



NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LIBEL ACTION AGAINST USCC  
DISMISSED BY SUPERIOR COURT

WASHINGTON--The Superior Court of the District of Columbia has dismissed a libel action brought against the United States Catholic Conference (USCC) by the Irish National Caucus.

The decision, by Judge Carlisle E. Pratt, was received September 21.

The suit arose in February, 1981, when Georgetown University conferred an honorary degree on British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. Criticism of the university's action by a spokesman for the Irish National Caucus occasioned a published rejoinder in a local newspaper by a USCC staff member who described the Caucus as a propaganda front for the Provisional Irish Republican Army. The Caucus has declared itself to be independent of the IRA.

The ruling by Judge Pratt hinged on the finding that the Irish National Caucus is a public figure engaged in a public controversy. Because of its status as a public figure Judge Pratt said, the Caucus would have cause of action against the defendants only if the defendants acted with actual malice in publishing the allegedly defamatory statement.

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If the USCC staffer did not act with malice, the Conference cannot be held liable, the court determined.

The Irish National Caucus "failed to present any evidence from which a reasonable jury could infer malice with convincing clarity," Judge Pratt ruled.

The USCC General Counsel, Wilfred R. Caron made the following comment:

"Although we were confident that we would prevail at trial, we are pleased with the Court's decision to grant our motion for dismissal which disposes of the case at an early stage. This result spares the parties the expense and other difficulties which a trial would entail. We trust that the matter is now at an end."

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