

BRITISH EMBASSY
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IRISH PUBLIC RELATIONS IN THE U.S.

You may like to know that the Irish public relations campaign in relation to Northern Ireland, which was announced towards the end of August, seems about to come to an end. I have been talking to the Irish representative in Washington of this campaign and in discussion he gave me the following outline.

The trans-Atlantic part of the enterprise consisted of three people taken from semi-public undertakings (he is Deputy Public Relations Manager of Irish Airlines, Bart Cronin by name). They have been based in New York at the Irish Consulate-General from which one of them has had a roving commission to Washington, one to Boston and the other to Canada. There has been no Irish press or information work in the U.S. hitherto, so part of their job has also been to launch a permanent information effort oriented as much or perhaps more to commercial work rather than to politics. Northern Ireland has been uppermost in their minds, but especially over the past few weeks these other aspects have increasingly taken over. Cronin and at least one of his colleagues in New York returned home permanently this weekend (14 November). So far the Irish Government has appointed no replacements, but Cronin expected not too long a lapse (bureaucracy permitting) because the ground work laid on the commercial side had to be carried forward if it was to be of any use.

It was difficult to get any real idea from Cronin how much value he thought his work had been. He said that he had spent a lot of time calling on newspapers and had found them sympathetic. He gave the impression that he had been rushed off his feet both in New York and Washington, and for this reason had to turn down most speaking engagements, even though he would have liked to have taken them up. By the sound of it, however, a lot of these requests were at high school level, which is hardly a worthwhile audience and one that we hardly ever accept. Aside from the illustrated

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- 2 -

pamphlet on Northern Ireland issued in September in time for the General Assembly, of which Cronin himself clearly took a dim view, the Irish effort from his description has been conducted reasonably and in fairly low key. Cronin told me that he and his colleagues had gone out of their way to be balanced and not, for example, to be polemical about Ian Paisley when he was here. (However, he made no secret of his belief that the more Ian Paisley and Unionist M.Ps. à la Stratton Mills and Robin Bailie come here on visits, the better the Irish view gets over to American audiences.) Nevertheless, as one would expect, their line has been that the Irish Republic can never accept that the Six Counties should not belong to them, although fully realizing that it will take some time before social, political and economic conditions allow for a change of status.

Cronin himself did not make a particularly good impression, but that may well be unfair since our meeting was not a long one. For all that he said he and his colleagues had been sympathetically received here, we have seen no evidence of this in the press or on television. Coverage of Northern Ireland has naturally declined very considerably since August, but both in the press and on television it generally continues to be balanced, if at times rather sombre and pessimistic. It has certainly not been either anti-British or pro-Irish Republic, and indeed, with the comprehensive reform programme, the Unionist Government (as opposed to the Party) emerges more sympathetically than for some time. All of this confirms our view (e.g., our telegram No. 2408 of 4 September) that our proper course was to play the problem in low key. Certainly, despite the publicity it achieved when it started, the Irish Republic's public relations campaign here has given us no real cause for worry.

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