-American sense of identity, the occasions can be exploited by those who would portray Irish reality as Irish legend i.e. portray the campaign of violence in the North as part of the legendary fight for Irish freedom.

Two organisations - NORAID and the Irish National Caucus - have sought to exploit the St. Patrick's Day parades for propaganda purposes. With varying success they have sought to infiltrate the organising committees of the parades in areas of major Irish settlement. By and large they were unsuccessful in any major way until 1981. Problems had indeed arisen before that with the participation of delegations from both groups in the parades but generally it was possible to handle these problems without undue publicity. However, the hunger strikes provided an opportunity for these two groups, particularly NORAID, to exploit the outraged sentiment of Irish-America. The promotion of dead hunger strikers as posthumous parade marshalls was successful in a number of centres and gave NORAID the leverage needed to exploit the 1983 parades.

Difficulties with regard to 1983 parades have arisen as follows:

### New York

The New York parade is the largest and most important in the US.

Last year the organising committee alienated much of the Irish-American community when, at Cardinal Cooke's behest, it sought to have the parade moved from 17th March to the nearest Sunday in order to lessen public drunkenness. The resultant uproar allowed NORAIID elements to gain crucial influence in the parade committee and they were quick to exploit their opportunity by having Bobby Sands elected as posthumous grand marshall of the 1982 parade. Since then NORAIID has consolidated its position and influence in the organising committee and has succeeded in having Michael Flannery, the 80-year-old national treasurer of NORAIID, chosen as grand marshall for this year's parade. Flannery, who admits to having been a gunrunner, was recently acquitted of charges of conspiring to send weapons to the PIRA/ (see background note at Annex A) The Consulate, on Government instructions, responded to the election of Flannery by issuing a statement/stating that the Government's representatives would boycott the parade. The response of the US media to the Irish action has been supportive although the ethnic media has been critical and tends to see the Irish move as confrontational. Cardinal Cooke, somewhat cautious after his ill-advised move in 1982, has been rather ambiguous in his response. He has issued two statements, in one of which he strongly condemns violence in Northern Ireland but does so in emotive and anti-British terms. In neither statement has he given an indication of his own intention regarding participation in the parade. The Government's view has been put personally to the Cardinal by our Ambassador and our Consul General in New York. The Government's position has been supported by Senator Moynihan and by former Governor Carey, both of whom will boycott the parade. Governor Cuomo and predictably, Mayor Koch, will attend.

### San Francisco

For the second year running a dead hunger striker, Francis Hughes (Sands last year), has been chosen as posthumous grand marshall of the parade. Irish representatives attending the parade will leave the stand when NORAIID and INC delegations march past.

Philadelphia

In Philadelphia Michael O'Rourke has been chosen as honorary grand marshall. O'Rourke, a fugitive from Irish justice who is wanted on explosives charges, has been in prison in New York for over two years as an illegal alien. Both NORAIID and the AOH are attempting to make O'Rourke's case a cause celebré in the US. O'Rourke was also chosen as grand marshall of the parade in Kansas City, Missouri.

Anglo-Irish Section

March 1983