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February 17, 1983.

His Excellency Tadhg O'Sullivan
Irish Ambassador to the United States
Embassy of Ireland
2234 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D. C. 20008.

Dear Ambassador,

Arising out of what I think we all felt was a most useful
discussion at the meeting of the Consuls General which
you convened recently it occurred to me that it might be
worthwhile to try to set out on paper some ideas on our
relationship with the ethnic organisations which in
varying ways pose problems for all our offices at some
time or another.   The enclosed paper, which is of course
purely personal, is intended as 'matiere de reflexion'
rather than something requiring any reaction or decision.

Yours sincerely,

Sean O Huiginn
Consul General.

cc : Consuls General Boston, Chicago and San Francisco
      Ms. Margaret Hennessy, DFA

RELATIONS WITH THE IRISH-AMERICAN ETHNIC ORGANISATIONS

1. Relations between Irish Governments and the Irish-Americans have surfaced repeatedly as a topic of political debate in Ireland. The following comments do not purport to be a comprehensive treatment of the subject. They are offered merely as a personal contribution to policy assessments which I believe are called for from time to time in this complex and potentially controversial area.

(i) CHARACTERISTICS OF IRISH-AMERICAN COMMUNITY

2. Any policy consideration must start with the question: is there an Irish-American community and if so what is it? A 1979 U.S. Bureau of the census survey showed that about 44 million Americans defined themselves as being of at least partly Irish ancestry. Of these about 10 million were of single Irish ancestry. Of this 10 million 86.6% were U.S. born of U.S. parentage, 10.4% U.S. born of one or more Irish born parents. Only 2.7% were Irish born. The survey shows the Irish-Americans are well integrated into U.S. life, with a high rate of inter-marriage with other ethnic groups. They are reasonably successful economically, with incomes around the American mean. It is also relevant to note that other census returns have shown that, as might be expected, the quarter of a million or so Irish-born in the U.S. are of advanced average age.

3. There is of course a difference between awareness of ethnic origin and a sense of ethnic community. On any functional definition, that is applying the criterion of spontaneous and active involvement in Irish affairs, the numbers are drastically

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smaller.   It would be impossible to give any precise figure for
those who engage in organised political activity related to
Ireland.   On the very widest definition of political activity
an overall figure of 200-250,000 for the entire U.S. might be a
plausible guess.

4.   In terms of structure it is somewhat misleading to speak
of an 'Irish-American community' since the term implies a sense
of coherence which is not there.   It is not just that the
organised elements and societies include only a small percentage
of the Irish-American population as a whole.   Even confining the
definition to organised groups it is important to realise that
there is not, and probably never can be, any single or natural
Irish-American leadership that can be dealt with as a single
entity or deliver collective Irish-American support.   With
perhaps the exception of South Boston, and a few minor pockets
elsewhere there are no longer any Irish 'ghettos'.   What does
exist is rather a series of fluid, occasionally overlapping
communities which, insofar as they come into organisational
focus, are brought together by occasional social functions,
membership in various ethnic organisations or the Irish ethnic
media.   The majority of these organisations, even those with
national membership, are in a state of decay.   Their membership
tends to be elderly and their generally low social status and
influence does not attract any new leadership of calibre.   The
exceptions to this pattern are for the most part organisations
where the original ethnic character has been overlaid or replaced
by more general social, religious or cultural purposes involving a
wider community.

5. Inevitably in a country as large as the United States the
psychology and dispositions of the Irish-Americans will show
large variations.   For example there is a contrast between
attitudes of Irish-Americans in traditional East coast areas of
settlement where rancorous memories of earlier discrimination
still persist and those in areas where no struggle for status
took place.   The contrast between those of Catholic Irish and
Protestant Irish origin is so great that the latter are generally
left out of the picture entirely, although in numerical terms
they probably account for a significant part of the global
figure of forty four million.   The activist end of the Irish-
American population is however the product of certain religious
and historical experiences which have helped to maintain their
sense of Irish or 'Irish-American' identity.   Since these ex-
periences also shape their attitudes to current developments in
Ireland it is worth trying to summarise their main features.

6. The religious experience, with an emphasis on the conservative
strand in Catholicism, is generally similar to that of the Irish
in Ireland.   However, the earlier organisational role of the
Church as a social focus for Irish immigrants has led to an
identification or amalgam of Catholicism with the sense of Irish
identity in a way that is much more explicit and unquestioned
than in Ireland.   As might be expected, the Catholicism strand
of the Irish-American identity has been the most durable one.
The great bulk of the voluntary effort of the descendants of
the immigrants has been channelled into church-related rather
than ethnic activities and many nominally Irish organisations

in the United States are in fact Catholic agencies as far as
their practical activities are concerned.

7. The Irish-American historical experience, while perhaps
more difficult to generalise, has left one conspicuous result--
a deeply ingrained resentment against Britain.   This is due
not only to inherited attitudes to the British in Ireland but
probably also to memories of the Irish experience in America.
The earlier immigrants had a fervent psychological need to
identify with their new country.   They reconciled the contrad-
iction between their idealised view of America as the land of
boundless opportunity and the obvious difficulty of their own
lot by projecting their problems backwards - on an unfair history
caused by Britain - or outwards, on an unrepresentative American
establishment in league with Britain.   The hatred of Britain
also provided a political common denominator and a powerful
bond between the Irish in America, so that what met a psychological
need also had political value as a rallying point.   The image
of Ireland as a hapless victim requiring the assistance of the
American-Irish who had attained personal freedom across the sea
was too strongly established as a historical perception and too
closely bound up with the self-esteem of the immigrants to be
seriously modified by the emergence of the Irish state particularly
in the circumstances of the treaty, civil war and partition.
To this day the anti-British reflex is the easiest and perhaps
the only really effective 'handle' on traditional Irish-American
attitudes at "grass-roots" level.

8.   What, if any, is the current "Irish-American political
influence in the United States?   In general the Irish in the
U.S. have followed the normal trend whereby the greater the
degree of assimilation the less the involvement in ethnic
causes.   It is instructive to compare the Irish experience
with the Jewish lobby, both because this latter is undoubtedly
the most successful ethnic lobby in the United States and because
it is frequently held up as a useful model for the Irish.   The
analogy falls down on a number of counts.   The Irish experience,
however grievous, does not compare with the holocaust.   The
degree of isolation involved in Catholicism in the United States
(something which in any case has almost totally evaporated since
Vatican 11) does not compare with the ingrained sense of vulner-
ability of the Jewish community.   On average, Jewish immigration
is much more recent and therefore more committed than the Irish.
The ethnic sense of the land of Israel is an integral part of
Jewish religious experience and is supported and perpetuated by
the religious infrastructure whereas Catholicism ultimately
competes with rather than reinforces Irish ethnic commitment.
Finally the "message" of Israel under threat is direct and
emotive and generally unifying whereas the complexities of the
Northern Ireland problem are both puzzling and a source of
disagreement.

9.   Unlike the Israeli issue there is no indication that the
Irish question has swayed any significant American election in
recent decades.   This is not to say however that there is no
Irish influence whatever.   In the first place the politics of the

United States have by now a well established "ethnic dimension".
Politicians are accustomed to protecting themselves by invoking,
however ritually, what are assumed to be basic concerns of the
major ethnic groups.   On the level of gesture, at least, they
are correspondingly open to pressure groups purporting to re-
present these interests.   Secondly there are significant
politicians of Irish extraction at every level in the U.S. who
manifest in varying degrees a personal interest in Ireland.
Irish-Americans are also of interest to politicians as a part
of the Catholic vote, currently an important because somewhat un-
predictable element in the play óf American party politics.

(ii)   OUR OBJECTIVES IN RELATION TO THE IRISH-AMERICANS

10.   Our objectives in relation to the Irish-Americans might be
grouped under the following headings:

(a)   to mobilise American political support for Government
      policy on Northern Ireland;

(b)   to counter Irish-American support for violence;

(c)   to exploit the potential economic benefit of the ethnic
      markets to Ireland;

(d)   to harness theethnic dimension in areas which can serve
      more general public relations or cultural promotion work
      in the U.S.;

11.   There is at least a potential conflict between (a) and
(b) above.   This is because there is a real and deep perception
gap on the Irish issue between the more activist Irish-Americans
and the Irish in Ireland.   Activist Irish-Americans tend to

relate to the ~~Irish problem~~ overwhelmingly in terms of redressing
the balance sheet of history by expelling the British from
Ireland.   While the majority accept the legitimacy of Irish
Governments there also exists a deep reservoir of suspicion going
back to the troubled origins of the state and few accept whole-
heartedly and unreservedly the primacy of Irish Governments as
interpreters or guardians of the nationalist tradition.   There
is a very scant appreciation of unionism as an intractable Irish
as well as a British phenomenon.   The Irish Americans are relatively
insulated from the appaling effects of violence in Ireland.   They
have a widespread tendency to believe that Irish Government
opposition to violence reflects British pressure and to feel
that while it might be appropriate for the Government to assert
this policy in relation to the South they have no right to
'dictate' it to the North or object to those who advocate it
for the North.   Electoral successes of Sinn Fein in Northern
Ireland naturally reinforce this tendency.   In some circles in
the U.S. there is also an inbuilt political incentive to assimilate
the violent and constitutional strands of Irish nationalism
since any American politician or trade unionist who wishes to
exploit the Irish issue for purposes of personal or political
advancement has a natural preference for a broad 'omnibus'
coalition rather than becoming involved in potentially divisive
stances based on realities in Ireland.   Irish Government repres-
entatives on the other hand reflect a culture where the readiness
to resort to violence in relation to Northern Ireland remains a
fundamental dividing line and where the thrust of policy remains
one of a practical accomodation with rather than coercion of the

unionist community, however variously these concepts may be interpreted. If the gap between the two is a real perception gap and not, as has sometimes been said, merely a communications gap, then Government policy has to be formulated in a way which minimises the potential contradiction between stimulation of American interest which is desirable on one level and containment of violence which is essential in another.

12. Of course the distinction between a perception gap (two deliberately different ways of interpreting the same set of facts) and a communications gap (differences based on access to different sets of facts) is neither rigid or static. The art of persuasion is using communication to influence perception. The question is how far this can be achieved in the debate between Irish Governments and Irish-Americans, since, on a theoretical level at least, this ultimately hinges on a number of subjective or unprovable theses - legitimacy of Northern Ireland, degree to which there is a unionist problem as distinct from a British problem etc. Differences in public comment in Ireland on the 'American dimension' tend to reflect the degree of optimism or pessimism the commentator brings to bear on the possibility of bridging this gap. The optimistic pole is the thesis that since U.S. influence is an important resource in the constitutional arsenal, as is demonstrated by British concern at even the most benign shows of American interest, it is important to maximise its scope and impact and that with sufficient flexibility on the part of Government representatives a core area of common purpose and formal cooperation can be developed with some key

organisations which can be integrated into our lobbying effort
in Washington. The pessimistic extreme is the view that any
raising of the ethnic consciousness of Irish-Americans will
ultimately transmute into support for IRA violence because of
factors such as those mentioned in the earlier paragraphs and
that policy should therefore concentrate on discouraging their
involvement.

13. Apart from the fact that either of these extremes would
represent sacrificing one desirable objective for another,
neither is in itself likely to prove a satisfactory policy
stance. The flaw in the optimistic thesis is that at its
extreme it would mean that we could find ourselves attempting
to sustain an element of foreign policy which made light of the
divide between violent and constitutional means when, manifestly,
democratic opinion in Ireland insists on the crucial importance
of such a distinction. Any such conflict between our domestic
and foreign posture would be quickly exposed by extremists with
a sharp and vigilant interest in opposing any extension of
Government influence in the Irish-American population. A
stance of openly discouraging Irish-American interest is also
likely to be unsatisfactory. In the first place the question
for at least a decade to come is not whether there will be an
Irish-American involvement or not, but rather what form it will
take. Secondly, even accepting the premise that, at least as
far as the traditional ethnic societies are concerned, this is
an element whose capacity for harm in relation to Northern
Ireland exceeds its capacity for good, this is not an argument

for disengagement but rather for involvement, education and containment.

14. In formulating policy it is also important to bear in mind the potential economic interest to us of the Irish American population and the wider implications of the Irish 'image' in the U.S. It is of course illusory to think of the 44 million Americans of some Irish ancestry as a deposit of benefits merely waiting to be tapped. On the other hand it seems likely than an awareness of Irish ancestry indicates some potential interest in Ireland which might be mobilised to certain useful economic purposes, for example through publicity or public relations campaigns. Even a small fraction of this large potential ethnic catchment could be a significant interest to us. On past indications the Irish ethnic presence in the U.S. must realistically be seen as at best a predisposition which might be a potential aid for marketing rather than a substitute for it. However the substantial number of Americans of Irish ancestry may also be a factor in the generally benign and positive attitude to the Irish label in America which obtains at present. This wider image is also a factor which counsels against any generalised policy of hostility towards the Irish ethnics.

(iii) POSSIBLE POLICY GUIDELINES

15. What form of policy is likely to minimise conflict between the different objectives listed in paragraph 10 above and maximise our overall gains? We start from the point that there is no

ethnic 'machine' which could or would deliver mainstream
American support to us in ready-made fashion. The task of
winning such support is therefore something we must address
directly ourselves rather than through the medium of ethnic
organisations. Our lobbying effort at a national level in
Washington and our press effort in New York and other important
centres throughout the U.S. are the main instruments for
addressing our U.S.-wide constituency and should be given
priority as such.

16. This is not to suggest a disengagement from ethnic organis-
ations. Although these are in decay both in terms of quantity
of membership and quality of leadership their inherited status
as apparently representative organisations, which survives
mainly because there is no other focus of Irish ethnic opinion,
gives them some degree of significance in the public relations
exercises and mirror-plays which are part and parcel of American
political life. Involvement of Government representatives with
them remains therefore worthwhile. It contributes to educating
such groups in terms of speeches and addresses which articulate
a position of constitutional nationalism and which can be a
helpful prop to moderates in the organisations. Winning personal
goodwill and establishing a presence which is known to be in-
compatible with any gesture of support for violence helps on
occasion to checkmate extremists from considerations of courtesy
if not from conviction. On a presentational level a visible
involvement with the organisations is important in terms of
domestic opinion in Ireland since it qualifies us to refute the
assertions regularly made to the more credulous representatives

of the press in Ireland that problems with the Irish-Americans
are due to nothing more than the failure of Irish Government /to
                                                  representatives
communicate with them, or to communicate sensitively with them.
It is in our interest to have a realistic awareness in Ireland
that there is a problem of substance and not of simple technique.
Since Washington must be the focus of our main political work in
the U.S. it is also clearly useful to demonstrate to various
Washington politicians an awareness of, and if possible a helpful
involvement with, local Irish organisations in their constituencies.

17. While the value of our involvement with Irish ethnic organ-
isations must be recognised it is also important for us to remain
clear-sighted about the probable limits of our achievements in
this area.   Because of the nature and outlook of these
organisations our involvement must realistically be seen as ess-
entially an education and containment exercise aimed at limiting
their propensity to do damage to our objectives.   This is not of
course to say that we should suspend in their case our ultimate
objective of winning positive support for Government policy.
Rather it means that we should avoid anything which makes our
overall campaign in the U.S. appear subject to the test of the
approval of these organisations.   Our dialogue with them must
be conducted in such a way as to avoid making them in any way
custodians of our political credibility, for example by engaging
in any open-ended process of coperation or in any joint activities
with them which involved even an implicit departure from our own
chosen terms of reference.   In short we should maintain unimpaired
our capacity to dissociate credibly and totally from them at any
time.

18.   While it may be helpful for the clarity of our internal policy processes to see our involvement with ethnic organisations primarily as a containment process rather than one which promises any great positive support for our objectives it is not suggested that we adopt this as a public stance or that our relations with them should take on a purely negative cast. On the contrary we should of course ensure that the Government message is conveyed in a way that is likely to maximise support. This means avoiding as far as possible any gratuitous slight to the self-esteem of these organisations or any unnecessary conflict with them.   It means emphasising common ground in terms of cultural relations, moderate nationalism and other areas which do not detract from our basic message on violence and hopefully enhance our credibility in delivering it.   Clearly in what is basically a political field there should be room for the application of local knowledge and sensitivity in handling particular situations.

19.   In the last analysis, however, our contact with these organisations is a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Our basic posture towards them should be one of cooperation rather than confrontation but we must realistically accept that the more successful we become in winning support for our message the more elements within these organisations will endeavour to engineer confrontations with us.   Where we are faced unavoidably with a conflict between what might loosely be called the requirements of access to the organisations (i.e. the popularity or acceptability of Government offices or representatives) and the

requirements of policy (e.g. the need to avoid something which might detract from our message on violence or some other fundamental issue) representatives should of course feel both authorised and mandated to protect and assert the basic policy position even if this should result in controversy and recrimination. This is all the more necessary since, as is obvious from the figures, the membership of ethnic organisations, which often overlap between different societies, covers only a small fraction of the Irish ethnic population in the U.S. If we are presented with a stark choice it would not make sense to sacrifice our readiness to address the wider outside constituency for the sake of good relations with these organisations.

(iv) FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

(2) The decline of the traditional ethnic organisations may prove to be not only quantitative - in that they will include an ever smaller fraction of the Irish-American population - but also qualitative, in terms of manipulation by extremists. Because most of these organisations have no great relevance to any American power structure they neither attract any new leadership of calibre or offer any great incentive for people of standing to stay with the organisations when problems arise. Those who reject extremist positions taken by the organisations tend to react by drifting away rather than by taking a stand within them. There is therefore, in some cases at least, a self-reinforcing process whereby the organisations in question become both more narrow in appeal and more extremist in complexion.

(21)   This process has obvious implications for our relations
with these organisations.   It reinforces the likelihood that
their leadership will not provide satisfactory or helpful in-
termediaries with the ethnic catchment in general and that the
containment element in our attitude to them will grow rather
than diminish.   It also suggests that our contacts should aim
at being broad rather than deep, that is to say that we should
use our limited resources so as to ensure that as many organis-
ations and moderate people in them throughout the U.S. get our
basic message at least once rather than investing too much
effort in any one particular location or organisation in an
uphill endeavour to compensate through our efforts for the
failure of moderates to involve themselves with the organisation
or to assert themselves.

(22)   It also raises for us an important wider question: is
it worthwhile or possible to try to bypass or 'leapfrog over'
these traditional societies to reach the wider ethnic population
at 'grass-roots' level?   In one sense of course this already
takes place.   The Irish ethnics do not form an organic community
but a population diffused throughout American society.   As with
any diffuse society they are reached through mass-media and our
activities in the U.S. have reflected an awareness of this for
many years.   Within the limits of our resources there has been
a conscious emphasis on cultural promotion, since culture is
the distillation of the Irish-American relationship when blood
ties grow remote, and in practical terms offers a valuable
rallying point for the 'roots-conscious' younger generation.
We have also been on the alert to foster and promote either new

societies or developments within old ones which offered a more
moderate or more 'upmarket' focus to Irish-Americans than the
traditional run of ethnic societies.   Would it be desirable to
go beyond this?

(23) The answer on a theoretical level is almost certainly
yes.   Our interest is not in suppressing ethnic interest, but
in trying to ensure benign rather than malign involvement.   It
would obviously be to our advantage to have a range of local or-
ganisations which would reflect and enhance or lobbying effort in
Washington.   It would certainly be to our detriment to have a
situation where, for lack of alternative, the only ethnic voice
at popular level is provided by decaying societies which are not
only open to manipulation by extremists but add to the credibility
of such elements by lending them, as it were, a wider ethnic
franchise and the presumption of representativity which the
organisations have inherited from earlier days.   A separate
focus of ethnic interest would combat this and could diminish
somewhat the telling use of their apparent mandate which has
been made by elements within such societies to intimidate or
pressurise those who have taken an anti-violence stand in public.

(24) Probably the optimum situation from our point of view
would be the existence of a U.S.-wide or at least an extensive
organisation which could tap and bring into focus the catahment
of moderate opinion in relation to Ireland.   This catchment
undoubtedly exists.   It is of course less easy to mobilise
than the extremist one.   This latter has the advantage of a

clear 'Brits out' slogan, at once easy to grasp, in harmony
with the historical conditioning of the Irish American community
and enjoying the natural initial advantage which a negative
'anti' stance offers as a rallying point and unifying platform.
Nevertheless, the stridency of the pro-IRA elements engenders
its own reaction, although this takes place largely outside the
organised societies as is therefore lost to any direct political
or presentational use by those opposed to violence.   Given
the size of the overall population catchment there is almost
certainly sufficient raw material for an alternative structure.
One plausible form might be a 'Friends of Ireland' type organ-
isation at citizen level, benignly associated with our political
effort in Washington rather than mandating it in any form.   One
might envisage a loosely federated series of chapters - open
perhaps to association or affiliation of suitable existing
organisations - and united not so much by rigid organisation
as by subscription to a common charter enshrining a commitment
to peaceful progress in Ireland and to promoting this end
through lectures, information work etc.   Such an organisation
would clearly require sustained support from the Government in
terms of things like a membership newsletter, visiting lecturers,
awards or recognition for particular individuals etc.   If such
an organisation were successful it would demolish the claims
of representativity which accrue by default to the older ethnic
organisations and on a more positive level would act as a
channel of information and a source of more balanced spokesmen
and views on occasions when letter-writing campaigns or television
interviews take place on Irish issues.   Regional or national

conferences of such leaders would be a collective expression of ethnic views which very few of the existing organisations could rival in scope.

(25) It is not being argued that the success of such an organisation would be a foregone conclusion. It would clearly come under pressure from extremists, who would see it for the threat it would be to them. It would almost certainly require a major quantitative increase in our diplomatic effort in the U.S. in terms of personnel and expenditure. Given the present economic situation it is probably unrealistic to expect that this could be forthcoming in the immediate future. Nevertheless it may be worthwhile to keep the idea in mind. The thrust of our current diplomatic effort in relation to the Irish ethnic community is discouraging support for violence and promoting moderation. Each office has a kernel of helpful contacts, some of which might form the nucleus of a more structured organisation. We have been at pains to support in every way possible the emergence of helpful new organisations such as the Irish Forum in San Francisco which appears to be a good local manifestation of the kind of approach we might profitably see extended nation-wide. Working towards such an objective within the limits of our existing resources would not distort our present effort. Rather it might give it a more precise goal and provide a more coherent basis on which to approach the difficult problem of handling an ethnic element whose existing manifestations may well present us with increased rather than diminished problems in the future.

14/2/83