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The-Northern Ireland Problem in the USA

Ireland has traditionally looked to the USA for both moral and financial support in its struggle for independence and subsequently in its efforts to end partition and to resolve the conflict in Northern Ireland. We have sought support there originally because we saw in the US a model for our emerging democratic state and because of the uniquely close ties between the populations arising from the high influx of Irish to America in the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. In recent decades successive Irish Governments have been conscious of the potential of the US as an influence on British policy towards Ireland and have consequently sought to convince US administrations and representatives of the rightness of our views in order that they might exercise that influence.

The basic aims of Irish Government policy vis-a-vis successive US Administrations in the last ten years might be summarised somewhat crudely as follows:

- 1) to seek the recognition of the US that the conflict in Northern Ireland is a destabilizing factor in Western Europe and that it should therefore be a concern of the US Government to help towards a solution;
- 2) to gain recognition that the problem is essentially a political one requiring a political solution rather than simply a matter of British internal security;
- 3) to seek endorsement of the view that the best hopes for a peaceful and permanent solution lie in movement towards a form of reunification of North and South but only with the consent of the majority population in Northern Ireland;
- 4) to encourage the US Government to express views along those lines to the British Government and possibly to bring some pressure to bear to encourage action along those lines;

- 5) to seek US co-operation in stemming the flow of funds and weapons to the IRA and other subversive groups;
- 6) to seek increased US investment in Ireland in order to alleviate some of the economic problems that face both parts of Ireland and thereby to create conditions in which violence would cease to flourish as prosperity grows.

In addition, it has been a major plank of policy in relation to the Irish-American Community and to the American public at large to try to increase the level of understanding of the Irish situation and to try to wean them away from simplistic and nostalgic perceptions which can make Irish-Americans easy prey for IRA fundraisers. With the pervasive over-simplification of the question by the news media and the very limited resources at our disposal, this is far from being an easy task.

The main areas in which Irish Government efforts are concentrated are

- 1) The Administration - Mainly the White House and the State Department.
- 2) Congress
- 3) Irish American Organisations
- 4) The Media